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In spring 1980 Professor Jay Ruby, of Temple University, in association with Linda Stryker and Susan Samuels, organized a series of lecture-screenings on the television documentary at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. The object was to generate debate and discussion, using the experience of the filmmaker-lecturers as the starting point. In this issue of *Studies in Visual Communication* we have brought together some of the key lecture papers in the hope of broadening the discourse.

As can be imagined, the documentarists spoke with many diverse voices. Some had had years of television experience. Some were virtual newcomers. Some argued for one method of approach and production, others maintained exactly the opposite. Whatever the conflicting viewpoints, all voiced a concern for the present and future of the television documentary.

This worry and concern is familiar to most people in the field. Today one approaches documentary with a distinct feeling of unease. Fewer and fewer are being produced and aired by the networks. Here and there something surfaces, but more often than not it is pseudo-topical, lacking in analysis, and largely irrelevant to the main concerns of the day. While drama documentary thrives, and Cousteau swims and the National Geographic roams, the documentary of social concern struggles for survival.

The last few years I have spoken extensively to nonfiction filmmakers. The concerns they raise are always the same, and without meaning to be exhaustive, I have listed a few below:

1. **Funding:** How does one raise money for films, and what is the place of the networks, foundations, business, and so on, in all this?
2. **Networks:**
   (a) Who decides what programs are to be made? What is the rationale for the decision?
   (b) What censorship procedures are in force, both formal and informal?
   (c) Why is the quality of documentary programming so low?
   (d) How can the independents gain access to the networks, and what is the worth of alternative distribution systems?
3. **Method:** What is happening with documentary style, method, innovation, and experiment in form?
4. **Materials:** What are the pros and cons of film versus video?
5. **Responsibility:** What is this thing called documentary responsibility and what does it involve?

Some, but not all, of these matters are touched on in papers collected in this issue. Some of the discussions, such as form and style, are the perennial diet of documentary self-questioning. Other matters, such as documentary responsibility, are too seldom talked about. None of the papers except one are theory papers. Few of the views have been bred in the warmth of the ivory tower. Most arise from the gut experience in the field and cover the broad spectrum of documentary practice and problems.

In many ways the paper of Robert Drew, one of the founding fathers of cinématé vérité, provides the ideal start. Drew, of course, is well known for pulling together the first practical and intellectual framework for cinématé vérité in the United States, and this has been well documented (Mamber 1974). What Drew provides afresh in his paper, however, is a glimpse of the original thinking behind early cinématé vérité and an inside view of the Time Inc. and Drew Associates collaboration.

Drew’s self-questioning starts off from square one. What has documentary done, what can it do, and what should it do if it is to be of relevance? At the time, the stumbling blocks of the fifties seemed to be burdensome equipment and documentary practices based on a lecture and word logic. Drew saw the answer to these problems in the form of lightweight equipment and moving to a picture-oriented documentary focusing on the drama of ordinary lives.

The first result of the extraordinary collaboration of the Drew team was *Primary*, later to be followed by *Nehru*, *On the Pole*, *Susan Starr*, and others. In *Primary* the Drew team recorded the primary election battles between Hubert Humphrey and John F. Kennedy. They also started a filmic revolution and blazed out a path for the filmmakers of the sixties. In other words, an event of major significance that nevertheless was almost totally ignored by the networks.

Of all the major commercial companies only ABC seemed struck with Drew’s pioneering efforts and commissioned him to do a film that eventually came out as *Yanki No!*. Yet Drew had drive, staying power, and a powerful track record, and in fact worked consistently for the networks, in an independent capacity, throughout the sixties. The facts of this relationship Drew outlines in a few broad strokes. Evidently it was a relationship that started with hope and promises and ended with bitterness and frustration owing to the increased timidity of the networks.

Robert Drew’s pioneer work was done in the late fifties and early sixties. At the same time experimental vérité work was being carried out in France by Jean Rouch and Chris Marker, and in Canada by Wolf Koenig, Roman Kroitor, and Terrence McCrney Filgate. Later, through the work of other pioneer photographers and producers such as Fred Wiseman, William Brayne, Richard Leiterman, Allan King, Joan
Churchill, and dozens of others, cinéma verité reached out into a myriad of directions. Today some filmmakers still use “pure” cinéma vérité. Others use elaborate scripts, interviews, and commentary. Is one method better than another? Which approach should be used and when?

The choice of approach and method is crucial, but there are few rules, and the papers of Julie Gustafson and Craig Gilbert are doubly intriguing because of the diversity of approach they show to similar themes. Gustafson’s series is called The Pursuit of Happiness. Gilbert was the creator and mind behind An American Family. Both series tackle the same questions: the meaning of family life today, the truth behind the relationships of parents, children, husbands and wives, and the search for individual stability, happiness, recognition, and fulfillment. But if the questions discussed are similar, the two approaches are light years apart.

In The Pursuit of Happiness Gustafson and her colleague John Reilly are for order and methodology. Using video, Gustafson wants to film various families typifying the American situation and show ordinary family events such as marriage and death. The vérité filming is set in a framework of interviews and discussions that Gustafson calls an experiment toward a cinema of ideas. In reaching toward this goal, she involves many scholars and undertakes sociological research. Eventually the views and advice are sifted and analyzed and a model is set up for each film. At the time of the Walnut Street Theatre discussions the work was still in progress, but the ideas of production were very fully described and the procedures for editing particularly well brought out.

By way of contrast Craig Gilbert comes across as a much looser and more intuitive filmmaker—a filmmaker working more from instinct and emotion than intellectualized theories. He eschews the route strewn with academic advice and helpful pundits. Though the filming and editing is done with a team, we know clearly at the end that An American Family is the vision of one man, and one man alone.

While Gustafson of necessity has to be speculative about method and outcome Gilbert is able to be very open about the nitty-gritty of the filmic development. His method was to observe one family almost daily over 7 months. Certain questions motivated Gilbert at the start of the filming, and the final series was seen as a partial resolution or clarifying of the questions, even if no answers were provided.

Little seems to have been left out by Gilbert in his paper. He provides one of the most complete descriptions of a filmmaker’s journey that one can hope to read. Everything is prized open, sometimes very painfully, from matters of financing and preproduction through National Educational Television (NET) policy to questions of crew organization and peace-keeping. Later Gilbert leads us through the intricacies of the filmmaking itself and the editing process till one is left with a very full understanding of both the complexities and the agonies of doing the series.

One area raised in the lecture—leading to many discussions and of deep concern—was the role of the networks in doing analytical documentaries for and about social change. A series that did consistently provide penetrating films was the NET Journal of the late sixties. In films such as Banks and the Poor, What Harvest for the Reaper, and Hard Times in the Country, writer-directors such as Mort Silverstein and Jack Willis showed brilliantly what could be done with the investigative documentary. After the demise of NET Silverstein moved over to WCBS and as Executive Producer of Eye on New York blazed new trails with the investigative documentary at local level.

Few networks have felt the urgency or the necessity of following the path of investigative analysis in recent years. CBS tends to plead that needs are met by 60 Minutes. NBC has made a few half-hearted attempts but has recently been backing off such controversial fraught areas. Thus, for the moment, ABC’s Closeup series stands relatively alone in dealing with documentary of a social nature in prime time. Closeup started under the guiding hands of Av Westin and Pam Hill. Richard Richter for many years has been a senior producer for the series. In his paper Richter analyzes the background and production problems of Youth Terror and The Uranium Factor, and other Closeup presentations.

The subject matter of the films runs from juvenile delinquency through uranium mining to prison treatment and reform. Much information is new, but a lot has a familiar and depressing ring as when Richter outlines the evasions and stalling of officials whom they want to film and the lack of access to official sources once word gets out about a story. After describing the film process per se, Richter comments on the relationship of the networks to independents. Like others before him, he cites the need for ultimate network responsibility as one of the reasons for limiting free-lance work. In other words, the network has to be trusted to speak with a voice of authority and has to be above political bias or party alignment. Though the issue is debatable, there is a lot to be said for this stand—a view largely followed in England and Canada by the BBC, ITV, and the CBC.

Documentary Film on Television: An Introduction

3
From the sidelines, however, I have always been curious as to how much that vaunted voice of God and independent authority and majesty was really worth. I thought one of the ways of looking at the subject might be to examine how television documentary treats controversial history, where the filmmaker has to make his or her way through a minefield of biases, prejudices, and partisan viewpoints. Thus my own paper, *Israel Television Documentary and Pillar of Fire*, is a small initial attempt to look at the concepts of authority and objectivity in a few network films.

The subject of history and documentary is raised in a different way by Erik Barnouw in his discussion of *Hiroshima-Nagasaki* in The Case of the A-Bomb Footage. His central themes here are matters of censorship, issue avoidance, and access to audiences. The film deals with the aftermath of the atom bomb raids on Japan. Material about the effects of the bomb was shot by a Japanese crew shortly after the events but was then held in secrecy by the American government for over 20 years. In 1968 the censorship was lifted and the footage returned to Japan. Shortly afterward Barnouw gained access to the material and together with colleagues from Columbia University made the film.

Though Barnouw outlines the discovery of the material and the shaping of the film, his interests are broader, and he raises a number of critical issues. First he questions the whole system of censorship of the Japanese footage. He theorizes that one reason for the secrecy was American governmental fear that publicity of the material would be detrimental to attempts to develop the H bomb. This raises the whole question of who censors what, and under what pretense, and what democratic safeguards, if any, are in existence to question the matter.

Barnouw is also fascinating when he details the ambiguous attitude of the Japanese government to the film. Altogether, the use of the film in Japan appears to have been a ticklish matter, particularly where Barnouw had to tread a wary path between rival Japanese interest groups wishing to use the film for various diverse propaganda purposes.

Barnouw's discussion of distribution is revealing. Although the commercial networks were invited to a preview showing of the completed film, not one representative turned up. Later the commercial networks refused to have anything to do with the film, though NBC changed its position once the film had been committed elsewhere. Eventually the film was broadcast in August 1970 on NET to an audience which though huge by NET standards was minuscule when compared to the commercial outlets.¹

The issue raised by Barnouw is central to any documentary discussion. Here was a film of absolutely fundamental importance to contemporary society totally dismissed by the commercial networks. If this is typical, which I believe is the case, then where does network responsibility start and end? Who are the gray men who shape our viewing habits and determine what we can see, and why are they so consistently out of touch?

This is not just Barnouw speaking here but almost every serious independent documentalist. In his paper Drew touches on the timidity of the networks that rejected *Storm Signal*. The film, on drug addiction, was sponsored by Xerox and won first prize in Venice, but was refused by all the networks. Eventually the sponsor itself paid for network time, and the film became the most-viewed documentary of the year. Gustafson's series calls for a network showing but will probably never get to first base. Richter, speaking as an ABC employee, has a partial answer—the networks must not get too far ahead of the general public. Given the large NET viewing for *Hiroshima-Nagasaki*, August 1945 and the overwhelming response to *Storm Signal*, the answer strikes one as being slightly inadequate.

This network unease is not the sole property of the American networks. One recalls only too well how the BBC refused to screen Peter Watkins' *The War Game* because it might disturb people. In that case the film, itself financed by the BBC, was never shown on TV but achieved a wide audience through theatrical bookings.

Access to network air time is the crucial question for the independent documentary. Simply put, the filmmaker wants an audience, and if the film concern is national social or political change, the filmmaker wants an audience of millions, not thousands. This inability to gain access is the bane of independent filmmakers. They do not want films such as *Harlan County* merely to preach to the converted in Union Halls or colleges; they want to reach a national audience and provoke comment and possible action.

The short-term answer in the past for independents has been to broadcast on public television, as Barnouw did with his *Hiroshima-Nagasaki* film, as well as Gustafson and Gilbert. They all mention in passing the insidious device of the public network, the group discussion following the airing which is used to quell controversy and limit the impact of an unusual film. Many years ago, writing in *Film Library Quarterly*, the noted documentalist Arthur Barron deplored network concentration on issue-oriented films and news and called for the documentary about simple human beings and their everyday concerns. Unfortunately this kind of documentary is still an infrequent visitor to the main channels despite the crop of films on feminism and the women's movement and on the family...
and family relationships in recent years. When these films do surface, it’s for a moment of glory on daytime public television, and then oblivion—a solution that satisfies no one.

The Pursuit of Happiness and An American Family clearly answer Arthur Barron’s call. Both Gustafson’s series and that of Craig Gilbert are important not just for how they are made, which was discussed earlier, but because of what they attempt to do in widening the boundaries of film. Both deal with the issue of happiness and the American dream, and the hopes and failures of human relationships in America today. The Pursuit of Happiness is still in the finishing stage. By contrast, An American Family was released in 1971. Although it was done for what was then NET, it achieved a huge national audience and was both garlanded with praise and blanketed with abuse. Gilbert’s paper does not avoid the problems of the series, nor does he shrink from facing up to the very unfair abuse. Instead Gilbert looks at the issues square on as he attempts to explain his background, position, and goals as well as the whole situation seen from his side. His paper is angry, frank, bitter, and intensely revealing. It is also, to my mind, one of the most provoking, honest, and important pieces I have ever read on the practice and theory of documentary.

The question that generated Craig Gilbert’s explorations was “Why are men and women in the U.S. having such a hard time today?” The answer, or part of it, he thought might come from a long and intimate study of one family. After various trials and tribulations, which he chronicles, he settled upon the Loud family of California and then spent 7 months shooting and a year editing.

Although Gilbert is very informative on the everyday process of the filmmaking, he is possibly even more interesting when talking about some basic ethical questions raised by the series. There are, for example, the very thorny questions of involvement, responsibility, and subject exploitation. Like most filmmakers, Gilbert tried to distance himself from the lives of his film’s subjects and maintain a strict policy of noninvolvement in their dilemmas. The difficulty for both Gilbert and his crew in pursuing this course makes challenging reading. He is also brutally frank in presenting the dilemma of the filmmaker who knows that in one sense he is using people as guinea pigs for his own ends and cannot be totally open about the objectives of the film. The situation of consideration for the subjects battling against film objectives comes up all over the place and is especially intriguing when Gilbert discusses his desire to film the divorce announcement of Pat Loud. Finally Gilbert discusses, at great length, the reactions of both the Loud family and the press. From the beginning Gilbert was open with the family about the filming. He mentions the limitations and boundaries discussed between them—their hesitations and then their approval. He showed them the rushes. They approved the final films—even loved them. And yet afterward, and particularly from Pat Loud, came accusations of exploitation and betrayal of trust. What more could Gilbert have done?

I think the problem was that the Lauds saw the film out of context without an audience reaction. Neither they nor Craig Gilbert foresaw the public response and were simply not prepared for the hostile and vitriolic reactions of some of the critics. In short, Gilbert fulfilled what were seen as his responsibilities as a filmmaker, but in retrospect that may not have been enough.

Why were a few of the critics so savage? Gilbert thinks part of the answer for the hostility lies in the shock of recognition of themselves by the critics, and I think he is right. The critics recognized their own lives up there on the screen, and the threat was too great to stand.

In recent years Americans have been more than zealous in investigating their inner selves. Indeed a veritable industry has grown up around the subject, evidenced by the success of such books as Passages. But this is an industry of the printed page, a medium that maintains a certain distance from us. The medium of film, however, is dimensionally different, more powerful, more threatening, more immediate. In Scenes from a Marriage Bergman dealt with much of the material of An American Family, but this was fiction and therefore safe and removed. Suddenly, in An American Family, there was no distancing. The critics and reviewers saw themselves and their problems on the screen and unable to face the reality of their lives turned some of their bitter reactions on Gilbert.

I’m sure this is part of the answer, if not all, and it is interesting to recall the reaction to Gray Gardens, a film about 79-year-old Edith Beale and her daughter. In this case, too, the critics claimed the Beales were exploited and that too harsh an exposure was presented on the screen. Here too, I think, little exploitation was involved; it was a case of the critics being unable to face facets of themselves they saw revealed in the Beales.

At the moment of writing these paragraphs my newspaper boasts an advert, “Discover the film and video revolution.” At the same time my desk is covered with articles on cable systems, Home Box Office, 50 channel possibilities, video discs, video tape recorders, satellite dishes, and home-retrieval systems. Seeing all this, I wonder what it all bodes for television documentary. My instinct is that, with the
technological revolution and particularly with the growth of channels and outlets, more will be lost than gained for documentary.

What television did at its best, and radio before it, was provide at certain times a national cultural unifier—a communal experience shared by millions at the same moment. Some of these national media events are still with us, such as the Royal Wedding, the Pope’s visit, the Presidential inauguration, and maybe certain national sporting events. But these media events are almost purely entertainment whereas in the past there were programmatic unifiers of substance.

What comes to mind besides Roosevelt’s fireside chats? Well, I would like to think that the Fred Friendly-Ed Murrow program on McCarthy was such an event, gaining a huge audience and having a significant impact on the times. Other programs in the past years such as Cathy Come Home on the BBC in England, and maybe The Selling of the Pentagon in the U.S., were, in a much more minor sense, the unifiers of which I speak. But with the superabundance of media outlets the audience for each program will inevitably diminish. In brief, the national impact documentary as we knew it—and if it ever existed, which may well be my wishful thinking—will be a thing of the past.

Luckily, for a few years or so we still have a chance to use documentary on the commercial channels to reach a mass audience. Thus the matter of access discussed so much in all the papers becomes even more crucial because of the time element. Besides access, the other message from all the papers is the need for relevance. One after another the papers stressed the need for network documentary to face the real burning issues of our time and provide something more than moving wallpaper in the living room.

What is this concerned documentary? Probably the one that shakes us out of our tranquillity and leaves us uneasy and disturbed. My old friend and teacher George Stoney put it very succinctly. For years he ran the Canadian NFB Challenge for Change experiment. He clearly wanted you to know where things were at so that when you walked into his office his motto was there for all to see: “The good documentary is the one that rocks the boat.” Happy rocking days!

Alan Rosenthal

Notes

1 Besides The Case of the A-Bomb Footage there are a number of other films in recent years that have dealt with various aspects of atomic warfare. In England, Robert Vas’s Survivors of Hiroshima (BBC) asks in the most poignant way what it means today to have lived through Hiroshima. More recently, John Else’s The Day after Trinity deals with the making of the atom bomb and the controversial career of Robert Oppenheimer, while A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb centers around Edward Teller and the development of the H bomb. Both latter films dealt with the past but carry heavy implications for the present and were presented on public television.

2 Strangely enough Gilbert seems totally unaware of Allan King’s film A Married Couple (Canada 1969), in which King follows a marital crisis for 8 weeks.

3 See in this context Allan King’s A Married Couple and the recent series Six American Families.

Reference

- Mamber, Steven
The Case of the A-Bomb Footage

Erik Barnouw

In 1970, a quarter of a century after the footage was shot, the documentary film Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945, which I produced, had its premiere and won an audience—an international one, as it turned out. In recounting the case history of this film, I want to emphasize the extraordinary 25-year hiatus. This seems to me to have implications for filmmakers and perhaps for the democratic process.

I became involved in this story in its later stages, almost by accident. Before I explain how, let me go back to the beginning of the story as I have been able to piece it together over the years.

In August 1945, after the two atom bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a Japanese film unit named Nippon Eiga Sha was commissioned by its government to make a film record of the effects of the devastating new weapon. Nippon Eiga Sha was an amalgamation of several prewar newsreel and documentary units which had been nationalized for war purposes.

The man entrusted with the making of the film was Akira Iwasaki, a film critic, historian, and occasional producer (who died on September 16, 1981). The choice of Iwasaki for the assignment was significant. During the 1930s he had been the leader of a leftist film group called Prokino, or Proletarian Film League, similar to the Workers Film and Photo Leagues in the United States. Being antimilitarist, Prokino had been outlawed shortly before the war, and some of its members had been jailed under a preventive-detention law. Iwasaki himself had spent part of the war in prison. The fact that he had regained standing and was given the film assignment reflected the turbulent situation in the final days of war and the extent to which the military had already lost status.

Because of the breakdown of transport and the difficulty of obtaining adequate supplies, it took the Nippon Eiga Sha film crews some time to reach their locations. But they were at work in Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the American occupation forces arrived. What happened then has been described by Iwasaki: "In the middle of the shooting one of my cameramen was arrested in Nagasaki by American military police. . . . I was summoned to the GHQ and told to discontinue the shooting." The filming was halted, but Iwasaki says he remonstrated, and "made arguments" with the occupation authorities. "Then," he writes, "came the group of the Strategic Bombing Survey from Washington and they wanted to have a film of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Therefore the U.S. Army wanted to utilize my film for the purpose, and changed its mind. Now they allowed me or better ordered me to continue and complete the film."

During the following weeks, under close United States control, much additional footage was shot, all in black-and-white; there was no color film in Japan at this time. As the shooting progressed, the material was edited into sequences under the overall title "Effects of the Atomic Bomb." There were sequences showing effects on concrete, wood, vegetation, and so on, emphasizing detailed scientific observation. Shots of the effects on human beings were sparse. Survivors on the outer fringes of the havoc were photographed in improvised treatment centers, but the guiding supervisory principle was scientific data-gathering rather than human interest. The interests of the camera teams were to some extent at variance with this aim.

When the edited material had reached a length of somewhat less than 3 hours, occupation authorities suddenly took possession of the film—negative, positive, and out-takes—and shipped it to Washington. Film and all related documents were classified "Secret," disappearing from view for almost a quarter of a century. Most people, including those in the film world, remained unaware of its existence. Although a few feet were released for Army-approved uses, and the project was briefly mentioned by Jay Leyda in Films Beget Films (1964) (a book that began as a memorandum for the Chinese government on the values of film archives), the existence of the earliest Hiroshima and Nagasaki footage remained an American military secret. With later color footage of the ruins making an appearance and to some extent satisfying curiosity, the missing footage did not become an issue in the United States.

Until 1968 I was oblivious to its existence. But early that year a friend, Mrs. Lucy Lemann, sent me a newspaper clipping she had received from Japan which excited my interest. It was from the English-language Asahi Evening News, which reported that the footage shot in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 by Japanese cameramen had been returned to Japan from the United States and that the government would
arrange a television screening "after certain scenes showing victims' disfiguring burns are deleted." The item also stated that the film would later be made available on loan to "research institutions," but it added: "In order to avoid the film being utilized for political purposes, applications for loan of the film from labor unions and political organizations will be turned down."

I was at this time chairman of the Film, Radio, and Television Division of the Columbia University School of the Arts, and had organized a related unit called the Center for Mass Communication, a division of Columbia University Press, for producing and distributing documentary films and recordings. Naturally, the clipping seemed to demand some investigation or action. Mrs. Lemann was a contributor to the World Law Fund, and at her suggestion I wrote for further information to Professor Yoshikazu Sakamoto, Professor of International Politics at the University of Tokyo, an associate of the fund. His prompt reply said that the Japanese had negotiated with the U.S. Department of State for the return of the film but that the Department of Defense was thought to control it. The film sent to Japan was not the original nitrate but a safety-film copy.

Somewhat impulsively, I wrote a letter on Columbia University stationery, signed as "Chairman, Film, Radio, Television," addressed to "The Honorable Clark M. Clifford, Secretary of Defense," with the notations that "cc" should go to Secretary of State Dean Rusk and to Dr. Grayson Kirk, President of Columbia University. The letter asked whether Columbia's Center for Mass Communication might have the privilege of releasing in the United States the material recently made available for showing in Japan. I felt a bit flamboyant in this, but felt I had nothing to lose. I scarcely expected results. But to my amazement, a letter arrived within days from Daniel Z. Henkin, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, stating that the Department of Defense had turned the material over to the National Archives and that we could have access to it there. So it was that in April 1968 I found myself with a few associates in the auditorium of the National Archives in Washington, looking at 2 hours and 40 minutes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki footage. We also examined voluminous shot lists in which the location of every shot was identified and its content summarized and indexed. Every sheet bore the classification stamp "Secret," but this had been crossed out and another stamp substituted: "Not to Be Released without Approval of the D.O.D." There was no indication of the date of this partial declassification. It may have been routine, or perhaps we were merely the first to have inquired about the material.

Some in our group were dismayed by the marginal quality of much of the film—a result, perhaps, of the circumstances under which it had been shot and the fact that we were looking at material some generations away from the original. But this quality also seemed a mark of authenticity, and it seemed to me that enough of the footage was extraordinary in its power, unforgettable in its implications, and historic in its importance to warrant our duplicating all of it. A grant from Mrs. Lemann to Columbia University Press made it possible to order a duplicate negative and workprint of the full 2 hours and 40 minutes, along with photostats of the priceless shot lists. During the summer of 1968 all this material arrived at Columbia University from the National Archives, and we began incessant study and experimentation with the footage, with constant reference to the shot lists and other available background information.

The footage contained ruins in grotesque formations and endless shots of rubble. At first we were inclined to discard many of the less striking rubble sequences, but when we learned that one had been a school (where most of the children had died at their desks), one a prison (where 140 prisoners had died in their cells), and another a trolley car (whose passengers had evaporated, leaving in the rubble a row of their skulls and bones), even the less dramatic shots acquired new meaning. Eventually a montage of such rubble shots, linked with statistics about the people annihilated or injured, and the distance of each location from the center of the blast, became a key sequence in the film.

The paucity of what we called "human-effects footage" troubled us deeply. We felt that we would have to cluster this limited material near the end of our film for maximum effect, but meanwhile we began a sweeping search for additional footage of this nature. We wrote to the Defense Department asking whether additional material of this sort had perhaps been held back. The Pentagon's staff historian answered, assuring us that nothing was being held back and adding: "Out-takes from the original production no longer exist, having probably been destroyed during the conversion from nitrate to safety film—if they were turned over to the U.S. Government at all." This curious reply made us wonder whether footage such as we hoped to find might still exist in Japan or might be held by people in the United States who were in Japan during the Occupation. Barbara Van Dyke, who became associate producer for our film, began writing letters to a long list of people, asking for information on any additional footage they might have. In the end this search proved fruitless; we found we had to proceed without additional "human-effects footage."

One of those to whom she wrote was the Japanese film critic and historian Akira Iwasaki, the original producer. His name was not mentioned in the documents received from the Defense Department or the National Archives but was suggested by the writer Donald Richie, a leading authority on Japanese cinema, as a
likely source of information. Iwasaki did not reply to our inquiry; he explained later that he had doubted the "sincerity" of our project.

Her search did produce one extraordinary find. One of the occupants of the observation plane that followed the Enola Gay, the bomb-dropping plane, to Hiroshima was Harold Agnew, who later became head of the Los Alamos Laboratory. As a personal venture he had taken with him a 16-mm camera. The very brief sequence he brought back provides an unforgettable glimpse of the historic explosion and the shuddering impact of the blast on the observation plane itself, which seems likely for a moment to be blown to perdition. From Mr. Agnew we acquired a copy of this short sequence.

Our first rough assembly was some 40 minutes long, but we kept reducing it in quest of sharper impact. What finally emerged, after more than a year of experimentation, was a quiet 16-minute film with a factual, eloquently understated narration written by Paul Ronder and spoken by him and Kazuko Oshima. Ronder and Geoffrey Bartz did the editing. We were not sure it would have the effect we hoped for, but our doubts were soon resolved.

After several small screenings we arranged a major preview at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, in February 1970, to which the press was invited. The auditorium was jammed, and at the end of the showing the audience sat in total silence for several seconds. We were at first unsure what this meant, but the comments soon clarified the response. Later that day the UPI ticker carried a highly favorable report that treated the film as a major news event, mentioning the address of the Center for Mass Communication and the print sale price ($96). Two days later checks and orders began arriving in the mail and continued, without promotional effort on our part, at the rate of 100 a month. In 5 months almost 500 prints were sold—to film libraries, colleges, school systems, clubs, community groups, and churches. Every screening seemed to bring a surge of letters and orders. Foreign sales quickly mounted.

Two things amazed us: (1) the electric effect on audiences everywhere and (2) the massive silence of the American networks. All of them had been invited to the press preview; none had attended. Early in the morning after the resounding UPI dispatch, all three commercial networks phoned to ask for preview prints and sent motorcycle couriers to collect them, but this was followed by another silence. By making follow-up phone calls we learned that CBS and ABC were "not interested." Only NBC thought it might use the film, if it could find a "news hook." We dared not speculate what kind of event this might call for.

The networks' attitude was, of course, in line with a policy all three had pursued for over a decade, that of not broadcasting documentaries other than their own. Nature films and a few other categories could win exemption, but as an NBC policy statement of 1960 had made clear, where "opinion-influencing" might be involved, only network documentaries were permissible. This was explained as a matter of responsibility, to assure authenticity and objectivity, but independent producers attacked it as a monopolistic ploy designed to secure for a network's own productions the limited sponsorship funds available for documentaries. Independents called it dangerous because, as a result of the policy, the documentary diet of most television viewers was determined by three network executives of similar interests and connections. We at Columbia University were outraged by the network policy. We had half-expected that the his-
Samples of the U.S. Air Force Hiroshima and Nagasaki footage records.

**USAF CENTRAL FILM DEPOSITORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looking along RR tracks showing damaged tracks and electrical wiring.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged electrical power lines of RR.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged wooden homes.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged steel frame bridge.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gunshot wounds, skull and debris.</td>
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<td>Damaged RR bridge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Damaged RR bridge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twisted frame and ties of RR bridge.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart attack.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Damaged steel frame of concrete building.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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<td>Remains of cell block.</td>
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**8275-2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A piece of a dress then showing how the pattern of the dress was burned onto the back of a woman.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Showing burns on the body, arms and head of a man.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Showing protection afforded by a wrist watch.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Showing burns on the face, neck and arms of a man.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burns on a man’s hand and how the movement of his fingers has been restricted.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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**10679-2**

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<th>Sample Description</th>
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<td>A piece of a dress then showing how the pattern of the dress was burned onto the back of a woman.</td>
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<td>Burns on a man’s hand and how the movement of his fingers has been restricted.</td>
<td>UNCLASSIFIED</td>
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The Case of the A-Bomb Footage

EFFECTS OF ATOMIC BOMB ON HIRONOSIMA AND NAGASAKI

1) CU Animation.
2) CU Top of male patient's head showing effects of burn, several angles.
3) CU Animation.
4) CU Two Jap children showing loss of hair.
5) CU Jap woman's face who is suffering radiation sickness.
6) CU Old Jap woman showing loss of hair.
7) CU Jap male patient's face, several angles.

PUBLIC GOODS

USAF CENTRAL FILM DEPOSITORY

EFFECTS OF ATOMIC BOMB ON HIRONOSIMA AND NAGASAKI

1) CU Animation.
2) CU Top of male patient's head showing effects of burn, several angles.
3) CU Animation.
4) CU Two Jap children showing loss of hair.
5) CU Jap woman's face who is suffering radiation sickness.
6) CU Old Jap woman showing loss of hair.
7) CU Jap male patient's face, several angles.

THE END

UNCLASSIFIED
toric nature of the material would in this case supersede the policy. But we were for the moment too busy filling nontelevision orders to consider any particular protest or action.

Then a curious chain of media phenomena changed the situation. On April 5, 1970, the Sunday supplement Parade, which generally gave its chief attention to the romantic aberrations of the mighty, carried a prominent item about Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945, calling it unforgettable, and necessary viewing for the people of any nation possessing the bomb. This apparently caused the editors of the Boston Globe, which carried Parade, to wonder why television was ignoring the film. They made phone calls to nuclear scientists and others, asking their opinions on the matter, and reached several who had attended our previews. The result was a lead editorial in the Globe headed: "HIROSHIMA-NAGASAKI, AUGUST 1945—NOT FOR SENSITIVE U.S. EYES" which ended with a blast at the networks for ignoring the film. Variety featured the Globe's "needling" of the networks in a special box in its next edition. This brought sudden action from National Educational Television (NET), which a few days later signed a contract to broadcast the film in early August, 25 years after the dropping of the bombs. No sooner had the contract been signed than NBC announced that it wanted the film for use on its monthly magazine series, First Tuesday. When Sumner Glimcher, manager of the Center for Mass Communication, explained that the film was committed to NET, he was asked if we could "buy out" NET so that NBC could have the film; we declined to try.

As the issue of a United States telecast was moving to a resolution, we were aware of parallel, and apparently more feverish, developments in Japan. Our first inkling of what was happening there came at the Museum of Modern Art preview, at which we were appr oached by a representative of Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS), one of Japan's commercial systems, with an offer to purchase Japanese television rights. To be negotiating such a matter seemed strange in view of the Japanese government's announced plans for a television screening, but the TBS man was persistent and eager, and we finally signed an agreement authorizing a telecast, with an option to repeat. The telecast took place on March 18, 1970, and the option to repeat was promptly exercised. We gradually became aware, through bulletins from Japan, of the enormous impact made by these telecasts. The government-arranged showing had taken place earlier over NHK, the government network, but had included little except the rubble shots. Human beings had been excised "in deference to the relatives of the victims," but this action had brought a storm of protest. It was against this background that TBS had negotiated for our film. It also gave our film, which made use of footage that the NHK telecast had eliminated, an added impact. Professor Sakamoto, of the University of Tokyo, began sending us voluminous translations of favorable reviews and articles, one of which paid special tribute to Columbia University for showing the Japanese people "what our own government tried to withhold from us." The reviews included major coverage in a picture magazine following the Life format. Viewing statistics were provided. The Mainichi Shimbun reported that the film "caused a sensation throughout the country," while in Hiroshima "the viewing rate soared to four times the normal rate." The Chugoku Shimbun reported:

At the atomic injury hospital in Hiroshima last night, nine o'clock being curfew time, all was quiet. Only in one room on the second floor of the west wing, the television diffusely continued its program . . . . They had obtained special permission from the doctors. . . . The first scene was of ruins. "That's the Aioi Bridge." "That's the Bengaku Dome." The women follow the scenes. Even the Chinese woman who had not wanted to see is leaning from her bed and watching intently . . . . The scene of victims which has elicited so much comment is now on. "That's exactly how it was," they nod to each other. However, when the film was over they contradicted their words and said, "It was much, much worse."

A letter came from the mayor of Hiroshima. The city would mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the bomb with a major observance, including a long television program, and wanted to include material from our film.

The most gratifying response came from Akira Iwasaki, who after a lapse of almost 25 years had seen his footage on television. His role in the project was not credited, and he might have been expected to resent this, but no sign of resentment appeared. He wrote us a long letter expressing his appreciation for how we had used the material. He also published a long review in a leading Japanese magazine, describing his reaction:

I was lost in thought for a long time, deeply moved by this film. . . . I was the producer of the original long film which offered the basic material for this short film. That is, I knew every cut of it. . . . yet I was speechless. . . . It was not the kind of film the Japanese thought Americans would produce. The film is an appeal or warning from man to man for peaceful reflection—to prevent the use of the bomb ever again. I like the narration, in which the emotion is well controlled and the voice is never raised. . . . That made me cry. In this part, the producers are no longer Americans. Their feelings are completely identical to our feelings.
The impact of the film was further illuminated by a bizarre incident. A delegation of three Japanese gentlemen was announced at my Columbia University office, and ushered in, all impeccably dressed. One member, introducing the leader, identified him as a member or former member of the Japanese Parliament, representing the socialists. The leader himself then explained that he came on behalf of an organization called the Japan Congress Against A and H Bombs, also known as Gensuikin. In this capacity, they had three requests to make. First, as a token of appreciation for what we had achieved with our film Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945, would I accept a small brooch as a gift to my wife? Puzzled and curious, I accepted.

Second, would I consider an invitation to speak in Hiroshima on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the dropping of the bomb, in the course of the scheduled observances? I hesitated—the suggestion raised endless questions in my mind—but I said I would consider. The leader seemed reassured and said I would receive a letter.

Then came the third request. Would he be permitted to purchase six prints of Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945? I explained that we sold prints at $96, for nonprofit use, making no discrimination among buyers. With an audible sigh of relief, he suddenly unbuttoned his shirt, ripped out a money belt, and produced six pristine $100 bills. We handed him the six prints. One member of the delegation had a camera ready; photographs were taken and the group departed. A few days later we received a letter from another organization with a very similar name—the Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, or Gensuikyo. It requested the right to translate our film into Japanese, without editing change. Again we wrote to Professor Sakamoto of the University of Tokyo for enlightenment. Again he responded promptly:

... the movement against atomic bombs has been split into two groups since early in the 1960's, the immediate cause being the difference in attitude toward the nuclear tests carried on by the Soviet Union. The Japan Congress Against A and H Bombs, which politically is close to the Social Democrats, is against all nuclear tests, regardless of nation. The Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, the other body, is close to the Communist Party, and is opposed to nuclear tests by the United States, but considers tests by the Socialist countries undesirable but necessary. ... The Council is a somewhat larger organization than the other. Many efforts have been made in the past to merge the two bodies but none have been successful to date.
In the following weeks we were bombarded by both Congress and Council with cabled requests about prints, translation rights, and 8-mm rights. To our relief the issue was resolved, by Professor Sakamoto’s revelation that in 1945 a Nippon Eiga Sha technician, fearing that the American military would seize and remove the footage, had secreted a duplicate set in a laboratory ceiling. For 25 years, fearing prosecution, he had not dared to mention this. Now at last he made known its existence. We now referred Japanese inquiries to this “newly available” resource. Apparently the Defense Department’s suspicion, expressed in the letter from the Pentagon historian, had had some validity.

On August 3, 1970, Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945 had its American television premiere over NET, giving the system one of its largest audiences to date. “Hiroshima Gets Numbers,” Variety reported. NBC’s Today program and the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite had decided, at the last moment, to carry news items about the event, using short clips and crediting NET and Columbia University. NET’s Tampa outlet did a delayed telecast via tape, after deleting some of the “human-effects footage.” So far as we could learn, all other stations carried the full film. The telecast won favorable reviews across the nation, and NET’s decision to show it was acclaimed.

To my disappointment, NET coupled the film with a panel discussion on the subject, “Should we have dropped the bomb?” It was an issue I had deliberately excluded from the film, even though most members of our group wanted the film to condemn Truman’s action. This seemed to me an issue irrelevant to our film, already endlessly discussed. To me the Hiroshima-Nagasaki footage is meaningful because of its implications for today and tomorrow, rather than as an escape into the past.

During the research for my books on the history of American broadcasting—especially The Image Empire—I became chillingly aware of how often in recent years men in high position have urged use of atomic weapons. French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault has said that Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, during the Dienbienphu crisis, twice offered him atom bombs to use against the beleaguered Vietnamese forces, but he demurred. Oral histories on file at the Dulles Collection in Princeton make clear that Dulles made the offer on the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Apparently Bidault’s refusal (not President Eisenhower’s as some writers have assumed) averted another holocaust. During the Quemoy-Matsu confrontation, use of an atom bomb was again discussed. In 1964 Barry Goldwater felt that use of a “low-yield atomic device” to defoliate Vietnamese forests should be considered (he later emphasized that he had not actually recommended it). More recently various commentators have made themselves sounding boards for proposed world strategies based on “tactical” nuclear weapons—a term meant to suggest a modest sort of holocaust, but actually designating bombs equivalent in destructive power to the Hiroshima bomb. (A more advanced bomb now equals 2,500 Hiroshima bombs, as our film makes clear.) Such proposals can be made only by people who have not fully realized what an atomic war can be. When I first saw the Hiroshima-Nagasaki footage, I became aware how little I had previously understood. To win a war with such weapons is to win an uninhabitable world.

Why—and by what right—was the footage declared “Secret”? It contains no military information, the supposed basis for such a classification. Then why the suppression? The answer is probably clear enough: It was feared, in that postwar time, that if people saw this, they might not support proposals for increasingly more powerful nuclear weapons, and Congress might not so readily appropriate the billions of dollars needed to create them. The film was seen not as a military threat but as a public-relations and Congressional-relations threat. Hence the misuse of the classification device, a habit perhaps as dangerous as the weapons.

I produced the short film Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945 with the hope that it would be seen by as many people as possible on all sides of every iron curtain. If a film can have the slightest deterrent effect, it may be needed now more than ever. Because of its continuing meaning, Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945 still wins new audiences. When Columbia University Press recently decided to discontinue its film activities, the distribution of Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945 was taken over by the Museum of Modern Art for rental and long-term lease. Meanwhile I have assembled the correspondence and documents relating to the film—some 300 items—and placed them with my papers in Special Collections of the Columbia University library. A photocopy of the entire file has been placed in the research library of the Museum of Modern Art. The documents I have mentioned and quoted can be found in both places.

I did not accept the invitation to the 1970 Hiroshima observances. But since then I have visited Japan twice, had long talks with Akira Iwasaki, met one of the cameramen in his 1945 unit, and visited the generously helpful Professor Sakamoto. I continued to correspond with Iwasaki. In 1978 he published in Japan a book whose title can be translated as Occupied Screen; one chapter concerns the story of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki footage and its final emergence as Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945. In 1980 a brief afterword was added to the film: “The original Japanese footage was shot by Nippon Eiga Sha under the supervision of Akira Iwasaki.”
An Independent with the Networks

Robert L. Drew

Robert L. Drew, chief filmmaker of Drew Associates, is a former fighter pilot and Life editor. As a Neiman Fellow at Harvard (1955) he worked out theories for a television journalism based on storytelling through candid photography. In 1960 he formed Drew Associates and conceived, produced, and managed the editing of Primary, the first film in which sound cameras moved freely with characters throughout a breaking story. Drew films (120 by 1981) are broadcast as network specials, winning Emmys and festival recognition for their spontaneity and humanity.

I have been asked to write about myself and two questions: How do I happen to make documentary films the networks seem willing to broadcast? What role do I play as executive producer of Drew Associates films?
An Independent

About myself, I was a high school student in Fort Thomas, Kentucky, when I ran into a kind of music man. He stomped on the floor to beat time, smoked powerful cigars, and taught music by shouting into your face. His name was McKenna and he had a temper. He drove me to practice the trumpet a lot over a period of years. He also led the band and made good music.

What that got me when I left for the Army Air Corps was an appreciation of fresh air and a lot of bugle playing. I graduated from flying school on my nineteenth birthday. On my twentieth I was taking a long walk through occupied Italy after my last mission as a fighter pilot.

Back in California, I flew the first U.S. jet fighters, and wrote a story about that for Life magazine. I spent the next 10 years as a Life correspondent and editor in Los Angeles, Detroit, New York, and Chicago.

As for my role as an executive producer, it began in 1954, the year I had an idea about television. Television was reaching more and more people, but its documentary films were not reaching me. However interesting I might find the subject matter, I dozed off in the middle of documentary programs.

Why that had to be I could not imagine. My job was covering the real world and I found it exciting. Every few days I would go out with the likes of Alfred Eisenstaedt, Leonard McCombe, or Eugene Smith to bring back still pictures of reality that captured excitement, spontaneity, and, sometimes, even emotion.

The idea was no very great leap. It simply occurred to me to go after some of the qualities in motion pictures that we were already getting in still pictures. But it was an idea that could grow on you. For instance, if one made a more interesting documentary, one might interest larger audiences and inform viewers on levels that journalism had not reached before. Such storytelling might pay for itself, develop its own independence, and improve the lot of journalism, television, and the public.

Because the changes I had in mind were so simple and the steps to make them so obvious, I decided to take a few months off and do them myself. Life gave me leave. NBC gave me the money to make a magazine of the air. I put Life photographer Alan Grant behind the main camera and set off to cover a half-dozen stories.

The crew was not immediately enthusiastic, I think because wrestling with the big, blimped camera, the oak-hewn tripod, a table-sized 16-mm tape recorder, movie lights, and trunks full of cables had diverted their attention from the finer things in filmmaking. Spontaneity didn’t wait around for all this stuff to be set up, and the only real surprises that took place in front of the camera were the shock of the clap sticks and outbursts of the sound man shouting “Cut!”

I found that an operation like this had to be planned and directed, and I directed it. I edited the film, wrote a narration, and delivered to NBC a magazine show under two different titles—Key Picture and, naturally, Magazine X. NBC professed to like the program and set off to try to sell a series based on it. I retreated to Life to try to figure out what had gone wrong.

After a few months I thought I had figured out most of the answers. Yes, we could get more talent into the process. Yes, we could reduce the size and complexity of the equipment, given money and time—maybe a million dollars and 3 or 4 years. Add a year or so at the front end to raise the money and a couple of years at the tail to make some breakthrough films and my simple fix had grown from a project of a few months to maybe 6 or 8 years.

That’s how you get hooked. I was pretty committed by now, and I had a terrible feeling that one problem remained for which there might not be a solution. Grant and I had done some good things. But the film we turned out was not measurably better than some other documentary films. The things we had done were really not that important to the overall power of the film. Something was wrong that photography and writing did not remedy. As we tracked it down, the problem appeared to be the editing, the way we put the pictures together. On one level they made perfect sense, but on another they didn’t build power. Until we got a line on that problem I feared that other improvements might not make the big difference I was after.

For clues I looked to Walter Lippmann, William Allen White, John Grierson, Henry Adams, Robert Flaherty, Josiah Royce, George Bernard Shaw. Josiah Royce? Yes, he was a philosopher, a contemporary of William James, and he wrote one book for laymen, The Philosophy of Loyalty. Royce had an inflammatory impact on me, not because he offered an answer, but because he offered an injunction: “Plunge ahead!”

I went off to Harvard on a Nieman Fellowship and spent the year on basic storytelling—the short story, modern stage play, novel. I wish I could tell you just how the answer grew on me over the course of that year, the realization of exactly what was wrong with the editorial thinking behind Key Picture and much other documentary filmmaking. The hints came from many sides and built up slowly until the answer seemed to me convincing and, yes, simple. It was so simple that I was embarrassed at the time it had cost me to realize it.
I am sure it is all perfectly clear to you today, but here is what I finally saw. Most documentary films were in fact lectures. They were then, and most remain today, lectures with picture illustrations. It was as clear as the lectures I was attending every day at Harvard and thrown into relief by the novels and plays I was reading every night. In television documentaries the logic was in the words, the narration, the lecture.

I tuned in to watch Murrow's See It Now. As the program progressed, I turned off the sound and watched the picture. The progression disintegrated. What power had been there turned to confusion. The logic left. When I turned the picture off and listened to the sound, the program tracked perfectly. Later that year Murrow's television programs were printed in book form. They read very well.

Obvious as all this must seem to you, it was staggering news to me. It made many things clear.

A lecture on the living medium of television must be dull. The apparent exception is when the lecture contains news, but then it is the news that sustains, not the lecture.

A lecture can promise a great deal. But the level of excitement it can deliver over a television hour cannot build. At best it remains flat. Even in a very good lecture, the curve of interest will generally droop.

The kind of logic that does build interest and feeling on television is the logic of drama. Dramatic logic works because the viewer is seeing for himself and there is suspense. The viewer can become interested in characters. Characters develop. Things happen. Whether the drama is a movie or a football game or a well-made play, the viewer is allowed to use his senses as well as his thoughts, his emotions as well as his mind. Dramatic logic may build power on a curve that has the possibility at least of going right through the roof. When this works, it puts viewers more in touch with the world, in touch with themselves and revelations about events, people, and ideas.

By this time, later in the Neiman year, the storytelling problem was beginning to sort itself out. Candid photography would capture the spontaneous character and drama that make the real world exciting. Editing would use dramatic logic to convey the excitement of the natural drama captured by the camera.

The other Neiman Fellows, all of them newspaper people, were not shy about offering me a challenge now and then, usually an alcoholic challenge as well as an intellectual one. I wondered what would give first, my liver or my brain, as we debated over martinis into the night the question of what, if anything, all this stuff about storytelling had to do with journalism.

Whatever the damage, I came out of the experience having considered some questions about knowledge, journalism, and storytelling.

A lecture on the living medium of television must be dull. The apparent exception is when the lecture contains news, but then it is the news that sustains, not the lecture.

By 1955 Walter Lippmann had applied Henry Adams' pessimism to American politics. Democracy cannot continue to function, said Lippmann, because the electorate can no longer know enough facts to vote rationally. Newspapers are declining. Television is leading us down the path of diversion and escapism. Knowledge is exploding, and nothing can make up for our not being able to keep up with it.

Such pessimism did not impress John Grierson at all. He agreed that no voter could know enough to vote rationally, but, he said, we've never made our decisions that way anyhow. It is "commonly shared experience" that has allowed us to make decisions together in the past.

But Grierson agreed with Lippmann that we do have a problem. Nations have become too large and complex to function as tribes, towns, or courts, or what the founding fathers had in the past. Grierson had a plan to fix all that.

All we need to do, he said, is build multitudes of theaters across the landscape, put films about the real world into them, and persuade whole populations to go to those theaters. Thus would Grierson use technology and filmmaking to give the millions the commonly shared experience necessary to the workings of their democracies.

I couldn't help taking Grierson's side because I recognized a certain kindred megalomania there and also because I had seen his improbable theaters actually materialize. I had one in my living room. Television had gone Grierson one better, and now what were we going to do about it?

Journalists have problems deciding what to do with television because most good ones are captive of the medium in which they learned their trade. Thus an Indian smoke signaler might fail to appreciate the possibilities of the telegraph key. A radio reporter might have trouble showing things instead of telling them. A lecturer might have trouble allowing a drama to unfold.

But journalism is not one medium or another. It is a function that combines what is going on (news) with the means to communicate it.

Henry Adams lived through perhaps the most dramatic of the knowledge explosions. When he went off to college in the mid-1800s, it was expected that he would learn all there was to know. By the time he finished The Education of Henry Adams in 1904 diversities in knowledge were so great that he believed any sense of unity to be impossible. But, he said, I am old, and it may be that as I die a baby will be born who will grow up to believe that he can see the unity of it all. Unity, like beauty, may be in the mind of the beholder.
Each means of communication survives by doing what it can do uniquely and best. Thus the New York Times does not try to print Life’s pictures. Nor does Life try to print all the facts. Try to do what some other medium does uniquely better and you are misusing your medium.

In television the nightly newscast is its own medium. What it does uniquely and best is summarize the news. Thus it calls for talkers to tell you many things quickly—a lecture with picture illustration that works because of its timeliness.

The prime-time documentary is a different medium altogether. What it can add to the journalistic spectrum is something absolutely unique—strong experience of what it is like to be somewhere else, seeing for yourself into dramatic developments in the lives of people caught up in stories of importance.

To address the question raised by my fellow Neimans, all this storytelling stuff has to do with creating a new television journalism that will bring the documentary into action doing what it can do uniquely and best. This means leaving to other media what they best can do. So don’t look for facts. Do be ready for some illuminating, high-voltage experience. And the print media should also be ready for floods of new and interested readers. The right kind of documentary programming will raise more interest than it can satisfy, more questions that it should try to answer. It should create interests to fuel a multimedia engine for informing, a system for knowing that leads from television to newspapers to books.

That is how the year went. At the end I wrote a piece on some of these things for Neiman Reports called “See It Then.”

I went back to Life hoping to quickly assemble my teams and engineer the lightweight equipment. But I found myself running in place to try to keep up with writing and editing chores. The managers of Time Inc.—Henry Luce, Roy Larsen—had looked at Key Picture and passed. Networks kept offering me jobs. I already had one of those. I was making $13,000 a year, and I needed a million dollars.

I was getting inspiration and sometimes help from a number of talented people: Richard Leacock, cameraman and filmmaker on a remarkable film for Omnibus, “Toby in the Tall Corn”; Arthur Zegart, a producer of CBS documentaries; Bill McClure, a cameraman for CBS Reports; Morris Engel and Fons Ianelli, experimenters with mobile equipment and filmmaking.

It took me 5 more years before I had the team, the lightweight equipment, and the story for a breakthrough film. In the meantime I had made a number of short films financed by Andrew Heiskell, the publisher of Life. Bullfighters in Spain, experiments with weightless men, a balloon flight to look at Mars through a telescope above most of the atmosphere, a college football game—each of these was the subject of a Life story and also a short film by me. The films were picked up and broadcast on network television by the Today and Tonight shows, between variety acts on the Ed Sullivan show and on network news programs. Life got its money back in promotion. I got to exercise my teams and develop techniques. But we did not yet have our lightweight equipment, and the films were only preparation for making the candid dramas.

In 1960 I was invited to move from Life to Time’s broadcast division. It owned television stations and had a terrific capital equipment budget.
Wes Tullen, vice president in charge of Time Inc.'s real estate and television operations, welcomed me aboard and asked me to teach the people in his stations "to make your kind of film." In return he would provide funds to buy and modify equipment and make my candid films.

To carry out my side of the bargain I commissioned a West Coast equipment maker, Loren Rider, to build a new machine that would allow us to edit complex films while mixing many sound tracks in any hotel room. It would be completely portable, and we could take it to any Time Inc. TV station, set up, and make our kind of films.

To engineer our lightweight cameras I asked Leacock to lay out the specifications, and we assigned D. A. Pennebaker, a filmmaker who once managed an electronics company, to translate these specifications to our equipment modifier, Mitch Bogdanovich.

By March 1960 I felt I was ready to make the first really candid film in which the camera-recorder would live intimately with characters involved in a real story. I settled on a young senator, John F. Kennedy, running for President in a Wisconsin primary against another senator, Hubert Humphrey. I told both Senators that for this new form of reporting to work we would have to live with them from morning to night, shooting anything we wanted to shoot, day after day.

They could not know or care when we were shooting, and that was the only way we could capture a true picture of the story. When Kennedy raised an eyebrow I said, "Trust us or it cannot be done." Kennedy agreed. Humphrey agreed.

To shoot the film Primary I assembled three teams in Minneapolis. Each was composed of a photographer and a correspondent who also took sound. I assigned Leacock with myself as correspondent to Kennedy and photographers Al Maysles and Terrence McCartney Filgate to swing between coverage of Humphrey and political gatherings. Pennebaker was there on his way to set up the new, portable editing machine in a Minneapolis hotel room.

It was 6 years since Key Picture, 5 years since Leacock and I had met, 4 years since we had begun preparing, and now we felt the excitement of a beginning about to begin.

On our first day with Kennedy, Leacock and I were riding in the candidate's car when it stopped in a small town. Kennedy bounded out, down a sidewalk, into a doorway, through a hall, and into a photographer's studio. The photographer posed Kennedy and took his picture, and Kennedy walked back out to his car. Leacock had never stopped shooting, I had never stopped recording. Now we looked at each other. It was a thrilling moment—the first time we had ever exercised such mobility in sync sound—maybe the first time anyone had.

We shot for most of a week. I gathered the teams every night to trade notes on what we had shot and make assignments for the next day. Two dramatic lines unfolded—Kennedy fighting to overcome the prejudices against a Catholic candidate, Humphrey warning the farmers against "Easterners who laugh at you." We followed those lines down to the night of the election. Kennedy was holed up in his hotel suite, and he had agreed that one of us would be there shooting. But Leacock was down in the coffee shop, reluctant to intrude on Kennedy's privacy. A laudable, decent fellow, this Leacock, I thought, as I walked him to the door and saw him into Kennedy's room. Leacock dropped midgetape recorders in a few ashtrays and shot what happened as Kennedy first appeared to be losing, then came from behind to win.

We arrived in Minneapolis with 40,000 feet of film. The door opened to the hotel room in which Pennebaker and Ryder had set up our new, portable editing machine. It was the size of a ballroom and full of machines and cables. "Don't worry," Pennebaker said, "we've wired the fuses." The thing was a monster. We worked around the clock to get it working and to synchronize the film and tape. There had been an invisible break in the wire Leacock and I had struggled so hard to maintain between his camera and my recorder. There was no sync signal. The film and tape would not match up. But Ryder had included a new gadget in his system. He called it a resolver, and all we had to do was turn the crank at the right rate in the right direction and we could transfer the sound in sync. The rates and directions changed constantly, and each piece took hours to bring into sync. Pretty soon we did not know whether it was day or night.

The people from the Time Inc. station would look in on us as they arrived for work in the morning and again as they left after work in the evening. They never showed the slightest interest in learning to make films our way.

This was the year I decided that photographers and correspondents must also edit. This would give them responsibility for paying off on what they shot and help each one of them develop as a "filmmaker"—a person capable of going beyond his or her specialty to also produce and manage the editing of films.

In this hotel room my theory ran into the first of the considerable problems it was to trigger over the next few years. Al Maysles was a brilliant cameraman, but there was something about sitting at an editing table hour after hour that immobilized him. Filgate, notorious for a corrosive wit, became positively ferocious after a few days and nights staring into a viewer.
The editing soon boiled down to Leacock, Pennebaker, and me. We schemed out sequences together. They cut them long. I cut them down. In the end I called in an editor from New York, Bob Farren, who combined the sequences. I gave the film a final pacing and wrote a spare narration. The film ran 52 minutes. Later Leacock reduced this to 30 minutes for air.

*Primary* seemed at that moment like a culmination. It was only a beginning. One thing it began was a period of furious production by an independent who was about to encounter the networks.

**With the Networks**

Independent documentary filmmakers have tended to regard the networks as huge, hostile, and indestructible. Yet the networks' actual output of documentaries has been limited in number and style, and many independents will probably survive the networks very nicely.

Not all networks have been hostile all the time. ABC has used or accepted outsiders from time to time—myself, David Wolper, the Raymonds. NBC has accepted some documentary making when it came through the entertainment side (the *Life Line* series), and it has employed or bought from independents for particular jobs (John Alpert's forays into Afghanistan and Cambodia). CBS has been more consistently closed to independents, though the entertainment division has been able to float documentary series such as *National Geographic* and *The Body Human*. But some tough reasons for hostility have remained, reasons of pride, style, and overhead.

When *Primary* was ready to be screened in mid-1960, nearly all network documentaries were based strictly upon the written word. Narration carpeted almost every film, with spots left open for interview, all edited so that the word flow never ceased. *Primary* contained less than 3 minutes of narration. It showed characters in action, and it was meant to be looked at as one would look at a theatrical film.
The reaction of network executives to *Primary* was summed up by my friend Elmer Lower, then an NBC News V.P. and later to become president of ABC News. "You've got some nice footage there, Bob."

The program was broadcast by station groups (Time Inc., RKO) and syndicated to local stations. It was never broadcast by a network.

*Primary* won the Flaherty Award for Best Documentary and the Blue Ribbon at the American Film Festival. In Europe *Primary* was received as a kind of documentary second-coming. It was broadcast on the television networks, won prizes, and made its way into theaters. Film critics in Paris rated it above the top fiction films of the year. My colleagues were lionized by the Europeans, and New Wave directors paid us the compliment of sending back our camera style in fiction films such as *Breathless* and *Tom Jones*.

After *Primary* things began to happen on the network front. I made a film on Indianapolis race driver Eddie Sachs, *On the Pole*. The vice president in charge of programming at ABC, Tom Moore, had been watching the evolution of our films. He showed *On the Pole* to his chairman, Leonard Goldenson, and came back to me with our first network proposition. Edward R. Murrow had just gathered a lot of credit for several documentaries on Africa. Moore wanted me to make a program for ABC on Latin America.

I protested that television journalism should be making films on people. I suggested we let Murrow have the continents and that we do something else.

"What else?" asked Moore.

I took a week to puzzle out what else in regard to Latin America and came up with a story that could be seen through people in conflict who represented the nations, factions, and ideas that were clashing there. Moore commissioned it, I shot and edited it with my team in a hurry, and the program, *Yanki No!* was broadcast in the fall of 1960. It made a splash with critics and the public. ABC's News vice president quit because his management had made the film with an independent. The sponsor, Bell and Howell, asked for more.

So the first network deal I made was for a single program on Latin America. It came about on the network's initiative because its chairman had a need his organization could not fulfill. We were selected because we were there at the right time with something promising to show. What we made for the network attracted commercial demand from a sponsor. That cemented a major arrangement between this independent and that network with Time Inc. as a profit-taking financial partner.

The arrangement called for me to produce programs in volume. I had never done that, but it fitted my theories. To build audiences big enough to pay for our programs and develop our independence we would have to broadcast the programming in a regular pattern. To do that we would have to produce in volume—perhaps 2 or 3 dozen hours a year. My theory called for most of those hours to be multisubject programs (magazine shows). I believed that we were selling "an experience," not "subject matter." But the network, sponsor, and Time Inc. wanted hours devoted to particular subjects, and that is what we were assigned to produce.

So far I had pretty much hand-made the programs one by one. But my theories called for training specialists who showed a talent for producing—cameramen, journalists, editors, writers—to conceive the films, manage the shooting, and "make" them in the editing. I called them "filmmakers" and began creditting at least one person as filmmaker on every production.

With Time Inc.'s help, I formed Drew Associates and saw that it was owned by the key, creative "Associates." I set up a research staff to find stories. I developed the concept of each program with a filmmaker and sent him or her off to shoot the story.

When the film came back, the whole production team would screen it, the filmmaker would present his "scheme" for editing it, and usually a free-for-all would ensue among the team members. Out of this I would adjudicate or, if necessary, compose a final scheme for the editing. The filmmaker would go off with the scheme, the raw film, and a half-dozen or so editors to make his first cut. A month or two later, I would see that cut and either approve it or recut it. Once or twice I was able to approve a cut. Mainly I found myself deep in the editing business. This was hurtful to filmmakers' pride, and I regretted it, but conceived it to be part of a necessary training process. In later years I have come to believe that the theory was wrong. It is true that a number of fine filmmakers have emerged. The first generation included Richard Leacock, Gregory Shuker, Don Alan Penne­baker, Hope Ryden, and James Lipscomb. Mike Jackson, Nick Proferes, Tom Bywaters, and Anne Drew rose from the ranks of editors. From the correspondents came Tom Johnson and Harry Moses. From the production side came Peter Powell, Phil Burton, and Sidney Reichman. I am now persuaded, however, that a great photographer does not have to be a total filmmaker and that anyone who sets himself up to make himself one may be defying the laws of art and nature.

Thus, in the first season with ABC, Drew Associates produced a half-dozen *Closeups* for Bell and Howell, broadcast at irregular intervals by ABC.

Time Inc. and ABC were giants who competed. They both owned television stations. ABC "stole" a Time Inc. station. A Time Inc. executive insulted ABC's president. Time Inc. lost its access to ABC air time.
Against my feverish advice, Time Inc. placed a multimillion dollar order with Drew Associates for a dozen new programs. I could see disaster for Time Inc.'s pocketbook and my whole editorial idea if I produced a revolution on film that could not find its way to the public via regular scheduling on network. Time Inc. ordered the programs. I produced them. They were syndicated at odd times in odd places. The film festivals loved our programs, but they built no television audience. Time Inc. finally had to release Drew Associates from what had been an exclusive contract.

This move set up Drew Associates' first direct network deal. We were shooting on speculation a film on President John Kennedy in the White House, working with his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, to counter the governor of the state of Alabama, who was trying to prevent black students from attending the state university. Tom Moore called to say that ABC would like to buy the program. That was nice because we had just run out of money and I was about to call back our teams, call off the film, and, in fact, call off the company. ABC sold the film, Crisis, Behind a Presidential Commitment, to Xerox, and we negotiated a 2-year arrangement by which Drew Associates would produce six documentary specials for ABC News. The day after the deal was signed, a new ABC News president arrived to take over his duties—it was Elmer Lower. We had a nice lunch at Tavern on the Green. He made me an offer, "Tear up the contract," he said. "Bring your people aboard as a unit of ABC News and you can make films as long as you like." There was a pause. "If you insist on remaining independent, these will be the last films you make for us."

For 2 years it was quite clear that we were "independent." We made films on Vietnam and Malaya and the death of President Kennedy, but Elmer and I didn't see too much of each other. The end of that period, 1964, was the end of our production for ABC News.

In 1965, Xerox asked me what subjects were too tough for networks to assign. I gave them a two-page list. They assigned an hour on drug addiction. The film, Storm Signal, won a first prize at Venice, but it was rejected by every network. Xerox bought time on stations in the top 50 markets, ran the film several times in each and got back figures proving that it was the most looked-at documentary of the year and ranked among the top ten specials of any kind.

In 1967, The Bell Telephone Company decided to commission a series of documentaries on the arts. The first year I produced three specials: Gian Carlo Menotti's "Festival of Two Worlds," the opening of the new Metropolitan Opera House, and a jazz festival in Belgium with Benny Goodman. The programs were broadcast as specials on NBC and won all kinds of prizes including a Peabody Award.

The second year The Bell Telephone Company asked me to produce all their specials—an even dozen. For the first time in my life, I turned down business. I agreed to produce half of the hours, six, and suggested they stick with their original producer, Henry Jaffee, for the other six. I felt I owed Jaffee something because he had brought me together with Bell, but also I wanted more time for hand-making the films. One of the programs, Man Who Dances, on ballet dancer Edward Villella, won an Emmy.

It was now 1969. Looking back, some interesting things had happened that had influenced relations between this independent and the networks. The one network that had known it could use independents now had a News president who felt that he didn't want any. This closed down our access to public affairs subject matter for network broadcast. The sponsors who had influenced networks to go after special qualities in documentaries were fading. Bell and Howell and Xerox and other companies had shifted into a less active and more conservative mode of broadcasting. As the costs of network hours increased, fewer sponsors could afford to buy whole programs. The networks gained strength as a buyers' market became a sellers' market. They became less responsive to sponsors' wishes. As network competition for audiences increased, culture disappeared as a regular commodity in prime time. The Bell Telephone Company was denied air time for a continua-
An Independent with the Networks

A kind of program was becoming fashionable that appeared to be a documentary but entailed none of the risk of dealing with the current real world—the Cousteau Undersea Series and the National Geographic Series. Finally, the cost of film increased, making it so costly to shoot real life uncontrolled that for me it became nearly impossible to continue to make really candid films. A lot of imitations appeared that tarnished a name that had been applied to our films in Europe, cinématé vérité.

Thus came about simultaneously a network freeze and an economic hold on development of the ideas on which we had been making some progress. For me, the 1970s became what the 1980s seem to be becoming for television in general, a move to more specialized audiences. This was a bit hair-raising and exciting, and demanded new combinations of film-making and technology. In science, we made a series of films for NASA on planets, Mars, astronauts, and extraterrestrial life. In the arts, we made films on dance, opera, mime, and the struggles of young artists as they tried to make careers. In government, we made a series of films on how a state, Pennsylvania, tried to manage its most pressing problems. For corporations, we made films on corporate mergers, computers, Tall Ships, the Bicentennial, and Einstein (LTV, IBM, Portec, Westinghouse, Mutual Benefit Life). For a number of these corporations, we also made commercials—our major representation on network television being minidocumentaries running 30 seconds to 3 minutes. We also made political films for Nelson Rockefeller and a feature-length film for theaters on soaring.

Our network relations were at a standstill as the '70s brought on the blossoming of a multisubject hour in the form of the CBS 60 Minutes and later magazine shows at NBC and ABC. These shows frustrated me because I was not producing them, because they were still relying mostly on word logic, and because I thought I knew how they could be better done.

In 1979, I proposed a 1-hour special to NBC that wound up as an assignment to produce a shorter film for the NBC Magazine show. As he was beginning to make the assignment, Paul Friedman, executive producer of the show, said, "Wait a minute, I'm not sure I can do this." He disappeared down the hall and came back; "Yep, I can do it," he said. This magazine show, it appeared, could do what it wanted with independents.

In the next 2 years, I produced a half-dozen pieces for the NBC Magazine show, half of them on videotape. This gave me a view on videotape and on some of the problems and prospects of the current Magazine shows.
Reflections on “An American Family”
Craig Gilbert

In the late fall of 1972 I was engaged in a dispute (there were many during this period) with the top management of WNET/13, the Public Television Station in New York City. At issue was how many episodes there would be in An American Family, a series about the William C. Loud family of Santa Barbara, California, which I had conceived and produced. After many tense discussions, the station executives decided on twelve hours instead of the fifteen I was asking for. When he broke the news to me, the vice-president in charge of programming said I shouldn’t be too upset. “After all,” he reasoned, “you have made a series about real life, and real life can end anywhere.” The absurdity of the statement was enhanced by my realization that the vice-president was also a novelist who would, I was sure, scream loudly if his next “real life” novel was shortened by two or three chapters for the same reason.

An American Family, was, of course, about real life, but it was about real life with a difference. What we had made was a series of films about real life, and films about real life (as well as novels about real life), if they are any good at all, have a form and a coherence and a meaning that real life as you and I experience it does not have. That’s one of the reasons for taking the time and trouble to make them.

I do not want to get into a discussion here of whether or not the making of documentary films is a major art or a minor art or even an art at all. What is important is that those of us who take documentaries seriously work within a discipline that has its own demands, its own forms, and its own special qualities that are quite different from the demands, forms, and special qualities of the lives all of us live every day. Real life depiction is not the same as real life itself.

Early in January 1973, when An American Family began appearing on the air, I was forced to face the fact that the novel-writing V.P. was not alone in his ignorance of most aspects of documentary filmmaking. Before you could say “Corporation for Public Broadcasting,” literally hundreds of self-styled experts were rushing into print and onto the air to express themselves on the subject of the series and its portrayal of “real life.” TV critics, talk show hosts, columnists of every stripe and persuasion, social historians, freelance intellectuals, and even the Lounds themselves could not wait, it seemed, to educate the public about “truth,” “reality,” and “objectivity” and warn that the sanctity of these concepts was being seriously threatened by An American Family.

This barrage of comment was directed not only at the series. As its producer, I was accused of being a Svengali-like manipulator, a crass invader of privacy, and a brooding East Coast neurotic with a compelling need to foist my twisted vision of life on an unsuspecting public.

I wish I could say I was able to ignore all this. But that would be untrue; it hurt too much to laugh and I was too old to cry. There was no way I could deal appropriately and rationally with all the inaccuracies, all the half-truths, and all the misconceptions. There were simply too many of them, and they came too quickly from too many sources. The torrent of words—written and spoken—was overwhelming (at least it felt that way to me), and I could not figure out how to put an end to it.

Perhaps if I had been a different kind of human being I might have been able to convince myself that it didn’t matter and gotten on with my life. But it did matter. No matter how much I tried to pretend otherwise, I did care—deeply.

Since I could think of no satisfactory way to deal with my feelings, I kept them to myself and they paralyzed me. I retreated from life. I told myself this retreat would be temporary; I would lick my wounds, re-group, and come out fighting. But of course that didn’t happen. Finally, and perhaps inevitably, I discovered that the sheer weight and intensity and scope of the criticism leveled against An American Family had affected me to such an extent that there was nothing about the making of documentary films or television or my own life I did not end up questioning.

A cry for sympathy at this point would, at the very least, be inappropriate. Most of what I have done (or, more accurately, not done) since An American Family is my responsibility and mine alone. If that period of my life was barren and unproductive (as it was), there is no way in the world I can shift the blame for that from my own shoulders.

Craig Gilbert has been involved in television production since 1951 when he was an assistant editor for the Victory at Sea series. He has worked as an independent for all three commercial networks and between 1971 and 1973 produced An American Family for PBS.
And when all is said and done, one central fact remains: to have had the chance to do An American Family was no small thing. It was an opportunity that comes once in a lifetime, and I do not delude myself that I was anything but extraordinarily lucky to have had it given to me. Perhaps it was inevitable that from the high of my involvement in the series there was no place to go but down.

If I could not work at my chosen profession, at least I could think about it. Indeed for the sake of my sanity I had no choice but to think about it, read about it, and talk about it in an almost obsessive search for answers to the questions that plagued me.

What follows is an account of the making of An American Family and some of the conclusions I have reached in trying to come to terms with the controversy stirred up by the series.

The Idea

On my personal happiness scale of 1 to 10, the winter of 1970–1971 rated a 2 or 3, and even that was perhaps on the high side. In the first place, my marriage was breaking up. I was aware that I was at least 50 percent responsible for this. For most of my adult life I had been successfully able to ignore certain destructive forces in myself, now these forces could be denied no longer, and I didn’t have the slightest idea how to deal with them. I could only stand by, depressed and angry, as the relationship with the woman to whom I had been married for 16 years and for whom I cared deeply descended into chaos and silent hostility. I was also drinking too much; it was the rare morning that I woke up without a searing hangover. And finally there was no work for me at NET where I had been on staff since 1964 after working for 10 years as a free-lance writer-director-producer with all three commercial networks.

The work situation was one that occurred annually at NET. Every February or March the Ford Foundation would come through with its $8 million, and production would start on the season’s new shows. (At this time, prior to the creation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS, NET produced the prime-time programming for all the 200-odd public television stations around the country. However, in 1971 they were called educational television stations, and NET stood for National Educational Television.)

Invariably, by fall all the money would be used up and production would grind to a standstill. Between May and September of 1970, I had made a film called The Triumph of Christy Brown, about an Irish writer in Dublin. It had gone on the air in October and then for almost 4 months I had sat around twiddling my thumbs. I was not in much of a thumb-twiddling mood.

To make matters worse, NET was in the process of being phased out of existence. No one would come right out and say this, but it was clear that that was what was happening. The coup de grâce actually came in June 1972 when it was announced that NET would merge with Channel 13, New York’s local public television station, creating what is known today as WNET/13. Despite the merger, NET was to retain its independent status as a producer of national programming. This pretense was maintained for a while—for just how long I can’t remember—until finally NET disappeared without a trace except for those of us working on An American Family.

The agonies of NET’s slow death in the winter of 1970–1971 were intensified by the spectre of Richard Nixon doing his best to mold public television in his
own political image—an accomplishment he came perilously close to pulling off. In fact, when the Ford money did come in and the program executives decided what shows would be produced for the coming year, there was nothing, in deference to Mr. Nixon, that sounded even vaguely interesting, much less politically controversial.

It seemed to me I had reached the end of the road. With my marriage disintegrating and no work to lose myself in, life seemed hopeless. There appeared to be no alternatives; I had to leave my wife and I had to leave NET.

As a first step in severing my connections with NET, I met with my boss, Curt Davis, who was the head of the Cultural Affairs Department of NET. I told him my feelings and that I would appreciate being fired so I could get severance pay and unemployment insurance. Curt was an incurable optimist; this had served him well during his embattled tenure as head of the Cultural Affairs Department. Against impossible odds, not the least of which were ridiculously low annual budgets, Curt managed to coax an impressive number of distinguished television programs from a small staff of outspoken and eccentric individuals.

For a week Curt tried to talk me out of quitting. From his fertile brain came a whole series of bizarre plans, all of which would somehow or other result in my being able to do some satisfying work. Many of these plans sounded fairly reasonable while I was under his spell, but an hour after leaving his office I knew that, despite his good intentions and superb skill at juggling, none of them would materialize.

At the end of the week—a Friday afternoon in late February 1971—I pleaded with him to stop trying; to please let me go without putting either of us through the agony of more pipe dreams. He agreed but, true to his character, not without one last reservation.

He would agree to fire me if I would do him one last favor. What he wanted to do, he said, was to pick my brain. Over the weekend I was to write an outline of the TV program I most wanted to do. I was to pay no attention to the normal restrictions of time, money, or practicality. Since this was only a game there were to be no limits. He just wanted to find out, he said, the subject that was closest to my heart. I agreed.

As usual that weekend I drank a lot and wallowed in self-pity. The focus of my thoughts was my failing marriage. Sometime on Saturday I began to realize I was not alone, that most of my friends' marriages had come apart, were coming apart, or, at best, were in extremely shaky condition. And even the younger men and women I worked with seemed, as I thought about it, unable to maintain relationships for very long periods of time.

"What is going on here?" I asked myself. "Why are men and women having such a tough time?" The question caused goose pimples to break out on my arms and the back of my neck, a sure sign for me that buried somewhere here was the germ of an idea for a show I would really like to do.

I grabbed pencil and paper and started making notes. The most obvious way to deal with a question like this would be to travel around the country interviewing people—all ages of married and unmarried women, all ages of married and unmarried men, therapists, marriage counselors, religious figures, anthropologists, sociologists, and so on. Even in my vodka-induced haze I knew this wouldn't work, or if it did it would be so boring that no one would watch it.

The problem seemed a simple one. How could I discover what women were feeling as women and in their roles as wives and mothers and what men were feeling as men and in their roles as husbands and fathers without doing a typical "investigative report" kind of documentary? The answer was not long in coming. The most obvious place in the world to find a man and a woman, a husband and a wife, and a father and a mother is in a family. There were more goose pimples, and I knew I was on the right track.

Curt Davis had admonished me to set no limits, so I had another drink and let the vodka take my imagination where it wanted to go. I knew the shooting schedule for what I wanted to do would have to be longer than the 3 or 4 weeks for the normal documentary. For anything to be revealed about the man-woman, husband-wife, father-mother relationships, I knew I would have to be around for a considerable length of time. But for how long? Since this was only a game, I decided that a year would be just about right. I had no idea how much this would cost, but I knew it would be a hell of a lot of money. If Curt really wanted to know what I wanted to do, then this was it. I had done what he asked me. I had several more drinks and went to bed.

The next morning, Sunday, I sat down and wrote the three or four pages which ultimately resulted in an American Family. I have no idea what has become of those original pages, nor can I reproduce from memory the actual words that appeared on them. But I can recall quite clearly the general outlines of that fateful proposal and the thrust of its basic premise. After explaining that my instincts—and the increasing evidence all around me of broken and disintegrating relationships and marriages—told me some disturbing force was at work between American men and women, I proposed that I find a family and film, within reason, its daily life for the period of 1 year. I freely admitted I didn't know what this marathon filming would reveal, but I was sure that, given this amount of time and based on my knowledge of the quality of American life in the early seventies, something of in-
terest and importance would be revealed about how all men and all women relate to each other.

The decision to ask for a shooting schedule of a year was not a whimsical one. If this project ever came to fruition (and of course I knew it never would) it would be necessary to allow for enough time to let things happen.

Anticipating an objection to my idea of having the man and woman of one family represent the men and women of all families, I spelled out my thesis: there are powerful myths, attitudes, conventions, pressures, and standards in American culture which have to do with how we see ourselves as men and women. These cultural forces are part of our national heritage; they cut across economic, racial, and regional lines. It makes no difference whether we are black or white, rich or poor, easterners or westerners. Every day, in thousands of subtle and not so subtle ways, we are told what a man is expected to be and what a woman is expected to be. In other words, the cultural forces I have mentioned unite all American men and women in certain recognizable commonalities. I proposed investigating those commonalities and suggested that the best way to do this would be through the medium of one family.

By the time Monday morning rolled around I was torn by conflicting emotions. On the one hand, I was enormously excited by the possibilities of the series I had conceived, yet at the same time I was absolutely convinced that nothing would come of it. I handed the outline to Curt when I got to work and sat in his office while he read it. When he had finished, he picked up his phone and called James Day, the president of NET. From what I could decipher Jim Day was not in, so Curt made an appointment for us to see him the following morning. I thought Curt was being silly and told him so; there didn't seem to be the remotest possibility that Jim Day would go for such a proposal. Curt's reaction was typical: "Don't be so sure. At least it's worth a try." The next day Curt and I met with Jim Day at 10:30, and sometime before 11 the president of NET had committed himself and the resources of his organization to the production of An American Family.

Curt, having pulled off another of his miracles, took the decision in stride and rushed off to tilt at more windmills. I was flabbergasted; I walked around in a state of shock. When the shock wore off, I realized Jim Day's assurances were no guarantee that the series would actually be made. It was still necessary to get the project approved by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and once this was accomplished it would be necessary to face the serious problem of where the funding would come from for such a major undertaking.

I found myself half hoping that one or both of these problems would be insurmountable. To be asked to put one's dreams on paper is one thing; to be told to make them come true is quite another. I panicked. Suppose they actually told me to go and do it? The enormity of the prospect was overwhelming.

Within 10 days the corporation gave its approval and $600,000 was found to finance the project. When I was asked if I thought the series could be produced for that amount, I had to answer that I honestly didn't know—there were so many unknowns. "O.K.,” I was told, “Let's start by finding the family.”

Again panic swept over me. How in God's name was I going to find a family; where would I even begin the search? A small town, a big city, the east, the south, the midwest? Just finding the family, I thought to myself, might take 6 months. And maybe I would never find one.

Over the next few days I forced myself to calm down and start thinking coherently. If my premise was correct—that the cultural forces which determine how we feel about ourselves as men and women are the same for all of us—and I believed then and believe now that they are, then, in theory, any family would do. But, as I thought about it, I realized there was another factor I had to consider. And that had to do with what the family looked like. Since the inception of television there had been a large number of family shows on the air: Make Room for Daddy, Father Knows Best, Ozzie and Harriet, to name just a few. In all these shows, the family was middle-class, attractive, and lived in a house (as opposed to an apartment) in what appeared to be a suburb of a large city.

If I was going to do a series with a real family living a real life, I had a sneaking suspicion that I was going to cause some uneasiness to the millions of viewers whose comfortable fantasies had been fed by those fictional shows. Despite what has been written about the series and my motives I did not set out to do a hatchet job on men or women or on the American family or on the middle-class way of life because of the recent unhappy circumstances of my own life. But I had lived long enough to know that the real lives of men and women and families were a far cry from the way they were portrayed on television. And I knew that if my camera crew lived with a family—any family—long enough this fact would become disturbingly evident. So for these reasons I wanted a family which, at least in the beginning, looked reassuringly comfortable and familiar to the people who I hoped would be watching. In short, I wanted to hook viewers before they began to realize they were in for an experience considerably different from the one offered by Father Knows Best or Ozzie and Harriet.
The Search for a Family

I decided that I would limit my search for a family to California. In the early days of our country the quest for happiness and fulfillment had led men and women toward the West and I felt, to a certain extent, that movement was still going on. I had a hunch that the dream had only slightly dimmed in the past 200 years.

There was another reason. In 20 years of making documentaries on all sorts of subjects, I had learned things were easier to get at in California; people there tended to be more open than in other parts of the country. At least that had been my experience. And finally, from a practical point of view, I knew the series was going to be difficult enough to do without having to cope with the blizzards and freezing weather that are the hallmarks of the American winter in most parts of the country.

For all these reasons and perhaps several more of which I was unaware, I flew to Los Angeles and, with the help of friends, began interviewing families. I stayed there for about a month, during which I interviewed about 20 families, until finally it began to dawn on me that Los Angeles was not going to provide the kind of family I was looking for. This was not for any lack of interesting or attractive families in the city. Rather it was because the city itself was so spread out and fragmented that the sense of community which I felt was important to the series seemed to be lacking. I never knew quite where I was; I always seemed to be losing my bearings. So I moved on to Palo Alto.

The only honest reason I can give for doing so is that I was operating almost entirely on instinct. In college I was an English major. I had, of course, taken single courses in anthropology and sociology, but by no stretch of the imagination did I consider myself an anthropologist or a sociologist. Nor did I have anything more than the most superficial knowledge of the research methods employed in those disciplines.

I was well aware that instinct had very little to do with the scientific method, but then, as I have said, I did not even remotely consider myself a scientist. And what I was after had nothing whatsoever to do with the scientific method. Two years later, when An American Family was on the air, many members of the academic community criticized the series for not being in the mainstream of existing studies of the family and me for not being an accredited authority on the family as a social institution. That struck me then and continues to strike me now as nonsense tinged with more than a little outrage at an outsider with the temerity to poach on a private preserve.

At any rate instinct (which in this instance proved to be wrong) took me to Palo Alto, where, over a period of 3 weeks, I interviewed about 25 families. Some were more interesting than others, a few came quite close to satisfying the demands of the series, but none seemed exactly right.

(left to right) Alan Raymond, Kevin Loud, and Bill Loud.
As the days turned into weeks in Palo Alto, I became more and more convinced that I was on a wild goose chase, that I would never be able to find a suitable family, at least not in the foreseeable future. One night, sitting in my motel room, I almost talked myself into accepting the fact that the whole project was hopeless. It had looked good on paper but in reality it was beginning to look more and more like an impossible dream. If there had not been a 3-hour time difference between Palo Alto and New York, which would have meant waking him up at one or two in the morning, I would have called Curt Davis to tell him I was giving the whole thing up. Instead, I had a couple of drinks and went to bed.

The next day I flew back to New York. For a week I stared at a map of California. At some point in this process I found that I was concentrating on a tiny spot called Santa Barbara. I asked around the office and was told that Santa Barbara had a population of some 70,000 and was about a 2-hour drive north of Los Angeles. For my purposes this was ideal. It would be easy to get our “dailies” processed and back again for viewing without undue delay, and the problems of extra equipment and equipment repair could be handled with relative ease.

Having satisfied myself about these practical considerations, I sought more information about Santa Barbara. It was a lovely city, I was told. The weather was perfect and the environment was aesthetically pleasing. There were also a lot of interesting things going on in Santa Barbara. There was the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California, which meant there would be a large population of young people. (In the back of my mind I always had the vague notion that if I couldn’t find interesting parents I would look for interesting children and work backward.) There was the Institute for Democratic Studies and other think-tanks. There was a large Mexican-American population and small black population. There was a radio station and a daily newspaper. In short, Santa Barbara seemed worth looking into.

And indeed it was. For climate, charm, and ease of life style, the city was a revelation to me. The air was sweet, the people were pleasant, and the beach was one of the most attractive I had ever seen. But, I had to keep reminding myself, I was there to find a family. After about a month, despite enormous help from the staff of the Santa Barbara News-Press, I was still searching. I had come close several times, but close was not good enough. I knew what I was trying to do was very hard and it wouldn’t work unless I had a gut feeling, an absolute conviction, that I had chosen the right family. I had done enough documentaries to know there were always problems and pitfalls; I didn’t want to get underway with reservations about the subjects.

Inevitably, the feelings I had had in Palo Alto returned in spades. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack. I knew that in theory it was possible to do what I had proposed to do; in fact, however, there were limits to my endurance and I was beginning to have a sneaking suspicion that even my strongest supporters at NET were beginning to have second thoughts. Since I had scheduled interviews for another week, I decided I would go through with these out of respect for the families and for my friends on the newspaper who had arranged them. Then I would fly back to New York and admit defeat.

Sometime during this week one of my newspaper friends noticed I seemed somewhat depressed. I explained my decision and with very little prodding, and a few drinks, went on to tell him I had separated from my wife 2 months earlier and that the only thing NET had to offer for the future was severance pay. His response was that I needed a date. Before I could protest (or even discuss it), he had gone to the phone and made all the arrangements. It was out of my hands.

The following evening, at the appointed time, I took a cab to the house of Mary Every, the editor of the woman’s page of the Santa Barbara News-Press. It was abundantly evident that Ms. Every had had several drinks before I arrived. She offered me one and then demanded that I tell her what I was up to; she had only heard bits and pieces. It sounded fascinating, she said, but she wanted to hear the whole story from me.

Under normal conditions I enjoy talking about myself and my work as much as the next man. But I had been doing this now for more than 2 months and was rapidly reaching the point where I could not stand the sound of my own voice. Over the weeks I had developed a series of set responses to questions like Mary Every’s—responses which, to my ears at least, sounded like the proverbial broken record.

But, out of politeness, I forced myself to go through it all again. In the process, my hostess downed several more drinks. When I had finished I noticed she was perceptibly less steady on her feet than when I had arrived. I had premonitions of the entire evening turning into a nightmare. I began, in my head, to form excuses for getting out of there and going back to the motel to watch television.

“That’s an absolutely fascinating project,” said Ms. Every. And then she added, “Would you mind if I make a phone call? I think I know a family that would be just right.”
A thousand reservations flashed through my head. I had serious doubts about Ms. Every’s ability to put me in touch with the “right” family. On that particular evening I didn’t feel like interviewing anybody. And finally I realized that, if we did go to see the family, Ms. Every would have to drive—a prospect which, considering the amount of liquor she had consumed, I found absolutely terrifying.

So, of course, I said I wouldn’t mind at all if she made a phone call. She disappeared into another room. In a matter of moments she was back with the information that she had talked to the family she had in mind and they were expecting us.

With fear and trembling I sat beside Ms. Every as she maneuvered the car over an incredibly twisting road in the Santa Barbara hills. I was drenched in sweat when we finally arrived at 35 Woodale Lane, the home of the William C. Lauds. Within 20 minutes I knew I had found the family I was looking for.

Finding the Lauds

On that first night at 35 Woodale Lane, there were drinks and pleasant conversation. I met all the children with the exception of Lance, who had gone to New York to work on a new underground magazine. We talked about television and the series and the practical considerations of how it would all work. After about an hour the family agreed to participate. As a matter of fact my private feelings were that they had agreed a little too rapidly, that they did not fully realize what they were letting themselves in for. I thought it would be good for them to experience being followed around for a day by a camera crew. On the following day there was to be a run-off election between Kevin Loud and another student for the office of president of the student body at Santa Barbara High School. In anticipation of Kevin’s winning the election, a party was planned at the Loud home. This sounded like an ideal situation in which to introduce the family to the conditions of cinéma vérité filming. They agreed, and I returned to the motel to make the arrangements.

After several phone calls I contacted a Los Angeles film crew (unknown to me) who were willing to come to Santa Barbara the following day. Once the shooting started it became quickly apparent that the crew was not very skilled at cinéma vérité filmmaking, a highly specialized technique which demands a kind of sixth-sense understanding between the person who is doing the shooting and the person who is doing the sound. Much of what was interesting that night was missed, and most of what was shot was badly framed and included not only the microphone but the man holding it. However, I really didn’t care. I had no intention of using the footage; I just wanted the family to know what it felt like to be followed by a camera, lights, and a microphone.

My suspicion that the Lauds had agreed to the project without really knowing what they were getting into proved to be correct. Around midnight Pat and Bill asked if we could talk for a while. Their first question was whether they could have final approval of what was included in the series. It was clear what they were concerned about. Liquor was flowing quite freely at the party, and I had noticed the cameraman getting quite a few shots of both Pat and Bill serving drinks to kids who were both underage and already quite obviously drunk. Two years later when the Lauds were claiming publicly, on television talk shows and in newspaper interviews, that we had shown only the bad times in their lives and none of the good times, they always mentioned this party as an example of the happy life that we had excluded from the series. I allayed their fears about the party footage by explaining that none of it was going to be used. But I made clear that in the future, when the shooting got started in earnest, I would have to retain the right to make that decision. However, I agreed that before any of the episodes were “locked up,” the family or any member of the family would be allowed to see it and raise objections, which, I promised, would be listened to seriously and discussed fully, and changes would be made if they were warranted.

There were other problems, but the party was still going on and I wanted the children to be involved in any further discussions. So I dismissed the camera crew and suggested we all get some rest on Saturday and I come back on Sunday to discuss the matter thoroughly. When that was agreed on, I went back to the motel and slept for almost 36 hours. It had been a little more than 2 months since I had started the search for the family, but I still did not feel secure enough to call Curt Davis and tell him the search had been successful. With a day’s rest and plenty of time to think over the pressure of Friday night, I had no idea whether the Lauds would change their minds.

Setting Ground Rules

The discussion on Sunday centered around three main points. The first had to do with privacy: where would the camera go and where would it not go? In this respect I promised the camera would never go through a closed door. If the family or any member of the family wanted to be alone, all they had to do was go into a room and close the door. In addition to this I explained that a normal shooting day would begin around eight in the morning and end around ten at night. There might, of course, be exceptions to this, but generally that would be the schedule. If the family
wanted to talk over anything they didn't want us to see or hear, it should be before or after those hours.

The second point had to do with what would happen if the family collectively came to the decision that they had made a mistake, that the whole thing was too much for them, and they wanted to quit. I said that if this happened I would of course want to talk it over with them to find out what was bothering them. If possible, whatever it was would be eliminated. If that could not be done, I said, the family would have the right to call it quits and that would be it.

The final point revolved around how much the filming would interfere with their lives. This was a difficult thing to talk about since there were so many imponderables. Obviously, it is not normal to have a camera crew following you around all day. For a while at least, I explained, it was going to feel strange and awkward. But my hunch was it wouldn't take long for the new circumstances of their life to feel reasonably comfortable. How quickly and how easily this happened would depend on the skill of the camera crew and the ability of the members of the family to get used to their presence and go on about their lives without feeling self-conscious.

My instructions were that they were to live their lives as if there were no camera present. They were to do nothing differently than they would ordinarily. This would be hard at first but would, I promised, become increasingly easier. We would never ask them to do anything just for the camera. In other words, we would never stage anything and we would never ask them to do or say something over again if we happened to miss it. To the best of our ability we would not become involved in the family's problems. By that I meant that as far as was humanly possible we would not intrude our feelings, opinions, or personalities into family disputes, discussions, or relationships. This last restriction became, as the filming progressed, the hardest restriction to live up to.

I wish to make it clear that at no time did I bring up the subject of payment nor did any of the Lauds ever ask for any compensation for participating in the project.

After we had talked about all these problems, the unanimous decision of the family was that they would participate in the project. We now had to set a date for when the filming would get started in earnest. Pat Loud said she would be flying to New York the following Saturday to spend a week or so with Lance in New York. We decided to start the shooting officially then. Pat said she would call Lance at the Chelsea Hotel and tell him what was happening, and I said I would go back to New York and get in touch with him sometime before Saturday.

I spent the rest of the day with the family, eating and talking and just getting acquainted. The next morning, I called Curt Davis at NET and told him I had found the family. He said it was a good thing I had because he had decided to give me only one more week and then was going to call a halt to the whole undertaking. I told him I was going to fly back to New York on Tuesday and asked if he could set up a meeting with the appropriate production executives for Wednesday morning. He said he would.

Establishing a Budget

Back in New York, the major production problems were the budget and the fact that in 2 days' time I wanted to start shooting. Most of the production people took the position that this was impossible. They were adamant that there would be no shooting until a firm budget had been established. I was just as adamant in maintaining that Pat Loud's visit to New York to see Lance had to be covered.

As I mentioned earlier, before I left on my search for a family, $600,000 had been found somewhere to fund the project. I now discovered the money had come from canceling a series called Priorities for Change, a public affairs series scheduled for production in the new season. Without my knowing about it, Priorities for Change had been dropped from the schedule, its budget had been made available to my project, and its six producers had been given their notice. Needless to say, this did not make me very popular with the Public Affairs Department or with Bill Koblin, the vice-president in charge of programming whose background was hard news and whose relationship with Cultural Affairs had been strained over the years.

In preliminary conversations with the production people it soon became clear that $600,000 would not be enough to cover the cost of An American Family. To find out just how much more would be needed, I was told to sit down with a production manager and figure out a realistic budget. One of the barriers that stood in the way of doing this quickly was the question of the camera crew and what their individual salaries would be. On the last film I had made I had used the camera and sound team of Alan and Susan Raymond. When that film was completed, I had promised the Raymonds they would work on my next project.

After The Triumph of Christy Brown, and to a certain extent on the strength of that film, Alan Raymond and his wife had gotten several assignments from other producers at NET, in the course of which they had dealings (most of them fraught with antagonism and anger) with several of NET's production managers. In fact, on one of those films Alan had managed to antagonize the very man he would now be negotiating with about his salary and the salaries of his crew. It was a very delicate situation, and I told Alan as much when we met in my office prior to our first budget meeting. That meeting proved to be a
disaster whose ramifications continued to be felt for the first 2 months of shooting. Alan's initial request, or, more accurately, demand, caused the meeting to end, almost before it had started, just short of a fist fight and generated so much anger that no progress of any kind could be made for almost a week.

What Alan wanted, before the specific question of salaries even came up, was an advance from NET so he could buy his own camera and thus eliminate the expense of renting one. On the face of it this did not seem an unusual request; in fact it made sense, inasmuch as NET would ultimately have to pay the rental fee anyway. The problem was the way in which Alan demanded this concession. Something in his voice and attitude touched off a lingering dislike of him, and within minutes the two men were glaring at each other, all pretense at maintaining the ordinary amenities out the window. When Alan called the production manager every obscene name he could think of, the meeting ended abruptly. The result of all this was that Alan Raymond wasn't close to having an agreement with NET, and Pat Loud was scheduled to arrive in New York in 2 days.

Some NET production people took the position that there would be no filming until an agreement was reached with the Raymonds, no matter how long it took. This of course was totally unacceptable to me. It was finally agreed that the Raymonds would be allowed to shoot for the length of time Pat Loud was in New York at a rate which, it was understood, was for that week and that week only and would have no bearing on the long-term agreement if and when it was ever worked out.

With this first problem at least temporarily solved we turned our attention to the coverage of Pat Loud's visit; this meant contacting Lance at the Chelsea Hotel. Numerous phone calls by Alan Raymond and myself had been unsuccessful—Lance was never in and he never returned our calls. About 3 hours before Pat was due to arrive, Alan reached Lance who said yes, he had been told what was going on by his mother and sure, the camera crew could come down to the Chelsea to meet him and to see what problems might be encountered in shooting in Lance's room.

At this meeting it became clear for the first time that Lance was a homosexual and was not in the slightest way ashamed of the fact. One of the more idiotic charges leveled against An American Family was that, through some strange alchemy, the process of shooting the series induced Lance to reveal hitherto hidden sexual preference to the American public. This is pure nonsense. Lance was a homosexual before the shooting, during the shooting, and after the shooting. The fact that we didn't find out about it until we did neither excited nor depressed me. In my original talks with Bill and Pat in Santa Barbara it had been agreed that whatever happened would happen,
Shooting

In point of fact, on a normal day the crew (Alan and Susan Raymond and an assistant) would arrive at the Loud home at about eight in the morning and would leave at about ten at night. Sometimes they would get there earlier and leave later, but not often. While they were at the Lounds, the Raymonds obviously would not shoot continuously. When, in their view, something interesting was going on, they would shoot; the rest of the time they would put their camera and sound recorder down and, in effect, become two more members of the family, talking, listening to music, or watching television. And some days they did not shoot at all.

When actual shooting was going on, the Raymonds were the only outsiders present in the house. The assistant remained outside loading fresh magazines with film and I was hardly ever present, having decided, at the beginning of the project, that the fewer people standing between the camera and the Lounds the better. A director or a producer or anybody else on the production staff, for that matter, would have been merely a distraction to the crew and to the family.

After the crew departed at night I would try to spend an hour or so chatting with the family to keep in touch with what its various members were up to and to try to get some idea of what might be happening in the next few days. I also tried, in this way, to stay in touch with the emotional state of the family, without, as I have said earlier, becoming involved in its affairs. On those days when the crew was filming Bill Loud at his office or at a business meeting, I sometimes spent the whole day at the house.

When the Raymonds were not shooting I would talk to them in person or on the phone about what was happening in the family, what we felt was going on, and what kinds of things to pay particular attention to. Despite this day-to-day communication with the Raymonds and despite their apparent understanding of my basic premise for the series, Alan's perceptions about the family and its individual members were not always my perceptions; his view of what was important was not always my view.

Since the moment-to-moment decisions as to what to shoot and what not to shoot were up to the crew, the arrangement was not always a happy one. Indeed, from time to time, it was the cause for some serious and painful disagreements. But there was no viable alternative, and in the long run I think the Raymonds did a remarkable job. Because life has a tendency to repeat itself—which meant that if Alan missed something I wanted the first time, he could get it the next time it happened—I think that over the 7-month period he and Susan recorded an extraordinarily accurate picture of how the Lounds lived.

As for lights, whenever possible the Raymonds relied on natural light and sensitive film. For night shooting, they substituted photo flood bulbs for the regular bulbs in all the lamps and overhead fixtures in rooms where shooting was likely to take place. These photo floods stayed in place for all 7 months so, as a matter of course, there was enough light for evening shooting in the house without any frantic last-minute preparations. This also meant the Lounds soon got used to living in a house that was somewhat more brightly lit than usual. There were no reflectors and no yards of black cable winding sinuously through the living quarters.4

I do not want to imply that having their daily lives recorded for 7 months was easy or normal for the Lounds or without problems. It wasn't. I am simply trying to point out that it was not as disruptive as many people, including the critics, believed.

For the production staff, the period from the end of May 1971 to January 1, 1972, was hardly problem-free. Almost every day there was a new crisis—personal, emotional, logistical, technical. Some of them—those that shed light on the filmmaking process—are worth mentioning.

Crises during Shooting

One of the early crises was caused by Lance's announcement that he was going to spend the summer in Europe. It was imperative to cover his trip, but the budget, in its final, approved state, did not allow for a second 16-mm crew to wander around Europe for a couple of months. Our problem was finally solved through the good graces of Richard Leacock, a pioneer cinéma vérité filmmaker in the fifties and early sixties, who had started an 8-mm film department at M.I.T. He and his students had spent a good deal of time trying to develop a super 8-mm recorder and camera rig that could shoot acceptable cinéma vérité film with synchronous sound in the field. He agreed that Lance's trip would provide an ideal test for the equipment. I do not remember what the exact financial arrangement was, but I do know it was reasonable enough to pass the careful scrutiny of the zealous guardians of the budget. The result was some marvelous footage (shot by John Terry) which, when blown up to 16-mm, added immensely to the overall interest of the series.

Pat Loud's trip to Taos, New Mexico, with her daughters Michelle and Delilah triggered a whole series of problems. Pat and the girls had not been gone for more than an hour before Bill was quite openly making arrangements to fly to Hawaii with his current girl friend, the manager of a boutique in Santa Barbara. The fact that he made no attempt to hide
these shenanigans put an enormous burden on all of us. As I mentioned earlier, I had tried to impress on the entire production staff the importance of not getting involved in the family’s affairs. This was, of course, an extremely difficult ideal to live up to, and none of us was totally successful at it. The very fact of living as close to the Louds as we did for 7 months made it humanly impossible to remain completely detached and unaffected by what was happening in their lives.

Like most of us, Bill Loud was a complicated man; he could be devious, irritating, and breathtakingly obtuse; he could also be astonishingly sensitive and quite perceptive. And when he wanted to, he could be irresistibly charming. So when he went out of his way to introduce his girl friend to me, as if to do so was the most natural thing in the world, it was very difficult to know exactly how to act. I didn’t want him to think I approved of what he was doing (which is what he wanted), nor did I feel I was in a position to lecture him on the subject of infidelity.

Bill’s flaunting of his relationship with the boutique manager also created filmmaking problems. Once the shooting of the series got underway, it didn’t take long to realize that Bill was a compulsive woman-chaser; from time to time he would allude to the affairs he had been involved in over the past several years. But to be faced with his current girl friend in the flesh was quite different from hearing about his conquests of the past.

In the days following Pat’s departure for Taos and preceding Bill’s departure for Hawaii with his girl friend, the question arose as to whether we would shoot them together having drinks at her house and dining at various restaurants in Santa Barbara. I made the decision not to. God knows I was tempted. But in the final analysis it seemed to me that doing so would put us in an impossible position with Pat and seriously endanger the completion of the series. From time to time Bill and Pat and the kids would ask to look at various pieces of film, and I didn’t want to have to lie about what we had shot while she was away. After Bill and Pat separated, there was no need to continue this self-imposed limitation.

The Raymonds and Susan Lester, the production assistant, flew to Taos to cover what was called Pat’s “vacation,” but which, in fact, turned out to be an intense period of soul-searching during which she made up her mind to ask Bill for a divorce. This decision was reinforced by a phone call from a well-meaning friend in Santa Barbara informing Pat that Bill had flown to Hawaii with the boutique manager.

One night, 3 or 4 days after the crew arrived in Taos, I received a phone call from Alan Raymond. He complained that he was getting very little on film. For one thing, Michelle and Delilah hated Taos and sat around all day complaining about what a dull town it was. And for another, Pat seemed very uptight and nervous and spent most of her time talking to Susan Lester, thereby making it impossible for him to do any shooting. Alan ended by asking me to get Susan Lester out of Taos so Pat would not be venting all her emotions in conversations which could not be filmed. I told him to do the best he could and said I would speak to Susan when the crew returned to Santa Barbara. (Incidentally, the best Alan could do, in this instance, was very good indeed. Somehow or other he managed to get on film a portrait of a woman at the end of her rope, trying to divert herself by attending art classes, engaging in aimless chitchat at dinner parties given by people she hardly knew, and wandering, under threatening skies, through Indian ruins with a sullen and alienated Michelle.)

When the crew returned to Santa Barbara I had a long talk with Susan Lester. Susan is a bright, talented, ambitious young woman. An American Family was the first major film project she had ever worked on. Her reaction to Alan Raymond’s criticism of her conduct was not unexpected. As she reminded me, she was one of the members of the production staff who felt my early admonition not to get involved in the affairs of the Loud family was not only unworkable but inhuman. From the very beginning of shooting Susan had developed a close relationship with Pat which I attributed to their both having an offbeat sense of humor and a sharp eye for the ironies of life and the pomposities of people. Evidently, Pat had slowly but surely opened up to Susan about the dark side of her life, and Susan had proved a willing and intelligent listener. In Taos, while Pat was wrestling with the painful question of divorce, she depended heavily on Susan for advice, support, and the understanding of a trusted friend.

Susan readily admitted to all this. She also agreed that, very likely, her long conversations with Pat had made it difficult for Alan Raymond to do his job. She added that if there had to be a choice (as there appeared to be in Taos) between maintaining a friendship and the integrity of a film, she would opt for the friendship every time.

We talked for many hours. I sympathized with her point of view; indeed there were times during our discussion when I felt her point of view was the only sensible and decent one. But in the end I held to my commitment to make An American Family, as far as possible, a series of films about the Louds and not about how the Louds interrelated with a film crew from NET. I knew damn well that no matter how we
conducted ourselves we could not avoid having some effect on the family. But I was adamant about trying to keep that effect to an absolute minimum.

There was no question about firing Susan; she was much too valuable a member of the staff. We worked out a reassignment which was mutually acceptable, and in the final credits for the series Susan Lester’s name appears as associate producer. Today Susan is a producer in her own right, and though we are still friends, I have no idea what her position would be now if faced with the same problem.

One evening early in September, while Bill Loud was away on a business trip, the Raymonds returned to the motel and told me Pat had announced she was going to file for divorce. They added that the following day she was going to drive to Glendale, a suburb of Los Angeles, to inform her brother and sister-in-law of her decision. I asked the Raymonds if they had made any plans to go along. They had not talked to Pat about it, they said.

I phoned the house and told Pat I had just heard about her decision and we discussed it for a couple of minutes. I tried to be as noncommittal as possible. After a while I mentioned her planned trip to Glendale and asked if we could film it. She said it was all right with her but that it was really up to her brother and his wife, since any shooting would have to take place at their house.

Pat planned to reach Glendale late the next afternoon. I told her that I would get there earlier to talk to her brother and his wife. If they didn’t want their talk with Pat filmed, I would be gone by the time she got there. If it was all right with them, I would meet her at the house with the crew. Pat agreed to the arrangement.

Her brother and sister-in-law not only agreed to the filming, they were enthusiastically in favor of it. Although they were against the divorce and planned to tell Pat as much, they felt the series should include Pat’s side of the story if the divorce actually took place. When Pat arrived, however, she had a change of heart; she no longer wanted the discussion to be filmed.

This was a moment I had dreaded; it was the first and last time anyone in the family objected to our shooting a sequence which I felt was absolutely necessary for the series. I asked Pat if we could talk privately. She agreed and requested that her sister-in-law be present. Now, almost 9 years later, I cannot possibly re-create that conversation. But at the end of half an hour Pat consented to have the film crew present.

(left to right) Michelle Loud, Pat Loud, Susan Raymond, and Alan Raymond.
In interviews after the series was on the air Pat sometimes said I had talked her into letting us film her explanation of why she was getting a divorce. And sometimes she said it was her "best scene." Because of these apparently conflicting statements, I could never figure out whether she was condemning me or thanking me, whether she was angry or happy that the scene had been filmed. I'm not sure she knew herself.

When Pat actually confronted Bill with a request for a divorce and asked him to pack his clothes and leave the house, one family became, in effect, two families, and I had serious doubts about whether the Raymonds could cover both of them. It did not take long for my doubts to crystallize into a conviction; I decided to hire another camera crew. First I had to convince NET this was an absolute necessity and the expense could be accommodated with a certain amount of budgetary juggling. As hard as this was, it was nothing compared to the problems which arose when I broached the idea to Alan Raymond. He hit the roof and didn't come down for a week. When he did, he threatened to fire me or thanking me, whether she was angry or happy that the scene had been filmed. I'm not sure she knew herself.

It was nothing to me. Raymonds. There was no way I could cover Bill's life and the lives of Pat and the kids perfectly adequately by himself. I was convinced there was no way he could possibly pull this off. I knew what was going on in his mind. He simply didn't want to share his credit with anyone. And there was nothing I could say that would get him to budge one inch. He knew he had me over a barrel; after almost 4 months of shooting he was indispensable to the series. There was no way I could fire him (I considered this option through many sleepless nights) without seriously jeopardizing the delicate personal and professional balance that had been established with the Louds.

Finally I had no choice but to ignore his objections and hire another crew and try my best to keep the whole undertaking from falling apart. And it almost did. Facing with another crew on what he considered his territory, Alan submitted an ultimatum that included the following points: (1) under no circumstances was the new crew to be allowed to shoot in the Loud house; (2) he would not consent to communicating with the new crew in any way whatsoever; and (3) he would not attend any screening at which "dailies" shot by the new crew were shown.

Luckily, the cameraperson of the new crew was an understanding, intelligent, easy-going woman named Joan Churchill who, though she thought Alan Raymond was crazy, agreed to go along with the restrictions. In fact, Bill's social activities increased to such an extent once he was on his own that there was more than enough to keep her and her crew busy. And from time to time, when Alan was busy elsewhere, she even shot in the house.

Finally, there is one more production crisis that should be mentioned, not because it is of any earth-shaking importance but because it graphically illustrates how convoluted, deeply held in theory, can evaporate in a minute under the pressure of actual shooting conditions.

It occurred on Thanksgiving day. Alan and Susan Raymond were at the house filming and I was at the motel feeling sorry for myself. It was the first Thanksgiving I had been alone in 16 years (in my life as a matter of fact); memory and desire were giving me a hard time. Suddenly the phone rang; it was Alan complaining that Thanksgiving dinner at the house was turning into a disaster. It was the first major holiday without Bill, and although nobody was actually saying as much, it was clear, according to Alan, that he was sorely missed. There was nothing to film; everyone was sitting around looking gloomy. He and Pat had talked and agreed it would be a good idea if I rounded up as many production people as I could find at the motel and brought them up to the house for some turkey. Alan said he would not get the production people on camera and that it might make Pat and the kids more animated.

This was a total reversal of the position Alan had taken in Taos (I thought this but didn't mention it). For reasons which even now I cannot quite be sure of, I agreed, thereby also completely contradicting the position I had taken in my discussion with Susan Lester.

I rounded up five or six members of the production staff and we went to the house. It was clear from the minute we got there that it wasn't going to work. Everything was strained and artificial. After a while, if I remember correctly, before the turkey was actually served I told Alan it wasn't going to work and that I was going to leave and take the production people with me. He didn't object strenuously.

It was a sad day all around. It was a sad Thanksgiving for us at the motel, and it was a sad Thanksgiving for Pat without her husband and the kids without their father. But at least it was an honest sadness and not a phony gaiety.
The filming of *An American Family* ended in the early morning hours of January 1, 1972. On or about February 1 the editing of *An American Family* began, a process that lasted a full 12 months and strained the patience and taxed the talents of almost twenty people.

In the 7 months of shooting we had accumulated 300 hours of film. The first thing we had to do was look at every hour of that film in chronological order (i.e., the order in which it had been shot). When I say "we" I mean the two editors, David Hanser and Eleanor Hamerow; their two assistants; Susan Lester; Jacqueline Donnet, the coordinating producer; and myself. Of the seven people in the screening room, only two, Susan Lester and I, had been involved in the shooting and had any day-to-day relationship with the Lauds. This was purposeful; I wanted to guard against the possibility of reading anything into the film that wasn't there. The five pairs of fresh eyes were a guarantee that this would not happen. The possessors of those eyes had never met the Lauds and knew next to nothing about them. Unlike Susan and me, they could view what was happening on the screen with something approaching reasonable objectivity.

For almost 3 months—5 days a week, 6 hours a day (more than 6 hours was intolerable)—we sat in a darkened screening room and watched as the Lauds lived their lives for a period of 7 months. Finally that particular purgatory was over, and then for a week in a bright, sunlit room, we discussed that footage and the best way of turning that footage into a series people would find interesting. In the discussions that arose I tried to make one point over and over again: what we were dealing with was a record (not complete by a long shot, but certainly representative of the major events) of how the Lauds lived their lives for a period of 7 months. Whether we liked or disliked individual members of the family, or whether we approved or disapproved of how they lived those lives, or how they dealt with those events was irrelevant. Our job was to put this film record together in such a way that it would not violate the characters of the individuals, the lives they led, or the events they participated in.

The best sequence that was filmically dull, we should not, through tricks of editing, try to make it less so; if a family member had a certain speech habit, we should not simply because we were tired of hearing it and thought it repetitive, try to minimize it through editing; if we decided to deal with a particular event, we should deal with it (as far as humanly possible) in its entirety and not compress it, through editing, to a more manageable length. During the week we discussed all these things and much much more. We also agreed that each episode would be 1 hour long and that the episodes would run chronologically.

To put it simply—in practice it turned out to be a very hard thing to do—I was asking the editors to let the material speak for itself rather than, as editors are trained and paid to do, create something out of the material. A couple of examples: if, for reasons of clarity or some other reason we decided to use a sequence that was filmically dull, we should not, without even...
Bob Shanks, who at that time was in charge of the late night 11:30 to 1 A.M. time period at ABC, was very interested. We started to talk after the series had been on the air for 2 or 3 weeks, and he was intrigued about the possibility of getting some cheap shows that would cash in on all the publicity being generated by *An American Family*. What he wanted was four shows. The first would be a recap of the highlights of episodes 1 through 12, and the others, of course, would be episodes 13, 14, and 15. He was very excited about the possibilities of this arrangement. I wasn't very happy about the recap idea, but I did want the money to complete the series properly.

Our talks proceeded smoothly, so smoothly, as a matter of fact, that one day Shanks announced that the next step was to get top management at ABC and WNET/13 involved in the discussions. (I should point out that I did not own the rights to *An American Family*. I was functioning as a salaried staff producer. I had been given permission to look for money, but any deal had to be signed by Mr. Iselin and his lawyers.) Shanks said he would call me in a couple of days to let me know how negotiations were progressing.

He was as good as his word. But when he called me the news was bad. It seems that when he had contacted the proper executives at ABC to get them involved in the project, he was told they were not interested. They gave him two reasons for this decision, and I set those reasons down here exactly as Shanks repeated them to me: (1) if the programs were successful, they (the executives) would be asked why they hadn't done them in the first place, and thereby been able to avoid having to buy them from public television; and (2) if the programs were successful, they would be asked to do more of the same, which they (the executives) agreed unanimously they did not want to do. In other words, from the executives' point of view, it was a no-win situation. It seemed to me then, and even more so now, that the reasons they gave are a pretty good indication of the kind of thinking that prevails in commercial television.

In addition to the dispute over the number of episodes, there were other disagreements with the management of WNET/13 during the editing period. Any fairly frequent viewer of public television cannot help but be aware of how often a host is used at the beginning of a program to tell you what you are about to see and at the end of a program to tell you what you have just seen. One day I was called to a meeting in the office of Jay Iselin, president of WNET, to discuss the advisability of having such a host for *An American Family*. When I asked why such a person was needed, I was told it would help to set the programs "in context." At the time I honestly didn't have the slightest notion of what "in context" meant and I objected to the idea strenuously. It was finally abandoned.

I have thought quite a lot about "in context" since then, and I think today I have a better idea of what it means. It is a euphemism for blunting whatever uncomfortable impact the program may have on the viewer; relieving viewers of the necessity to think for

(Left to right) Pat Loud, Alan Raymond, Craig Gilbert, and Susan Raymond.
themselves about the content of the program; and getting the station management off the hook if the program should turn out to be socially, politically, or historically unpopular.

Although I argued successfully against the use of a host on An American Family, I lost my battle to prevent an hour-long discussion by assorted “experts” from being aired immediately following the broadcast of the final episode. I watched this discussion at home and then had drinks with several of the participants. One of them, an anthropologist, asked whether I had heard his perceptive remark about the credits in the last episode. It seems that he alone had noticed that the credits seemed to be dissolving, a subtle and telling commentary on the breakup of the family. He congratulated me on this deft touch. When I told him this deft touch was wholly unintended, that it was simply the result of a technical problem called “tearing,” he was taken aback for a minute and then quickly recovered, giving the opinion that, intended or not, the effect was the same. Until then I had never been overly fond of panel discussions by experts; at that point my opinion of those television mutations reached a new low.

Perhaps the most violent argument I had during the editing period with the men who ran WNET/13 was over the question of an Executive Producer credit for Curt Davis. When the credit list was submitted as a matter of course to the proper executive, the uproar was such that you would have thought I was suggesting the series acknowledge its indebtedness to Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin, with perhaps a bow in the direction of Jack the Ripper.

As I pointed out earlier in this account, An American Family would never have been made had it not been for Curt Davis. In addition to prodding me into coming up with the concept and having the faith to pursue the possibility of what, in the beginning, seemed to me like a pipe dream, Curt had been enormously supportive of the project through all the shooting and the early months of the editing. At that point, as part of the phasing out of NET, he had been fired.

We had never discussed what his credit would be, but there never was any question in my mind that the one he deserved and the one he would get was Executive Producer. When I was told this was out of the question, I exploded. There were extremely heated words, and at one point I said that if Curt’s name did not appear as Executive Producer I would destroy the series and the station would be left with the task of explaining why it did not appear on the air. The battle continued for over a week; in the end Curt got his credit.

You may well be asking why the station had such strong feelings about what seemed, on the surface at least, to be such an insignificant issue. The answer, which has been confirmed many times since then, has to do with the politics of public television. By the time An American Family appeared on the air, NET, which had been responsible for the series, had disappeared without a trace. Its functions, on a national level, had been taken over by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and on a local level by WNET/13. Jim Day, the president of NET, and Curt Davis, the head of the Cultural Affairs Department of NET, were no longer on the scene. A revisionist history of public television in which the dirty word, NET, would never appear was in the process of being written. Three years later, while I was sitting in the waiting room of the Corporation in Washington before an appointment, I leafed through the coffee-table literature that told the history of public television and listed its triumphs. Nowhere was there any mention of NET or An American Family. Quite simply, the intensity of the fight over Curt’s credit had to do with the issue of whether, for those who cared and remembered, there would be a lasting reminder that before the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, before PBS, and before WNET/13 there had been another organization which, for all its faults, had represented courage, freedom, and a tentative, but growing, integrity.

The actual editing of the series was a long and laborious process, but it went well except for a difficult problem which arose quite early in the process. That problem had to do with the inability of one of the editors, Eleanor Hamerow, to live with the editing guidelines I had tried to establish.

I liked Ellie very much; she was an interesting, intelligent, warm woman. From the very beginning we got along well together. For many years she had been employed as an editor on issue-oriented documentaries—what recently have come to be known as “investigative reports.” These documentaries are put together by shooting as much material as possible on both sides of the issue being examined within the time allotted by the budget and then bringing the footage back to the cutting room where it is given its shape by the editor. In other words, Ellie had spent a great deal of time creating interest, tension, conflict, and drama from footage which, in its original state, was essentially devoid of these qualities. She was an expert at “making something” out of interviews, silent footage, stills, stock material, and other random film.

Her first assignment on the series was to cut episode 1. After a reasonable length of time I asked her how it was going. She said she was having some trouble but thought she knew how to solve it. Days and weeks went by, but still there was no rough cut of the episode. I began to get frightened and went to
the cutting room to talk to her. To my horror she said she was having trouble "making something" out of the material. When I asked her what she meant, she explained that she was trying to make Pat Loud a little more acceptable as a human being. In the next few days we talked at length about the problem, and slowly but surely it became clear that Ellie not only didn't like Pat but that she didn't like the entire family and was trying to make them less objectionable through her editing. Finally, regrettably, I had to let Ellie go. It was difficult for both of us.

Ultimately the series employed three editors: David Hanser, Pat Cook, and Ken Werner. A large part of whatever distinction the series has is due to their skill as editors and to their decency and compassion as human beings.

On the Air and the Reaction

During a 12-month period in 1967–1968 I made a documentary called Margaret Mead's New Guinea Journal. In the course of that experience I became a friend of that remarkable woman, and we remained friends until she died. Shortly before An American Family went on the air, I invited her to a screening of the first couple of episodes. Her comments were perceptive and flattering, but she also added a realistic warning: "There are going to be a lot of people, Craig, who, after they've watched the series for a little while, are going to ask themselves: what would a camera crew see if they lived with my family for 7 months? This thought is going to make them very nervous and it won't be long before that nervousness turns to anger and they turn you off."

As was usually the case, Margaret Mead was extraordinarily accurate in her prediction. But I think we were both more than somewhat shocked (I know I was) by the source of the anger she had predicted. By and large, viewers all over the country liked the series, although perhaps "liked" is not the correct word to use. In the incredible amount of mail generated by the series, the writers said they found the series "painful but true" about many aspects of their family life, that they appreciated seeing "something
on television that portrays family life the way it is,” that the series helped them to feel that they were “not alone.” There were viewers, of course, who did not like the series. But the source of most of the anger I was aware of came from the Loud family and the critics. By critics I mean not only the reviewers of television programs but the men and women who write articles and feature stories for newspapers and magazines.

It is hard for people to believe I did not anticipate the anger of the Louls. Perhaps I was naive, perhaps I chose to ignore that it was a very real possibility. Ultimately I understood, even sympathized, but when it first broke around my head I was puzzled and hurt. Throughout the shooting we had been good friends, and we remained so during the year it took to edit the series. As I had promised, we screened every episode for a member of the family (usually it was Pat, sometimes Pat and Bill, and occasionally one or more of the kids would be present) before it was “locked up.” There were very few objections, certainly none of any substance.9

After one such screening, the staff of An American Family received a letter from Pat. I quote from her letter as a contrast to her and her family’s future anger. It said, in part:

I think you have handled the film with as much kindness as is possible and still remain honest. I think you have put it together in such a way and with such fine pacing that a vast audience, quite unknown to us, will find enough in each program to look forward to the next. I am, in short, simply astounded, enormously pleased, and very proud that your collective wits have collaborated on this venture. You have eminently justified the faith my family tacitly put in you when we started this series and, my dears, we shall keep the faith... Believe me, if anyone ever wants to muck around in my life again, it has got to be you.

The lives that Pat and Bill and their children had lived during the 7 months we filmed them could not be called unusual by any stretch of the imagination. Although I never regarded any of the Louls as typical or average, I did suspect that the emotions they felt, the problems they encountered, and the pressures they attempted to cope with were fairly representative of those experienced by members of millions of families all over the country. The Louls didn’t see themselves as unique or in any way out of the ordinary, and neither did I.
But it was precisely this ordinariness and our faithfulness to it in the filmmaking process that caused all the trouble. Because, in the recording of it over a 7-month period, something extraordinary was revealed. It took me a long time to understand what I am now about to say, and an even longer time to face the implications of it. And I may not be able to say it very well. But I will do my best.

As you remember, at the very beginning of this account, I theorized in my proposal for the series that if you could stay with a family, any family, for a long enough period of time something interesting would be revealed about why men and women in their various roles were having such a difficult time in America of the early seventies.

The operative words here are "difficult time." Yes, I am guilty. I had a point of view. My senses, my perceptions of what was happening in my life and in the lives around me led inevitably to that point of view. No, I did not think men and women were blissfully happy; no, I did not think relationships, by and large, were mature, mutually satisfying, and productive; no, I did not think family life was the endless round of happy mindlessness pictured in television commercials or a convenient cornucopia of serious problems which could be resolved neatly and joyously in the space of an hour as the television sitcoms and dramas would have us believe. If I had felt all this, if I had felt that Ozzie and Harriet, The Brady Bunch, and Father Knows Best were accurate portrayals of the way American women and men were living their lives, I would not have spent 2 years of my life making An American Family.

Yes, I thought that what I was proposing would reveal some unpleasant, disturbing, depressing things. Yes, what I found was unpleasant and disturbing and depressing, but not because I or anyone on the staff manipulated the Louds' lives as they lived in actuality or on film. I found these things and they appeared in the series because they were there.

And what I wanted to say was that, because of the very ordinariness of the Louds, the universality of the problems they faced, the emotions they felt, and the pressures they had to cope with, this is a series about all of us, you and me and every man and woman, young or old, rich or poor, white or black who lives in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century.

I hoped that viewers would sense the universality and understand it and in the course of experiencing the "shock of recognition" begin to realize that many of the things they felt were also felt by millions of other men and women. I was not foolish enough to think that An American Family would solve any problems, but I did hope it might be the beginning of a small awareness. And I hoped this awareness might be the beginning of something more.

And it was. Several families on a block would get together to watch the series and talk about it afterward, schools assigned classes to watch the series and prepare for a discussion the next day, clergymen gave sermons on the series and suggested their congregations turn it on. I know this is true from the mail the series generated and from talking to audiences in several lectures I made around the country after the series was off the air. In short, and I know I have said this already but it is important to emphasize the point, millions of viewers were pleased that An American Family was on the air; they found it interesting, helpful, and positive. In their letters they found the Louds courageous, understandable, likable, and more than a little similar to themselves or someone they knew.

Some of the critics (not too many) felt the same way and said so in print. As a matter of fact, the trouble (my trouble) started with a review by a critic, Fredelle Maynard, a free-lance writer whose piece, An American Family: The Crack in the Mirror, appeared in Image, WNET/13's membership magazine, a couple of weeks before the first episode of the series appeared on the air. The following are some excerpts:

They could be the Geritol couple. He's handsome, charming, sexy, a good talker. She's beautiful and elegant, with legs a twenty-year-old might envy and a kind of total calm. But he never says "Honey, you're incredible!" In fact, he seldom speaks to her directly. From the first breakfast scene of An American Family you sense that . . . these two decorative people lost each other a long time ago. . . . Most viewers will experience the shock of recognition. There we are, and our friends and neighbors. . . . Flying, partying, quarreling, just talking, the Louds reveal a peculiarly American faith in simple solutions, instant cure. Unhappy? Take a trip. Lonely? Give a party, set your hair. Pat's instinct in a crisis is to reach for a drink. . . . The breakdown of communication so striking in the Loud family is perhaps a typically American disease, the result of disproportionate emphasis on maintaining surfaces, keeping cool. These people touch without meeting, meet without touching. . . . Again and again a single scene encapsulates the family tragedy. . . . Lance, after his mother leaves, climbing what seems an endless flight of stairs. Bill turning on the charm over cocktails—"Have you been in a wreck lately?"—and revealing himself more than he knows as he plays out the line. . . . What went wrong? What does it mean? As the camera searches for answers—the fault is everyone's and no one's—something remarkable happens to the viewer. He finds himself thinking not just about the Louds but about families in general—and about himself.
When I read this review I was very pleased. It was the first outside professional evaluation of the series we had received, and it said all the things I had hoped it would say. In 7 months of filming this decent, ordinary family something indeed had been revealed and Fredelle Maynard had seen what it was.

My joy was short-lived. Lance, who loved to cause trouble, got hold of the article and read it over the phone to his mother in Santa Barbara. And of course she hit the ceiling. (I say "of course" now, but it wasn't so easy to say "of course" at the time.) Pat's anger stemmed from a conviction that I had betrayed her and her family, something I had promised I would never do. And I didn't think I had, either in the 7 months of shooting or the 12 months of editing. Her letter, it seemed to me, was proof of that. Pat Loud and Fredelle Maynard had looked at the same 12 episodes; the problem was that, inevitably, they had seen them in different ways. The old cliche that we never see ourselves the way others see us had come home to roost with a vengeance.

Eighteen months earlier, during the shooting in Santa Barbara, an incident had occurred which Pat's anger now triggered in my memory. One night, Pat and I and several members of the production staff were sitting around having drinks when, out of the blue, she turned to me and asked, "Listen, Craig, what the hell is this series supposed to be about?"

She had asked the question several times; the first time of course had been when I met her and her family and told them about what I was planning to do. I have tried my best to remember what I told her then and on the other occasions, but I honestly can't. However, I do remember what I said this time.

Perhaps it was my mood, perhaps it was the several drinks I'd already had, perhaps it was the knowledge (always with me) that only recently I had failed in my own marriage. Whatever the reason, I blurted out, "You know what this series is about, Pat? It's about how you and I and everyone in this room and everyone in the country is fumbling around trying to make sense out of their lives." Pat's response was immediate and understandable: "I'm not fumbling, for Christ's sake. That's a lot of shit."

None of us likes to be told we are not in complete control of our own destinies, at least not in front of other people. On the other hand, sleepless, at three in the morning, most of us have felt the gnawing fear that all is not right with our lives. I had a strong suspicion that Pat Loud was currently experiencing many of those fears. In this sense, her response, though consistent with her character, was not entirely honest. But then neither was my answer to her question.

Unless you are doing what I have referred to earlier as an "investigative report" it is hard to explain, with absolute truth, what your documentary is about. If what you are doing is concerned with an "issue," it is...
easy and accurate to say "I am making a film about the dangers of nuclear energy" or "I am making a film about how nursing homes mistreat old people" or "I am making a film about the spread of terrorism in the world." But if what you are doing is concerned with more general questions of human behavior, it is a good deal more difficult to give a specific and satisfactory answer without either misleading or antagonizing the subjects of your film and in the process endangering the life of the project.

Having read thus far in this account, you are well aware of my desire, in An American Family, to explore the reasons why, in the early seventies in the United States, it seemed to be so difficult for adults to get along with each other in their roles as men and women, husbands and wives, and fathers and mothers. However, I was well aware that the so-called cinéma vérité technique of following the members of the Loud family as they lived their lives for 7 months could produce a series of films which would touch on many aspects of those lives in addition to the ones I consciously set out to explore. The cinéma vérité net invariably comes up with much more than the fish you are trying to catch. So for this reason, a precise, definite, conclusive answer to Pat's question would have been misleading. But there were other reasons not quite so altruistic.

Human beings do not like to be treated like guinea pigs. If you tell the subjects of a documentary their behavior and their lives are being used to make a larger statement about human behavior and human lives in general, they are more than likely to be highly insulted. We all tend to think of ourselves as special and unique, with problems, fears, likes, and dislikes different from every other person in the world. Of course this is not true, and the discrepancy in perception between the way we see ourselves and the way others see us always comes as a distasteful shock when we are forced to confront it. Incidentally, it is also this discrepancy, if the proper subject is chosen, which makes the cinéma vérité technique such a powerful and exciting form of filmmaking.

Finally, people have a tendency to idealize themselves. If, for instance, I had told Pat I was trying to do a series of films about how men and women feel about themselves and their various roles, I'm sure she would have said something like, "Listen baby, we're perfect," and considered me crazy for trying to compare her family with any other family in the country. At the very least she would have been more self-conscious, and she might even have considered backing out of the project.

If Bill had asked what the series was about (he never did and didn't seem to care), I would have been in even more trouble. After An American Family was on the air, he stated publicly that one of the hardest things for him to understand was why his family had not been perceived by viewers and press as the West Coast Kennedys.

At any rate I know there were problems in responding to Pat's question with complete honesty, and I also know those problems were not limited to the special conditions under which An American Family was filmed. More often than not, and certainly more often than has been admitted, documentary filmmakers are unable to tell the whole truth about what they're up to without running the risk of being told to peddle their papers elsewhere. It is not that we are liars or more inherently dishonest than anyone else; it is simply that the nature of the business we are in makes it impossible, a good deal of the time, to be absolutely candid.

The bottom line, as they like to say in television, is that we are using human beings to make a point. To invoke the harsh but accurate word, we are "exploiting" them to make our films, and no matter how sensitive, caring, or understanding we may be, the fact is that our incomes and our careers often depend on our ability to conceal the truth of this exploitation from our subjects. That some subjects accept this exploitation and others even revel in it does not alter the fact that documentary filmmaking poses very real ethical and moral questions which must be dealt with carefully and compassionately.

In retrospect it is clear that Pat would have been angry with any comment which implied less than total approval of the way she, her husband, and her children conducted their lives. Understandably, she was happiest with those reviews and feature stories which accepted her violent protestations of betrayal and manipulation as the gospel truth and went on to denigrate the series as a malicious put-down of the essential nobility and sanctity of the American family and definitive proof of the deviousness and viciousness of Craig Gilbert, the filmmaker.

This was the beginning but not the end of my disillusionment with American journalism. Faced with a difficult, complicated story that had great bearing on a number of important issues—not the least of which was television's ability or inability, willingness or unwillingness to deal with certain kinds of reality—reporters chose to take the easier and more salable road of sensationalism. And the great majority of them, deeply dedicated to fairness and objectivity, never even bothered to pick up the phone to get my side of the story. As an example of this kind of journalism I quote from an interview with Pat Loud by Kay Gardelis in the New York Daily News of February 20, 1973, as follows:
"If Craig Gilbert gets an Emmy for the American Family Series," said a disturbed Pat Loud yesterday, "then I guess we get the brass garbage can. I feel like Joan of Arc on a jackass riding backwards!" Pat, the 45-year-old divorced mother of the Loud family of Santa Barbara, feels betrayed by the series' producer and WNET and she's not sure how to react and what to do about it. . . . "I was assured by Craig that everything would be handled with great delicacy, taste and sensitivity. Instead it has been handled with enormous sensationalism and cruelty. . . . I don't understand why WNET and Gilbert permitted the printing of Fredelle Maynard's article in the station magazine when they promised there would be no editorial comment on the series. . . . I don't know how scientific such a series can be. Anyway the people making it aren't scientists, although Gilbert is claiming now to be an instant anthropologist. Pat has been doing television appearances and will be seen with members of her family on tonight's Dick Cavett show. If she resents exploitation and editorial comment, why, we asked her, is she going on the talk show? "I want people to see us as we are on a program that won't be edited or shaped to a concept. We've had everything said about us and have been treated with such cruelty that I think it's time we stood up and defended ourselves."

I am tempted even now, 8 years after this appeared in print, to offer a rebuttal, point by point. But I think it would be a waste of time; I have already explained the state of mind Pat was in when she gave the interview. For those interested in trivia, however, I should point out that I did not get an Emmy for An American Family; I was not nominated for one, nor was the series, nor was any individual who worked on it. During the award ceremony, the series was dismissed with a rather snide joke in an exchange between Robert MacNeil of PBS and Walter Cronkite.

A couple of weeks before An American Family went on the air, a few of us who had been involved with the series for 2 years were sitting around the production office talking about nothing in particular. At one point someone asked, "What do you think the critics are going to say about the series?" I won't pretend the question had not occurred to me as the air date grew closer, but there were many other things to worry about and I had never given it much serious thought. Now, without even thinking, I said, "I really don't see how anyone can review the series without reviewing his own life." I cringe as I write this because it sounds pompous and arrogant and not a little bit sanctimonious. But what I meant was this: We had filmed the Lounds for 7 months and had put together a 12-part series showing what their lives had been like during that period. We had done this as honestly as possible. We (and I don't mean the editorial we—I mean everyone who worked on the series) had all been keenly aware that we had a responsibility not to play fast and loose with the trust the family had placed in us. The fact that the family had approved of each and every episode was proof enough for us that we had lived up to their trust.

Those of us who had worked on An American Family were not new to the documentary form. We had no illusions that we had put together a complete record of the family's life during the shooting period, nor did we kid ourselves that what was up there on the screen was the total truth of who the members of the family were and why they felt and behaved the way they did.

Within the limits of the documentary form and the time and money allotted to us we had tried to give some indication of the characters of the various members of the family. We had tried to show how the members of the family related to each other and how, singly and together, they dealt with some of the daily events of their lives.

We knew that to some extent the family had been affected by the presence of the camera despite our best efforts to minimize this effect; we admitted this in a statement that appeared at the beginning of episode 1.

Finally, we knew that An American Family was firmly rooted in a well-defined tradition of documentary filmmaking which had existed in the United States since the late 1950s and early 1960s. In his book Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film, Erik Barnouw characterized this tradition, in part, by commenting:

the special glories of the genre were its unpredictability and its ambiguity, qualities that scarcely made for comfortable relations with sponsors.

Barnouw further states:

One of the problems hanging over observer-documentarians was the extent to which the presence of the camera influenced events. Some practitioners—Leacock, Malle—worried about this. Others—Maysles, Wiseman—tended to minimize it. Some filmmakers, notably Jean Rouch, held still another view. Rouch maintained that the presence of the camera made people act in ways truer to their nature than might otherwise be the case. Thus he acknowledged the impact of the camera but, instead of considering it a liability, looked on it as a valuable catalytic agent, a revealer, of inner truth.

Because of the relatively long and much-written-about history of this kind of filmmaking technique and its general acceptance by the profession and the public, it didn't seem to me the critics would consider it worth more than a passing mention. The problems we had faced in the making of An American Family were the same problems that had been faced for the
past 20 years by every filmmaker who made a cinéma vérité or direct cinema film. By 1973 there was nothing startlingly innovative about the technique. It was employed wholly or in part in most documentaries appearing on television and had been for some time. Except for the length of time spent with the subjects and the creation of a series rather than a single program, we had done nothing new.

Since An American Family had not been directed, at least not in the usual sense, direction was an aspect of the series which the critics could not evaluate. And they couldn't praise or find fault with the acting or screenwriting since neither of these disciplines was involved in the series.

For all these reasons I felt, naively, that the critics would have no choice but to deal with the material that was up there on the screen, and that in doing so could not avoid dealing with their own lives. If they found anything in the series that reminded them of their own childhoods, their own relationships with men or women, their own marriages—if, in short, they found any similarities between themselves and the Louds—then, I thought, they would like the series or at the very least treat it with respect. If, on the other hand, they could find nothing to identify with—if nothing on the screen evoked echoes or resonances in their own circumstances—then, I was afraid, they would not like the series and dismiss it as a commendable but unsuccessful effort.

I couldn't have been more wrong. Kay Gardella's mindless and exploitive acceptance of Pat Loud's understandable and inevitable anger was the most obvious example of the use of sensationalism as a way to invalidate the content of the series.

Other journalists, though appearing to be more thoughtful than Ms. Gardella, discovered equally irrelevant reasons for avoiding any serious discussion of what they had seen on their television screens.

Newsweek: Some critics stung the Louds by identifying their central problem as an inability to communicate with each other. In at least one sense, however, they were perhaps too good at communicating. Their impromptu remarks in the film often seem improbably articulate, as though they had been scripted ahead of time.

National Observer: An American Family is a monument to Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy—that the mere fact of observation has an influence on the observed. There is no pure data gathered by the motion-picture camera, and it is a slick deceit to pretend otherwise.

Craig Gilbert
The Nation: An American Family was a bad idea. It is not art, because art does not use people, but rather celebrates them; and it is not fact because man, for all his compulsive display, is essentially as secretive as the fiddler crab.

Commonweal: So, on the Cavett show for example, they [the Louds] try to fill in the gaps and reveal what the film ignored. . . . Craig Gilbert the producer is there. He is now an essential part of the drama. Not only has the New York Times linked him with Pat, but now the whole family angrily wants to know why he took out one sequence and left in another. He stutters and stumbles. The audience is getting a glimpse of this character who has been so ignored. . . . Craig Gilbert the producer is there. He is now an essential part of the drama. Not only has the

New Republic: . . . what we have in the end is a long way from the thing-in-itself. Which means, inevitably, that the series on one level has to be judged as a work of art or artifact, and there it fails rather badly. Art enhances life. This replaces it. And something of the preciousness inherent in all experiment clings stickily to these films, partially barring sympathetic entry. It’s expressed in the glib satisfaction the producer feels in the series (which the Louds, incidentally, largely hate). Craig Gilbert has patted the family in a condescending way, calling them “incredibly human” (maybe he was expecting mandrills?).

I do not mean to imply that no one had anything nice to say about An American Family. For example:

Time: An American Family is extraordinarily interesting to watch.

Newsweek (Shana Alexander): Their [the Louds] candy-box ideal of ‘family’ is something all Americans to some degree share. Why do we sacrifice so much on this altar? Why do we exhaust and consume ourselves in the struggle to create and maintain the nest? Partly we do it for the children, believing that in this way we can pass along the highest possible value to our offspring. . . . And so the silence of the Louds is a scream, a scream that people matter, that they matter and we matter. I think it is a scream whose echoes will shake up all America.

Esquire (Merle Miller): I felt that the Louds emerged as very human and that the series is one of the most remarkable achievements ever. I think all kinds of important things will come out of this new way of looking at ourselves, and when the series is repeated, as surely it will be, we may even be able to set our personal discomfort aside and learn something from it.

New York Times, March 4, 1973 (John O’Connor): Whatever its faults An American Family is posing serious questions. About values. About relationships. About institutions. About a constantly consuming society. About accelerating treadmills to meaningless status. About avoiding, at any cost, problems . . . . Those questions, in turn, are now being avoided as the massive publicity entertainment mills devour the Louds. If the series and the reaction to it have been painful for the family, let’s reduce it to a joke!

The most difficult criticism for me to understand consisted of articles which took the position that the Louds were some strange mutation of human animal, certainly not American and very possibly not of this earth. An overwhelming majority of the critics and columnists chose to admit no kinship whatsoever with the Louds. As a matter of fact, they took quite the opposite view. When they wrote about the members of the family, they described them as strange creatures who bore little if any resemblance to any human beings the critics had ever known. It was strange to read the daily outpourings of these writers, in which the Louds were described as “foolish,” “pathetic,” “uncommunicative,” “spoiled,” “superficial,” “stupid,” “insensitive,” “unaware,” and embodying a long list of other qualities, none of which could possibly be attributed to the families of the critics or to any family, in fact, residing in the United States. In short, the Louds and the series about them could be dismissed as having no bearing whatsoever on any aspect of life in the good old U.S.A.

On the other hand, letters by the hundreds were being sent to the series production office by viewers describing the Louds as “courageous,” “likeable,” “sympathetic,” “representative,” and “recognizable” and their problems as “painful but true,” “the way it is in my family,” and “similar to the way it is with our friends and the people we know.”

It was strange, to say the least—the same series provoking such widely divergent, indeed diametrically opposed, opinions. In honesty I had trouble seeing the Louds as anything but a normal upper-middle-class family; during all the months of shooting and editing there were moments of intense déjà vu when I had the eerie feeling that what I was seeing or hearing in Santa Barbara I had seen or heard many years before when I was growing up in Woodmere, Long Island.

By no stretch of the imagination, however, do I mean to imply that there were no legitimate grounds for a critic to dislike An American Family. Some considered it boring; others found it difficult to listen to because of inferior sound. There were those who considered the series superficial and pretentious and those who felt that, though the series conveyed a
good idea of what the Lounds were doing, it didn’t convey very much at all about what they were thinking.

Although I did not agree with these opinions I understood, at least during my calmer moments, how they could be held. What I couldn’t understand was what appeared to me to be an unreasonable hostility toward the Lounds and a need, almost an obsession, to deny their membership in the human race. Coupled with this was an equally strong need to ignore what was on the screen in favor of the filmmaking methods involved. If any or all of these methods could be proved invalid or sleazy, the critics seemed to be saying, then the series itself could be disqualified from any serious consideration.

Toward this end, they concentrated on five main points:

1. The presence of lights, cameras, and microphones, etc., influenced the Lounds to such an extent that their behavior on the screen had no relation to the way they would have behaved under normal conditions. I will add only the following to what I have already said. Even if people can change their behavior or their life style or their way of relating to people for a week or two weeks or perhaps a month, they cannot keep this up for 7 months. Sooner or later, they will have to revert to living their lives the way they have always lived them. This is one of the reasons I insisted on such a long shooting period.

2. Without manipulation the Lounds would not have permitted the filming of such a revealing portrait of their family life. A corollary of this charge was that many of the scenes would not have happened without being staged. I have already said quite enough about these charges. I would add only this: there is more manipulation and staging in one 20-minute segment of 60 Minutes than there is in all 12 hours of An American Family.

3. The invasion of the privacy of the Loud household was unethical, immoral, and outside the limits of acceptable documentary filmmaking technique. When, every night on every local news show in the country, a reporter shoves a microphone in the face of a grieving mother and asks how she feels about her recently killed child, I suggest it is about time to redefine "invasion of privacy."

4. The editing process by which some 300 hours of film were cut down to 12 is proof positive that the series was dishonest or at the very least a highly prejudiced account of their lives. All television critics should be required to take a crash course in documentary filmmaking. One of the things they would learn is that the cinéma vérité or direct cinema technique is a very wasteful one. Since nothing is scripted and since there is a commitment not to manipulate or stage, a great deal of useless footage is shot. The ratio of film shot to film used on An American Family was 25 to 1—a normal ratio for this kind of shooting. Unlike most of us, television critics seem to be ignorant

(left to right) Ken Werner, Pat Cook, and David Hanser.
of the fact that most of life is dull, boring, and uneventful.

5 Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy—that the mere fact of observation has an influence on the observed—undermines the validity of the entire series. This is sheer nonsense. But let’s for a moment suppose it’s true. Then serious doubts would have to be entertained not only about An American Family but about all documentaries.

As a matter of fact, the same thing can be said about the other points on which the critics harped. If, indeed, they applied to An American Family, which they most certainly don’t, then they also apply, like the Heisenberg principle, to every other documentary which has ever been made.

It seems to me that the critics’ preoccupation with these points is an excuse for not dealing seriously (favorably or unfavorably) with the real content of the series, a tacit admission that there was something about it they didn’t want to confront, something about their own lives they didn’t want to face up to. I know that sounds self-serving, but after 8 years it is the conclusion I have come to.

About 6 months ago I was asked to participate in a series of discussions about the documentary and television. First there was a screening of episode 2, and then there was a question-and-answer period lasting almost 2 hours. A week or so later I received a letter from a woman who had been in the audience that night. I did not meet her then nor do I know whether she asked any of the questions which I tried to answer. Her letter says in part:

I went back to a different college library this time and re-read some of those 1973 articles. . . . In those articles I picked up a peculiar note of hostility, the same feeling I picked up at the Walnut [Street] Theatre [in Philadelphia where the discussion was held] last month. What people were saying was “It’s your fault I’m in pain.” And relatively trite issues, “It’s not a scientific sample,” etc., are offered as evidence of the pain. Clearly nobody is asking why they were so bothered.

It seems to me what the woman is saying, and what I have finally come to believe, is that an awful lot of time and energy were spent trying to find scientific or moral or technical reasons for invalidating An American Family, for doubting its integrity, for questioning its conclusions. In short, there was a great deal of effort to avoid having to deal with the content of the series, and when all else failed, the last resort was to reduce it to a joke.

I said earlier that the only innovative aspect of An American Family was the length of time spent with the Lauds. However, there is something else about the series—perhaps the most important thing—which sets it apart from most of the documentaries being made today. And that is its subject matter.

Craig Gilbert and Pat Loud (writing Pat’s narration about her mother and father and her childhood).
Because of considerations of time and money most cinéma vérité filmmakers like to hedge their bets by picking subjects which promise, ahead of time, excitement and dramatic conflict. Primary, in which two men battle for the presidential nomination; Happy Mother's Day, in which a family fights for its dignity and survival against the onslaught of commercial exploitation; and Salesman, in which gullible believers are hustled into purchasing Bibles, are but a few examples of subject matter that guaranteed interesting films before shooting began.

Another way in which the cinéma vérité filmmaker traditionally hedges his bet is to choose as his subject a celebrity involved in a glamorous occupation. In this way, even if nothing happens in the time allotted for the shooting of the film, the inherent interest in watching the celebrity perform the routine functions of everyday life will be enough to hold the attention of most audiences.

There is nothing wrong with this kind of filmmaking. Indeed for almost 20 years I made films in exactly the same way, carefully picking subjects which had obvious interest and built-in drama. Some succeeded and some didn’t. But whether they succeeded, whether they communicated to the viewer what I hoped they would communicate, their subject matter was foreign, to a greater or lesser degree, to the experience of the people who viewed them. I am proud of Margaret Mead's New Guinea Journal, which was a film about how people change and a portrait of a great and fascinating woman, but I don’t think too many people who watched it were able to see similarities between their problems and the problems of the people in the tiny little New Guinea village of Peri. I am also proud of The Triumph of Christy Brown, a film about the necessity of establishing some sort of human contact and communication no matter how isolated and imprisoned we are in the cage of our own emotional fears and physical infirmities. But I have a sneaking suspicion that comparatively few viewers saw this film as anything more than a portrait of an Irish novelist with cerebral palsy who taught himself to use a typewriter with his big toe. A film about courage, yes; an inspiring film, yes; but not a film, I’m afraid, perceived by millions of Americans as being relevant to their own daily lives.

But An American Family was something different; it was based on the belief that there is considerable drama in the daily lives of ordinary citizens. The citizens themselves may be unaware of this, as the Louds were, but it is there just the same, waiting to be captured by the peculiar alchemy of the camera in the hands of anyone with the ability to see and the patience to wait.

Had Jim Day or Curt Davis asked me what I expected to find by filming the Louds for 7 months I would not have been able to answer with any degree of certainty. But they didn’t ask that question because they shared with me a general vision of what life is about and a specific vision about the quality of life in the United States in 1971. They were as convinced as I that if we could afford to spend the money and the time—time to let things happen—something fascinating would be revealed. None of us had the slightest idea what the something would be, but we gambled—based on what we knew of our own lives and what we sensed about the life of the country—that whatever it was it would say something important and revealing about all of us.

Many critics dismissed the events in An American Family as “lucky breaks.” In their view it was “lucky” that Pat asked Bill for a divorce; it was “lucky” that Lance was a homosexual; and it was “lucky” that Delilah was experiencing the joys and sorrows of first love. The implication was that if none of these things had happened, particularly the divorce, there would have been no series.

My answer is that television critics, like most journalists, wear blinders which limit their perceptions and keep them from any true understanding or identification with the people they write for and about. They tend to see themselves as slightly apart from the rest of us and better able to cope with, if not entirely immune to, the passions, fears, hopes, and disappointments motivating their readers and the subjects of their articles. By calling Bill and Pat’s divorce, Lance’s homosexuality, and Delilah’s romance “lucky,” they not only demean those individuals, they miss completely the point of the vision behind the series. That vision was that something would happen. If it hadn’t been a divorce, it would have been something else. It might have been a serious illness or the loss of a job or a birth—or all three. Whatever happened would have revealed, within the context of the Louds’ daily life, as much about how men and women feel about each other as those events which actually did occur.

I feel strongly that the television documentary, if it is to have any future, must go in this direction. It must be in a series form—repetition and involvement with characters is what holds viewers—and it must be concerned with the events in the daily lives of ordinary citizens.

In a proposal I wrote for another project 3 years after An American Family I tried to explain one of the reasons why I feel this way:

A documentary series that deals with how we Americans live our lives—how we relate to each other, how we earn our livings, what we think of our institutions, our government, the way we deal with our hopes, our fears, our disappointments—has a very special ability to break through the aching sense of being alone that most of us feel even though we are surrounded by friends, neighbors, relatives and hundreds of fellow citizens.
The cumulative effect of the events of the past thirty years, the death of the Dream, and the resulting sense of hopelessness, have caused us to draw into ourselves, to feel threatened by and alienated from other human beings. There is an ever-increasing sense that we can depend on no one and no thing, a conviction that it is every man for himself.

A documentary series, like the one I am proposing, can help alleviate this sense of being alone, can convey to millions of viewers an awareness that, to a remarkable degree, the great majority of us share the same hopes, the same fears, the same doubts, the same frustrations, the same insecurities. It can show us, in fact, that we are anything but alone.15

Despite these high-sounding words about what I think should be the future course of the television documentary, I honestly don't feel that the documentary in any form has very much of a future at all. There are numerous reasons for this; I will mention just a few.

Every year the race for ratings and the advertisers' dollar becomes more intense than the year before. In this competitive climate, air time is perceived as being much too valuable to waste on documentaries which traditionally rank near the bottom of the Nielsen listings. If, under these conditions, there are fewer and fewer normal 1-hour documentaries on the air, it would be approaching insanity to expect that a documentary series could even be considered.

In a futile effort to improve the low ratings and prove to the powers that be that their films deserve air time, the makers of television documentaries and the executives who employ them are taking a position diametrically opposed to the one I feel would work. Instead of making films about ordinary people, they are making films about people who are wretchedly poor, terminally ill, or violently rebellious. They are making films about the disenfranchised, the bewildered, and the angry in such a way as to emphasize the symptoms of the problem and not the causes. They ask us to look at these horrors, but they neglect to give us any insight into how these horrors came about. I insist that it is possible to make films which are not specifically about these people but which would explore the reasons for their plight in much more interesting, understandable, and meaningful ways. Poverty, sickness, and violence are not the special preserve of the poor, the uneducated, and minorities. You and I are touched by these conditions every day; the potential for them exists in every one of us, and so does the understanding required to deal with them in our own lives and in society.

It does not take great genius to make films which will say these things, but it does take a certain amount of courage and understanding to allow them to be made and shown on the air.
Appendix 1

"An American Family" Credits

Conceived and produced by Craig Gilbert
Filmmakers:
  Alan Raymond, camera
  Susan Raymond, sound
Coordinating Producer: Jacqueline Donnet
Associate Producer: Susan Lester
Film Editors: David Hanser, Pat Cooke, Ken Werner, Eleanor Hamerow
Additional Photography: Joan Churchill
Additional Sound: Peter Pilafian
Super 8 Footage:
  Produced and filmed by John Terry
  Sound—Al Meckinberg
Assistant Cameramen: Tom Goodwin, Peter Smokler, Mike Levine
Assistant Film Editors: Janet Lauretano, Joanna Alexander, Bob Alvarez, Ernie Davidson
Sound Editor: Thomas Halpin
Assistant Sound Editor: Pete Begley
Editing Assistants: Tikki Goldberg, Dan Merrill, Joe Lovett, Sue Steinberg
Editing Apprentices: Jesse Maple, Hannah Wajshonig, Harvey Rosenstock
Production Managers: Kathleen Walsh, Michael Podeil, Hal Hutkoff
Assistant Production Manager: Janet Freeman
Location Unit Managers: David Burke, Bernard Katz, Peter Scarlet
Production Assistants: Kristin Glover, David Henry
Research: Will MacDonald
"Vain Victory" Sequence:
  Adam Giffard—camera
  James Ricky—assistant
  Jack Riedel—gaffer
  Mark Dichter—sound
Series Title Film: Elinor Bunin
Title Music Supervision: John Adams
Production Secretary: Alice Carey
Engineering Supervisor: Ed Reingold
Senior Video Engineer: Art Emerson
Sound Mixer: Richard Vorcek
Sound Mixer (episode 12): Lee Dichter
Funding Provided by:
The Ford Foundation
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
Executive Producer: Curtis W. Davis

Appendix 2

The Credits: A Few Notes

More than 50 people were involved in transforming An American Family from an idea into a series of 12-hour-long films. For a variety of reasons (including time and space) their names have never appeared before in one coherent list. That has always bothered me. This is a chance to set the record straight—a chance to correct an omission that has nagged at my conscience for the past 8 years.

Credits, while serving the purpose of designating a specific function, do not always tell the whole story of a person’s contribution to a project. The credits for An American Family contain several such examples.

Jacqueline Donnet is listed as Coordinating Producer, a title which, although not unknown to films, is not all that common. What it meant on An American Family was that while the rest of us were filming in various parts of the country and Europe, Jackie ran the series production office at NET headquarters in New York. One of her most important jobs was keeping close tabs on the budget. In this capacity she had to answer, on almost a daily basis, a never-ending series of questions from NET executives about why we were spending certain sums of money. She did this with good humor, accuracy, and an understanding gained from long experience in the business. In doing so, she took the heat and allowed those of us in the field to devote our full energies to filming the daily life of the Lounds. Jackie also paid the bills, saw to it that salary checks were for the right amount and mailed out on time, and on one occasion acted as the producer of the “Vain Victory” sequence which Adam Giffard and his crew shot at the La Mama theater in New York. In addition, Jackie was intimately involved in the editing process, and her spontaneous reactions of heart and mind to what was, for her, fresh footage guaranteed that the rest of us did not lose sight of the humanity of the Lounds and the universality of their joys and sorrows.

Four film editors are listed in the credits, but David Hanser was the only one who was around for the entire year that it took to put together the twelve episodes that make up An American Family. In a very real sense his title should have been supervising editor. From the beginning he understood the editing theories that I tried, not always successfully, to articulate. The other editors looked to him for advice and encouragement, and I looked to him for understanding and compassion when the problems piled up. When the editing started, I hardly knew David; today he is a close and valued friend.

There is no “directed by” in the credit list for An American Family. This was not an oversight. It was a conscious decision I made after giving the matter a great deal of thought. Most cinéma vérité films do list a director. I had taken the credit myself many times in the past. There was ample precedent for my doing so on An American Family. But in all honesty I had never been totally comfortable with the custom. To say that an unstaged film about how people live their lives—whether those people be rock stars, patients at an emergency ward, or New Guinea natives—is directed in the generally accepted sense of the word always struck me as somewhat misleading. Not misleading enough to prevent me from taking the credit, but misleading nevertheless. To be sure, in any kind of film there has to be a single vision that prevails, and from time to time I had asked myself what the possessor of a cinéma vérité vision should be called. Needless to say, I had never come up with a satisfactory answer.
And the experience of making *An American Family* did not provide me with one. Yes, I had had the vision for the series; yes, I had picked the family; yes, I had made the large, general decisions about what to film and what not to film; yes, I had given instructions to the editors and approved their final versions of each episode—but I had not directed the series in the conventional sense of that word. And I was afraid that television viewers would be hopelessly confused by seeing “directed by” in the credits for a series which claimed to be a recording of real life as it actually happened.

Two or three months before *An American Family* was to go on the air, I sat down with Jackie Donnet to make up the credit list. As we were in the process of doing this, Alan Raymond appeared in the office and objected strenuously to being designated “cinematographer.” Since that was exactly the function he had filled on the series, I was somewhat perplexed. Surely he would rather have “cinematographer” than “photographed by” or “filmed by.” Yes, that was true, he said, but none of these was satisfactory. Well then, what did he want? What he wanted, it turned out, was “filmmakers” for himself and Susan. We discussed the matter for some time and finally I gave in. This argument with Alan came after a long and difficult 2 years, made longer and more difficult by the many nasty confrontations with him. At the time of this particular disagreement I was battling with the executives of Channel 13 on several fronts, and I was simply too exhausted to engage in a long, draw-out war of attrition with Alan Raymond.

In giving him the credit he asked for—but which he did not deserve—I made a mistake which will plague me for as long as *An American Family* lives in the public consciousness. By not taking a "directed by" credit, by giving Alan and Susan Raymond credit as filmmakers, and by retreating from the controversy generated by the series, I created a situation in which a man who had held a camera and a woman who had held a microphone could, by capitalizing on public misunderstanding and journalistic sloppiness, slowly but surely begin to take credit for being responsible for *An American Family*. They never actually came out and said as much. They simply talked in such a way as to lead whoever was interviewing them into naturally assuming that *An American Family* was their vision, their creation, their “baby.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Raymonds had absolutely nothing to do with conceiving the series, nor were they involved in choosing the family. They did not participate in producing the series, directing the series (in the sense I have discussed above), or editing the series. In short, they were hired as a camera and sound team, and that is the function they performed.

can Dream Machine, in which there was a segment on the FBI. Both these shows had brought the full fury of the Nixon administration down on NET. I have a hunch that one of the reasons, but certainly not the only one, that Jim Day had given the go-ahead to *An American Family* and that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting had agreed so rapidly was a desire to shy away from any programming that could in any way be considered controversial. I am sure no one expected any trouble from what promised to be an innocuous series about an American family.

In an article entitled “Spy Drama,” an unnamed writer in the March 5, 1973, issue of *The Nation* had this to say: “Further, anthropologists have long known that even the most tactful and unobtrusive intervention in the life of a social microcosm significantly changes the phenomena under observation; so that if one wished to generalize from the behaviour of the peculiarly uncritical Louds, it would be necessary to ask first how natural was the presence of Gilbert, his camera crew, microphones, lights, reflectors and yards of black cable sinuously through the living quarters?”

For those whose ideas of how a cinéma vérité team works have been formed by movies and television, it should be noted that the new 16-mm technology has eliminated the old slate/clapsticks method of identifying the shot and providing a synch mark for the editor. To start shooting, the sound person simply flashes a light which is recorded as a beep when the tape is rolling; the camera-person photographs this light and continues shooting. All the editor has to do is line up the beep on the sound tape with the light on the film and he is “in sync.” This effectively eliminates the necessity of an assistant’s standing up in front of the camera with a small black-board and announcing “*An American Family*, scene 10, take 1” and then clapping the sticks; it can be done so unobtrusively that it is sometimes hard to tell when shooting is actually taking place.

In a memo dated June 20, 1972, to a WNET/13 executive, which accompanied our list of episodes I wrote: “This does not mean, by any stretch of the imagination, that this is the correct structure or the proper breakdown of the material. All it represents is our best guess as to how to solve the problem. I know that you are aware of this, but I am still reacting to the knowledge that—for a long time around here—guesses tended, in a remarkably short time, to be regarded as positive statements of opinion. . . . The only positive statements I or anyone else will be able to make about the structure will come out of working with the material in the cutting room.”

In an article which appeared in the New York Times on January 22, 1973, John J. O’Connor, the television critic, succinctly explained the background and nature of the problem: “*An American Family* began as a project of NET. Curtis W. Davis, no longer with public television, receives credit as executive producer. Last year, however, the New York operation was given a new executive regime headed by John Jay Iselin, now acting president of WNET/13, and Robert Kotlowitz, senior executive editor.

“As the programming focus switched from national to local levels, the nationally oriented NET was absorbed into WNET. Mr. Iselin and Mr. Kotlowitz were then faced with a decision on what to do about the 300 hours of material already filmed but not yet edited for *An American Family*. At one point it was thought 8 hours might be enough. Mr. Gilbert objected strongly and the 12-hour format was accepted by all parties. “Now Mr. Gilbert says that, as the editing evolved, it became apparent that 12 hours would be inadequate for his creative purposes. Under the old NET regime, in which the film maker frequently prevailed, the producer may have had his way. But the current WNET management, acutely more concerned about costs and limited funds, insists it is not about to be swayed.

“The result is a classic illustration of the broadcaster versus the film maker, the editor versus the creator.”

Notes

1. In an article entitled “The Louds of Santa Barbara,” in the March 23, 1973, issue of *Commonweal* magazine, Michael Murray wrote, “The publicity releases describe the technique [used in *An American Family*] as a television version of Oscar Lewis’ painstaking re-searches into Mexican life.” Oscar Lewis is the famed anthropologist who used hundreds of hours of audio tape interviews as the basis for his classic *The Children of Sanchez*. I have no idea who dreamed up the Oscar Lewis reference for the WNET/13 publicity release; one thing I am sure of, it did not come from me. In general, the publicity for *An American Family* was inaccurate, misleading, and highly exploitive.

2. There were two departments at NET: the Cultural Affairs Department, headed by Curt Davis, which produced shows having to do with the arts, history, literature, music, etc.; and the Public Affairs Department, headed by Don Dixon, which produced shows on politics, social issues, and topical news subjects. *Priorities for Change* was to have been produced by the Public Affairs Department, which several months earlier had been responsible for an NET Journal called *Banks and the Poor* and an installment of *The Great Ameri-
7 The first half of episode 1 covered New Year's Eve at the Louds' house at 35 Wooddale Lane. The kids are having a party and at one point Lance calls from New York to wish his brothers and sister Happy New Year. We hear his voice but don't see him. We briefly see Bill, who has been living in a motel for 3 months. Halfway through episode 1 (as the kids and their guest are singing "Auld Lang Syne" to Pat) there is a slow dissolve to the entire family having breakfast 7 months earlier. The narration says, "Our story begins on a bright spring day in late May."

8 From that point on we planned to move chronologically from the end of May to New Year's Eve again. New Year's Eve footage in the final episode would have been some of the same that was used in episode 1. But there would have been new footage of how Lance spent his New Year's Eve in New York, including the circumstances under which he made the call to his family. And although there was a little footage in episode 1 of how Bill was spending his New Year's Eve, there would have been a lot more in the final episode, including a phone call which he received from Lance while having drinks at the home of the boutique manager.

9 As an example, in one restaurant scene Bill thought he was shown drinking too much so we eliminated a round of drinks. A little bit later in the same scene a male friend of Bill and Pat's in Santa Barbara walked by with a woman who was not his wife. Bill made some comment like "There goes John Doe with Jane Smith." He asked us to eliminate the name of the woman, and of course we did. There probably were other changes that were asked for, but I can't remember them. And whatever they were, they were very very minor.

10 It might be of interest to point out here that although An American Family was entirely financed by Public Television funds, an effort was made to recoup some of this money from corporate underwriting. The series was submitted for this purpose to some of the largest corporations in the country. None of them, of course, wanted to have anything to do with it. The reaction of the representative from the Kraft Food Co. is indicative of the general feeling. He said, "I think the series is, perhaps, the most important thing that has happened in television in the past twenty-five years. But, having said that, I must also tell you that my company wouldn't touch the project with a ten-foot pole."

11 There were many such films in the early days of cinéma vérité: Donn Penebaker's Don't Look Back (1966), a profile of singer and songwriter Bob Dylan, and Monterey Pop (1968) about the jazz festival in that city; and the Maysles' Showman (1962), featuring movie producer Joseph E. Levine, What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA (1964), Meet Marlon Brando (1965), and Gimme Shelter (1970), following the Rolling Stones on tour. The 1981 Oscar for Best Documentary was From Mao to Mozart, a film record of Isaac Stern's trip to China.

12 The following quote is from a letter written by an executive at one of the networks in response to the proposal from which I have quoted above: "I'm not quite sure how to put my finger on the problem. I think perhaps it is that you and I have been discussing ideas that are not very 'journalistic', although perfectly respectable as documentary subjects and treatments. We have really been discussing a way of pushing back the frontiers of normal news documentaries and exploring more intimately ordinary human life and finding there the drama that others seek in news activities—reporting big events, disasters or wars. This I warmly welcome as an approach. However, I think in order to sell such a notion both to [name of network] and to the American public we need to come up either with a new idea so startling that it cannot be resisted or with a proposal that is not too extravagant in terms of money and time. A lot of the work you and I have been discussing would necessarily be highly experimental in that we would have to be ready to abort if we did not get results. I write all this with some diffidence, because I greatly enjoyed your series on the family [he screened two episodes—1 and 9—and told me he looked at nine before he looked at one, but he didn't think it made much difference] and would dearly like to find other applications of the same technique. In short, I would be most happy to continue our dialogue (and this I would not say if I did not sincerely mean it) but I would not raise your hopes too high and prevent you from pursuing discussions elsewhere, because I'm not too sure that [name of network] is quite ready yet for the approach that you and I have been talking about."

The project we had been discussing was a series which, through the lives of eight or ten or twelve people living in a medium-sized midwestern city, would tell the story of what has happened to this country between the end of World War II and the present time.
Producing Documentaries for Network Television

Richard Richter

The crowds still swarmed around the long walkway outside the theater. People shouted, whispered to one another, waved, and surged around us as we made our way to our limousine. A mammoth blond walked just ahead of us. The crowd seemed to think she was Dolly Parton. We obviously were somebody. Celebrities. Part of Hollywood's big night, the Academy Awards of 1980. Champagne in the limo on the way to the big hall. More crowds, discoing the night away, and finally the ever-so-chic late, late supper in our suite along with fellow ABC celebrants.

The scene was not what working for a network news documentary unit is supposed to be all about. But we gladly suffered through the pushing, the shoving, and the noise of it all. It was part of our job. Besides it was fun.

That we didn't win an Oscar wasn't difficult to take, because we had been surprised that our documentary had been nominated in the first place. The Killing Ground was the first network news documentary ever nominated for an Academy Award. It had made it to the big night because it had won major film festival awards at Monte Carlo and Mannheim (Germany). Domestically, it had won a handful of Emmys and a bunch of other prizes.

Oscar night was the most glittery occasion of 2½ years (from 1978 to mid-1980) of the ABC News Closeup documentary unit, but it was not the only high point. Nor did it mean that everything we did brought instant acclaim and recognition. There have been low points, too.

I came onto the documentary scene in the beginning of 1978 to work as senior producer under Pamela Hill, who had just been named executive producer in one of the series of moves Roone Arledge had made after taking over as head of ABC News. Together, Pam and I were to direct the Closeup unit. The idea was that my 20 years of hard news, daily deadline experiences on newspapers as well as television would supplement Pam's extraordinary filmmaking flair and talent for in-depth examination.

Our first effort was greeted with skyrockets of acclaim, followed by demands for an investigation by the Federal Communications Commission. The program was Youth Terror: The View from behind the Gun. Producer Helen Whitney put together an un­narrated hour about the causes of juvenile crime. No experts were interviewed on camera. The kids and their families did all the talking.

We knew it was good, but the reviews exceeded our dreams.

Tom Shales wrote in the Washington Post: "The precarious reputation of ABC News takes a great leap forward tonight... with an explosive, important and uncommonly immediate look at juvenile crime in the big city of the 70s."

And Time said: "Youth Terror may be the most disturbing and dramatic news program ever seen on American commercial television. It certainly is the most explicit."

Explicit it was. It was the first time that "mother fucker" was ever broadcast on a network program. Nineteen ABC stations refused to carry the broadcast because of the language—most of them in the southern Bible Belt but also in Philadelphia.

We didn't want to purposely alienate anyone with the use of the profanity. But we felt that to delete or bleep it would have been to castrate the young people who were passionately trying to make the nation understand them. There was nothing false about the black youth who said toward the end of the program: "This is a concentration camp. That's the way I feel. I give less than a fuck how any other people feel... that's the way I feel. This is a concentration camp, you dig?" I been around here 21 years. This is hell. Believe me."

Arledge and his two top lieutenants, vice presidents David Burke and Richard Wald, approve all documentaries before broadcast, but for Youth Terror there was a special screening for the very highest network executives as well. They concurred that the language was essential.

In addition, it was agreed that no permission to bleep would be given to individual stations that wanted to run the program but objected to the language. There were dozens of phone calls before airing, and many more afterward, but the controversy was only beginning.

There were charges that certain scenes, involving a brief scuffle in a Brooklyn street, had been staged. The accusations were made by a disaffected part-time free-lancer who had been hired for the early portions of production and then was let go when he was no longer needed.

The story of the charges made page 1 of the New York Daily News as well as the news columns of other papers across the country. To clear the air, Arledge ordered an investigation by an independent law firm. The probe lasted several weeks, and the investigators were tough and thorough. Their verdict declared the charges untrue. Shortly thereafter the FCC, which had been asked to investigate, concluded that it did not feel a probe was warranted.

Richard Richter is Senior Producer of Documentaries at ABC News and has been in the news business for more than 25 years.
The controversy took up the better part of the summer of 1978, a summer that was, indeed, very long and hot. We knew the charges were false, but we also were aware that the innocent are not always found innocent. And once the smoke had cleared, Youth Terror went on to win six awards.

A series of successes since then has not meant quiet respectability. The odyssey of our latest battle began in the spring of 1979, after the nuclear reactor accident at Three Mile Island. The accident had signaled to Pam and me that we had to do something about nuclear energy. Steve Singer, coproducer of The Killing Ground, was dispatched to Three Mile Island to nose around. And soon he began an investigation which began to reveal sloppy standards and procedures in the construction of reactors. But other reporters started to break some of our stories, so even though we still had some exclusive material, we decided the edge would be gone by the time we got on the air, which was likely to be 4 months, and more likely, 6 plus. It takes that long to investigate, research, plan, shoot, and edit a 1-hour documentary.

Singer and his troops then decided to concentrate on one of the untold stories of the nuclear age, the inadequate regulation of the uranium mining industry. Regulation was so bad that radioactive dust had led to many cancer deaths among miners; and the casual disposal of radioactive waste had created serious environmental hazards.

Most uranium mining in the United States is in the West. We focused on New Mexico, where state and federal regulation was poor, where medical care for miners was dubious, and where the already "good" story was enhanced by the victimization of Indian miners, the desecration of Indian land, and the stark beauty of the arid Southwest.

The Uranium Factor was broadcast in June 1980. The program was neither pro- nor antinuke. But New Mexico pronuke groups attacked it, and industry spokesmen voiced displeasure. A local pressure group put together a rebuttal program that was broadcast by an Albuquerque station. The rebuttal complained that I had refused to provide answers to more than 20 questions, which actually amounted to a request for us to do most of their research. The rebuttal also neglected to point out that the "impartial" reporter, who narrated their interview, was actually an employee of Gulf Oil, the owner of substantial uranium interests in New Mexico. At one point, Mr. Gulf Narrator even interviewed a Gulf management spokesman, who, surprisingly, said everything was just dandy . . . well operated, controlled, and regulated.
Governor Bruce King, who was interviewed for The Uranium Factor, also publicly voiced his displeasure about the program: his administration did not look especially vigilant with its lax regulation of industry hazards.

The displeasure of the bluff and hearty rancher-turned-governor seriously affected another Closeup project which had just begun: an investigation of the explosive riot at the New Mexico State Penitentiary at Santa Fe, where 33 inmates were murdered by their fellow prisoners in the most savage prison riot in the history of our nation.

King had first promised producer Steve Fleischman full cooperation, including access to state officials and permission to interview inmates and film inside the prison. But after The Uranium Factor he barred us from talking to state officials and closed the prison to our cameras. Local reporters said he told them his reversal was directly connected to our uranium program.

By the time the doors were slammed shut, Fleischman, correspondent William Sherman (who had interviewed King in The Uranium Factor), and the rest of their staff had already gathered substantial evidence of incredible incompetence and inattention to the prison during the administrations of King and his two predecessors. But no filming had been done. Pam and I flew to Santa Fe, conferred with the staff for 2 days, and concluded that even without official cooperation there was enough material available to go ahead. Filming began almost immediately.

Our decision to proceed was big news in New Mexico newspapers and local radio and television newscasts. It would appear that the governor had thought we would not go ahead, and when we did, the sparring became even livelier.

When local television crews were finally allowed to film inside the prison after weeks and months of denial, we were not told of the press tour. All the ABC team, except production associate Lynn Geller, were filming in Albuquerque, 70 miles away. But when Lynn heard about the tour, she raced to the prison. The local press crews had just arrived and were making their way in, but when she identified herself she was told, "Sorry, no one from ABC gets in."

And with that, the battle moved into the courts. ABC News brought suit against the state, charging that we had been unlawfully singled out as the only news organization denied access to the prison. We went to court not expecting to win, because a United States Supreme Court decision had denied San Francisco radio station KQED access to a California prison on the grounds that the press had no more right to enter prisons than did the ordinary citizen. The New Mexico court ruled in favor of the state, and we did not appeal in light of the Supreme Court precedent. Still, we felt that our initial action was essential to signify that we would not be dissuaded from taking every possible route to obtain the truth about the prison. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that it was not easy to obtain local counsel to represent ABC against the state. New Mexico is so sparsely populated that virtually every first-rate attorney does some business with the state. In fact, the first lawyer we approached turned out to be the husband of Governor King’s press secretary, who uses her maiden name.

Strange things began to happen after the court ruling. We were allowed limited access to film in the prison. And during the Democratic nominating convention in New York, we got word from the governor, who was a delegate, that he would consent to an interview. Either he decided on his own that he would look worse if we stated on the air that he had refused to talk to us, or someone else, perhaps even a member of the Carter administration, leaned on Governor King, causing him to change his mind. In addition, the ban against interviewing state officials was lifted, and we were allowed another filming session inside the prison. This time we were able to talk briefly to prisoners, not exactly with the state’s blessing, but mostly because of Sherman’s quickness in beginning and ending interviews before the authorities could tell what was going on. We were, however, still foiled in our attempt to interview Felix Rodriguez and Robert Montoya, the two prison officials who had had most responsibility for operating the prison in the years before our investigation occurred. They just wouldn’t talk.

Not all our documentaries have been enveloped in so much drama. However, if you deal with difficult subjects, the road to production does figure to be bumpy. And if not bumpy, certainly not easy.

Then, too, our road has sometimes been difficult because we have chosen to be progressive in form and approach; not all our documentaries are in the well-made play, traditional style, where an Ibsen drama might be equated to a CBS Report or NBC White Paper. Our feeling: the form should be tailored to the subject or to the talents of the producer/director. If Helen Whitney is superbly suited to the nonnarrative genre, why force her into another form? Her project after Youth Terror was Homosexuals, which stirred giant waves because we dared to deal with the subject and to do away with glib experts, letting the people tell their own stories.

Closeup has also been the focus of enormous attention because we are the only commercial network that will use the work of independent producers. The reluctance is due in part to the fact that in-house staffs have to be paid anyway, but also because of
the need to maintain editorial and production control over the documentary. Fair enough, but we have found it possible to adhere to strict standards of factual and production integrity through careful selection of the independent producer and tight monitoring of the project while it is in progress.

We have presented four documentaries by independents. The first, Police Tapes, had already been shown on a portion of the PBS network. We bought the program from producers Alan and Susan Raymond and cut it from 90 minutes to 1 hour. The resulting presentation attracted a relatively large audience, despite it having been seen before in several markets.

Subsequently, we asked the Raymonds to go to Northern Ireland to film To Die for Ireland, a look at Ulster 10 years after the British army had been called in to settle the civil war between Catholics and Protestants. This time the Raymonds worked according to the same production procedures as staff producers, first submitting ideas, then an outline and a detailed treatment of how they conceived their film. They were also able to draw upon additional staff and resources they would not have been able to afford as independents.

The other two independent productions were totally different. The first was The Shooting of Big Man. It came to us as 100 hours of unedited videotape from Eric Saltzman of the Harvard Law School’s Evidence Film Project. We edited the tape to 2 hours, and the program preempted the Friday Night Movie. This documentary was the first time all phases of a criminal case had been recorded, from shortly after the arrest of the accused to the jury’s final verdict. Its value was not so much the dramatic unfolding of a trial as an extraordinary inside view of the criminal justice system.

Saltzman had obtained access to all aspects of the case except the jury deliberation. Viewers were able to see the defense attorneys conferring with the accused in jail, lawyers talking to the victim in the hospital, police and the prosecutor preparing their case, attorneys and the judge conferring in their chambers, witnesses giving pretrial statements, and then the actual trial itself. They saw the relief, joy, and chagrin at the “not guilty” verdict. And were left to wonder if justice had been done when told in an epilogue that the victim had died shortly after the trial and the defendant spoke boozily without remorse about the shooting.

The Shooting of Big Man was a highly successful production because the interesting raw material was skillfully shaped by our own producer Tom Bywaters and a marvelous tape editor, Ken Gutstein.

That project and Police Tapes are the only tape productions we have done. We are not yet set up with our own sophisticated tape-editing facility, and we feel film is still more flexible and artistically suitable for what we are attempting.

The fourth independent work resulted from our admiration of Who Are the DeBolts?, a documentary that won an Academy Award in 1979. Its producer, John Korty, had been director of The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, one of the finest dramas ever seen on television. Pam simply called Korty and asked him if he had any interest in doing something for us. He said he had a couple of ideas, and we liked one of them. Shooting started before the final contract was signed. The result was a lovely celebration of the strength of the human spirit, Can’t It Be Anyone Else? This was the story of three children battling leukemia: Jimmy, 10, telling his schoolmates he had to have a bone marrow transplant because it was his last chance; Dnart, 12, hoping that he could get a hamburger in heaven because existence wasn’t anything without one; and Diana, 12, saying defiantly, “I’m going to live. I’m not going to die.” Jimmy died less than a month after the broadcast. Dnart and Diana are still doing well. I had never met Jimmy, but it was like losing someone who was close. I felt the same way about the death of Sarah Lytle, the young defense attorney who was the “star” of The Shooting of Big Man (she died of a liver disorder some weeks after the program aired).

It is commonly assumed that sponsors wield a heavy hand on all television programs. Not so. We never know who our sponsors will be until shortly before air time. Then it is important for us to know so that the program will not contain a tasteless juxtaposition of editorial matter and sales pitch. We were especially careful with Can’t It Be Anyone Else?, screening all the commercials in advance and getting the sales department to rearrange the placement of two 30-second spots and to substitute a new product for one pain-killer message. No dramatic confrontation was necessary: a reasonable request, a prompt professional response.

Occasionally, Closeups have carried advisories at the head of the program, warning, for instance, about rough language or, as in Homosexuals, about explicit discussion of unconventional sexual behavior. In these instances, the sales department informs the sponsors so they may withdraw their spots if they wish. Sometimes they have. If no new sponsor will step in, a public service promo is substituted. But never is the body of the documentary affected.

Homosexuals ran without sponsors, as did Terror in the Promised Land, an examination of Palestinian terrorists which was objected to before broadcast by American Jewish organizations. Not only was the Palestinian program not tampered with, but it went on to
win the Overseas Press Club's Edward R. Murrow Award as the year's best documentary. And Michael Arlen, in The New Yorker, wrote: "I thought the ABC documentary showed us more about the Palestinians in fifty-seven minutes than most news organizations, large or small, have printed or televised in the past dozen years—and showed it with an uncommon mixture of judgment and perspective." That's the kind of review producers dream about.

We've received a gratifying number of exceptional notices that make the long hours and intense pursuit of the inside story well worthwhile. My personal favorite was a piece about The Killing Ground on the Op-Ed page of the Washington Post by its ombudsman, Charles Seib.

He wrote: "Occasionally, things happen that make me particularly proud to be involved—even peripherally—in the news business. I am not talking about massive coverage of major events, like Jonestown or the Three Mile Island crisis. I am talking, rather, about journalistic enterprise that goes beyond what's happening and demonstrates the positive role the free press plays in our society."

He went on to cite three examples, one of them The Killing Ground, writing in part: "A more chilling illustration of man's destruction of his environment—and possibly himself—would be hard to imagine.... No solutions were offered. But millions of Americans are now more aware of this terrible abuse than they were before this program was broadcast."

That, after all, is what the news business is supposed to be all about. And documentaries are indeed, first and foremost, news programs, whatever the artistic refinements employed.

The worst review was by a Chicago critic who wrote that no one in America should watch Homosexuals. His thesis was that it glorified homosexuality. I suspect his extreme admonition helped boost the ratings, which were an incredibly high (for documentaries) 35 percent share of the viewing audience.

I am frequently asked what kind of pressure we are under to achieve high ratings. The answer is: Some pressure, but not much. It is assumed by the network that documentaries will not rate as high as entertainment programming. On the other hand, no one wants to broadcast a program that is virtually unwatched. For us that means that we choose subjects that are important and interesting. Never something that is simply flashy but unimportant. Once the choice is made, we insist that the highest level of journalistic and artistic effort be put into the production. Critical reaction to Closeup would seem to indicate that we have succeeded reasonably well. Our ratings have also been respectable. For the first year they were the highest ever achieved by a documentary series. But then, as the ratings race among the networks intensi-
fied, we received less favorable time slots, and there was a decline. If we have a complaint, it is that we lack a regular prime-time slot. That would enable us to build an audience which could anticipate and plan for each of twelve Closeups a year.

Occasionally, we are questioned about how severely we are affected by network censors, referred to in the trade as the department of program standards and practices. We are not required to show every documentary to these people before broadcast. Theoretically, anyone in the network can see each documentary 5 days before broadcast when it is fed on a closed circuit to ABC stations throughout the country. The purpose of that feed is to enable stations to preview programs since, legally, they are responsible for what is broadcast on their channels. Sometimes stations decide against carrying the program for reasons of “taste,” as when 19 affiliates decided against Youth Terror. But that doesn’t happen often. Once, a local NBC station picked up a Closeup when it was rejected by the ABC affiliate. The city was Dallas, and the program was The Shooting of Big Man. Obviously, that is something we don’t want to encourage.

For a time our station in Atlanta, WXIA, was playing around with Closeups; either not running them or delaying their broadcast. I visited the general manager, and after a long talk he said his consciousness had been raised. The practice became less regular.

If there is the possibility of massive reaction to a portion of a show for “taste” reasons, we make sure that program practices views the program well in advance of broadcast. So far, their response has been that any deletion would compromise the documentary’s integrity so it should remain intact.

It should be emphasized that since we don’t want to offend large sections of the viewing audience, we are not likely to repeatedly present material that individual stations will black out. We want our documentaries to be seen. We also recognize that one’s personal convictions and standards of taste, morality, or propriety cannot be forced on a national viewing audience. Actually, the problem is relatively easy to deal with because all of us have been in the business long enough to know full well what is okay and what isn’t.

We’ve also been around long enough to know the value of the right kind of publicity. For each Closeup a special plan of action is devised with ABC News publicists. Trade and professional journals are targeted, and so are newspapers, magazines, and television and radio stations that would be especially interested. In connection with The Killing Ground, for instance, we were surprised to learn how many waste-disposal publications there are.

Congressional committees are contacted if we deal with a problem that might be the subject of congressional action. A special Capitol Hill showing of The Killing Ground was arranged for congressional committee staff personnel. For the subsequent update of that program, one of those staff members arranged to have praise of the program and a call for action read into the Congressional Record by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Youth Terror was also shown on Capitol Hill to a panel of senators and representatives. Their reactions were taped for inclusion in a special late-night discussion that aired the day of the broadcast. During the screening, Representative Shirley Chisholm briefly broke down. She had recognized one of the young people as a constituent from her Brooklyn district.

We don’t feel we have to bring people to tears, but, above all else, we do want reaction. We want people to care and to think. Whether it be about street crime, chemical waste, uranium, terrorism, a prison, or the courage of a child facing death. We want to be forced to think and care, too. ABC would like us to hit a home run every time we go to bat. That’s as it should be. Sometimes that kind of pressure can be wearying. But I would like to think it also forces us into new forms of expression, into new areas for exploration and examination. It is my hope that there is no finite limit to what can be done.
Toward a Cinema of Ideas

Julie M. Gustafson with Nancy Peckinham and Muriel Diman

John Reilly and I have been experimenting with documentary programs about ideas for the past 10 years through our nonprofit media center, Global Village. Documentaries are traditionally seen either as a form for the expression of news and information or as an instrument for the objective recording of reality. We see them as a means of visualizing complex ideas.

Numerous filmmakers encompassing both the narrative and the documentary traditions have experimented with what Jay Ruby, in a personal communication, has labeled the "cinema of ideas." These filmmakers, including Eisenstein, Vertov, Godard, Rohmer, and Rouch, have sought to present their ideas through behavior and dialogue which can be filmed and which both explicitly and implicitly express their ideas. We have been influenced by their techniques and have modified them, adding the device of juxtaposing individuals and events that are not directly related conceptually. Thus, in Home, one of our recent documentaries, we used portraits of four families at crisis moments in their lives to explore the way in which the meaning of home and family has changed in America over the last 200 years.

In the history and development of documentary film and video a number of schools have emerged, including the British documentary tradition which most American documentary "white papers" for the networks are based on. But two other major forms, loosely called cinéma vérité, have also developed. Although people do not frequently differentiate between the two forms, they have distinct goals and methods. Eric Barnouw, in Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film, has offered a useful distinction.

Cinéma vérité is a style principally associated with the French filmmakers Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin. At the time of their film Chronicle of a Summer, they were asked what they were doing. They said they were trying to continue Kino Pravda, Vertov's school of filmmaking, a cinema of provocation, which was literally translated into French as cinéma vérité. Later, people writing in English interpreted this to mean "cinema of truth."

Rouch's approach involved using the camera as a provocative tool to elicit responses from the subject being filmed. In Chronicle Rouch went into the streets of Paris with a camera asking people, "Are you happy?" and he filmed their reactions. The filmmaker consciously created the scene. It is said by filmmakers that when asked about his objectives, Rouch says his goal is to get people to reveal themselves in a way they never have before.

The second major style, which Barnouw calls "American direct cinema," was pioneered by Drew, Leacock, and Pennebaker. Robert Drew was trying to translate into filmmaking a journalistic essay style of photography that he had learned at Life magazine. He collaborated with Leacock and Pennebaker to create an observational, descriptive style. Their objective was to record the activities of selected individuals in a way that allowed them to be themselves. They generally recorded public figures or people associated with a controversial institution or issue in a way that magnified values and social trends of interest to the general public.

At Global Village we have developed a third style, which we have loosely been calling "modified cinéma vérité" and which combines elements of both cinéma vérité and American direct cinema. Our method, like the two just described, is process-oriented; we do not use scripts. We first develop a framework, or blueprint, for expressing our theme through the observation of crises and change in real subjects' lives. This technique allows us to record visible evidence of the way in which social or economic factors act on peoples' ideas and values. Interviews with our subjects, based on the theoretical framework of the project, are juxtaposed with the observational material. The structure of the work usually follows the natural flow of events in our subjects' lives paralleled with the logical presentation of our theme derived from the interviews.
History of Global Village

These methods have roots in early Global Village productions. Global Village was founded 10 years ago by John Reilly and Rudi Stern as a place to screen works made on video tape, a new material for producing television images by using portable and inexpensive equipment. Together with video artists such as Nam June Paik and Frank Gillette, Reilly and Stern produced works which were shown at Global Village.

In 1969 Global Village was one of the only theaters in America where this kind of video could be seen. In the early years Stern and Reilly produced both video art and documentaries. In 1972 Stern’s departure from Global Village and my arrival coincided with a greater emphasis on documentary production.

In Lifestyles: An Experiment in Feedback (1972) John Reilly and a group of students compared attitudes about sex roles by focusing on the lives of two members of their classes who had radically different experiences and views about their roles. In Politics of Intimacy (1973) I explored changing attitudes about sexuality by juxtaposing 10 women talking about their own feelings and experiences. These two works both drew heavily on verbal articulation of the program theme, but they contained within them the seeds of a method for the visualization of abstract ideas. In Giving Birth (1976) we taped the births of children to four couples who chose radically different methods of giving birth. We planned to include interviews with single mothers, mothers who had been administered various types of questionable drugs during labor, and numerous experts. But as we proceeded with the work, we realized that the most powerful material was contained in the juxtaposition of the four births. We lightly wove a few experts through this structure, but largely relied on the births to convey our concern with parental choice and responsibility in giving birth.

Home (1979) was the first work in which we consciously sought to evoke an abstraction through the observation of change or crises in real subjects’ lives. John and I had been struggling to figure out a way to explore changes in the concept and functions of family life. One of the physicians in Giving Birth had commented on the importance of institutions which were involved with families in caring about important life moments. He spoke of the birth of a child, a marriage, the death of a parent, and ultimately one’s own death as especially crucial experiences. His phrase resonated with us, and we decided rather blindly to juxtapose sequences of those moments in several families’ lives and to use those contemporary moments as a means of evoking past methods of handling these life events. The result was very powerful, not simply from an emotional point of view, but also from a symbolic one. The framework that we created was enormously suggestive of the shifts and changes in family life that we wanted to portray.

Our current project, a series called The Pursuit of Happiness in American Life, also has rather abstract origins. We were first struck by the phrase “the pursuit of happiness” when Walter Mondale used it in his eulogy to Hubert Humphrey in 1978. Although Mondale spoke of “the pursuit of happiness” in reverent tones, the phrase sounded jarring to us: in the context of Hubert Humphrey’s funeral and a decade in which increasing numbers of Americans were feeling apprehensive about the future, the optimism of the phrase seemed out of place. This experience disconcerted us and stimulated us to think about the origins and values implicit in the phrase. We decided to do a series that would explore this concept in the lives of five contemporary American families and that would also probe backward through history to suggest where contemporary ideas about the right to pursue happiness came from.

As we began working with this idea we realized that it was enormously complex, involving both philosophical and historical concepts. We decided to apply to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a grant so that we could undertake a large-scale series and afford to involve scholars in the project.

In January 1980 we applied for and received a planning grant from NEH, and we formed a group of consulting scholars that included a former collaborator, John Demos (social historian), Jay Ruby (visual anthropologist), David Noble (cultural historian), Muriel Diman (cultural anthropologist), and Laurence Thomas (philosopher). We asked this group to help us research the idea of the pursuit of happiness in American history and devise a framework for uncovering evidence of its importance in the lives of contemporary American subjects. Later, when we began to specify the types of individuals and families we wanted to use for the project, we sought out three additional scholars in the area of Black, Native American, and Ethnic and Women’s Studies. Jeannie Bains (Black Studies), Mike Mitchell (Native American specialist and filmmaker), and Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (Ethnic and Women’s Studies) joined our group.

Because our work is process-oriented, we felt we needed to create some method of working that would allow an authentic involvement of these scholars in the project. There is little precedent for the sustained involvement of scholars in television production. In fact, collaborations between filmmakers and scholars are notoriously rocky. We decided to develop a format for collaboration that would increase the involvement of the scholars beyond the script- and proposal-writing stage but at the same time clarify and define production roles. We based our structure on the idea of an ensemble method of collaboration from theater,
in which various specialized people—actors, lighting designers, writers—work together to produce a work of art. In the theatrical model constant feedback and revisions within the group define the creative method. John and I felt that we could benefit from this long-term involvement of professional scholars as long as our leadership roles were clearly understood.

So far I think we’ve been very successful. Our former collaborator, John Demos, offered to work with us. We did extensive reading on the subject to expand the ideas into a proposal. After receiving a planning grant, we enlisted new scholars to help refine and reshape the ideas, revealing new layers of the concept. During a group meeting we built a model, using our refined understanding of the issues and concept. This model was once again presented to the scholars, who made suggestions for revisions of the framework. This consultation process with the scholars was repeated throughout the planning stage and will continue in the preproduction, production, and postproduction stages.

Simply stated, we decided to isolate the five key ideas we believe are intimately connected to American interpretations of the pursuit of happiness: “land,” “freedom,” “livelihood,” “achievement,” and “survival.” Each of the programs of the series will focus on one of these themes. We will choose five families to provide figurative representations and evidence for the examination of the idea of the right to pursue happiness. Each program will include segments from all five families but will feature the family whose past and present experience most powerfully evokes the program theme.

The role of the scholars will be most important in the selection of families, in providing feedback on the process of shooting, and planning the editing of the material. The particular situation of a chosen family may vary from the hypothesized model, requiring the restructuring of the program’s model. Unpredictable responses from the subjects will require reconsultation with scholars and revision of the model to incorporate these new problems and ideas. The question for both ourselves and the scholars who wish to work with us in making ideas explicit in our work is: "How do you make something conceptual filmic?" We have found that the process of grappling with this question is enormously exciting for all of us.

Collaborative Aspects of the Method

Our method is principally based on raising questions with our subjects and looking with them to find answers in their lives. To achieve these goals, the interest and cooperation of our subject are absolutely necessary. The ideas behind the project are presented to the subject, and our methods of working and our objectives are described. This is sometimes reinforced by showing them previous work done by Global Village.

In our minds a subject is an active participant in the creative process of making the work. We place a high value on their contributions and go to some lengths to protect the relationship. At the outset of a project we try to be very clear about what the work will involve, what we expect from the families, and what we return to them. Because most of the people we work with are not public figures, we show our subjects the work before it is aired, in case there is material in the piece they object to. Nobody yet has asked for any changes, although in a few instances someone has been mildly disturbed by aspects of the program.

In many ways audiences are also collaborators. The audience is presented with both the framework of the program and the observational material from the lives of our subjects. From this material the audience creates its own intellectual experience, adding to it personal experiences and commonsense knowledge. Picasso described the process I am referring to when he said, “A picture is not something which is thought up ahead of time and done. It is a process, an image which is constantly changing. It even changes when it’s finished depending on what the viewer is thinking or feeling.”

The techniques we use to involve the audience fall roughly into two categories: empathetic devices and distancing devices. To create empathetic bonds between the subject and the viewer we have always used as subjects real people rather than actors. Like Drew, Pennebaker, Wiseman, and other filmmakers using American direct cinema, and cinéma vérité, we spend as much time as possible with our subjects so that they will feel as comfortable as possible with us during the taping period. Although we recognize the influence of our presence, we never interfere in the natural flow of events by, for example, asking the subjects to do things over again for the camera.

We also select a powerful event or crisis to tape because at such a time the subject’s behavior is clearly painted. Crises occur in everyone’s life, and in the subject’s response to a crisis, the values and beliefs which motivate people are stripped down and become believable to the viewer. This method of capturing what is essentially an abstraction is similar to the methods photographers use to catch the abstrac-
tion of choreography, stopping a dancer in motion. The clarity of action at a crisis moment in contrast to everyday details and textures is the essence of the work.

Finally, to create a powerful and attractive story, we use conventional dramatic techniques of filmmakers and playwrights to finally structure our program to draw our audience in. We structure our shooting around strong individuals and clear action. We also, in editing, use the classic methods of dramatic introduction, exposition of the problem, and dénouement.

Along with these efforts to draw people into our work, we employ techniques that distance viewers from the subject, causing them to reflect on the ideas presented in the work and, we hope, to search within themselves for answers. The devices we use are like those that the playwright Berthold Brecht used on the stage, where they were known as "alienating" devices. Brecht believed that the audience in traditional theater believed too much in the reality of the characters and action. Because of their tendency to empathize, they never took a step back to consider the themes that the playwright was trying to convey when he wrote the piece. One of Brecht's devices was to make his characters break out of their roles and speak directly to the audience or burst into song. Another device was the use of title cards, which intentionally broke the dramatic flow of the scene and pointed to underlying political issues. A third was to deliberately reveal set machinery, lighting apparatus, and other elements of stagecraft hitherto concealed. Brecht's objective was to make the play move beyond the carefully reconstructed reality and become a provocative display which involved the audience in the resolution of problems and crises.

As producers we use alienating or reflexive devices as well. The first device we use occurs during the opening titles and credits. In addition to program titles we always put in the title "This work is by John Reilly and Julie Gustafson," so that the audience will know that the program is a work originating from two individuals, that it is authored. After the titles we generally dedicate the work, thereby revealing a part of our motivation for undertaking the project. For example, Giving Birth was dedicated to "our son—Lars Christopher Reilly—born 9/25/75." In just a few words we were able to suggest that the birth of our child had motivated Giving Birth.

The presence of a narrating voice or titles also reminds the viewer of our influence. Although we use only a small amount of narration to introduce the subjects and the objectives of the program, we use our own voices. Later, when we ask questions of our subjects, the audience can connect our voices to the narration and therefore to the point of view of the work.

A second distancing device is to include glimpses of the mechanics of the shooting process in the final work, a practice derived from the techniques of both cinéma vérité and American direct cinema. We may tape ourselves setting up the lights and thereby see the effects of our presence on the subject's life. We also include shots of the microphones or other equipment so that the viewer occasionally sees the complete reality of the scene. Another device is to show the conceptual mechanics of making the program. We usually include, for example, the questions we ask people instead of just their responses. We have been encouraged by our group working on Pursuit of Happiness to include scenes from the first few times we spend with the subject when our presence is most noticeable to the subject, and to consider using a first-person narration, which would give a clearer idea of our underlying motives and intentions for making the work. For example, we might say outright in the narration how we got the idea and explain what our method is.

The importance of the collaboration among artist, scholar, subject, and audience is that we are able to identify and formalize important intellectual and social ideas which are part of everyday life and which surface by connecting them to a disciplined and intellectually accurate framework. The audience, inspired by the questions we raise and moved by our subjects' responses, asks questions of themselves and search for resolutions in their own lives. Our hope is that these factors combine to create not only a moving experience but also a profound intellectual one—a participation usually denied television viewers.

Production

John and I divide the labor. In addition to his creative responsibilities, John acts as executive producer and is responsible for fund-raising, financial matters, and distribution of the work. He conducts the primary interviews with the subjects as well. Being freed from day-to-day on-location shooting enables him to maintain a distance from the subjective interaction with the families and to keep an overview of the project. In addition to my creative role, I act as line producer, initiating the search for subjects and planning the production details in the preproduction period. I do all the camera work and later edit the material. My most difficult task is that on location I must respond to the families and make decisions regarding their needs while still keeping the idea in mind and the subjects within the framework of the piece.

The first step in production is the tentative selection of a family from those we have interviewed. As we discussed earlier, it is necessary to evaluate the spe-
cific characteristics of the family to see if they fit the model, and if not, if the model can be altered to incorporate variables slightly different from those originally hypothesized. In the preproduction period of *Home*, for example, we planned to record a subject facing his or her own death for the final sequence. We found, however, that in the family we picked the experience the family was going through was more suggestive of the “death of a parent” sequence than the one of “facing one’s own death,” so we used it for that. Then we adapted our plans for the next sequence to account for this change.

We then ask a family to participate. If the family members decline, we may ask them to recommend another family, and the process begins again. If they accept, we must evaluate their reasons for accepting. An urge to be seen on television is not sufficient; the individual family members must have an inherent interest in the idea and energy in expressing their thoughts on it that will transfer well to the video medium.

Generally, the family’s initial reaction is tentative; they usually have a lot of questions and reservations about how the project will affect their lives. Before reaching a final decision, the families may discuss the project with all those who may be affected—family members and friends.

The reasons behind subjects’ decisions to participate are varied but generally fall into three main categories. They may be stimulated by the potential educational experience, they may see it as an opportunity to learn about television and more about themselves. Or they may see the project as a means of rethinking an issue which the program is about or, in the case of *The Pursuit of Happiness*, the importance of recovering their family history. Finally, a family may participate because of a sense of self-worth, and the realization that it has an important story to tell.

After receiving final confirmation from the family, we begin planning the production period with them. We explain the function and the purpose of the shooting periods, the first interview, the observational shooting, and the wrap-up interview. This is important so that families know that the shooting is not open-ended. We clarify their understanding that we will be working with them for approximately 3 months and arrange a shooting schedule. We usually try to shoot the observational material consistently, approximately 3 days a week over a 3-month period. We prefer to shoot from morning to night, although some families prefer a shorter block of time such as 4 to 11 P.M.

Another important point to be worked out with the families is the event or series of events that precipitated the crisis around which the sequence is structured. With Dee and Lee, the couple about to be married in *Home*, we chose specific events leading up to the marriage and the marriage itself. When all the details have been worked out and the contractual agreement is accepted, we enter into the first stage of shooting, the interview.

Prior to the first interview, we will meet with the scholars to discuss the specific questions that will be used in the interview and to review the conceptual model that will be the framework within which the interview is guided. The questions are designed to elicit information which creates the material to be used in the editing, material which expresses the contemporary setting and the historical background of the family. The first questions are of an expository nature that will eventually help us to introduce the family—who they are, what type of work they do, and the nature of the crisis. This is also the interview to bring in questions that will help us in the editing to foreshadow and explain the values motivating the crisis moment. For example, for the birth sequence of *Home*, we asked Irene and Barry Beren, “Why are you having the baby away from the hospital?” Their answer provided some of the expository material we needed in the opening minutes of the birth sequence. It also explained the beliefs that motivated them to make such an unusual decision.

It is also necessary to elicit the subject’s responses to the principal question of the program or series. In *Home* the underlying concern was to explore the way in which important moments in human life have changed in the last 200 years. In our first interview with the expectant couple we discussed questions of different methods of delivery and why they had rejected a hospital setting for the birth of their second child. Their answer provided material to express our theme to the audience.

Another example of the way our questions generate material for the construction, this time historical contrasts, occurred in *Home*. We were interested in seeing how the life of Lena, the woman facing old age in a nursing home, was different from people in the generation after her. She had been married for 50 years and we asked her, “In light of all the couples getting divorced today, how did you stay married so long?” She gave an answer which evoked what she called “old-fashioned ideas” about marriage.

In *Pursuit of Happiness* we will ground the subject’s present situation in the historical events that shaped their forebears’ culture and adaptation in the United States. Questions will be used to elicit continuities of values between then and now to see how their value system has changed in relation to economic and social developments outside the family. In guiding the direction of the interview, we know it will be important to provoke the family to think abstractly about concrete events in their lives. We will try to get them to go beyond the personal crisis and think more abstractly about the motivation of their behavior.
Lena Gardiner, a 94-year-old widow (from the "Growing Old" segment of *Home*) with *Home* producer Julie Gustafson and her child.

John Reilly, Julie Gustafson, and Nathaniel Merrill, producers of *Home*. 
The initial interview is usually the first time that the family has been recorded on video tape, and as such it is introductory, providing an opportunity to acquaint the subject with the technology we use. The immediate playback offered by video is taken advantage of at this time so the subjects can see themselves and become more comfortable with the shooting process.

As interviewers, we are aware of the need to ask questions which set off problems and foreshadow the crisis which will be resolved by the end of the program. We must also respond to the needs of the family, be concerned about issues that must be dealt with sensitively. We never try to trick a subject into revealing damaging information about him- or herself; in fact, we try to warn an individual if we feel there may be negative feedback to his or her situation, giving the subject the option to suggest the best approach. This concern is based on one of our underlying principles: our work is about the relation between a subject's behavior and belief and intellectual themes; it is not about individual neurosis. We try very hard not to exploit subjects for sensationalism.

After the initial question-and-answer period we stop asking our prepared questions and allow the subjects to free-associate ideas that have been stimulated during the first half hour of the interview period. Once the initial questions have given us material to construct the framework, we find that subjects bring up a lot of rich textural material as they reconsider their family's history and value system. During this latter period the subjects usually state new or related problems that they return to later in the shooting.
Once the first interview is completed and we (in the case of The Pursuit of Happiness, scholars, producers, and family) are confident that it will be a mutually beneficial relationship, the observational period of shooting begins. The idea behind this period is to capture an event or crisis in a subject’s life. We record material using the natural flow of events within the family on a day-to-day basis and over a discrete period of time, and we use this to organize our portraits. The observational material provides interesting and provocative contrasts to the interview material; it becomes possible to see what a subject actually does in response to a given situation as opposed to what he or she says he or she will do in the interview.

We conduct the observational period as unobtrusively as possible. We do not use anything outside the natural scene, neither sets nor scripts. We try not to ask people to change their behavior, reproduce an action, or repeat a phrase. In the editing process we maintain the naturalness by not introducing music or other effects to the pace of the material. It remains as close to what we observe as possible.

During the observational shooting only the sound person and I are on location. On the first day of the shooting period we arrive with all our equipment and begin setting up the lights, which will remain in position during the entire shooting period. We experiment with different lighting conditions and make acoustical tests and adjustments, perhaps supplying a soft-spoken person with a wireless microphone. We may bring along the first taped interview to show the family. During this time the family becomes more comfortable with the shooting process.

As we mentioned above, the observational period operates on two axes. First, we shoot several days from morning to night. We find that subjects begin with a certain mood in the morning that influences the day’s events. The resolution of daily problems usually occurs during the early evening hours, after dinner and before bedtime.

The second axis is to record specific events that relate to a crisis where resolution elicits thematic elements and demands an examination of values. In most of the sequences in Home, we chose a clearly defined event such as birth, death, or marriage. In one sequence about Lena aging in the nursing home, we focused on events relating to the arrival of her daughter from Florida. This provided us with a discrete time period in which to search for material for the final program.

On location I use my own discretion in the scenes I choose to tape, keeping in mind that they should relate to the program’s theme. It is important to find an opening scene within the first third of the shooting period. If a scene which introduces the program’s theme and the subject’s concerns about it has not been found, it may be necessary to reevaluate the model and/or family and change one or both. Sometimes the opening scene comes easily, as in the case of Lena in Home. The very first day we went to work with her, she turned from making her bed and sighed, saying, “It’s not easy to grow old.”

In addition to the opening scene and expository material, I look for scenes to reveal the “cathartic” process of resolution of the sequence’s crisis. At some point there must be a scene that addresses the subject’s own resolutions and reflections and ends the sequence.

It sometimes proves difficult for me to maintain distance (objectivity) while shooting. I cannot avoid interaction with the subject and may respond subjectively to the event going on in the family. In this case John provides perspective on the direction of the project through his “objective” evaluation of the on-location events. In The Pursuit of Happiness the scholars, too, may be called in to elaborate on ideas that emerge during this interaction with the families and may assist in expanding or refining conceptual ideas behind the daily events.

When the observational period is completed, a final interview is conducted, with John as interviewer. The same questions that were asked in the first interview are repeated. For example, in the marriage segment of Home we ask, “After your marriage, what do you think of your decision to have a big family wedding in a church?”

**Editing**

The final stage of production is the editing procedure. Editing is the use of the raw footage as it is put together in a final program. The physical work of editing involves reviewing the footage, transferring the footage from cassette to cassette, weeding out the good takes from the bad, and putting one shot next to another.

But the editing process actually begins long before, when the program’s intent is established, and continues throughout the creative process of production. The design of the program, the choice of scholars to work with, the choice of subjects, even the camera and the lighting employed during shooting reflect the ideas which are later refined in the editing process.

Editorial decisions are made throughout the shooting. During the shooting process it is kept in mind that there must be sufficient material, which will finally be pieced together in the editing process, to build the program’s thematic framework. The choice of times to shoot is an intrusion on the flow of daily events and represents a decision as to whether a scene is important to the thematic development of the program. The choice of shots and the length of shots again are edi-
editorial decisions. In the shooting process, the intentions of our investigation take on shape in the footage; editing creates a coherent and visible expression of these intentions for the television audience. Metaphors emerge which shape the design of the final program and suggest resolutions to the questions posed by the investigation.

In the selection of the shots which will be used in the piece, it is important that each shot add some element to the development of the idea of the program. It is useful to think of the raw material in literary terms. Each shot is combined with other shots to form a scene, much like words in a paragraph. A number of scenes put together create a sequence, similar to a chapter in a novel. Finally, all the sequences or chapters are put together and the whole work is complete.

When the footage has been copied, and the originals put aside until the final edit, we can begin to look for the work which is hidden in the raw material. We look at this footage from beginning to end with as few preconceptions as possible. We want to approach the material with an open mind, trying to see what is there rather than what we plan or hope to be there. At Global Village we employ an assistant editor who has not been on location, and together we look at the footage and take detailed notes, called "catalogues."

In the cataloguing notes we describe events and write down the dialogue verbatim. We also make technical comments (e.g., "terrible sound"), often indicating that something may be totally unusable on tape although the content may help us make other decisions or be useful in writing the narration. We also make filmic structural comments, for example, "possibly good opening scene."

During the cataloguing process, when we find particularly rich or significant shots, we call in John. He is seeing the footage for the first time. In effect, he's almost watching a rough edit because we only show him what we think is important. Together we discuss this footage for the best scenes. The scholars may be informally involved in cataloguing, to discuss whether an issue has been covered.

After cataloguing, John and I discuss how to build the program; then I make a paper edit. The paper edit represents our first attempt to design the program. This is analogous to writing a book, where you write a broad outline showing the large coherent parts. We then begin to fill in the details of the paper edit on a scene-by-scene basis, always with the entire program in mind. But, just as with a book outline, if it doesn't seem to flow well the edit won't work. So we must be constantly prepared to revise and rework the paper edit. When it is completed, the scholars are sent the paper edit for comments and suggestions.

With the edit down on paper, we try a real edit. This is a long process involving constant starts and stops as we search through the footage for the necessary shots. I begin editing with broad strokes, working down to the smaller shots. Often the structure changes right away. The language, meter, rhythm, and tone of the footage are very powerful factors influencing the content. If we find that the aesthetics of the footage say something other than what is down on the paper edit, we may revise the outline or even look for and shoot new footage.

I usually start editing with the first scene of the first program. This is often difficult and the end result unsatisfying, so I may go on to something easier rather than forcing the first scene. In Home we worked on the first sequence, the birth, for two weeks without satisfaction. Instead of forcing the edit, I moved on to the next sequence with Lena. The shots emerged one after another, building scenes until the entire sequence was completed 2 days later. Working with the Lena sequence revealed the aesthetic shape and tone of the whole work. We then edited the next two sequences; one was easy, the other tougher, but neither as difficult as the first. Then, once the shape of the portrait had revealed itself, we went back and reedited the first sequence.

Sometimes the problem with the first sequence is that it lacks some structural element. In the birth sequence a crucial set of questions were missing. To correct this we went back to the family and asked these questions in a final interview. This shows how our decisions can develop from our early shooting experiences. Although there may be false starts, once a path through the footage has been cleared the work falls into place.

Video editing is simply a transfer of shots from one tape cassette to another. With each transfer the image moves another generation away from the original. After numerous re-edits, in which sequences or shots are moved around without starting again from the beginning, the image on the tape has been removed so many generations that it is now barely visible.

At the end of the rough edit we usually add the titles, which we believe should foreshadow the program content. Titles are shot over symbolic images from the program in a way that poses a question to the viewer. The titles are in the foreground, and a shot of the subject, muted under the titles, is in the background. Our conception of the title shot is that it constitutes a summation of the program, encapsulated in a single glimpse. Throughout the rest of the program, we bring out all the details which were in the background, elaborating on the location, the characters, the actions, and so on.

When we are satisfied with the rough edit, we begin the final edit by bringing the originals of the footage chosen for the final piece to a video-tape editor (for
our last few tapes we have worked with John Godfrey of TV Lab at WNET. We also bring extra footage to create leeway for dissolves at the beginning and ends of shots. I also bring in extra shots, not included in the rough edit, in case of last-minute revisions or refinements. This material is transferred to quad and time-coded. Time-coding involves "burning in" hours, minutes, seconds, and frames along the bottom of the picture. It provides great accuracy and flexibility in the final edit. The total amount of footage transferred and time-coded is usually about twice the length of the final program.

The final editing process has been revolutionized in the past 2 to 3 years by the development of editing computers. The work goes faster and easier than ever before, and the resulting edits are cleaner and more subtle. The computer process has enabled video producers to have control, equal to that of filmmakers, over their medium.

With the time-coded cassettes, the editor makes a computer edit of the final program. I discuss with the editor questions of timing, tone, and other factors. Every hour of the program will take approximately two 40-hour weeks to edit. At a rate of $100 per hour for the computer facilities, the final edit for one program may cost as much as $8000. In the final edit, an editing list is also produced by computer. This list is printed on punched tape, thus translating the entire program into computer language. It contains the time code for the entry and exit for each segment, including the start and end of such effects as lap dissolves.

With the punched tape and final edit in hand, and when an air date has been scheduled, we are ready to move to the final stages of production, when the program is polished by computer in a room affectionately dubbed "the space room." We feed the punched tape into the computer and the computer takes over, editing automatically while we sit and watch. The computer is stopped when effects or titles are added. Rental for the "space room" is $300 an hour, and it takes two 8-hour days to complete a 1-hour show. This completes the visual track of the program, but it is still necessary to refine the sound track.

Sound is stripped from the video cassette and transferred to 8-track audiotape. Many producers skip this procedure, which involves laying separate tracks and then mixing them in a high-quality sound studio, but we rely on it to add an extra dimension of quality to our work. Although we don't use much additional audio (such as music), we generally use four tracks: one each for narration, dialogue, ambient sound (background noise), and for the time code of the final edit master. All audio tracks are then mixed down to a single track by a professional sound mixer. With this track we return to the "space room" for another 2 or 3 hours and transfer the sound onto the completed final edit.

**Distribution**

The final stage of production is the distribution of the work. Although there is a small, natural audience for our work among documentary enthusiasts and social scientists, we are increasingly interested in achieving the large general audiences that broadcasting allows. The commercial broadcasters rarely air the work of independent documentarians, so public television is currently our principal outlet. Both Giving Birth and Home were aired nationally on PBS and did very well in terms of audiences and critical response. With Home, we entered the Public Broadcasting System through the TV Lab at WNET, which paid us for the local air rights. PBS did not acquire the rights, claiming they did not have funds for the program, so it was given to the stations free of charge.

This experience of not being paid for the work is at the heart of the dilemma faced by the producer who is really interested in ideas rather than entertainment. The commercial sector and the corporate funders of PBS are not interested in intellectually or politically motivated programming unless it shadows their own beliefs. With the current backlash against government support for the arts and humanities, programs about ideas and experimentation with forms that convey ideas will have greater and greater difficulty coming to life. As a result, the progress we and other producers like us have made in sensitizing audiences to programs with life and substance may be lost. Our plan now is to retrench and persevere, working on one program at a time and hoping that we can continue to refine and develop our method of working and to cultivate an audience that can appreciate it.
In 1968 I was invited to Jerusalem for a year to help set up Israel television. For ages there had been talk of the coming of television—now there was to be action—and I had a chance to come in as a founding father, so to speak. The whole idea intrigued me, and I accepted with speed. In the end I stayed 12 years in Israel, and the experience shaped most of my patterns of thinking and acting as a filmmaker.

Israel was very late in coming onto the television scene and only decided to establish a one-channel national television after the Six-Day War. A small educational television station had, in fact, been set up in Tel Aviv by the Rothschild Foundation in the early sixties. In 1968 it was still broadcasting, but to a limited audience of a few thousand people. There had been talk of a national television for years, but it had been opposed by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and by the conservative and religious elements in the country.

The 1967 war, however, broke down all the resistance. The showing of the war on the neighboring Arab screens had demonstrated the propaganda value of television, and now the government wanted it as fast as possible. They did this by appointing an American professor of communications, Elihu Katz, long resident in Israel, to head the fledgling Israel TV and to recruit a team of experts. Eventually Professor Katz's Odyssean wanderings brought him to London in search of a crew. We met, talked, and a few weeks later I was asked to climb aboard.

Prior to the invitation I had been working as a filmmaker and lawyer in England and the States, and had established a fairly good reputation in documentary. I had also filmed a few times in Israel. In 1961 I spent 5 months working on televising the Eichmann Trial, and in 1964 I had done a film on the kibbutzim under fire. I guess the two things added together had occasioned the invitation, and I was looking forward to a third visit. But this time there was some trepidation. I knew that working in Israel on a long-term basis would present a completely new set of challenges, both on the practical side and in terms of cultural understanding.

The cable that arrived for me in April 1968 simply said: "Please join our team in two weeks. One-year contract." In a sense the cable typified what Israel television was to be like for a few years—long on demands for immediate action, short on explanation and understanding. What was clear, though, was that things were happening fast.

Equipment had been ordered from America. CBS experts were arriving in Brooks Brothers suits waving organizational charts. Would-be filmmakers were being corralled, mainly from radio and the press, and 18 experts including myself were wandering around in a daze getting ready to teach the splendid art of television and film production. Everything was at fever pitch and slightly crazy, so I didn't turn a hair when I was told that we had to be broadcasting within 4 months, starting from scratch.

Although my main function was to help set up the documentary department, I was also heavily involved in teaching film production, both to the general television trainees and to the would-be documentarists. The teaching was great fun, terribly chaotic, badly organized, and complicated by the fact that half the Israelis were unteachable. They came as students, but told us they had all been professors of film at UCLA, had worked with Eisenstein in the thirties, or had won the McNamara award for television excellence at a 2-week TV course at Glasgow University—so what had they to learn from a few American or British network hacks.

Half of this was amusing nonsense but half of it was true. So we trod warily. I didn't mind for myself, but it was hard on world experts such as Stuart Hood, former head of BBC news, to have his advice continually ignored. Stuart took all this with a sense of humor and imparted marvelous advice to those who had the sense to listen.

Altogether it was a world where very little of what one knew before counted, or made sense. But it was a stimulating world where talent was high and technique was low, where almost anything could be tried first time, and where nobody paid the slightest attention to anybody else. It was a world where the production car was unavailable for shooting because someone's wife had borrowed it to go shopping, where editing services were halted for evening prayers, and where students studying directing on Monday set up their own school for production techniques on Tuesday.

The Documentary Unit

After working a few months with the basic trainees, my job narrowed down to setting up the documentary department with Herbert Krosney. Herb was a very talented producer-director who'd worked with the NET Journal in New York and like myself was very enthusiastic about what could be done with documentary in Israel. We had 20 trainees in the fledgling department and reckoned that half of them would become excel-
lent filmmakers, given the chance. So everything was set to go.

At that stage in Israel the areas of both feature filming and documentary filming were relatively unexplored. Each year a few features were made either at the Geva or Herzliya studios, but these were mostly comedies of the crudest kind. As to the documentaries, they were few in number, and when produced were mostly propaganda shorts financed by the Jewish Agency or entertainment newsreels having little to do with news but a great deal to do with fashion and bathing beauties. Occasionally a foreign documentary on Israel such as Chris Marker’s Portrait of a Struggle or Meyer Levin’s The Illegals would be shown, but they would be few and far between. This, then, was the extent of Israeli documentary coverage when we arrived.

The problem, which both Herb and I grasped very quickly, was that until we came the country had never really seen itself on the screen except in a humorous or propaganda way. Now the task was to consider and think through what we considered were the proper functions and implications of documentary. What we had to do was define a path and a goal for a new kind of documentary that would go further and dig deeper than the sugar-coated travelogues of the past. We saw Israel as being in a state of flux and transition, and thought that the perceptive social and analytical documentary could help establish a climate for logical and humane decision making.

This was all very well in theory, but first of all both Herb and I had personal matters to contend with. When we came to Israel in 1968, we were both seen as foreigners. My having spent 6 months in the country previously counted for nothing. Nor the fact that I spoke Hebrew. “You’re a bloody Englishman and you don’t know our ways. You haven’t been in a youth movement and you haven’t been in the army.” This was said to me by my television students. They knew because of their birthright—Herb and I didn’t. To my chagrin they were largely correct. The only thing I could do was look, learn, listen, and talk, and hope that time would bring insight.

The first problem was to understand the audience. This posed an immense number of ramifications. We were going to make films for a population of over 3 million, the majority being Jews, but a large minority Moslem Arabs. While the Arabs were fairly homogenous, the Jewish population was divided every way under the sun. There were the sophisticated Berliners who had arrived in the thirties. The Yemenites from Saana who came in 1949. The North Africans from Morocco and the semi-Bedouin Jews from the Atlas Mountains who came in the fifties. And the Russians from Georgia, Moscow, and Leningrad who came flocking in the seventies.

Besides the population, one could also get overwhelmed by the fantastic diversity of Israel. One stumbled on Christian groups going over Crusader castles; Moslems celebrating Ramadan; blue-shirted Jewish youngsters visiting the site of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Geographically, historically, and religiously it presented a painting of a thousand different colors.

For the documentary filmmaker all this diversity of material was a godsend, if one could just remove the panache and the flamboyance and see what the society was really about. To do this we instituted seminars for our group where everything was discussed, from documentary methods to Israeli politics. A little bit was formal, but the really serious discussions were always informal, done at the many television parties or on the way to a picnic in the desert.

The flow of ideas was marvelous, but theory took a while to translate into reality. This was because there was a push for “product,” to get something on the air, no matter what, to show that Israel TV had arrived.

Our theories about television documentary and society change had to wait, we were told. What was wanted was film now.

Somehow the word had gotten around that our documentary department worked fast and was producing good learning exercises. Immediately some one came to view the exercises, deemed them great, and we were told to produce as many as we could as fast as we could for actual broadcast. In retrospect that wasn’t a bad thing. Thus the first two films ever to appear on Israel TV came from our department, as unannounced experimental broadcasts on an August morning scarcely 4 months after the founding of Israel TV.

The first film was a 15-minute short made by Herb and Adir Zig on the Jordan Valley. The second, 20 minutes long, was a film I did with Yossi Goddard called Bedouin Resettlement, in which we filmed Bedouin in their tents in the Negev Desert. We then explored the pluses and minuses of their lives and looked at the results of the government policy of resettling the Bedouin in certain urban environments. Both films were made very fast and were screened as workprints, without the benefit of negative cutting.

Though we didn’t realize it at the time, both films typified the duality of filming in Israel. On the one hand, there was the appeal of the romantic and the picturesque—and both the Jordan Valley and the Bedouin tents supplied all this. On the other, there was a desire to show the changing reality that was seen in the urban resettlement, which would never have been shown on the usual travelogue.

These films were counted a success and the department was soon in hectic business. Thus films poured out about artists, exhibitions, Arab life, architecture, kibbutzim, the army, musicians, and Jewish converts. There were films on religious ceremonies,
Bedouin festivals, road building, health. Speed and product were of the essence, and we were given a freedom of action and subject choice that was soon to be curtailed. But these were the early days when budgets were loose, manpower was available, there were few schedules and little department rivalry, and proposals did not have to shuffle for months through a bureaucratic maze of decision making.

Few of the films were brilliant, but most were more than competent allowing for the fact that the filmmakers were still learning their craft. Nearly all the films were under 15 minutes, were shot in black-and-white (there was then no color television in Israel), and were shot on a ratio of six to one. Usually they were made in Hebrew, but occasionally in Arabic, and they had to be edited in 3 to 4 days.

I would like to think that these films went deeper than the former newsreels. They certainly had a populist element, but they roamed wider and were more socially and politically sensitive than the theatrical newsreels. They put the city Israeli on the screen as much as the romanticized kibbutznik. In a small way they dealt with contemporary problems from urban renewal to education and health. And they used interview and vérité techniques rather than the old voice-of-God narration plus saccharine music. It was a small revolution, but a revolution nevertheless.

For someone like me, used to filming in the United States and England, the whole atmosphere sometimes seemed surrealistic, bizarre, and funny. You had to allow twice the time when filming Arabic subjects because so much time would be spent drinking numerous cups of coffee and tea. You had to watch out for religious films because your crew would stand idle for half an hour while the subject rabbi gave an impromptu lesson on the Talmud. Politicians were also difficult because they were just beginning to learn the value of unpaid media publicity.

Then, to add another touch of craziness to all this, one had to put up with the foibles of the crew. Normally we had Saturdays off, as this was the Jewish sabbath. But Ahmed, our assistant cameraperson, was a Moslem, so needed Friday off, while Peter, our electrician and a Catholic, wanted Sundays off for confession. Then there was the day my sound person turned out to be a Cohen, a priest under Jewish law, and thus couldn’t go into the graveyard where we were filming. And finally that memorable evening when my Orthodox editor refused to cut the film I was doing on Israeli restaurants because “maybe the food they were eating in the film isn’t kosher.”

These were the lighter moments, but there were also the deeper problems a filmmaker had to consider, such as censorship and security. Here one had to tread very carefully, and the possible impact of your films could never be dropped from your mind for a moment.

Until recently Israel was surrounded on all sides by countries with whom she was in a state of war. Except for Egypt, this is still the case. Yet because of proximity, nearly all Israeli broadcasts can be seen in parts of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Thus the impact of one’s broadcasts on the enemy, though not central to one’s filmmaking, is always somewhere there in the background. The impact of one’s films on Israel’s own Arab population was also a subject which warranted serious thought.

Then there was official censorship, which came up mainly in the context of films dealing with the border situation, terrorism, and the army. In nearly all these cases permission had to be sought for filming and the films cleared before broadcast. This meant going through the army bureaucracy, working with their spokesmen while filming, and going through a battery of army censors at the editing stage. Generally I found the army censors sympathetic, but have dealt with this subject in another paper (Rosenthal 1981).

Changes and Shifts

Slowly our films got longer, and after a year or so we reckoned we’d racked up some notable successes. The department had made major films on the Holocaust, the war-wounded, the frontier kibbutzim, and numerous social problems. Herb had also found time to make a couple of films, while I had done a series on Israeli athletes, a half-hour film on Professor Yadin’s archaeological explorations at Hazor, and another major film on road accidents. All of us were feeling pleased with ourselves, and there was a terrific feeling of élan within the department.

Gradually, however, we found ourselves confronting two problems. The first was autonomy. We wanted a strong documentary unit, with its own staff and its own air time once or twice a week. But things were pushing us in another direction entirely. This was the pressure, subtle and not so subtle, from the news department, which wanted documentaries to become a subsection of their own division. Both Herb and I thought this was totally wrong and started fighting this pressure as best as we could. This was difficult because till then many of our shorts had been slotted into the news magazine. Once the battle was on, a number of our films were simply shunted aside or had to wait ages to find a broadcast spot.

The second problem was the very nature of documentary. This had not been an issue the first year because everything had been so loose. However, when in the second year we started pressing for more investigation-type films or consumer-oriented films, we were told to slow things down. The time wasn’t quite right. Israel wasn’t ready. We would rock the boat too much. This has been discussed elsewhere (ibid.: 9–12), but two examples suffice to show what was happening at the time.

Early in 1969 I made a 15-minute film about the village of Ein Karim near Jerusalem. It was my own suggestion, and with Herb’s backing I went ahead. The film is what we would now call an urban protest. It showed a beautiful village being ruined and destroyed by both neglect and the actions of a large building company. It named names, it pointed fingers, and it took an attitude that said this doesn’t have to happen. The only place it could fit in was on the news magazine, but after a number of viewings the film was pronounced “too provocative” and set aside for a few months. Finally it was broadcast as an emergency fill item when a newsclip failed to arrive one evening.

The other example of rising censorship concerned a friend of mine, Ram Levi. One of the first major films that Rami did for the department was about two families—one Jewish, one Arab—both of whom had lost sons in the 1967 war. The film was finished in 1969 but then reviewed by committee after committee. I’d see them meeting in the editing room next to me and pontificating as to whether this mild, gentle film would cause riots in the Galil or cause Arabs in the Old City to rise in revolt. Eventually it was shown, in 1972 or 1973—a mere 3 years late.

The fate of those two films was symptomatic of what was happening in 1969—a feeling that the good times were coming to an end. At that point there was a general upheaval within Israel TV. A number of senior personnel resigned, including Professor Katz, who on the whole had been in favor of the investigating documentary, and for a while television was rudderless and drifting. Later a new television head was appointed, more familiar with radio than television, and a more cautionary mood gradually permeated the Israel TV building. Meanwhile Herb resigned to set up his own independent production company, and I took off for 2 years to Canada. Because of this move I lost touch with Israel TV until 1971, when I came back to Jerusalem to work as an independent producer for Israel TV rather than on staff.

During my 2-year absence the fog had cleared, but I found the situation of documentary had deteriorated. The emphasis now was on entertainment, singing programs, and imported American detective serials. The news department had established its own powerful empire and was thriving, but of documentary there was almost no word. In practice it had been relegated to a position of the least importance in Israel TV, a poor sister begging for her family’s handouts.

As I’ve said, Herb and I had wanted an autonomous department, fully staffed, with its own adequate budget and guaranteed air time. What I found on return was that the department had been broken up and our trainees sent to work elsewhere. As a sop to our original plan, there was still a Head of Documentaries, though there was no one to serve under him or her. In short there was a title without much power, a department without a spirit, and it is no wonder that there were subsequently six changes of Documentary Head within 9 years.
What happened after 1971 was that documentary in Israeli TV turned into a free-for-all. Generally there were three areas of television that could use such programs—a religious series called morashah (inheritance), the Arabic department's weekly documentary series, and the Hebrew department's occasional documentaries. These programs were fed to the departments concerned in two ways, from inside Israel television and from without.

Both the religious series and the Arabic department took the major proportion of their documentaries from outside independent producers. This was the biggest change for me, as there had been hardly any independents on the scene when I had left in 1969. The less frequent and far more prestigious Hebrew program documentaries, however, drew their creative power from both within the TV building and without. And it was in the selection of both filmmaker and subject that the Head of Documentaries could wield a little of the vanishing power of the department.

Unfortunately there seemed to me to be little rhyme or reason in the selection of the mainstream documentaries; the choice was haphazard. Sometimes good films appeared, sometimes bad, and overall there seemed to be a lack of direction. This wasn't surprising because in reality there was no policy, philosophy, or movement toward a particular goal—everything was arbitrary; at least this is how it looked to an outside observer.

Within the Israel TV building control was meaningless. One did not have to be a documentarist to make documentaries. One could be a drama director, a light-entertainment specialist, or what have you. All that was needed was a strong desire to cover a certain subject, a sufficient seniority, and an expertise to guarantee bringing in the picture sometime. Providing the picture was not too far out, the seal of approval of the Head of Documentaries was almost automatic. In practice, though the system was open to abuse, it also gave unsupervised space to some of the best talents around.

Outside the TV building the situation of the independent producers was complex. They needed to bring in a steady stream of documentaries, because that was their business, and subject choice or documentary passion was the least of their concerns. In the main the independents worked for the religious programs or the Arabic department because documentaries in those two areas were easy to obtain and were rarely critical. But the prestige documentaries were the hour-long general Hebrew documentaries, and these were hard for the independents to come by. There were few of these going, and one might go through weeks of meetings to get a proposal accepted only to have it shot down by an internal TV budgetary committee. Because the process was long and the outcome uncertain there was a tendency for the independent producers to go for the noncontroversial subjects, the subjects that would give offense to neither man nor beast nor committee member.

As a result most of the films of the seventies stay in my mind as safe films following a pattern of self-imposed censorship. There seem to have been endless films on venerated poetesses and esteemed artists. All the historic kibbutzim got their day as did border towns and famous streets. Occasionally we would have a day in the life of a policeman, a rabbi, a doctor, or a farmer, and then to add color there would be three harmless films about army life or two films about the Bedouin. Which is where we came in.

Few of these films were bad. Generally they were well directed and edited, and taken singly were quite interesting. Their problem was one of predictability and conservatism. They usually affirmed the status quo and stood as a record to some remarkable person, place, or event. What they failed to do was investigate the subsurface mood of Israel in the seventies, where vital social and ethnic changes were taking place.

Some directors did go against the safe trend. Sometimes this was done in drama documentaries such as Kobi and Mali, which looked at juvenile delinquency, or Ram Levi's Chirbat Chiza, which examined the evacuation of an Arab village in 1948. Another documentarist, Eli Cohen, did two brilliant films on the Yom Kippur War, Walk on Two Feet and Plugah Bet, which looked at the war-wounded and at the mood in a reserve army unit. Meanwhile other directors such as Yossie Goddard, Yigaal Burstein, Micha Shagrir, Zvi Dorner (later to be Executive Producer of WGBH's Enterprise series), and Ester Dar were turning their sights on prostitution, the changes in the kibbutzim, Russian refugees, ethnic antagonisms, and the low state of morale in the border towns.

But these films and these efforts were few and far between. The only place where caution as a whole was thrown to the wind was in the news department. I've mentioned that this was the strongest department in Israeli Television, and using its power it occasionally ventured into documentary. Generally these were descriptive documentaries such as Jewish Life in America, or The Making of a News Broadcast, but occasionally they penetrated deeper, such as Chaim Yavin's analysis of the Israeli elections. Once a week the department also put out an hour-long news magazine that presented the kind of social and political analysis that we'd been arguing for for years. But these items were too short—a mere 8 to 10 minutes long—to have the impact of a full-scale documentary.
Documentary and History

During this period I myself was making two to three documentaries a year. They covered everything from underwater archaeology and desert research to musical profiles, social analyses, and Arab problems. However, the films that most fascinated me were three I did on the Holocaust and on Israel in the fifties. All three used archive material and dealt extensively with Israel's past, and all three echoed in my head long after the films were finished. It took some time for me to realize why.

For years a number of friends and myself had felt a certain malaise about Israel documentary beyond everything listed above, but had never bothered to articulate it. Gradually we realized this had to do with the failure of Israel television to explain the past in any meaningful way. The series I'd worked on had dealt with Israel after 1948, but what of the energy, history, controversies, and pulse of the times before that?

One could put the problem another way. We were scratching the surface of the present in our films, but what emerged didn't make that much sense because, although we were dealing with a country that was changing with tremendous speed, we were totally ignoring the past, the roots, and the whole basis of the society.

While we were mulling over this fact, an Israeli journalist, Amos Eilon, published a critique of Zionist history called Fathers and Sons in which he examined changes in attitudes and values over four generations of Israeli society. One question he asked was "Has the dream failed . . . and what can be done to renew it?" and that question immediately conjured up another: "What in fact was the dream and why do our children know so little of the past?"

Amos Eilon's musings and our own general questioning overlapped, and thus there was quite a stir (at least among filmmakers) when Israel TV suddenly announced that Yigal Lossin, former Head of Documentaries, was about to embark on a television series about the history of Zionism. This was 1976. The series finally appeared in 1981 under the title Pillar of Fire, and was subtitled Chapters in the History of Zionism.

The series started in obscurity and finished in controversy. As it is now generally considered the most important group of films ever to have appeared on Israeli TV and to have changed the face of documentary there, I will use the rest of this article to discuss three points about it in detail: (1) how it was made, (2) how it compares with other television histories of Israel and Palestine, and (3) audience receptivity.

"Pillar of Fire"

Pillar of Fire, with some films only half finished, began weekly broadcasts on January 5, 1981, and ran to 19 1-hour films. Although the series deals with the years 1896 to 1948, the time span splits up informally into three main periods. The first starts with the Dreyfus affair and the rise of political Zionism and culminates in the early thirties. The period includes Russian and Polish pogroms and the early immigration waves to Palestine, providing as well a picture of the early Turkish rule and the start of the British Mandatory government. Also prominently featured in this period are the history of the Jewish pioneers and the reclamation of the land and the rise of Arab nationalism.

The second group of films starts in 1933 and ends in 1945. They deal with the further waves of immigration and the Arab riots and opposition but slowly begin to spread wider and show European and world events in great detail. We see the ascendance of Hit-
Pillar of Fire: members of the Palmach, the Haganah commandos.

When he proposed the series at the beginning of 1975, it was obvious he was taking on an immense task. Israeli history is riddled with controversies, not just between Arabs, Israelis, and the British but also rife with tensions and the bitterest arguments among Israelis themselves. It is the continuing intensity of these controversies which so thoroughly distinguishes Pillar of Fire from such other television documentary histories as The World at War or The Churchill Years.

Both these latter series contain disputes, but they are arguments on which the dust has long since settled except among professional historians. By way of contrast the Israeli historic controversies still raise whirlwinds everywhere. Hence the reluctance of Israeli documentarists to tackle the subject and infuriate the powers that be before Lossin came on the scene to take the bull by the horns.

But why did Israel TV approve the series? Possibly because of the debate on Zionism within the country after the Yom Kippur War and because of Lossin's status and regard within Israel TV. It was also a subject that presented in the right way could not possibly be rejected in a country so proud of its past. Everyone realized the series might mean opening Pandora's box, but at some time or other this had to be faced. In the end Lossin was proposing the right program at the right time, and it was virtually impossible for Israel Television to say no.
In practice the approval of Israel TV meant far less than in many other countries. No departments, manpower, or massive funds were suddenly put at Lossin's disposal. Everything had to be fought for. Basically the attitude was "Hustle around. If you can find some people and raise some money, good luck to you. Meanwhile you'll just have to make do with our blessing." In the end the $1 million budget was raised, after years of hassle, mostly from Israel Television's own revenues plus a small grant from the Israel Foreign Office. To cover the immense creative and organizational problems of the series Lossin set up what was, in effect, a tripartite responsibility. Lossin himself stood at the apex of the triangle as executive producer, series writer, and overall man in control. Allied with him, in major supporting roles, came Naomi Kaplansky and Yitzhak Eisenmann, both senior staff members at Israel TV. Kaplansky, who had already made her name as one of the founder members of Israel TV, was assigned the tasks of associate producer, key researcher, and main interviewer. Eisenmann, a cinematographer of note, was made general producer and given the onerous job of overall project coordination.

In the early months of planning few people were involved outside of Lossin, Kaplansky, and Eisenmann. Later, as the project expanded, staff was recruited from two directions. In general the production assistants, secretaries, and research assistants were taken from the ranks of the permanent TV staff. The directors and editors, however, except in one or two cases, were chosen from among free-lance filmmakers. Finally, five Israeli University professors, experts in general history, Zionist history and politics, were coordinated to provide a panel of advisers on the content, balance, and historical accuracy of the films and texts. It is worthwhile comparing for a moment the creative structure of Pillar of Fire and The World at War. In the latter series money was available from the start to the Executive Producer, Jeremy Isaacs. What was most notable about Isaacs was that, though he maintained a firm overall grip on the series, he allowed a tremendous amount of creative freedom to his writers and directors. As a result the films that finally emerged varied a great deal in style and approach. David Elstein's film on the dropping of the atom bomb, for example, is very rational, intellectual, and argumentative. John Pett's episodes, however, on Burma and the Pacific fighting are more subjective and mood-oriented films, intent on portraying the feelings of the ordinary soldier caught up in the maelstrom.

All these films were made by what I would loosely call the "singular-group" process. By contrast, Pillar of Fire was made more laterally by what I would call the "interfusion" process, with Lossin as the kingpin dictating a unified style. In a sense there was little else Lossin could do once he had decided on a central approach.

In World at War the starting point for Isaacs had been when he sketched out 25 or 26 topics central to the Second World War that would provide the basis for the series. Although there is continuity, it would also have been possible for many of the films to have stood alone as individual essays. This was particularly true of the episodes relating to the British home front, Dunkirk, the Holocaust, and Burma. In Israel, however, Lossin's starting point was time-oriented rather than topic-oriented. Although the series would commence with the famous Dreyfus case, this episode would be just one part of a historic overview that would run from 1896 to the creation of Israel in 1948.

Even before the formal go-ahead was given, Lossin had started the immense task of scanning world film archives and libraries. In Israel this meant days spent at the Rad, Axelrod, Yad Vashem, and Zionist archives just as a beginning. Abroad the search ran from Germany and Europe, through the British Imperial War Museum, to Yivo, the Sherman Grinburg, and other American archives. Lossin himself did two general archive searches to get the program on its feet. Later Kaplansky did a third archive search to find specific material to aid or supplement material already at hand. This search was more off the beaten path than Lossin's, a search into the byways of many private collections that yielded undreamed-of material such as photos of a Ukrainian pogrom in 1919.

The first scripts were written by Lossin in September 1977. At that time only three 1-hour films were envisaged. As the material poured in and increased funding looked feasible, the scope was enlarged to nine films and then thirteen. Finally the grand total came to nineteen, a figure that had certainly not been in Lossin's head in the beginning.

By mid-1978 a great deal of the footage had been assembled and interviews conducted. The draft scripts had been revised in the light of the experts' advice and materials at hand, and the time had come to choose directors and editors. I use the word "director," but what was covered was a function more akin to director-of-editing.

Once appointed, the editor was given the script to his or her film and told what footage and interviews were available. Often the director would suggest a reshaping of the film or an alteration of the text because of the strength or availability of footage "A" over footage "B." Sometimes the director would call for more visual material or initiate a specific archive hunt. Or they would suggest a new interview to illustrate a point and have Kaplansky do it or do it themselves.
Archival Problems

What were the difficulties of the series apart from organization and finance? Obviously there is the nature of the television medium itself, which implies boundaries that affect the ultimate worth of any serious series. These limitations are so obvious—the diversity of the audience, limited attention span, inability to linger or deal in depth—as to hardly merit discussion. One problem, however, needs to be discussed in more detail and that is the subject of archival footage.

The boundaries of almost any television historical series tend by necessity to be defined by the available archival footage. One is dealing with a visual medium and the pictorial record is the main source, yet for a dozen reasons these records can be woefully inadequate. If they are, then they will affect the worth of the program. Thus the nature of the archival footage on Palestine was of serious consequence to *Pillar of Fire*.

Filming in Palestine has a long history going back to Lumière’s cameraman at work in Jerusalem in 1896. In 1917 the Edison company shot *The Holy Land* to show the land of the Bible to Americans. A little while later cameramen accompanied General Allenby and the British Army on their triumphant campaigns and entry into the capital. Throughout the twenties and thirties Jewish and Zionist filmmakers like Nathan Axelrod were making Zionist propaganda films for showing in Europe and the United States. Later Palestine became the venue for all manner of foreign stringers capturing the trials and tribulations of Jew, Arab, and Britisher caught up in the almost unresolvable political turmoil.

So there has been a mass of filming, but its worth is restricted. For instance, much footage is repetitive, as the local newsreels of the time tend to capture the smooth surface events such as flower shows, industry, beach parties, and agricultural developments. This paucity of material has to affect the filmmaker. Thus *Pillar of Fire* tends to show a preponderance of marches, parades, maneuvers, kids at play, and group events, not necessarily because of their importance but because that was the only film available to illustrate a certain time period.

Another problem facing makers of television history is the tendency of producers and camera people to shoot the overtly *dramatic* action-packed event rather than the less flamboyant *significant* event. Taylor Downing, a British filmmaker who worked on the Thames TV *Palestine* series, put this very well when he wrote, “this imbalance . . . is the inevitable case with all film records because of the nature of the medium, which can illustrate the symptoms and aftermath of violence without really covering the causes.”

All these are problems confronting most makers of historic series, but there was one extra element facing Lossin and his group—the dearth of film from Arabic sources and covering Arab life. Most of the available pre-1940s material was shot by Jewish cameramen sympathetic to the Zionist dream and concentrating on Jewish action. Where Arabic scenes were shot, they were photographed for their worth as biblical illustrations, peasant color, or rural romanticism. Rarely was Arab life portrayed in any meaningful manner, nor was the Arab view sought on film at any deep or significant level. Today the scene has swung very much the other way, but the absence of such Arabic source material makes the task of portraying history fairly just that much harder.

Given the above limitations, the amount of significant and important footage found and used in *Pillar of Fire* is a tribute to tremendous efforts. Much of the material is new to the television screen and adds immensely to our perception of the past. Here I would include the amazing footage of the Ukrainian pogroms of 1919, found by Kaplansky in New York, and the rescue of the Jews of Iraq in 1947. What is also of note is the way the filmmakers have discarded standard documentary depiction scenes that have become cliché over the years to find something more meaningful. This is particularly true of the three or four films in the series touching on the rise and development of Hitler’s Germany.

What is of particular interest in *Pillar of Fire* and contributes to the feeling of credibility is the constant *particularization* of scenes. This is contrary to the way a lot of filmmakers work. In many historic documentaries, for example, color material is found and is then used to express a generality. Thus the narrator says, “It was a happy time in Germany,” and we see crowds laughing; or “The mood was somber after the Czech crisis,” and we see unidentified people gathering on undefined street corners. This is a legitimate use of film but one often wishes for more. Unfortunately an overuse of background color has been all too prevalent in documentaries on Palestine.

*Pillar of Fire* is often forced into the use of mere color but wherever possible tries to identify and be specific about material we have all used, myself included, in a generalized way in the past. Thus a wedding is no longer just “a typical wedding of the twenties” but becomes the special wedding of Lord Samuel’s son, which explains the Bedouin guests. Or again, we do not merely see a kibbutz and watchtower being erected but are told this is Chanita or Mishmar Haemek being built for a particular reason at a particular date. All this helps to concretize the historical discussion.

Besides the whole question of archive material, another difficulty facing the filmmaker is the selection of interviewees to flesh out the facts, to recall, to com-
ment, and to bear witness. In *Pillar of Fire* an outstanding job was done in finding interviewees around the world who presented diverse viewpoints. The people selected fall into two types. First, there are those interviewed because they witnessed a particular incident, or remembered an incident that illustrated a generality. Second, we have interviewees—British, American, Jewish, European, and Arab—who comment from their experiences on the diplomatic and political significance of certain events both as seen at the time and as viewed in later years. The number of memorable witnesses was so large that they cannot be listed, but a few stick very much in my mind. For example, there is the old Arab who saw the Hebron massacres, the middle-aged woman who fought in the Warsaw ghetto, and the driver who tried to bring a food convoy to besieged Jerusalem. There are also memorable interviews with the captain of the British destroyer that took the *Exodus* refugees back to Germany and with the British officer who stood by with his troops while members of a Jewish hospital convoy were killed by the Arabs before his eyes.

Among the political witnesses are all the big Israeli names from Golda Meir to Shimon Peres, and Americans such as Dean Rusk. Little new is really added from the Israeli side, but some of the interviewed British diplomats are amazingly frank. Thus the author of the 1939 British White Paper restricting Jewish immigration admits the totally cold and brutal expediency practiced at the time. Then another British diplomat adds (and I quote from memory): “We knew whatever we did in the Second World War the Jews would still help us, and we needed Arab oil. So we could afford to be extra friendly to one side and blunt the hopes of the other.”

### Whose History?

Given the shortcomings of the archives, given the death of the principals, and given the evasions and covering-up in which we all indulge, how is the series as history? How does it fare as a series dealing with political events and with controversies and issues that still burn and scorch? Is it merely a partisan series of programs limited to Israeli and Jewish audiences, or is it balanced enough to be seen by all viewers?

First to the obvious. This is history as seen by Israel TV in 1981. It is not indifferent! It is a series which is sympathetic to Zionism and the Zionist ideal, supported by Israel TV, made by members of a Jewish State when Israel itself is under political attack around the world and its aims, ideals, and raison d'être being questioned by the UN. I mention the obvious because filmmakers, too, have their sympathies and beliefs, and whatever the guise, no one is unbiased and neutral. But given all this, what is quite remarkable and outstanding is the high objectivity of the series and its openness of approach. It is unmoralsing, nondogmatic, and extremely willing to examine events from all points of view—including those of the Arabs on most points of contention.

The representation of the Arab view is done mostly by using interviews with witnesses, showing dupe material of Arab statesmen of the past or by using the comments throughout the series of Anwar Nusseibeh, an Arab politician and former Defense Minister of Jordan, who very strongly and forcibly defends the traditional Arab position and attacks Jewish usurpation. In particular, extensive coverage is given to films and speeches of Arab politicians of the thirties. During the forties we are treated to many of the Arab arguments made to various international investigating bodies such as UNSCOP, and we are given extensive ex-
tracts from the Saudi Ambassador’s speech to the UN in 1947 roundly condemning Jewish immigration, the alienation of the land, and the possible creation of a State. These arguments are strong, bitter, and well reasoned and are set out at length.

While the Arab point of view is, if anything, overstressed, that of the British is understressed, and British policy comes in for a lot of criticism. This is partially understandable since so many British television series in the past have whitewashed British military and political actions in Palestine. Given the deluge of British series on Palestine such as Roads to Conflict (BBC), Palestine (Thames), and Struggle for Israel (Yorkshire TV), and given the fact that Pillar of Fire covers so much of the same material, we suddenly have a marvelous opportunity to see how different filmmakers and countries see the same events. The differences are quite astonishing and possibly warrant a separate examination of the questions “Whose history are we following on the TV?” and “What is the meaning of authority in regard to the TV documentary?”

We all select, and the British selection in this matter is quite interesting. I have already mentioned the matter of British expediency shaping events. This is usually ignored or kept well subbed in British programming. Another issue is that of terrorism, which is treated in a highly selective manner by the British. Thus Palestine and Struggle—both very well-known series—fail in essence to distinguish between the Hagannah (a widely supported Jewish defense organization) and the small Irgun and Stern gangs, the minority groups that believed in terrorism. Both Palestine and Struggle give very extensive coverage to Jewish terrorist actions such as the blowing up of the King David Hotel and Deir Yassin but fail to mention or gloss over the often brutal actions of the British-controlled Palestine Police, the British terrorist action in blowing up Ben Yehudah Street, and the yielding of territory straight into the hands of Arab groups at the outbreak of hostilities.

History is often contentious, and clearly the reason for the Arab exodus is a case in point. When the facts are not in dispute, then emphasis and balance may become the issue. To me, Pillar of Fire does seem relatively balanced in contrast to the two cited British series. The latter maintain a facade of balance, but this often fades at crucial junctures. One incident in particular, cited in Pillar of Fire, Palestine, and Struggle, illustrates the subtle but persuasive anti-Israel bias of the British programs and illuminates generally the question of editorial emphasis. The facts are simple and agreed on by all.

In 1947 three members of the Irgun underground group were hung by the British for helping Jewish political prisoners to stage a mass escape from Acre jail. The British were previously warned that if they carried out this death sentence there would be strong Jewish retaliation. In spite of the warning the British proceeded with the execution, and a few days later two British army sergeants were caught and hung by the Irgun.

In Struggle for Israel the sentencing and hanging of the Jews is given a cold, factual rendering in about 10 seconds of air time, while about 1 minute and 20 seconds is devoted, in highly emotional terms, to the hanging of the British sergeants. Thus, over pictures of the sergeants and angry British soldiers a voice is heard saying, “The bestialities practiced by the Nazis could go no further.” In Richard Broad’s Palestine the hanging of the sergeants is again shown against a British Movietone news quote that says this hanging “is the sort of cruelty once commonly indulged in by the Nazis.” This time Broad, a very well-known and highly regarded producer, does not even bother to mention that the hanging of the British sergeants was a specific retaliation for the hanging of the three Irgun members a few days before.

And what of the Israeli version? In Pillar of Fire the death of the three Irgun fighters is given extensive coverage, the implication being that they went to a hero’s death. Immediately after we are shown the British hangings. Prime Minister Begin then speaks for about a minute concerning the warnings that were given the British. The section ends with a long comment on the disgust felt by the majority of the Jewish community of Palestine for the Irgun action.

The problem of “Whose history are we seeing?” arises strangely enough in its acutest form among the Israelis themselves. Although the series was highly praised and critically acclaimed and became compulsive viewing for most of Jewish Israel, it also gave rise to interminable arguments, dissentions, rows, and even court actions.

The first matter, very widely discussed and hotly debated in a postseries round-table television debate, dealt with Lossin’s emphasis and point of view on Zionism. Lossin had pinned his first program to the Dreyfus case, which had been such a focus for anti-Semitism in France and which inspired Herzl’s Zionist awakening. For a number of people this was quite the wrong emphasis and the wrong beginning. For them the programs should have begun early in the nineteenth century with the pre-Herzl thinkers and philosophers. To tie the rise of Zionism to French and European anti-Semitism seemed to them to be too simplistic and, what is worse, a denial of centuries of dreaming and yearning.
Another line of criticism was to berate Lossin for devoting so much time to the Arab point of view. This group of critics in particular argued that more time should have been devoted to historic personages and speeches and that the films should have been far more propagandistic, not merely commenting on the Zionist dream but passionately advocating its renewal on the screen.

Probably the bitterest opposition to the series came from a group of Sefardim. Historically the name applies to the Jews of Spain, but currently it is applied to the Jews of North Africa, Yemen, Iraq, and Persia. Most of this group came to Israel after the founding of the State, and they make up about 60 percent of the population. The contention of the Sefardim was that the series was Ashkenazi history, a history extolling the efforts of the Jews of European origin which totally ignored the contributions of the Sefardim in building the State.

What is interesting is that most of these declarations were based on rumor, with bitter letters reaching the papers before the series had ever been aired. In practice the series did stress Sefardic actions and history wherever possible, but this failed to stop the attacks. Later, when I questioned one of the program advisers—a historian of some note—he told me that if anything the Sefardic element in the series was overdone and out of proportion to their contributions to pre-State history.

Finally, there were the semipolitical controversies, such as which political group contributed more to the Zionist dream, Jabotinsky Revisionist or Ben-Gurion Socialist, and why was one being given more emphasis than the other. All this came to a head when Meir Pa’il, a reserve general and member of the Knesset (Parliament), threatened to bring a court injunction to stop the broadcasts. The claim in this case, again made prior to viewing, was that the role of the Irgun and the Revisionists was overemphasized while little time was devoted to the achievements of the Haganah, the main Jewish defense organization, which had truly built the dream.5 The injunction was never granted and the programs sailed on smoothly. However, after the close of the series Pa’il continued to make the same allegations, even though the last two or three programs had concentrated very fully on the exploits of the Haganah.

**Aftermath**

The Israeli reasons for making *Pillar of Fire* have been discussed; but what purpose does the series serve outside Israel besides giving us the history in depth? What does this mean more specifically? Well, to start with, one very important point is that the series allows us to correct certain stereotypes of the Israelis and Arabs.

In the past our image of Israelis and Arabs has very much been formed through such films as *The Juggler, Cast a Giant Shadow, Judith,* and *Exodus.* These films tend to portray the Arab as ignorant peasant and the Israeli as superman or superwoman, both images totally at odds with the reality of the country. At the other end of the spectrum documentaries such as Susan Sontag’s *Promised Lands* have been equally guilty in promoting stereotypes, with the Arab seen as eternal romantic nomad and the Jew as Chassidic rabbi, blustering soldier, or product-grabbing housewife. *Pillar of Fire* breaks through the stereotypes and allows us to see the Israelis and Arabs as three-dimensional, real human beings rather than poster prototypes.

Another important result of *Pillar of Fire* is that it allows us to regain the reality and meaning of the Holocaust. In the last few years the Holocaust has been debunked, debased, and dismissed. *Pillar of Fire* makes us aware of what the Holocaust really means, and it makes us see why its darkness and uniqueness is one of the central events in the evolution of the twentieth century. And by resurrecting the forgotten it also puts the lie to the grotesque tendency of certain modern historians to deny there ever was a Holocaust.

We can rationalize about the effects of *Pillar of Fire,* but there is one aspect where the reaction is almost unfathomable, and difficult to articulate. We watch the facts of the twenties and thirties and suddenly realize the enormous and amazing achievements of Israel, of the dream turned real. We realize we are watching the creation of myth. So the dream is staggering, the achievement immense, but in the light of today’s politics this has been forgotten.

But the dream and the accomplishments have had a price, and it is to the credit of *Pillar of Fire* that it lets us think in a deeper way about the plight of the Arab refugees. We see the yearning of the Jews for a homeland and cannot but make the jump to the Arab masses in the refugee camps of Lebanon and Jordan. The program makers know this but are also aware they are giving us a context to understand the complexities of the past and the present.

Finally, the last contribution of *Pillar of Fire* is that it is not judgmental. Like the British series on Ireland—*The Troubles* (Thames TV) and *Ireland: A History* (BBC)—we are presented with a highly intelligent
use of television that really helps us to fathom and penetrate the shadows and mysteries of this century. We are given the facts, we are given room to breathe, to understand in depth, and to make up our own minds. Altogether, one cannot ask for more. With Pillar of Fire, documentary on Israel TV has finally come into its own.

Notes

1 This timid policy has now changed and the news magazine offers some of the most critical and analytical programs seen on Israel TV.
2 Taylor Downing, introduction to the script of "Palestine."
3 This identification of witnesses seems to me infinitely preferable to the anonymous comments and quotes, such as "a soldier wrote home," which appeared in so many documentaries.
4 I accept the fact that the producers may be using these quotes to show the mood of England at the time and that these are British programs made for an English audience. However, the mood comments become synonymous with an editorial point of view when so little is given from the other side.
5 A lot of this argument is relevant to the point discussed previously: TV history is often tied to available footage. What seems to have happened is that the publicity-seeking marches of the Revisionists were widely photographed, while the Haganah, which was an underground secret defense force, was of necessity camera-shy.

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Pillar of Fire: an immigrant boat arrives in Palestine just before World War II.
Political Cartoons and American Culture: Significant Symbols of Campaign 1980*

Michael A. DeSousa and Martin J. Medhurst

In his classic anthropological journal, *Tristes tropiques*, Claude Lévi-Strauss describes what he calls an "extraordinary incident" resulting from his attempts to learn what members of an Amazon Indian tribe would do if presented with paper and pencil. Since the tribe had no written language, the anthropologist was surprised to note that the tribal chieftain began to scrawl furiously on his pad, producing a mass of unintelligible scribbles. At first Lévi-Strauss reasoned that the chief was simply aping the wavy lines which he had observed the anthropologist making during his daily journal entries. But upon observing the awed tribal reaction to the chief's apparently spontaneous grasp of writing, Lévi-Strauss reached a deeper conclusion: Without understanding specifically how writing worked, both the tribal chief and his followers did comprehend that these scribbles somehow contained tremendous power; the chief was simply feigning a grasp of this new power in an effort to solidify his authority over the tribe (Lévi-Strauss 1977: 333-339). Simple scribbles can often hold great significance for human beings.

This article addresses a very different class of scribbles, but like the products of the experiment noted above, they are equally problematic. We are not quite sure what the scribbles mean, but we are somehow certain they are important. We refer to that most neglected genre of political communication, the editorial cartoon. This article examines the American editorial cartoon from the vantage point of the 1980 presidential campaign. Our argument is twofold. First, we believe editorial cartoons provide a subtle framework within which to view the American political process and its players. Cartoons not only reflect our culture but also invite us to think about its constituent parts and their meaning for our own lives. Second, we believe the real significance of the political cartoon lies not in its character as propositional argument or as persuasion but in its ability to tap the collective consciousness of readers in a manner similar to religious rituals, civic ceremonies, and communal observances. Cartoons are important to the extent that they help to maintain the ties which identify us as one people.

There are various ways in which this maintaining and identifying function can operate. We will discuss four possible options. But before moving on to our functional hypotheses, let us consider what others have said about political caricature, and in doing so distinguish more clearly our own views from those which once held sway and still, to some extent, find ready acceptance among contemporary scholars.

The Nature and Significance of Caricature

In this century three basic paradigms have appeared to explain the uses and effects of cartoons: the psychoanalytic, the sociological, and the rhetorical. Each model supplies useful insights within the bounds of its respective assumptions. In isolation, however, each fails to account for what we believe to be the central significance of the art—that cartooning is a culture-creating, culture-maintaining, culture-identifying artifact.

The psychoanalytic approach, for example, reminds us that symbolism is the heartbeat of caricature and that condensation and displacement play central roles in the production and interpretation of political cartoons. Ernst Kris, a leading exponent of this view, argues that "adult comic invention, and certainly the comic in its tendentious forms, helps in obtaining mastery over affects, over libidinal and aggressive tendencies warded off by the superego; the ego acting in the service of the pleasure principle is able to elude them by taking the path of comic expression" (1952:183). Cartoons, in other words, are merely the adult's way of displacing aggression through the adoption of a symbolic substitute.

The sociological paradigm moves outside of the mind and motives of comic inventors to stress societal structures which limit and enhance caricature, the symbolic resources available in such a society, and the potential meaning and uses of such symbolism within specific sociopolitical contexts. The works of Streicher (1965–1966 and 1966–1967), Coupe (1966–1967 and 1969), and Alba (1966–1967) stand as exemplars of this perspective. As Streicher says, "caricature is a way of catching at a glance the meaning of an event, a person in the news, or a pictorial summary of a current power constellation" (1965–1966:1). Showing the interrelationships of people, events, and power is, from a sociological perspective, the primary function of political cartooning.

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The rhetorical approach borrows from both the psychoanalytic and sociological perspectives as well as from Gestalt psychology to comment on the interaction of creator, message, and audience. Within this framework Morrison (1969) has speculated on the image-making function of cartoons, Turner (1977) has explored the enthymematic structures of graphic satire, and Medhurst and DeSousa (1981) have advanced a typology for the language function of caricature. Though employing radically different approaches, each of these communications scholars operates from a similar assumption—graphic art has persuasive dimensions.

Caricature and Popular Culture

Editorial cartoons have been relatively neglected by scholars in political and cultural studies, and the failure of such scholars to take the political cartoon seriously may be traced in part to a fundamental bias against the popular arts. Popular arts, from one vantage point, are topics unworthy of serious examination or thought. A less extreme view is that although popular culture is an appropriate field of study, in many respects it offers only marginal or superficial insights into the real business of politics.

We can easily dismiss the first view but would do well to think seriously about the implications of the second. Robert Meadow typifies the latter when he writes:

Political cartoonists are in the difficult position of continuously criticizing, moving from issue to issue, but they must consider many elements only superficially. . . . As elements of the popular culture they are the most explicitly political. But to the extent they offer only a passing chuckle rather than a deep reflection on government, political cartoons and comics offer limited political significance compared to other elements of the popular culture. [1980:203; emphasis added]

Meadow's generalization reflects one major perspective on the role of popular art in general and on political cartoons in particular. Such cartoons are easily dismissed because their apparent function, entertainment, appears peripheral to politics as a serious enterprise. Moreover, Meadow's observation may reveal an even more fundamental orientation to the field of political communication, an orientation which holds that only those communications which are effective in demonstrably changing beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors are politically significant. If this is the position adopted or implied, it is misleading insofar as it unnecessarily restricts the arena within which symbolism functions in a politically significant manner. A contrasting view, implicit in this essay, holds that symbolic interactions, which maintain but do not necessarily alter the political environment and its ever-changing power relationships, serve an important sociopolitical function. James Carey refers to this clash of paradigms as the tension between a transmission and a cultural view of human communication.

Cartoons, according to a cultural or ritual view, are attempts "not to provide information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process" (Carey 1975a:6). So defined, cartoons reveal a subtle yet powerful frame within which to characterize the American political process and its players. In contrast to Meadow's position, it is clear that political cartoons may, indeed, result in some deep reflection, if by reflection one means a mirroring, a reviewing, or a remembering of the dominant culture.

The power of the political cartoon lies not in the specific artist's intent or success at fostering change but in the degree to which, and the manner by which, the cartoonist taps the collective consciousness of readers and thereby reaffirms cultural values and individual interpretation of those values. The cartoonist does not create from whole cloth, but, instead, articulates a frame from the artist's unique percept to the shared experiences of the readers. The cartoon generally functions not as a change agent but as a statement of consensus, an invitation to remember cultural values and beliefs and, by implication, to participate in their maintenance.

If this cultural view of communication is correct, the political cartoon may indeed be "very powerful," as James David Barber hypothesizes in a Newsweek article (Adler et al. 1980), precisely because it argues for a prevailing view and functions as a statement of graphic opinion which maintains the political environment. But how might such a view be confirmed or refuted? An examination of what Gombrich calls the "cartoonist's armoury" (1963), his invention storehouse, is a logical place to begin.

The Cartoonist's Armoury

What, for example, are the recurring sources to which cartoonists turn for daily inspiration? How deep are the reservoirs of cultural forms that can be tapped day after day? Our analysis revealed four major in­ventional resources: political commonsplaces, literary/cultural allusions, personal character traits, and transient situational themes.
Political commonplaces are those topics which are readily available to any cartoonist working within the context of modern electoral politics. Such commonplaces include the state of the economy, foreign policy, national defense, the political process, and various dimensions of the electoral framework, such as campaigning, polling, voting, and special interests. Political commonplaces provide the daily grist for the cartoonist’s mill. They form the core of political cartoons in the sense that one cannot create graphic caricature on a regular basis without some awareness of these predictable subthemes. To some degree, political commonplaces are the constituent parts which define politics as politics and which differentiate it from other aspects of American culture.

A second invention source used by cartoonists is the literary/cultural allusion, by which we mean any fictive or historical character, any narrative form, whether drawn from legend, folklore, literature, or the mass media, which is used to frame a political event or issue. Such allusions are used to call attention to the contrasts between well-known fictions and contemporary political realities.

For a cartoonist like Patrick Oliphant to portray John Anderson as Don Quixote preparing to tilt at windmills is to make a complex set of statements about Anderson, Oliphant’s perception of Anderson, and the American public’s evolving perception of the third-party candidate (see Figure 1). Yet it is the ambiguity of the allusion which is so problematic. Which dimensions of the literary character are being attached to Anderson? Is this Quixote the courageous man of principle fighting against all odds or Quixote the madman, foolishly tilting at windmills which can never be defeated?

The use of the literary/cultural allusion presumes that readers will be able to draw the connections between the political event (Carter at the Democratic Convention) and the fictive or cultural form (Custer’s Last Stand) (see Figure 2). While most allusions involve simple historical events or literary forms which are collectively understood within United States society, elitist or esoteric allusions also appeared in campaign 1980 cartoons. For example, twice cartoonist Paul Conrad used the albatross imagery from Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to comment on political liabilities. In the fall of 1979 he pictured
Ted Kennedy collared by the albatross of Chappaquiddick, and in fall 1980 he burdened Jimmy Carter with the albatross of his Democratic rival for the party nomination (see Figure 3). The works of Shakespeare, Homer, Picasso, Cervantes, and Melville were all borrowed by cartoonists seeking to draw comparisons between an elite art form and a contemporary political event or figure.

These elite allusions stand in strong contrast to the many popular arts—television, film, legends—which were alluded to by cartoonists during the 1980 campaign. Our sample of cartoons revealed that well-known films of yesterday (see Figure 4) and today (see Figure 5) were the popular art most used by editorial cartoonists. Films such as The Black Stallion, The Empire Strikes Back, Kramer vs. Kramer, and Raise the Titanic, and, of course, humorous references to candidate Reagan’s films (see Figure 6), were used as vehicles for political commentary. The question remains, however, whether either popular or elite allusions were the more powerful graphic messages.

A cartoon employing the literary/cultural allusion, then, derives its impact not solely from the political event or figure it treats but also from the interaction of that person/event with an identifiable fiction or a historical event. To decode the cartoon in line with the cartoonist’s intent requires familiarity with the fictive or cultural form to which it refers.

The cartoonist’s third inventional source draws upon popular perceptions of the politician’s personal character. Such traits as intelligence, honesty, age, morality, charisma, and leadership can be portrayed through a combination of image and caption. The exaggerated portrayal of these traits forms the basis of what we popularly know as caricature, a term derived from the Italian caricare, “to charge or overcharge with meaning.”

But no traits, whether physical or psychological, can be wholly manufactured by the cartoonist and imposed on the politician. For a caricature to be a viable amplification, the exaggeration must first be based on a collective perception that the cartoon reflects some inner truth about the political figure. (See Table 1, which shows the percentage of exaggerated...
Table 1 Exaggerated Features of Political Candidates in Campaign 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Carter</th>
<th>Reagan</th>
<th>Anderson</th>
<th>Kennedy</th>
<th>Brown</th>
<th>Connally</th>
<th>Bush</th>
<th>Ford</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of cartoons in which portrayed (236)</td>
<td>(153)</td>
<td>(64)</td>
<td>(94)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exaggerated features as percent of total representation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smile</td>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Glasses</td>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Shape of face</td>
<td>Body shape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lips</td>
<td>Facial wrinkles</td>
<td>Jaw line</td>
<td>Puffy face</td>
<td>Chin</td>
<td>Chin</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Bald head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teeth</td>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Chin</td>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>Crocked jaw</td>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>Gestures</td>
<td>Body shape</td>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Face</td>
<td>Eyebrows</td>
<td>Shape of face</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>Smile</td>
<td>Smile</td>
<td>Glasses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 Bob Englehart, Dayton Journal Herald, copyright 1980. (Reprinted with permission.)

Figure 8 Paul Conrad, Los Angeles Times, copyright 1980. (Reprinted with permission.)
features for each candidate in our sample.) Herblock's early renderings of then Vice-President Nixon, complete with five o'clock shadow, did more than reflect the physical reality of Nixon's unfortunate combination of heavy beard and transparent complexion; they reflected a shared perception among many Americans that Nixon was indeed a shady character ("Tricky Dick"), the sort of shyster who could be revealed by the con man's blue beard. Similarly, Conrad's artful lampooning of Ronald Reagan neatly combines both widely perceived ideological traits (conservatism, chauvinism) and physical traits (wrinkled face, pompadour hairstyle). Conrad does not invent a Reagan persona so much as he gives expression to the Reagan persona resident in the political consciousness of at least some of the electorate (see Figure 7).

The following examples also illustrate that effective caricature must do more than simply reflect an apparent physical reality, an obvious physical trait. In Figure 8 Oliphant uses the visual icons associated with old age (cane, shawl, wheelchair, craggy features), as well as caption, to comment editorially on Reagan's advanced years and, by extension, the politically outdated mentality consistent with those advanced years. Bill Schorr also uses a perceived trait in his consideration of Kennedy's morality (see Figure 9). The cartoonist establishes a graphic context via a political commonplace (baby-kissing in campaigns), then violates the expectation of the commonplace by placing an untoward action within the frame. The result is a wry commentary on a suspected character trait of the candidate.

Figure 7  Paul Conrad, Los Angeles Times, copyright 1980. (Reprinted with permission.)
Timely and transient situations which appear unexpectedly during the course of a campaign constitute a fourth invention resource for political cartoonists. Such events may have an immediate impact and spark short-term controversy, but they seldom endure beyond their immediate historical context. It is this truism which makes so many historical cartoons incomprehensible to modern readers (Sproule 1980:348). These transient events take their meaning, in large part, from the context of the headlines, the now.

In Figure 10 the reader is required to be cognizant of the antics of Billy Carter and the “Billygate” affair to understand the cartoonist’s message. The short-lived flap over Reagan’s “duck joke” is yet another example of the role which transient tempests-in-teapots play as inspirations for the cartoonist’s daily musings (see Figure 11). The gaffe, the faux pas, the off-the-cuff comment add unexpected and welcome variety to the cartoonist’s repertoire.

The invention storehouse—political commonplaces, literary/cultural allusions, personal character traits, and situational themes—reveal the cultural premises from which cartoonists work. No doubt many cartoonists intend their creations to function persuasively, to change audience perceptions. But research reveals that the persuasive potential of cartoons is often vitiated by audience interpretation. That which the cartoonist intends is not congruent with what the audience understands from viewing the caricature. Cartoons, it seems, are not particularly effective as agents of change. In what sense, then, are they effective or significant?

As indicated earlier, the importance of the political cartoon lies in its ability to maintain a sense of cultural coherence and personal identity. To this end, the important question is not what cartoonists intend to communicate or what beliefs, values, or attitudes they hope to change, but rather how readers use cartoons to understand their culture or maintain their sense of identity within it.

We offer four possible options for understanding how readers use cartoons to maintain a sense of self, others, and society. Like other ritualistic mediums, political cartoons are used to express internal states, to achieve an understanding of cultural order, and to establish touchstones against which other interpretations of reality can be measured. Specifically, cartoons serve an entertainment function, an aggression-reduction function, an agenda-setting function, and a framing function. Different people will of course use cartoons in different ways, but these four options appear to be the most likely alternatives for the preservation of cultural ideals and the maintenance of personal identity.
The Entertainment Function

We would commonly say that political cartoons give us entertainment, that they make us laugh at situations and individuals (Gruner 1978:149–155). But the covering term "entertainment" does little to explain how cartoons serve the consumers of these graphics. To say that political cartoons are entertaining because they are comic is again simplistic, but at least this descriptor places the cartoon within the critical framework of the comic. In fact, a brief retreat to classical conceptions of the comic may even be useful.

Ever since Aristotle discussed comedy as counterpart to tragedy, one characterization of the former has been the depiction of the acts of baser (common) men for the purpose of providing moral education for the audience (McKeon 1941:1459). If, for example, we attend a comic play or read a comic poem in which someone very much like us suffers shame or ridicule because of some improper act, we have an opportunity to learn from the mistakes. If we connect the social punishment with the impropriety, we can avoid such punishment ourselves by avoiding the wrongful act (lying, cheating, infidelity, vanity, etc.). We laugh or smile at the social disgrace visited on the sinner in recognition of the same flaws in ourselves and out of gratitude that we are not the victims of the moral lesson being taught. This strong sense of the comic, of comedy as social or moral education, runs through medieval and Renaissance thought and remains a fundamental tenet of contemporary writing on the subject.

We may think of the political cartoon as comic, then, to the degree that it portrays and critiques, in capsule form, basic human failings. The actors in these little dramas, however, are not willing players. They are those public figures suspected of moral or ethical wrongdoing, duplicity, hypocrisy, or stupidity. Their punishment is ridicule through portrayal on the editorial page in some compromising or unflattering depiction: Carter as inept clown or Reagan as ingenious liar (see Figures 12 and 13). The reader's internal state is transformed as the comic function moves from mirth to morals and, finally, to a cultural sense of morality.

The Aggression-Reducing Function

The ways in which the apparently powerless succeed in deflating the apparently powerful via symbols indicate the tremendous stock we place in the destructive potential of symbolic forms (Jaffe 1977:260–261). The cruel rhymes of childhood, the effigy, and the caricature are reminders that although sticks and stones may break bones, symbols, when wielded effectively, may inflict even greater punishment.

That the relationship between the governing and the governed is less than amicable is a political truism. We are ambivalent about our national leaders, at once needing their leadership while resenting our dependence on them. That our leaders do influence our lives is also a political truism. Taxes are raised, services are cut, and young men prepare for war based on the decisions of those individuals we know as leaders.

When citizens object to actions taken by a political leader, they can act instrumentally against that person through the ballot box and the recall petition. But the unseating of a political leader may not be nearly as satisfying as his graphic persecution on the editorial page. The vigor of First Amendment protection, combined with the unlimited creativity of visual caricature, make the political cartoon a near-perfect vehicle for the symbolic denigration of a politician. Since the world within the cartoon frame need bear only passing resemblance to everyday reality, visual images may provide readers with more fanciful and stark symbolic weapons than do verbal symbols. One need not be satisfied with calling a despised senator an ass if one can enjoy a visual depiction of the offender complete with ears and tail.

In reality, few citizens will ever take effective instrumental action against a deceitful or incompetent public official. We must usually be satisfied with bringing them down a peg or two via the symbolic derogation we can practice as symbol users. Besides satisfying our fundamental need as humans to express our inner states, the ability to channel aggression symbolically by way of the political cartoon may entail certain political benefits or harms, depending on one's ideological orientation. As forms of communal criticism, editorial cartoons may provide an outlet, a safety valve for protests which might otherwise surface in more instrumental forms. The stability of a regime, it could be argued, might be furthered, rather than threatened, by the provision of channels through which citizens could participate in the symbolic killing of their leaders. For example, in the Soviet Union the publication Krokodil features editorial cartoon satire, within limitations, of the Soviet system. As Hugh Duncan (1962:376–380) has cogently argued, the ability to vent hostility in socially approved symbolic activities may lessen or even negate the need for violent aggression.
The political cartoon may thus qualify as one very understated way for some members of a society to channel collectively their hostility toward political leaders. Cartoons are successful vehicles for symbolic aggression to the degree that reader satisfaction is achieved within the dramatic world of the caricature. Cartoons which suggest that Carter or Reagan should be carted out of town on a rail are not preludes to some later satisfaction, such as the actual deportation of the victim. The cartoon is not a model for subsequent action, but an act unto itself, a symbolic act. The cartoon, as a collective fantasy, is functional for its readers to the degree that it provides them with some sense that the guilty have been punished, thereby bringing to the cartoon consumer an internal equilibrium and also supplying a continuum between cultural ideals and symbolic satisfactions.

The Agenda-Setting Function

Another function of the political cartoon results from its dependence on timeliness for much of its editorial impact. Although selected editorial cartoons may indeed speak to universal audiences with timeless messages, most political caricatures are invariably rooted in the now, in today’s headlines. It is precisely the characteristic of fixed temporal context which so often renders cartoons from even the recent past insignificant. For example, the short-lived controversy generated by Ronald Reagan’s ethnically offensive duck joke typifies the cause célèbre whose meaning might well escape the cartoon reader of the near future. Similarly, a political cartoon commenting on Abscam or the Billygate affair months after the events took place would appear lifeless and out of context. Yet it is precisely the cartoon’s dependence on the political present which makes it an important index to the major issues of the day.

Political cartoons may contribute to the agenda-setting generally attributed to the major media in the sense that they provide readers with some sense of the most significant issues, events, or topics. Is a candidate’s wife, religion, or family an important issue in the campaign, part of the agenda? One barometer might be whether the person or issue regularly preoccupies the major cartoonists since they are supposedly such sensitive reflectors of society’s most important political issues (DeSousa 1981).

To the degree that this mirroring eventually succeeds in bringing to public discussion certain issues, the political cartoon may participate in what Noelle-Neumann has tendered as the powerful role of mass media in shaping perceptions of “public opinion” (1973:67–112 and 1974:43–51). Agenda-setting, in this characterization, takes on much more significance than simply assigning topics in terms of their importance. Rather, the assignment of significance itself may result in greater public discussion, which, in turn, may result in attitudinal changes among participants in the discussion. That a topic is declared important is the first step toward its thorough discussion, a discussion which will eventually win or lose adherents for the issue at hand. Agenda-setting in the political cartoon may be conceptualized as one small but useful step toward identifying public issues.
The Framing Function

A final probable function of the political cartoon derives from the nature of caricature itself, namely, as a highly condensed form of expression. Unlike the comic book illustrator or the strip cartoonist, the editorial caricaturist does not have the luxury of unfolding imagery in successive panels. He usually has only one frame with which to work, so the efficient use of forms within that frame is essential if the artist is to achieve the desired end. Editorial artists must achieve a concrete understanding, a *Verstehen*, with the reader almost immediately. To achieve this the cartoonist must concoct imagery that is at once compelling and powerful, drawing frequently from potent symbols within the political and cultural mythology.

This condensed nature of the political cartoon equips it for the reduction of complex issues into single visual designs. The cartoon functions, as Gombrich (1963) has written, to “give us the satisfaction of pretended insight.” By reducing a complex issue or event to a simple metaphorical form, the political cartoon provides the reader with an attractive illusion of understanding that can serve as a touchstone for subsequent thought or action. For example, while the presidential primary system is anything but a simple process, cartoon characterizations of it presume to discover its essence, likening it to a beauty contest or a game of chance. Such cartoons do not unpack the actual usefulness or shortcomings of the system but instead offer a distilled message which is attractive because it provides perspective without the effort of personal investigation (Graber 1980:122–123). It is the enactment of a ritual that calls for a stock response. But like all rituals, it calls forth a response that can lead, in time, to deeper insight and understanding.

Our study of political cartoons from the 1980 campaign reveals nine clearly identifiable clusters of metaphors which were used to condense or characterize specific political events such as the primaries, conventions, and debates. Such clusters, or root metaphors, provide a critic with some sense of the dominant popular frameworks used to express American orientations to politics. Major root metaphors for the 1980 campaign included:

1. Campaign as combat/battle (Figure 14)
2. Campaign as gamble (Figure 15)
3. Campaign as media event (Figure 16)
4. Campaign as double-bind/nonchoice for voters (Figure 17)
5. Campaign as race (Figure 18)
6. Campaign as circus (Figure 19)
7. Campaign as beauty contest (Figure 20)
8. Campaign as sport/game (Figure 21)
9. Campaign as mudslinging/dirty business (Figure 22)
Figure 16  Paul Conrad, *Los Angeles Times*, copyright 1980. (Reprinted with permission.)

Figure 17  Patrick Oliphant, *Washington Star*, copyright 1980. (Reprinted with permission of Universal Press Syndicate. All rights reserved.)

Figure 18  Bill Mauldin, *Chicago Sun-Times*, copyright 1980. (Reprinted with permission.)

"May the best man win"

Figure 19  Tony Auth, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, copyright 1980. (Reprinted with permission.)
The idea of cartoon as frame for events and issues is consistent with media research that maintains that the role of various media increases when the topic in question is one with which the consumer has little personal experience. One may not need the media to help conceptualize inflation because it is experienced daily, but one is likely to be dependent on the media to give some sense of the situation in Iran or the United Nations because these topics are removed from immediate experience. Similarly, the political cartoon, as a message system within a major medium (newspaper), serves to provide readers with capsule characterizations of complicated issues. Although often simplistic characterizations, they are nevertheless attractive, as they rely on familiar forms to make metaphorical connections. To define the American presidential campaign as a dog show does not illuminate the campaign process, but it does provide a handle for individuals seeking escape from its inherent confusion. As a touchstone for further comparison and contrast, the framing function of cartoons serves a useful purpose.
Conclusion

In his essay, "Sociology of the Cartoon," Emory Bogardus traced the roots of what we now call cartoons to the preliminary sketches prepared by Renaissance painters. He states that the cartoon was essentially "a pre-drawing, a sketch, something roughly depicting behavior patterns; not details but general features" (1945–1946:139). Ironically, research into the nature and function of the political cartoon is similarly unfinished and preliminary. To maintain that the American political cartoon is part of American culture is, in itself, a useless generality. What is needed instead, aside from a long-sought specific conception of culture, is a description of the roles played by cartoons as communicative forms within the culture. Clifford Geertz provides a lead when he writes that "culture consists of socially established structures of meaning," which is to say that culture can be defined as the totality of symbol systems used by a people in their drive to create and sustain shared meaning (1973:12). Actually to accept the political cartoon as a largely visual symbol system would be to pose a host of important research questions.

First, an effort must be made to determine whether an identifiable iconic vocabulary exists for cartoonists and their readers. To what degree does political cartooning, as communication, require a body of stock images and themes? As Dennis and Dennis (1974) have argued, the national syndication of political cartoons in the 1920s required that cartoonists use "uniform symbols for national appeal." Artistic creativity had to be sacrificed for the demands of the newspaper as national mass medium. As a result, the top-hatted plutocrat, Uncle Sam, and the bloated, corrupt politician became stock figures in the cartoonists' visual repertoire. What other stock figures like Herblock's anthropomorphic "Mr. Atomic Bomb" have been added to the national cartoon repertoire? Are the communicative powers of contemporary cartoonists hampered by a visual vocabulary that is too often rooted in archaic imagery and forgotten historical allusions?

A second area of needed research concerns the political cartoon as an evolutionary record of social change. The cartoon is not only an artifact of the here and now but a valuable barometer of social and political change within a culture. For example, the Meyer and associates (1980) study of the evolving portrayal of women in July 4th cartoons exemplifies research investigating a visual form to plot the changing image of a national subgroup, in this case the changing persona of the American woman.

Third, the influence of the sociopolitical climate in affecting the cartoon depiction of political events and persons is worthy of exploration. What impact does changing public opinion have on the ways the political cartoonists practice their craft? Goldman and Hagen (1978) demonstrated that the post-Watergate political climate influenced political cartoonists in their increasingly negative caricatures of Richard Nixon's facial physognomy. Cartoonists during the 1980 presidential campaign were also influenced by the political attitudes of their mass readership. For example, Jimmy Carter's declining popularity and perceived lack of leadership resulted in his literally shrinking stature in many editorial cartoons: Carter was often drawn to half the scale of other candidates to visually portray his diminished political stature. Cartoonists in Campaign 1980 were also prevented from capitalizing on visual caricatures of Ronald Reagan's age because of growing national reluctance to tolerate "age-ism," the ridicule of behaviors and traits associated with the elderly.

Finally, there is the serious demand for experimental and field research on the ways in which newspaper readers use political cartoons. While this article has argued for four functions of political cartoons—entertainment, aggression reduction, agenda-setting, and framing—they by no means form an exhaustive list. Scholarly attention should be paid to the argument that the political cartoon is a fundamentally persuasive form of communication. Since Thomas Nast first lampooned the infamous Boss Tweed, there has been a historical association of the political cartoon with motivating social and political change. While the persuasive intention of cartoonists is well-documented, there has been little research into the effectiveness of the cartoon as visual rhetoric.

Until these and other research topics are addressed, we are faced with a dilemma not unlike that of Lévi-Strauss's tribal chief: we are resolute in our belief that the often simple lines which create the editorial cartoon have meaning without fully understanding their real significance.
Notes


3. For further analysis of the ramifications of a "cultural" versus "transmission" view of communication, see Carey (1975a: 173–191 and 1975b: 1–22).


5. On classical and medieval theories of comedy see Alex Preminger, O. B. Hardison, Jr., and Kevin Kerrance, eds., Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1974). Renaissance conceptions of comedy evidenced in the writings of Tristiano, Cinthio, Sydney, Lope de Vega, and Mazzoni are found in Allan H. Gilbert, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962).


8. See Carl's research cited in note 5; also see Del Brinkman, "Do Editorial Cartoons and Editorials Change Opinions?" Journalism Quarterly 45 (1968): 724–726.

References


Figure 1 ★ No. 243. The Lower Falls (1871). View from the east side of the canyon. 7 x 10 inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 27. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 82.)

Figure 2 Camp scene (n.d.). Figure is Dr. Hayden. 3½ x 4½ inches. (U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 1119.)

Figure 3 Camp Study (n.d.). W. H. Jackson. 5 x 7 inches. (U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 592.)
A Tall Tale Retold: The Influence of the Photographs of William Henry Jackson on the Passage of the Yellowstone Park Act of 1872

Howard Bossen

Imagine the excitement William Henry Fox-Talbot, an English inventor and country gentleman, must have felt when in August 1835 he succeeded in permanently fixing a fleeting sun-picture. The image is of the oriel window in his home at Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire, England. It measures not quite an inch square.

As the world’s oldest extant photographic negative, it represents the foundation of the negative-positive process in photography. It presents to the world one of the earliest permanently fixed photographic recordings of an object. In a note written to the left side of this paper negative, Fox-Talbot wrote: “When first made, the squares of glass about 200 in number could be counted, with help of a lens” (Lassam 1979:13).

Since that magical moment when Fox-Talbot demonstrated the ability of photographic recordings to document the 200 or so glass squares in his window, photography has been used to demonstrate that something exists, that something is lovely, or, perhaps, hideous. From almost the moment of their invention, some have attempted to use photographs as powerful persuaders.

Apparently the very first time a specific body of photographic work was used with stunning effect was in the winter of 1871–1872. The photographs were made in the summer and fall of 1871 for the U.S. Geological Survey of the Yellowstone region of Wyoming and Montana (see Figure 1). This survey, usually referred to as the Hayden survey, was named after its director, Dr. Ferdinand V. Hayden, an M.D. and a professor of geology at the University of Pennsylvania (see Figure 2). The photographs were made by William Henry Jackson, who served as expedition photographer for the Hayden surveys from 1870 through 1879 (see Figure 3).

Jackson was born in 1843 and lived to the age of 99. Before joining the U.S. Geological Survey team he operated a portrait studio in Omaha, Nebraska. In addition to his photographs of the Yellowstone region for the government, he made numerous other photographs of the American West. In 1875 he produced for the U.S. Department of the Interior the Descriptive Catalogue of the Photographs of the United States Geological Survey of the Territories for the Years 1869 to 1875, Inclusive. And in 1877 he wrote the Descriptive Catalogue of Photographs of North American Indians. This major ethnographic document describes over 1000 photographs in the possession of the government. The intent of the publication, according to Jackson, was to systematize the collection of Photographic Portraits of Indians now in the possession of the United States Geological Survey of the Territories, and to place on record all the information we have been able to obtain on the various individuals and scenes represented. [Jackson 1877]

After leaving the government in 1879, Jackson resumed his career as a commercial photographer. Moving first to Denver to set up a studio, he eventually photographed people and places all over the world. Many of his images he sold through commercial firms with which he was involved, first in Denver and later in Detroit. The Detroit View Company owned by Jackson sold his scenic pictures as well as those made by other photographers. His reputation had been made as a landscape photographer, yet one of his large commercial projects was the production of The White City, a folio of views of the 1893–1894 Columbia Exposition in Chicago.

Jackson’s magnificent views of Yellowstone’s natural wonders are considered by several historians to be the first time that photographic evidence was used to shape national policy in the United States. Beaumont Newhall, the United States’s most prominent historian of photography, wrote in his classic study, The History of Photography:

The United States Congress was persuaded to set apart the Yellowstone region as a national park by the convincing evidence of William H. Jackson’s photographs which had been presented to its members by Ferdinand V. Hayden as documents; they made credible the reports of natural wonders which until then had been dismissed as the tall tales of travellers. [Newhall 1964:137–138]

Gail Buckland, in Reality Recorded: Early Documentary Photography, wrote:

Jackson’s photographs of the West served to validate the tales that were told of the natural wonders that existed in North America; they greatly impressed the members of the United States Congress—to the extent that they set apart Yellowstone region as a national park. [Buckland 1974:40]
Her bibliography lists Newhall as a major source. Barbara London Upton and John Upton (1981) wrote in *Photography*: "William Henry Jackson's photographs of Yellowstone helped convince Congress to set the area aside as a National Park . . ." (p. 332). In their preface, they acknowledge relying upon Newhall.

George Craven (1975) wrote in *Object and Image*:

But the best known of all the frontier cameramen was William Henry Jackson, who worked his way west from Omaha and was the official photographer to the Hayden Surveys from 1870 to 1879. The 1871 trek explored the natural wonders of the Yellowstone region, and Jackson's photographs, displayed to the Congress in Washington, were instrumental the next year in creating Yellowstone National Park. [p. 44]

And Peter Pollack, former curator of photography at the Art Institute of Chicago, in his *The Picture History of Photography*, is quite specific in his claim for Jackson's influence. "Nine of his photographs saved Yellowstone for the people of America, making an area 3,578 square miles into the country's first national park" (Pollack 1977:63).

Perhaps because the statements seem so intuitively correct, none of these historians bothered to footnote their sources. Perhaps because the statements seem correct, they have become accepted as historical truth. For whatever reasons, the perception that Jackson's photographs played an important, and perhaps decisive, role in gaining the passage of the Yellowstone Park legislation, which formed the basis for the national park system, has become the accepted truth. Descr iption might exaggerate, but the camera told the truth; and in this case the truth was more remarkable because none of these writers cites sources for their claims, the role Jackson's photographs played in the passage of the Yellowstone legislation needs to be reexamined. What evidence did Newhall and the others marshal?

Apparently Newhall relied on the pioneering work of the chemist and historian Robert Taft. Taft, a native of Kansas, published one of the earliest well-documented histories of photography. His work, *Photography and the American Scene*, subtitled *A Social History 1839-1889*, covers photography's first 50 years. Taft compiled a remarkable amount of data. The book is, however, more an encyclopedia of facts than an analytical social treatise. Nevertheless, considering the vacuum in the field in the 1930s, it represents, even today, a monument to diligence and scholarship.

The similarity to the assertions found in Taft's and Newhall's books is strong. Taft wrote:

The real value of Jackson's photographs became apparent the following winter [1872], when through the efforts of Hayden and of N. P. Langford and William H. Clagett, a bill was prepared and introduced into both houses of Congress setting aside the Yellowstone as a National Park.

Jackson's photographs were prepared and placed on exhibition and had an immense influence in securing the desired legislation. Senator Pomeroy, of Kansas, who introduced the Senate bill, had some difficulty in getting its consideration. The second time he attempted to bring up the matter in the Senate he remarked, "There are photographs of the valley and the curiosities, which Senators can see." The Senators must have seen them, for the next time the bill came up for consideration it was passed without dissent, and on March 1, 1872, President Grant signed the bill creating the Yellowstone National Park. [Taft 1964:300, 302]

After citing Senator Pomeroy's comment, duly excised from *The Congressional Globe* (now known as *The Congressional Record*), Taft continued to build his case by relying upon the work of an early Superint endent and historian of Yellowstone Park, H. M. Chittenden. Taft continued:

The value of these photographs in aiding in the passage of this bill is also attested by Chittenden, the historian of the Park, who says, "The photographs were of immense value. Description might exaggerate, but the camera told the truth; and in this case the truth was more remarkable than exaggeration. . . . They did a work no other agency could do and doubtless convinced everyone who saw them that the region where such wonders existed should be carefully preserved to the public forever." [ibid.:302]

Taft's footnotes provide specific sources upon which he based his conclusions. He also includes quotations from two of those sources. As well researched as Taft's book is, his conclusions in regard to Jackson's photographs, however, are not supportable. A careful examination of his text, notes, and sources reveals: (1) he strung together sentences from different chapters in Chittenden's book, thereby creating a false connection; (2) he quoted Senator Pomeroy out of context; (3) he ascribed the difficulty in getting the Yellowstone Park legislation onto the floor to the fact that the senators had not been adequately exposed to Jackson's photographs; and (4) he incorrectly implied that because of Jackson's photographs this legislation "passed without dissent." Taft manipulated the record. His reason, conscious or unconscious, was to substantiate his belief in the power of photographic evidence to persuade, and resulted in the creation of a myth. Newhall, as well as other respected writers, has perpetuated it.
When examining the effort to persuade Congress to pass the Yellowstone Park legislation, one finds that many people were involved. Jackson’s photographs represent but one kind of data collected. The lobbying effort included many pieces of data and many kinds of activities. One source claims that 400 copies of Scribner’s Monthly containing an article on Yellowstone by an early explorer, N. P. Langford, were distributed to all members of Congress just preceding the day of the vote. In the February 1872 issue of Scribner’s Monthly an article by Professor Hayden, head of the 1871 survey, appeared. It concluded with a specific plea for the establishment of Yellowstone as a national park.

The intelligent American will one day point on the map to this remarkable district with the conscious pride that it has not its parallel on the face of the globe. Why will not Congress to pass the Yellowstone legislation. The most prominent was N. P. Langford, who, in addition to writing “The Wonders of Yellowstone” for Scribner’s Monthly, toured the country lecturing on the wonders of Yellowstone. After the passage of the legislation he was appointed the first superintendent of the park.

Truman C. Everts became lost, and after several days other expedition members stopped searching for him, fearing he had perished. He was found by a search party that was sent out after the expedition had returned. He wrote “Thirty-seven Days of Peril,” which described his terrifying ordeal, for the November 1871 edition of Scribner’s Monthly (Everts 1871:1–17).

Corinelius Hedges wrote a series of articles for the Helena Herald. Evidently his accounts of the expedition “attracted wide interest in the country and were immediately copied generally by the press . . . ”

This comment, part of one of the earliest published descriptive articles on the Yellowstone region, placed into the public record the fact that the sheer repetitive nature of the “tall tales” had resulted in many people beginning to believe the descriptions. Failure to take this point into account, when claiming that the photographs of Jackson made the “tall tales” believable, is an important omission.

The following year the Washburn expedition took place. This, too, was a private and unofficial expedition, but it included “some of the most influential citizens and officials of the [Montana] Territory.”

General Henry D. Washburn was the surveyor general of Montana. He had been given the rank of major general for services rendered during the Civil War and had served two terms as a United States congressman. Cornelius Hedges was a judge and member of the Montana bar. Samuel Hauser was a civil engineer and prominent banker in Helena. Walter Trumbull, an assistant assessor of internal revenue, was the son of Lyman Trumbull, a United States senator from Illinois. Truman C. Everts was the assessor of internal revenue for Montana. Nathaniel P. Langford had been the collector of internal revenue for Montana. And Warren C. Gillette and Benjamin Stuckney were merchants from Montana.

Because of the presence of so many influential persons, a military escort was granted. The head of the military contingent was Lieutenant G. C. Doane. His account of the expedition represents the first major official government report on the Yellowstone region. Professor Hayden refers to it in his preliminary report on the official 1871 expedition. He commented “that for graphic descriptions and thrilling interest it has not been surpassed by any official report made to our government since the time of Lewis and Clark.”

Several of the people on the Washburn expedition played a role in lobbying for the passage of the Yellowstone legislation. The most prominent was N. P. Langford who, in addition to writing “The Wonders of Yellowstone” for Scribner’s Monthly, toured the country lecturing on the wonders of Yellowstone. After the passage of the legislation he was appointed the first superintendent of the park.

The country around the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, although frequently visited by prospectors and mountain men, is still to the world of letters a veritable terra incognita. . . . Owing to the fact that this class of men had gained a reputation for indulging in flights of fancy when recounting their adventures, these reports of waterfalls, hot springs and volcanoes were received with considerable incredulity, until it was noticed that, however much the accounts of different parties differed in detail, there was a marked coincidence in the descriptions of some of the most prominent features of the country. [emphasis added]
Just as "the information secured from Folsom led to the Washburn exploring expedition in August 1870," the results of the Washburn expedition most likely led to the sanctioning of the official government survey of 1871.

An article appearing in the November 14, 1870, Helena Herald claims that:

The wonderful discoveries reported by General Washburn ... are likely and almost certain to lead to an early and thorough exploration of those mysterious regions under the patronage of the general Government and of the Smithsonian Institute and other prominent institutions of this country. I think this will be sure to take place next season.

The earliest reference to the Yellowstone region listed in the New York Times Index is a report dated January 22, 1871, on N. P. Langford’s lecture. Langford discussed his experiences as a member of the Washburn expedition. The article reports the lecture at Cooper Institute the preceding evening in a matter-of-fact manner:

In Montana County, Nature, he said, displays her wonderful beauties in a magnificent manner, and it is inhabited only by wild beasts, Indians and a few trappers.

There is not any indication to lead a reader to believe the New York Times doubted the general veracity of Langford’s report. However, when the New York Times coverage of Yellowstone picks up again in September 1871, referring to the Hayden survey, it does become apparent that the truth of many of the Yellowstone accounts had been in question. The Times wanted more evidence, yet there is no indication that the evidence it desired was photographs. Rather the newspaper awaited the reports of trained scientists.

Hitherto the reports that have reached us, have been mainly those of popular as distinguished from scientific observers. Those now to be furnished, on the other hand, we have a right to anticipate will be trustworthy, exact, and comprehensive, and will thus supply much needed information of one of the most wonderful tracts of the American continent.

On October 23, 1871, the New York Times again wrote about "The New Wonder Land." Here one finds reiterated the Times’s reluctance to believe fully earlier reports, including the report of Lieutenant Doane. The Times wanted "confirmatory testimony" and argued that:

... the official narrative of the Hayden expedition must be deemed needful before we can altogether accept stories of wonder hardly short of fairy tales in the astounding phenomena they describe.

The article concludes with a statement attesting that the New York Times had been convinced by the evidence that the descriptions of the explorers were accurate, at least in general:

We have heard enough now to be satisfied that the region in question must be among the most wonderful of this wonderful central continent of ours, and to suspect that it deserves, in this wise, absolute preeminence, Prof. Hayden’s official report, which, we hope, will not be long delayed, will enable us to arrive at conclusions more positive.

They did await specific details not available until the publication of Hayden’s final report. They had been convinced on the basis of the written descriptions of a Hayden survey artist, Henry W. Elliott. The article relied upon a letter Elliott sent to Professor Henry, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

Two days after the bill passed the House, an article appeared in the New York Times applauding the action. Although it is possible that the reporter(s) who worked on this article and the previous ones may have seen Jackson’s photographs, it is clear that no reference was made to them. The Times’s belief in the beauty of the Yellowstone region seems to have had nothing to do with his photographs.

The accounts of the various expeditions and the descriptions of Yellowstone which appeared in magazines and newspapers demonstrate that there was public interest in the exploration of the Yellowstone region before the Hayden survey and before Jackson made his photographs. However, the Hayden survey did provide the final bits of scientific evidence needed to convince skeptics that the descriptions of the breathtaking nature of the Yellowstone region were fact, not fiction.

Upon the conclusion of the survey, Hayden and some members of his group joined the lobbying effort already under way to reserve the Yellowstone region for the people. William Henry Jackson’s photographs became a part of that lobbying effort.

A search of The Congressional Globe reveals that in the Senate reference to or action on the Yellowstone legislation was made on December 18, 1871; January 22, 23, and 30, February 27 and 29, and March 5, 1872; and in the House on January 30 and February 27 and 28, 1872.

Senator Pomeroy, on December 18, 1871, introduced "a bill to set apart a certain tract of land lying near the headwaters of the Yellowstone as a public park." He made no specific mention of Jackson’s photographs, but did say, "Professor Hayden has made a very elaborate report on the subject." By unanimous consent, leave was granted to introduce a bill (S. No. 392) and it was "referred to the Committee on Public Lands."
The record is clear that after the committee on Public Lands had decided to report back to the Senate, Senator Pomeroy twice tried and failed to gain its consideration. 

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It was on the third attempt on January 30, 1872, that the measure was voted on. The record is also clear that insofar as the comments of the senators are reported in The Congressional Globe, the photographs of William Henry Jackson are not of major concern.

Photographs in the Senate comments are mentioned only once, in the House comments, not at all. The quotation Taft excised from Senator Pomeroy's comments comes from the end of a fairly lengthy statement by Pomeroy, in which he explains the reasons the bill should be passed.

MR. POMEROY. Yes, sir. There are no arable lands, no agricultural lands there. It is the highest elevation from which our springs descend, and as it cannot interfere with any settlement for legitimate agricultural purposes, it was thought that it ought to be set apart early for this purpose [a park]. We found when we set apart the Yosemite valley that there were one or two persons who had made claims there, and there has been a contest, and it has finally gone to the Supreme Court to decide whether persons who settle on unsurveyed lands have no rights as against the Government. The Court has held that settlers on unsurveyed lands have no rights as against the Government. The Government can make an appropriation of any unsurveyed lands, notwithstanding settlers may be upon them. As this region would be attractive only on account of preëmpting a hot spring or some valuable mineral, it was thought such claims had better be excluded from the bill. There are several Senators whose attention has been called to this matter, and there are photographs of the valley and the curiosities, which Senators can see.

[emphasis added] The only object of the bill is to take early possession of it by the United States and set it apart, so that it cannot be included in any claim or occupied by any settlers.22

When examined in the more complete context, it is difficult to believe that Pomeroy was presenting a strong case for the influential character of Jackson's photographs. In a somewhat casual manner the remark suggests that verification of the claims regarding the lack of arable lands, the presence of hot springs, and other matters could be obtained in photographs "which Senators can see." In no place do the comments on the floor of the House or Senate suggest that senators or congressmen were either persuaded by Jackson's photographs or had actually seen them.

While the record shows one reference to photographs, it reveals four references to the work of the geological survey team. In the Senate on December 18, 1871, when Senator Pomeroy first introduced the bill, he cited Professor Hayden's elaborate report on the subject.23 On January 22, 1872, Senator Pomeroy commented: "Professor Hayden and party have been there, and this bill is drawn on the recommendation of that gentleman to consecrate for public uses this country for a public park."24 On January 23, 1872, he again referred to the "exploration" by Professor Hayden.25

And in the House on February 27, 1872, Congressman Dawes remarked: 

...we but interfere with what is represented as the exposure of that country to those who are attracted by the wonderful descriptions of it by the reports of the geologists. ...26

To put the importance of Jackson's photographs into perspective one must realize, as Jackson did himself, that the photographs represented but a part of the evidence Hayden was gathering. In fact Hayden's published report for the 1871 expedition includes no photographs. It includes many drawings of scenery, rock specimens, and similar matter, but no photographs.27

Jackson wrote in Time Exposure, his autobiography, that:

Pictures were essential to the fulfilment of the doctor's plan for publicizing this Survey; but the basic purpose was always exploration. I cannot be too careful in emphasizing the fact that in this [the 1871 expedition] and all the following expeditions I was seldom more than a sideshow in a great circus. [W. H. Jackson 1970:201]

Clearly, Jackson viewed his own role as supportive rather than primary.

Taft implies from his reading of The Congressional Globe that somehow the lack of familiarity with the Yellowstone photographs was responsible for the two thwarted attempts at introducing the legislation. Nothing so sinister seems to have been the case. When the bill was reported out of committee on January 22, 1872, Senator Pomeroy asked for its immediate consideration. It appears that objections to this had to do mostly with the time element. The Vice President said:

The Senator from Massachusetts and the Senator from Kentucky both gave way only for current morning business [emphasis added], but the Senator from Kansas now asks unanimous consent for the consideration of the bill which he has just reported.28

The following day Senator Pomeroy again tried to have the bill considered. This time he made extensive comments, including ones about photographs. Before Pomeroy could get the bill acted upon, Senator Thurman was able to end the debate with the following comment: "I object to the consideration of this bill in the morning hour. I am willing to take it up when we can attend to it, but not now."29

These remarks can be interpreted in two ways. First, enough members of the Senate felt there was inadequate time to debate the bill before their noon recess. Second, there was substantial opposition to the bill on political grounds, and these objections...
were polite, but effective, parliamentary delaying tactics.

Given the fact that the bill was first introduced in mid-December 1871 and finally passed the Senate on January 30, 1872, it would seem that the resistance to the legislation was not very strong, that perhaps lunch, and not politics, held the bill up. This analysis concurs with Cramton's conclusions. He noted:

The speed with which the Yellowstone Park bill proceeded from introduction to enactment into law is surprising. It is true that it was not accompanied by any appropriation and was merely the reservation of lands already belonging to the Government. There were, however, projects pending at the same time involving the reservation or transfer of lands totaling about 100,000,000 acres, most of which projects failed. It was just after the Civil War, a period when economy in the National Government was urgent. Nevertheless the bill which was first introduced in Congress December 18, 1871, became law March 1, 1872, only about 10 weeks later.30

Jackson, in his autobiography, mentions that his photographs were needed for the lobbying effort, but does not describe how they were used. He, too, says that "The photographs ... had helped do a fine piece of work: without a dissenting voice, Congress established the Yellowstone as a national park ... " (W. H. Jackson 1970:205). If memories fade as time passes, one should not fault Jackson for his imperfect memory. After all his own glory was tied to the perpetuation of the myth.

His son Clarence Jackson, writing about the importance of his father's work, described the lobbying process in the following manner:

Each member of the House was visited personally by Langford, Hayden or Clagett; the Senators received the same flattering attention; the Secretary of the Interior was induced to give the bill his public approval. Specimens of the mineral wealth and the animal life of the region where such wonders existed were on exhibition and were distributed among those perennial, shadowy gentlemen who were believed to have an "influence" beyond their immediate official position. It was these actual pictures of the wonders of the upper Yellowstone that clinched the vote in favor of the first National Park. [C. Jackson 1971:145]

One would suppose that if the Jackson photographs were used as a trump card during the period of January 23 to January 30, 1872, some mention of them as a persuasive device would have found its way into some official record or some news account of the time. So far this researcher has been unable to locate such documentation.

Clarence Jackson's description of the lobbying process, although a bit overly dramatic, seems plausible. What does not is his conclusion. Even he acknowledges the vast amount of other information presented to the congressmen, yet he is insistent upon the overriding importance of his father's work.

Chittenden acknowledges the documentary value of the photographs but limits his praise to the context of their being but one type of evidence. The last sentence of Chittenden's paragraph from which sentence one in Taft's quote is taken reads:

The report and collection of photographs and specimens by Dr. Hayden were therefore the principal results of this season's work, and they played a decisive part in the events of 1871-72.31

From Chittenden's perspective, then, the photographs were but one of three important elements in the official reports. They were not the decisive element as Taft claims. All three were interrelated. This interrelationship is emphasized again in the second paragraph from which Taft excerpted material. A more contextual look at that paragraph reveals that the "they" to which Chittenden was referring were the "photographs and specimens," not just the photographs. He wrote:

[Hayden] was thoroughly familiar with the subject, and was equipped with an exhaustive collection of photographs and specimens collected the previous summer. These were placed on exhibition and were probably seen by all members of Congress. They did a work which no other agency could do, and doubtless convinced everyone who saw them that the region where such wonders existed should be carefully preserved to the people forever.32

Perhaps, but Chittenden, like Taft, Newhall, and the younger Jackson, ascribes cause without demonstrable proof of cause. Neither he, nor Taft, nor Newhall demonstrates which piece of evidence, if any, to which members of Congress were exposed convinced them to support the legislation.

A letter by William H. Clagett, the congressman who introduced the Yellowstone legislation, shed some light on the exhibition question and its possible influence on the legislators.

When [Professor Hayden] returned to Washington in 1871, he brought with him a large number of specimens from different parts of the Park, which were on exhibition in one of the rooms of the Capitol or in the Smithsonian Institute (one or the other), while Congress was in session, and he rendered valuable services in exhibiting those specimens and explaining the geological and other features of the proposed Park ... 33
From what Clagett stated, it does not seem reasonable to conclude that because there was an exhibition all the members of Congress saw it. The evidence seems to be lacking to support this notion. The fact that all members may have had an opportunity to see the exhibition, or may even have been presented with personal copies of the photographs, does not mean that they all, or even a majority, did in fact see them and, more importantly, were in fact persuaded by them to vote for the legislation.

With the exception of passing reference to their existence in official government documents, mention is not made of Jackson's photographs in printed accounts written at the time. Rather, drawings and paintings are mentioned and reproduced in more than one source.

As far as the persuasive device argument is concerned, the only mention of visual material found by the researcher is to drawings and paintings made by Private Charles Moore and Walter Trumbull of the Washburn expedition of 1870 (see Figure 4) and by Thomas Moran and Henry W. Elliott of the Hayden expedition of 1871.35

Walter Trumbull was the son of Senator Trumbull, one of the senators who figured prominently in the passage of the Yellowstone legislation. Just before the bill was voted on in the Senate, Senator Trumbull remarked:

Here is a region of country away up in the Rocky Mountains, where there are the most wonderful geysers on the face of the earth . . .

Now, before there is any dispute as to this wonderful country; I hope we shall excerpt it from the general disposition of the public lands, and reserve it to the government.37

In the House, one of the bill's principal proponents was Congressman Dawes, whose son, Chester M. Dawes, was an assistant on the Hayden expedition of 1871 (see Figure 5).38 Perhaps the passage of the legislation was due more to the influence Trumbull and Dawes exerted on their colleagues than to any of the geological evidence. At least one historian thinks this is partially so. Louis Cramton wrote:

. . . Dawes was one of the greatest powers in the House of Representatives. The speed with which the bill became law after it was introduced is in part to be explained by this.39

It does not seem likely that the bill passed only because of their interest. Yet one must not minimize the important role they played, a role that was perhaps more persuasive because of family considerations than because of the photographic or geological evidence at hand.
Figure 5
No. 273. The Anna (1871), the first boat ever launched upon the lake. Its frame-work was brought up from Fort Ellis and then put together, and covered with tar-soaked canvas. A tent fly made the sail. In it two adventurous members of the survey visited every arm and nook of the lake, and made all the soundings. It is so named in compliment to Miss Anna Dawes, a daughter of the distinguished statesman whose generous sympathy and aid have done so much toward securing these results. 5½ × 9 inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 29. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 1268.)

Author's comments:
The last sentence of this caption would seem to draw the Dawes connection even closer. Not only did the Congressman have a son with the Hayden group, but he also was honored with the first boat being named for his daughter.

Figure 6
No. 298. The Grotto in Eruption (1871), throwing an immense body of water, but not more than forty feet in height. The great amount of steam given off almost entirely conceals the jets of water. 8 × 10 inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 31. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 111.)

Figure 7
No. 264. Mud Geyser in Action (1871). The only true mud geyser discovered, eight miles below Yellowstone Lake. It has a funnel-shaped orifice in the center of a basin 150 feet in diameter, and in which there are two other hot mud springs.

The flow of geyser is regularly every six hours, the eruptions lasting about fifteen minutes. The thick, muddy water rises gradually in the crater, commencing to boil when about half way to the surface, and occasionally breaking forth with great violence. When the crater is filed it is expelled from it in a splashing, scattered mass, ten feet in diameter, to forty feet in height. The mud is a dark lead-color, and deposits itself thickly all about the rim of the crater. 8 × 10 inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 29. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 97.)
Figure 8  No. 260.  
SULPHUR SPRING (1871). At Crater Hills, ten miles above the falls, on the east side of the Yellowstone, in the center of a most interesting group of hot springs, is a magnificent sulphur spring. The deposits around it are silica and enamel like the finest porcelian. The thin edges of the nearly circular rim extend over the waters of the basin several feet, the open portion being fifteen feet in diameter. The water is in a constant state of agitation, and seems to affect the entire mass, carrying it up impulsively to a height of four or five feet. The decorations about the spring, the beautiful scalloping around the rim, and the inner and outer surface, covered with a sort of pearl-like beadwork, give it great beauty. 7½ x 10 inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 28. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 94.)

Figure 9  No. 233. TOWER FALLS (1871), near view from near base. 7 x 9 inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 26. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 78.)
When Taft claims that the legislation “passed without dissent,” he is inaccurate. It was passed in the Senate without a vote count being recorded. The vote was probably a voice vote, which Taft interprets as meaning a no dissent vote. Whether there in fact was little or no dissent in the Senate, the dissent in the House was duly noted in The Congressional Globe. Although the legislation passed by a significant margin, it is hard to argue that a vote of 115 yeas, 65 nays, and 60 not voting represents unanimous endorsement.

Taft does not say that the House passed the bill without dissent; he does not mention the House vote at all. His writing, however, clearly leaves the impression that whatever opposition to the final passage may have existed evaporated because the photographs had been seen and had been persuasive.

More than any other linkage of photographs to the unanimity of support for the legislation, it was the one by Taft on which Newhall and the others relied when they argued that William Henry Jackson’s photographs of the Yellowstone region played a decisive role in shaping national policy. The record, however, shows that support was not unanimous, as Taft implied. Nor does the record support the argument that the photographs were the principal agent in the persuasion process.

All who have seen Jackson’s photographs of the Yellowstone region would agree that they present a natural wonderland magnificently observed by a gifted photographer. The photographs did offer proof of the existence of “The Grotto Geyser” (see Figure 6). No one who has seen these photographs would argue that the splendor of Yellowstone was merely a delusion of grandeur shared by those explorers who fell victim to its spell (see Figures 7–9).

While it is clear that William Henry Jackson’s photographs were part of the scientific data available to congressmen, there is little evidence to indicate that they influenced the legislators more than any of the other bits of information presented to them. The contention that Jackson’s photographs played the primary role in the shaping of national policy is dubious. There were many factors involved in the persuasion process, no one of which can be shown to be more important than the other. This finding, by calling into question the influence of Jackson’s work, suggests that it may be time to reexamine other claims for the influence of photographs on national policy.

Notes

**Author’s Explanation of Art and Legends**

In tracking down the illustrations for this article I discovered that the most accessible source for Jackson’s photographs for the 1871 Yellowstone expedition is the United States Geological Survey Photography Library in Denver, Colorado. This library has a cataloged collection of over 1600 of Jackson’s photographs made during the U.S. Geological Surveys of 1870–1879. Most of the captions in Denver’s cataloged collection were taken largely if not entirely from the Descriptive Catalogue of The Photographs of The United States Geological Survey of The Territories for The Years 1869 to 1875, Inclusive, Second Edition, 1875. This catalog was written by W. H. Jackson and is listed as a Department of the Interior Miscellaneous Publications No. 5.

All captions used with the W. H. Jackson photographs, unless indicated by italics, are excerpted from the 1875 catalog and were written by Jackson. The catalog lists and describes each photograph. No photographs are reproduced in his catalog. In fact his catalog was published several years before the halftone process of reproduction was invented.

Italicized captions used with the Jackson photographs were taken from the catalog of the collection of Jackson photographs in the possession of the United States Geological Survey Photography Library in Denver. These captions were probably also written by Jackson.

All the photographs were made in 1871, except for those noted “n.d.” (no date available), in what is now Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming.

Whenever possible the index numbers and page numbers used in the 1875 catalog are given as well as the index number used in the catalog of the collection of the United States Geological Survey Photography Library in Denver. The index number of the 1875 catalog precedes the title; the other information follows the legend parenthetically.

The 1875 catalog lists all negatives as being 8 × 10 inches. The catalog of the collection of the United States Geological Survey Photography Library in Denver lists a variety of sizes. The dimensions given are from the Denver Catalog.

All reproductions were made from modern prints pulled from copy negatives.

1 Hiram Martin Chittenden, The Yellowstone National Park, ed. Richard A. Bartlett (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 82. This is a reprint of Chittenden’s work (1964) which originally appeared in 1895. The edition Taft consulted was one published in 1917.

2 Many of the articles in the Helena Herald, as well as one from the New York Times, are reprinted in: Louis C. Cramton, Early History of Yellowstone National Park and Its Relation to National Park Policies (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Depart. of the Interior, 1932). This volume also has a bibliography which is indispensable for locating obscure references.

3 Ibid., p. 6. Cramton wrote: “Joseph Meek visited this region in 1829. James Bridges, the noted hunter and scout, is clearly shown to have visited the region at various times from 1830 on....”

4 Ibid., p. 11.

5 This article, titled “The Valley of the Upper Yellowstone, by C.W. Cook” is reprinted in Cramton’s book, pp. 83–89. Cramton argues, however, that the author really was Folsom, not Cook. He states on page 11: “Every reference to the article, except the signature in the Western Monthly, speaks of it as having been written by Folsom, and Director Albright informs me that Mr. Cook told him that the article was written by Folsom.”

6 Ibid., p. 83.

7 Ibid., p. 13.
Our exchanges, East and West, are just now reaching us, containing copious extracts from the Herald’s Yellowstone reports. ... The Herald is everywhere complimented for ... those excellent and reliable reports. ...
Reviews and Discussion


Reviewed by Joel Snyder
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In the introduction to The Pencil of Nature, the first book about photography that was illustrated with photographic prints, W. H. F. Talbot described the frustration that led him to invent the positive-negative system of photography eleven years earlier.

One of the first days of the month of October 1833, I was amusing myself on the lovely shores of Lake Como, in Italy, taking sketches with Wollaston’s Camera Lucida, or rather I should say, attempting to take them; but with the smallest amount of success. For when the eye was removed from the prism—in which all looked beautiful—I found that the faithless pencil had only left traces on the paper melancholy to behold.

After various fruitless attempts, I laid aside the instrument and came to the conclusion that its use required a previous knowledge of drawing, which unfortunately, I did not possess. [Talbot: 1844-1845]

Talbot’s desire was to take the pencil out of his unskilled hand and turn it over to nature. It is emblematic of the period in which he lived that nature, or at least some important part of nature, was understood to be synonymous with the mechanism of the camera obscura—the ancient forerunner of the modern camera—and with a set of rather recently synthesized and reasonably pure chemical compounds. What Talbot’s introduction underscores and what the remainder of The Pencil of Nature demonstrates is that the project to make pictures by mechanical means grew out of the desire to make acceptable pictures and that the standards of acceptability were not only in place prior to the invention of photography, but that the invention of a photographic means of depiction did not challenge those conventions.

Even a cursory glance through Talbot’s book of twenty-eight photographs shows how thoroughly conventional his approach to picture-making was. In fact, the pictures are so totally in keeping with the canons of conventional illustration (e.g., architectural and travel illustrations) —so familiar in terms of subject matter and mode of presentation—that some readers took the photographs to be handmade engravings. Talbot felt obliged to insert a cautionary notice into some copies of his book:

William Henry Fox Talbot. “The Open Door” (c. 1843) salted paper print from Calotype negative. (Arnold H. Crane collection, Chicago)

This print is Talbot’s first published attempt to demonstrate one of the many uses he predicted for photography—the making of pictures that were in accord with the canon of high art. Talbot finds the “authority” for the picture in “the Dutch school of art” that flourished more than two centuries before this picture was made. The caption accompanying “The Open Door” states:

Plate VI. The chief object of the present work is to place on record some of the early beginnings of a new art, before the period, which we trust is approaching, of its being brought to maturity by the aid of British talent. This is one of the trifling efforts of its infancy, which some partial friends have been kind enough to commend. We have sufficient authority in the Dutch school of art for taking as subjects of representation scenes of daily and familiar occurrence. A painter’s eye will often be arrested where ordinary people see nothing remarkable. A casual gleam of sunshine, or a shadow thrown across his path, a time-withered oak, or a moss-covered stone may awaken a train of thoughts and feelings, and picturesque imaginings.

It is apparent from this quotation that Talbot saw no special photographic syntax, no peculiarly photographic features in pictures like these. In fact, he was a thorough-going operationalist who saw photography as a medium with a large set of potential uses and not as a material that necessarily produced certain formal properties in all its products.
The plates of the present work are impressed by the agency of Light alone, without any aid whatever from the artist's pencil. They are the sun pictures themselves, and not, as some persons have imagined, engravings in imitation.

Much of the critical literature on photography, ranging from the perversely innocent ruminations of Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes through the careful and informed studies of recent photographic historians, assumes that photographs are *sui generis* and stand apart from the broad family of handmade pictures. It has been further assumed that because of the alleged essential differences between photographs and other kinds of pictures, there is a total discontinuity between the history of the manipulative graphic arts and the pre- and early history of photography. This has meant that the prehistory of photography has been treated as a set of related scientific-technological issues that necessarily excludes consideration of aesthetic-pictorial problems.

In recent times, just this assumption—that there is some essential difference between photographs and handmade pictures—has come under vigorous attack. The work of the art historian Ernst Gombrich and that of the philosopher Nelson Goodman, while at odds in certain crucial respects, agree on this: photographs and, say, paintings, represent in the same way and for the same reasons. The demolition of the conceptual as well as the practical grounds for asserting an essential difference between photographs and handmade pictures is a fact. The effects of this recent work in the theory of pictorial representation are just now being felt by historians of photography. The history of photography, as a discipline, is now in the odd position of having a canon—or, at least, a list of greats and near-greats—but it does not possess a reasoned analysis of why or how photography came into being at all.

Peter Galassi's *Before Photography* is an admirable attempt to show that the invention of photography is continuous with the pictorial practice—or at least one evolving strand of that thread—of the period in which it was invented. In Galassi's words, "photography was not a bastard left by science on the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the western pictorial tradition." *Before Photography* deals with the origins of photography and Galassi quite rightly is concerned with finding an appropriate and limited context in which to place the invention of the medium.

Now, there are obviously multiple contexts that one would have to study in order to provide a reasonably exhaustive answer to the question: what were the conditions that were required for the invention of photography in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century? For example, one might look at the developing need for cheap pictures by commercial and industrial interests during the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Or, one might look at the question of the availability of pure chemicals and note that it was not until the early
nineteenth century that some of the essential chemical components of photography were manufactured with predictable characteristics—an obvious necessity for the invention of photography. And one might usefully look at the history of the *camera obscura* in an attempt to find the standards of design, and the origins of those standards, to which cameras were built in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Too, one might look at the conventions of pictorial practice in the early nineteenth century to see what various audiences expected different kinds of pictures to look like.

*Before Photography* deals with the invention of photography within this last context. In this review I take a negatively critical stance regarding Galassi’s central thesis, but I wish to emphasize that much of what he has to say is both interesting and substantial. It would be wrong to conclude, however, that I am merely at odds with him on certain specifics. The issues do not resolve to details; they concern the entire program.

Galassi’s argument takes this form: the technical and aesthetic origins of photography can be traced back to the fifteenth-century invention of linear perspective, a system of representation that “adopted vision as the sole basis for representation.” Perspective, however, is only a tool and may be employed to obtain various pictorial goals. Galassi identifies two different and polar opposite uses of the system. In the first case (and here he cites *An Ideal Townscape* from the circle of Piero della Francesca, c. 1470), the artist begins by establishing his point of vantage and the frame of the picture, and this “stage” is then filled in with the various elements that are to form the picture. This process leads to the production of perspicuous pictures in which all the elements combine in a clear and transparent manner. The process is “synthetic,” building up the whole from pieces in an ordered and programmatic fashion.

In the opposing and more modern use of perspective, “the world is accepted first as an uninterrupted field of potential pictures. From his chosen point of view, the artist scans this field...forming his pictures by choosing where and when to stop” (p. 16). As a paradigm for this use of perspective, Galassi cites Edgar Degas’s *The Racing Field: Amateur Jockeys near a Carriage* (c. 1877-1880). In this mode of picture-making, the artist is guided by “selective description” and not, as in the former case, by logical construction. As the older use of perspective is characterized as a “synthetic” process, the newer use is said to be an “analytic” one.

There is an ontological principle hiding at the base of all these distinctions: perspective was originally put into the service of an “idealized” art, while the newer use is concerned with something more personal and immediate than the ideal. The old use was employed as a “record of the imagination”; the new use serves the interest of recording *reality*. Galassi contends that photography was invented during a period when art was undergoing a major transformation away from the goal of portraying the imagined and ideal towards the new goal of depicting reality in “straightforward” terms. He summarizes his thesis this way:

*The Renaissance theory of perspective harnesses vision as a rational basis for picture making. Initially, however, perspective was conceived only as a tool for the construction of three dimensions out of two. Not until much later was this conception replaced—as the common intuitive standard—by its opposite: the derivation of a frankly flat picture from a given three-dimensional world. Photography, which is capable of serving only the latter artistic sense, was born of this fundamental transformation in pictorial strategy. The invention of photography must then coincide with or succeed the accumulation of pictorial experiment that marks the critical period of transformation from the normative procedure of Uccello’s era to that of Degas. [p. 18]*

Galassi believes that this thesis is demonstrated by the handsome group of forty-four landscape studies, produced between 1782 and 1839, that accompanies his essay. He explains his choice of these pictures as follows:
I have chosen...to focus on that aspect of landscape painting that is the clearest (if ostensibly the most modest) symptom of the broad artistic transformation that catalyzed the invention of photography. The landscape sketches...present a new and fundamentally modern pictorial syntax of immediate, synoptic perceptions and discontinuous, unexpected forms. It is the syntax of an art devoted to the singular and contingent rather than the universal and stable. It is also the syntax of photography. [p. 25]*

The argument places the invention of photography within the context of the changing norms of high artistic practice in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The invention of photography was “catalyzed” by these changing artistic goals (“photography. . . was born of this fundamental transformation in pictorial strategy”). A new pictorial “syntax” was coming into being and photographs naturally possess this syntax.

I am frankly baffled by the claim that photography was engendered by the change in pictorial strategies. And I am not much cheered by the alternative location that has the invention of photography catalyzed by changing pictorial programs. I would understand, though I would still disagree with, the claim that changing pictorial interests among self-conscious artists created expectations in an educated audience that were not denied or, perhaps, were fulfilled by the work of the early photographers. My unhappiness with this way of thinking about the invention of photography is that it excludes consideration of functional illustration and places total emphasis on the evolving conventions in the Western high art tradition. I should add that I do not think that the high art context and the context of what I am calling functional illustration are hermetically sealed off from one another—they are not. But to look for the origins of photography in a context that excludes functional illustration makes it look as if the medium were invented to satisfy an exclusively artistic set of problems, and this is demonstrably false.

Nonetheless, Galassi is not merely interested in placing the invention of photography within the context of the high art tradition. Certainly, his use of the expression “was born of” strongly implies some type of causation—if not of the efficient form, then at least of the final variety. This may seem like verbal quibbling, but it is not. Before Photography is intended to be explanatory, and it is not mere verbal fussiness that demands to know just what is being explained. Again, it is quite one thing to claim that the “pictorial climate” in the 1820s and 1830s was “right” for the invention of photography and quite another to claim that the climate was somehow causally efficacious. I suspect that there is something of a Panofsky-like way of thinking underlying part of Galassi’s argument. Panofsky viewed the invention of pictorial media, e.g., the magnificent development of wood engraving in the hands of Dürer, as responses to specific aesthetic problems that grew out of artistic practice (Panofsky: 1947, 1960). It may be that we are to understand the present thesis as a sort of generalized Panofsky-ian argument, to wit: as artists came to value “the contingent qualities of perception,” photography was invented as one solution to the pictorial problems engendered by the new value. The problem here is that at least in the Panofsky scheme of things, new media are self-consciously devised by artists in quest of pictorial solutions, and the invention of photography does not fit this scheme.

At the outset of the essay, Galassi asks, in effect, why photography was not invented more than a century before the watershed of the 1830s, since “all of the inventors simply combined two scientific principles that had been known for quite some time.” The clear implication, which is in fact worked out in the rest of the essay, is that the invention of photography was technically but not aesthetically feasible in the early eighteenth century. This is something like asking why the technology of atomic energy was not worked out in the 1920s. It would be foolish to attempt to reduce the invention of photography to a technical issue, totally separated from pictorial concerns. Nonetheless, Galassi is quite wrong in stating that the invention of photography came about by the “simple” combination of well-known principles. The wonder is that given the primitive state of manufacturing chemistry in the early nineteenth century, photography was invented as early as it was. It is useful to recall in this regard that Talbot’s early prints were not stable and that he abandoned the use of sodium thiosulfate—today’s standard “fixing” agent—for a number of years because of the poor quality of available thiosulfate. The technical issues at stake in the invention of photography are enormously complex and involve an exhaustive study of economics, science, and industry. It is simply wrong to assert that photography could have been invented prior to the critically important work of early-nineteenth-century chemists and manufacturers.

The thesis of Before Photography is not quite the revolutionary proposal it first appeared it was going to be. In a sense it is a nonhomogenous thesis insofar as its attitude toward pictures is concerned. The essential pivot in the argument is this: photographs are different from pictures made in keeping with the use of perspective as practiced prior to the eighteenth century. Photographs possess all the syntactical “oddities” (by reference to the early pictures) of the transformed artistic vision of the early nineteenth century. In other words, photographs are inherently different from the older kind of pictures, but are very much like the newer kind. But unlike the newer kind that derive their formal characteristics from the new purpose of representation (to record “the contingent qualities of perception” and in a “straightforward” way), photographs necessarily possess these characteristics since they are inherent features of the medium. While the form of a painting is arrived at conventionally, the form of a photograph results from the qualities of the medium. It is not terribly surprising that an interim pre-history of photography would attempt to do the impos-
It is not about anything visible, much less is it a record of anything visible.
Or consider this example: a photographer, say Talbot himself, sets up his camera on a busy London street and photographs it. His exposure lasts five minutes. The print from his negative shows a deserted street with no horses, no carriages, no persons, because none of these items stayed around long enough to reflect enough light to register on the film. (Talbot wrote about this in his journals.) What relation does this photograph have to the visible reality that was present before the camera? Both of these photographs are “purely photographic,” neither is a trick, neither is mysterious. Each has a straightforward and sensible explanation that—and this is very important—does not rely in any way on the character of either visible reality or human vision.

I see no reason whatsoever to deny that photographers can and usually do compose their photographs. It is not quite clear to me what is at stake in the denial of this. Photographers can compose by moving objects around in front of the camera, or by moving the camera around in front of objects. A photographer can put things in or out of focus—there are no constraints upon him in this regard. The original Latin meaning of “compose” is “to bring together or into union.” A photographer, when working with his ground glass, brings a variety of surfaces (not things) together to form some kind of unity. Whether or not a photographer moves objects around in front of his camera, he cannot avoid composing his picture. He may, given the conventions of composition that obtain at the time he is working, do this well or poorly—but he cannot avoid doing it.

The notion that there is an inherent photographic syntax is also deeply troublesome. To begin with, syntax is a notion borrowed from the verbal arts, where it may be properly understood in its logical or linguistic sense. Syntax, in its primary sense, is the arrangement of units in definable relations without regard to meaning. It would be helpful to know what the units of depiction are and what rules apply to the correct arrangement of these units. It seems to me that even if it were possible to specify what a pictorial syntax might be for a depictive mode that deals exclusively with continuous tones, the assertion that photography has a singular syntax would still make no sense. (It should be noted, in passing, that William Ivins, Jr., who originally adopted the notion of syntax for his analysis of prints made in discontinuous media, specifically denies that photography has any syntax at all.) The claim that photography has an inherent and peculiar syntax must mean, if it makes any sense at all, that all photographs are formally quite similar. I do not see that this is the case. I have the sense that in photography, as in painting, drawing, or poetry for that matter, the question of formal properties cannot be reduced to media considerations. Conventions, which are, after all, just shorthand descriptions of ways of arriving at certain goals, are the very bone and flesh of form. One can work conventionally or counterconventionally, but not a priori. This is merely an exalted way of saying that form and purpose are inextricably bound in all made objects. And so it seems to me that a reasonably thoughtful analysis of photographs made to serve a variety of ends will show that they differ as much formally as do the ends for which they were made. To my eyes, a portrait of a fisherwoman by Hill and Adamson, a portrait of Thomas Carlyle by Julia Margaret Cameron, and a portrait of George Wallace by Richard Avedon all look quite different, one from the other. I would like to know the relevant “syntactic” respects in which they all look alike.

And this brings us full circle. Galassi’s thesis is that the invention of photography—a medium that is capable of dealing only with the singular and contingent and not the universal and stable—was necessitated by the transforming pictorial concerns of nineteenth-century art. I believe that the pictorial origins of photography might have been brought into sharper focus if Galassi had set his sights lower in his search for the parents of photography. I agree with him— it seems impossible that anyone could intelligently disagree—that photography is the product of the Western pictorial tradition. But the tradition from which
it sprung can be seen across a broad field of pictorial habits that were in place during the years prior to its invention. One need not point to a set of changing artistic concerns as the precipitator of photography. The pictorial tradition that gave rise to photography can be seen clearly in the reasonably stable canon of architectural and travel illustration (as well as in other kinds of functional illustrations including portrait miniatures) that preexisted photography. No artistic transformations, no matter how monumental, necessitated the invention of photography. Photography, like the other great graphic medium that was invented a few years before it—lithography—was born of our multiple needs for and our abiding fascination with pictures.

Notes

1. The camera lucida is not a camera at all. It is a prism, mounted to a dowel, that appears to project an image of the field in front of the prism onto a sheet of paper. The artist traces the apparent image on the paper.

2. Not all of the illustrations in The Pencil of Nature are by Talbot. Some of them were made by his two assistants. Talbot selected all the photographs used in the book.

3. See, e.g., Gombrich (1960) and Goodman (1968). I have noted only Goodman and Gombrich because they represent the two major and to some extent opposing views on representation.

4. Galassi is exceptionally slippery in dealing with vision. He seems to think that vision is a natural standard that possesses an inherent structure. It seems to me both unwise and unnecessary to do this. Modern views hold that there is a reciprocity between the ways that we see and the ways that we represent, and that our descriptions of what we see are heavily dependent upon the dominating modes of representation. Too, it is misleading to say that perspective was initially concerned with the construction of three dimensions out of two. The notions of two- and three-dimensionality do not arise in the initial discussions of perspective during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. They appear in the literature only after the system enjoyed a near-total domination of picture-making in the West. The original concern of the early writers on perspective was how to give a painting “relief” so that it would look like what we see. And the latter is given clear definition.

5. It strikes me as somewhat odd for Galassi to concentrate on landscape, given his belief that the newly evolving “pictorial syntax” represents a more modern use of perspective. One does not need a system of perspective in order to paint a landscape. The issue of spatial relations is rarely dealt with in terms of grid patterns in landscape depiction. It does come up in a wonderful way in Paolo Uccello’s A Hunt, cited by Galassi in the text because Uccello uses the ordered diminution of trees in very much the same way that cityscape painters used the ordered diminution of vertical elements of buildings to indicate depth. Galassi apparently believes that occlusion and diminution in the size of figures in a landscape constitute the use of perspective. They do not. Degas’s The Racing Field was not produced by means of a perspective system. This does not deny that it appears to have a point of vantage.

6. The alleged principles are (1) the optical fact that light passing through an aperture projects an image on a wall placed in back of the aperture, and (2) certain chemicals, especially silver halides, turn dark when exposed to light. He notes Wedgwood, Niepe, Talbot, and Daguerre as nominees for the invention of photography. Wedgwood, together with the chemist Humphry Davy, attempted (from 1799 to 1802) to make light pictures by employing silver nitrate solutions on leather and paper. He succeeded in making unstable photograms of leaves and lace, but was thoroughly unable to make the prints stable. The solvent properties of sodium thiosulfate on silver halides, an absolute necessity for photography as we know it, were not discovered until 1819 by John Herschel. Wedgwood and Davy failed in their attempts to make pictures by means of the camera (thus, they admitted that they could not combine Galassi’s two “simple principles”). The Niepe brothers did not use silver salts as the basis of their photographic system. Their motivation was initially to make lithographic stones and plates that were engraved by the action of the sun on certain oily substances. Their work could not have commenced until after the publication of the principles of lithography in 1813. Daguerre’s system is absolutely dependent upon the use of elemental iodine, which was not discovered until 1813 by Gay-Lussac and Humphry Davy and which did not go into commercial production until 1821. Talbot’s system required his own discovery (made in 1834) that silver halides (e.g., silver chloride) were highly light-sensitive if made with an excess of silver nitrate and a small amount of some halide, and that the same silver halides were barely sensitive to light if made with low-concentration silver nitrate and high concentrations of halide salts. Talbot’s major discoveries concerning the salts of silver could not have been made prior to the early 1830s because many of the compounds he used were not available before then. From a technical perspective, the invention of photography was an extraordinary achievement that could not possibly have been accomplished before it. In fact, was. At least it could not have been brought off given the two “simple principles” adduced by Galassi.

7. Ivins (1956). A continuous medium, like drawing or photography, brings off changes in values by using continuous patches of white, various grays, and black. In discontinuous media like etching and engraving, value changes are indicated by the distance or proximity of black lines or dots from one another.

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Reviewed by M. Jane Young
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This volume, which claims as its integrating theme the role of the kachina in the Hopi world, is intended to operate on different levels. On one level it is a collection of introductory articles about the Hopi, written by experts, on topics ranging from social order to material culture. On another, it is a catalog published to accompany an exhibit produced by the Science Museum of the California Academy of Sciences. Unfortunately, the two levels are not made explicit, and the underlying purpose of the book is often lost as one reads the separate articles. The exhibit itself arose from Nathaniel Owings's gift of his collection of kachina dolls to the California Academy of Sciences, and this volume contains photographs of the dolls which made up the main part of the traveling exhibit. However, there is some confusion as to whether the book was meant solely to accompany the exhibit or to stand alone as a treatise on Hopi kachinas in its own right. Although the book has the same title as the exhibit, this is somewhat misleading, since the articles included in the book give a general introduction to Hopi culture but do not focus specifically on kachinas.

Both the exhibit and the book were produced in collaboration with Hopi consultants. The prologue to the book is written by one such consultant, Emory Sekaquaptewa, who suggests that the purpose of the exhibit is "to bring the Hopi world to the outside onlooker" (p. 7). This prologue is followed by an introduction written by the editor of the book, Dorothy Washburn, who repeats that the purpose of the exhibit is to open a window onto the Hopi world (p. 8). One assumes, quite validly, that this is also the purpose of the book, but, once again, there is confusion, for the prologue and introduction describe the purpose and plan of the exhibit, not of the book.

Although the catalog of the exhibit is included in the book, this catalog was intended to supplement the exhibit; thus the reader of the book is given only one dimension of the picture which the catalog and exhibit together would present. For this reason the catalog strikes the reader as incomplete, although perhaps the necessary complementary information was provided by the exhibit. Washburn states that at the suggestion of the Hopi consultants the exhibit focuses upon the kachinas, "supernatural messengers who mediate between the harsh realities of Arizona's environmental limitations and the daily needs of the Hopi people" (p. 8). Various aspects of the exhibit are then discussed, including an audiovisual introduction to the physical environment of the Hopi, a collection of artifacts that are described as juxtaposed against photographs and paintings portraying the activity of Hopi daily life as well as the complex relationship of spiritual and secular life, and, finally, as the conclusion to the exhibit, an audiovisual commentary by the Hopi people themselves "about their present life and future hopes" (p. 8).

It is stressed that the exhibit is meant to be "comfortable" for the Hopi as well as informative for the American public. Certainly Hopi involvement with the production of the exhibit and catalog is apparent and, indeed, essential in an undertaking which challenges us to "reset our thinking about another culture" (p. 9). It is perhaps for this reason that Hopi words, differentiated from English by italics, are used frequently in the text and are accompanied by a key to their correct pronunciation in the Hopi language. This linguistic information is supplemented by the Hopi alphabet, again with a key to pronunciation, provided by Emory Sekaquaptewa.

Following the introduction are seven excellent articles which provide supplementary information on various aspects of Hopi life. Accompanying these articles is a series of documentary photographs, the high point of the book's "visual representation of Hopi life." In the wide margins of the text are relevant quotations from books by and about Hopis which complement the text and photographs.

The first article, "The Prehistoric and Historic Occupation of the Hopi Mesas" by E. Charles Adams and Deborah Hull, is a nicely synthesized chronological treatment of subject matter which "is as yet incompletely understood" (p. 11). Included are a brief introduction to archeological investigations at Hopi; a discussion of change in artistic expression (especially for ceramics) as a reflection of change in world view; an evaluation of archeological evidence which traces influence from neighboring Native American groups, particularly on forms of material culture and ceremonial life; and a conclusion which briefly details culture change and continuity in Hopi life.

Watson Smith's article, "Mural Decorations from Ancient Hopi Kivas," is a particularly enlightening description of the process of conservation of mural paintings. Since such paintings were covered over with plaster at the conclusion of a particular ceremonial so that the wall could be newly painted for the next ceremony, the archeologist is confronted with the delicate task of uncovering the paintings layer by layer. Especially significant is Smith's location of this material within its cultural context as he interprets several of these murals in light of modern Hopi ceremonies.

In "Kachina: Window to the Hopi World," Dorothy Washburn recounts the Hopi origin myth (the one given
"according to most accounts") and then discusses the ways in which, in symbolic terms, every ceremonial is a reenactment of this origin myth. In exploring the symbolism of the ceremonial costumes, Washburn concludes that the kachinas "literally wear their world" (p. 41). She gives an informative overview of the ceremonial cycle of kachina dances, emphasizing the uniquely Hopi "asymmetric relationship between the celebration of an event and the actual occurrence of an event" (p. 43).

The article is concluded by a brief discussion of secular aspects of Hopi life and a statement that underscores the central theme of this book and the exhibit — that "the Hopi continue to rely ultimately not on modern technology, but on the power of the kachina" (p. 49).

"Hopi Social Organization" by John Connelly begins with a view of the "Hopi way" as one of balance and harmony with the physical environment. It is suggested that the "persistent now" of Hopi language and world view and the extreme importance of individual responsibility within the community are components of this harmony. Connelly continues with a discussion of Hopi place names, giving their English translations and aptly pointing out that the Hopi occupied places of residency and acquired farmlands "in return for commitments of responsibility" (p. 52). The article's subsections — "communities and community clusters," "clans and phratries," "households and lineages," "societies," and "tribal council" — provide a sketch of Hopi social and ceremonial organization, emphasizing in particular the complementary processes of separation and integration as strategies for maintaining harmony in a harsh environment (p. 63).

Clara Lee Tanner and John F. Tanner discuss "Contemporary Hopi Crafts: Basketry, Textiles, Pottery, Kachinas" within a historical framework, including a description of change in form and style through time. For each of the above-mentioned items of material culture the authors discuss basic form, function, technique of construction, and use of design and color. Of special interest is a brief mention of what constitutes a good basket in the eyes of the Hopi. The emphasis of the article is on process: how things are made and used and who makes them. The latter is particularly important because the production of certain items is restricted by male and female roles. The impact of acculturation on traditional crafts is also discussed.

The final article, "Modern Hopi Painting" by J. J. Brody, is a discussion of the development of painting, from its limited use on kiva walls, altars, and domestic artifacts prior to 1900 to its modern role as "painting for its own sake" (p. 87) which developed only with radical changes in the entire Hopi way of life. Brody includes a treatment of changes in style and form in modern painting and delineates ways in which economic factors and acculturation contribute to such change. The work of several individual Hopi artists is described in some detail and photographs of their work are included.

Following the articles is a series of vivid color photographs of kachina dolls and also of several modern paintings of kachinas. A brief identification is included with each photograph. The accompanying "Catalogue of the Exhibition" is made up of black-and-white photographs of kachina dolls, rattles, jewelry, dance sashes, moccasins, pottery, kiva murals, baskets, and a bridal costume. Included for each photograph is an identification of the artifact, a description of the materials used in its construction, its height in centimeters, and the name of the loaning museum. The artifacts are arranged within the following categories (subdivisions of the catalogue): kachinas, kiva murals, Soyo, Powamu, gifts, farming, clowns, spring and summer kachina dances, Niman, and Hopi bridal costume. Despite this arrangement, the items in the catalog appear as artifacts out of context; of note is the lack of any description here of the ceremonies in which particular kachinas appear or any discussion of specific roles of certain kachinas. Such information is available in the anthropological literature about the Hopi and may even have been included in the exhibit, however, its absence from the catalog is surprising. The volume concludes with a listing of the Hopi alphabet, key to pronunciation, small glossary, and a fairly substantial bibliography.

In summary, this book is commendable for its interdisciplinary articles and documentary photographs which provide a mosaic of approaches to the book's central focus, an introduction to the Hopi world. Some of the material included in the book provides supplementary information for the exhibit, but takes on a somewhat fractional aspect when it stands alone. The publication of such a book in 1980 is significant, for this is the year of the Pueblo Tri-Centennial, commemorating the Pueblo Revolt of 1680—a stand for freedom from Spanish domination.

Reviewed by Howard S. Becker
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For well over 100 years, some residents of Washington, D.C., have lived in alleys. The houses in alleys do not face on main streets, but rather onto the inside of larger blocks, some running through to the street directly, others (“blind alleys,” literally) ending in courts and cul-de-sacs. Until recently, when they became fashionable, alley houses were essentially small slums built into higher-class blocks. The pattern developed before public transportation made it feasible to segregate the population by class and race so that the well-to-do could live away from their work and servants could live away from the homes of their employers. Washington’s alleys housed mainly rural migrants, at first European immigrants, as well as black slaves, and in the end almost entirely free blacks from the rural South.

From the beginning the alleys had a terrible reputation as places in which disorganized migrants lived dissolute lives of vice and crime, places even the police feared. They shared this reputation, of course, with the more totally segregated (both racially and economically) slums that replaced them as transportation systems grew. Both kinds of areas gave substance to and evidence for large-scale theories about the disorganizing effect of urban life. Though alleys and segregated slums were very similar, alleys were distinctive in one interesting way that had been pointed out by Engels in The Condition of the Working Class in England: because they were inside of larger blocks, they were not visible to middle- and upper-class people who lived nearby and walked by them daily, the upper classes could live close by and yet not know how the poor lived.

Social historians have been interested for some time in a question that is, because of the difficulty of finding adequate sources, hard to answer: what was the real character of social life in these hidden and segregated slums? Was it really disorganized and vicious? Did people lose all the ways that had served to organize collective life where they had come from when they migrated to the big city? Or did they bring with them customs, traditions, and patterns of collective action that made these segregated quarters more wholesome places to live than they appear to have been?
Some of the terms in such a discussion are inherently ambiguous. How many families need to be one-parent before we can say that the alleys lacked the nuclear family? How much junk has to be strewn about the backyard before we can say that it is “disorderly” as opposed to a place in which people, for instance, store materials they have scavenged until they can get a good price? Is a sparsely furnished shack evidence of terrible living conditions or of the way people have made a tasteful accommodation to poverty?

Many such questions can be turned into factual questions about what people actually did, what their homes and yards actually looked like, who actually lived in those buildings. To answer such questions, however, requires data that are hard to come by. Slum residents do not produce neat archives of letters, diaries, portraits, and the like out of which the answers can be fashioned. James Borchert has done a heroic job of combining a multitude of fugitive sources to give at least some preliminary answers.

He has, for instance, turned up a number of surveys and observational studies of alley life, with which he fleshes out more general and sketchy findings gleaned from census records, city directories, case records of social agencies, and the like. Most importantly for readers of this journal, he discovered and copied over 700 photographs of alley life, made at a variety of times by an equally various group of photographers: journalists, reformers, and members of the famed F.S.A. group were the most prominent. He lists the places one might find such visual data—in the archives of government agencies and newspapers as well as in published reports—and gives an extensive review of the literature on “photocanalysis,” both of which will be useful to others who want to use such materials.

How does Borchert use the photographic data he assembled? For one thing, he answers questions, on a factual basis, about matters that were taken as too obvious to need proof in earlier reformist accounts of alley life. Writers who described alleys as disorganized and dangerous places implied, without actually stating it, that there was no common space freely available to all inhabitants for purposes of sociability. But a number of photographs show people sitting on their alley stoops socializing, resting, playing games, and promenading. That such activities did go on shows that the earlier description is factually incorrect.

Similarly, reformist researchers described alley flats as filthy and untidy. The pictures Borchert reproduces reveal rooms that are poor and bare but that also show clear evidence of some attempt to make the best of circumstances: ingenious uses of space and equipment, efforts at decoration, the use of such middle-class home furnishings as tablecloths and curtains. (This analysis, in fact, reveals an ambivalence of Borchert’s. On one hand, he wants to show that alley dwellers might not have lived up to middle-class standards of propriety but had their own standards, developed in response to the conditions of their lives—a relativistic view of the proprieties. On the other hand, he takes every opportunity to show that alley dwellers really did live up to those middle-class standards.)

In addition to demonstrating that earlier descriptions were wrong, Borchert provides a systematic reading of his 700 photographs under a large number of rubrics. He uses them to assess the character of the typical alley house, the makeup of family groups and neighborhood patterns of interaction (e.g., windows and doors on the street frequently appear open and with heads sticking out of them, supporting the interpretation that the house and the outdoors ran into one another in a characteristic way).

Overall, the photographic analysis is very convincing. Although individual interpretations sometimes appear farfetched, the mass of pictures makes you see as important things your eye had skipped over before. You notice, in a picture of some older black men (whose illness prevents them from working) sitting on a stoop in an alley, that they are in fact watching over some small children playing nearby; thus the demographic makeup of alleys made it untrue that children ran wild, unsupervised by responsible adults. Having seen that, you begin to notice the unremarked presence of similarly watchful adults in other photographs, as you notice the attempts at household decoration in interiors pointed out elsewhere.

Taken together with the other materials, Borchert uses the photographs to argue that black residents of the alleys, far from being disorganized migrants, had viable communities, relatively stable families, and a web of tradition and custom that helped them make lives for themselves: “Despite intolerable conditions, then, alley residents were able to shape and control their own lives within the economic, social, and political limits imposed by the dominant white society.” He further uses comparative materials on other cities with similar housing patterns—alleys turn out to be quite common in the U.S. and elsewhere—to show that his findings can be generalized.

Borchert’s argument is interesting and his assessment of the evidence judicious. In the end, his thesis, peppered with such expressions as “it is probable that” and “we may infer that,” is not as compelling as he would like it to be. Yet the final result, bringing together so many kinds of evidence, somehow adds up to more. I came away from the book knowing more than I had about a topic I had been made to see was of considerable importance.

Reviewed by Paul Messaris
University of Pennsylvania

A considerable amount of theory and some research about movies and television have borrowed ideas from linguistics. Among them is the well-known notion, usually associated with Whorf, that the thought processes of habitual users of a particular language are shaped by the way in which the vocabulary and syntax of that language carve up and organize experience. Many writers have speculated about the possibility that an analogous process may characterize the relationship between visual (and other) media and their users. Some of Marshall McLuhan’s ideas were probably the most prominent academic variants of this kind of hypothesis, but a notion of this sort is also present in the widespread public assumption that the disjunctive editing patterns of American commercial television have lowered attention spans and otherwise degraded the capacity for coherent thought among children brought up with the medium. A test of part of this assumption is one of the many interesting details in Gavriel Salomon’s comprehensive exploration of this general approach to visual media. Unlike much previous writing which has flirted with this approach, Salomon’s book is marvelously systematic and precise, both in its theoretical sections and in the empirical work which flows from them. The book is a model of how experiment and theory are supposed to complement each other, and for this reason, in addition to the importance of its subject, it will be of great value to any reader with a disciplined interest in visual communication.

Salomon addresses himself most directly to people doing research on uses of media for educational/instructional purposes. He argues that most of this research is insufficiently grounded in a general theory that would predict which aspects of media should affect learning, what kinds of conditions should facilitate or inhibit these effects, and what kinds of learning should occur given a particular set of conditions. His own work, as represented in this book, is based on the notion that the critical feature of any medium is the particular symbol system to which its technology gives rise. In other words, what counts, with respect to the use of a medium for education/instruction, is the particular set of syntactic and semantic codes that characterize the messages of any particular medium. The nature of these codes, in turn, should serve as an indicator of the conditions influencing a medium’s effectiveness as a learning resource. These are, according to Salomon, (a) the learner’s initial level of skill with codes of this kind and (b) the appropriateness of these codes to the cognitive task at hand. Finally, this concern with codes leads Salomon to a distinction between two kinds of learning: on the one hand, the acquisition of code-independent knowledge about various features of the environment; and, on the other, the cultivation of code-specific cognitive skills with which to operate upon the environment. (Here and elsewhere, Salomon draws heavily on the work of Goodman, Olson, and Gardner.) The degree to which either kind of learning occurs through a particular medium should depend on the interaction between its symbol system, the nature of the task, and the viewer’s aptitude.

These points—and the many complications and elaborations through which Salomon weaves them into the theoretical armature of his work—are tested through a series of experiments and field studies. The bulk of these are concerned with the second kind of learning distinguished above, that is, with the acquisition of cognitive skills through the use of a medium characterized by a particular symbol system. The two media of most concern to Salomon in his investigation of this Whorf-like problem are television and film. An example of this empirical side of Salomon’s work is an experiment testing the effects of three different kinds of visual “syntax”: the alternation, through zooming in and out, between long shot and selected close-ups; direct cutting back and forth between long shot and close-ups; or one continuous long shot. The particular cognitive skill of concern to this experiment was the ability to record detail in a complex visual field (“cue-attendance”). Subjects were pretested on this skill and were then trained in one of three ways: (a) through the use of films which zoomed in and out of details in a single painting, while the subjects recorded what they saw; (b) through slide sequences that had the effect of cutting back and forth between various close-ups and the painting in full view, while once again the subjects recorded detail; and (c) through single slides of the whole painting without any close-ups but with the same task on the part of the subjects. Posttests revealed an interesting interaction between one’s initial level of skill and the kind of training one received. Subjects with low initial scores profitted more from the film with the zoom-ins and zoom-outs. Subjects with high initial scores, however, profitted more from the single, uninterrupted slide showings. Salomon argues that in the first case the film is providing viewers with an explicit model of the desired information-processing operations, which less-skilled viewers can easily assimilate. Subjects who were already skilled, on the other hand, had much less to learn from this condition but did experience an increase in skill through the challenge of the version in which no overt model was provided. In other words, as Salomon’s theory had predicted, the cultivation of cognitive skills through the use of a particular kind of syntax depends on the user’s initial position with regard to these skills.
Although in this and other related experiments Salomon has generated impressive evidence on the capacity of media syntaxes to influence their users' cognitive patterns, his own theory also predicts that the actual occurrence of such a process outside the experimental situation depends on the nature of users' involvement with various media. To the extent that Salomon's experiments may have generated uncommonly active involvement with each medium's presentational style, these experiments probably exaggerate the degree to which any comparable influence of a medium's syntax on users' thought processes may occur in the course of the more typical—i.e., largely "recreational"—uses of film and television. For this and other obvious reasons, the studies with which Salomon concludes the empirical segments of this book were conducted in more "natural" situations, with less or no manipulation of viewers' media use and with longer time periods over which effects could accumulate. It is in one of these studies that Salomon tests a version of the popular assumption of a relationship between the spasmodic narrative style of most American television and lack of continuity of children's thought processes. His finding, in a long-term experiment in which children watched either "Sesame Street" or nature/adventure films (presumably containing longer narrative threads), was that a steady diet of the former led to reduced perseverance in the performance of routine, repetitive tasks. More generally, however, Salomon's nonexperimental research on the relationship between long-term television-viewing patterns and cognitive skills does not support the notion that "television syntax" affects viewers' cognitive skills in the case of children using the medium primarily as "light entertainment"—i.e., with no motivation to process its messages "in depth."

This last finding can be read in more than one way. Salomon uses it to conclude that, while it can be demonstrated that the symbol system of a medium has the capacity to affect cognitive skills under appropriate circumstances, the ordinary circumstances under which one views television and film are probably not appropriate in that sense. However, this may be a prematurely cautious conclusion. While the specific cognitive skills that Salomon tested in his latter set of studies may not have been affected by habitual television viewing, it would seem reasonable to assume that there may be other, as yet untested, skills for which effects could have been found. In fact, it is not at all clear—to this reviewer, at least—why the particular battery of skill tests used in these latter studies were the most appropriate measures of the kinds of skills we would expect to be cultivated by watching television. Furthermore, it is not even clear what cognitive skills one should in fact expect to be cultivatable by the medium. In Salomon's earlier, experimental work, the syntactic properties of the media used were tightly controlled, and the measured skills were closely matched to these syntactic properties. No corresponding tight-
It looks like a coffee-table book—large, glossy format, illustrations on almost every page. And do our eyes deceive us? Yes, they do. Straight lines appear distorted, regions of the same lightness and color look different, edges appear where there are none printed. Spectacles are provided, one lens a red filter, the other a green filter, and with the aid of these, patterns appear in depth.

These include a marvelous three-dimensional spiral which rises up out of the page from what had been only a random texture of red and green dots. The book also includes reproductions of some of Escher’s impossible landscapes and the work of other artists who have explored the limits of ambiguity in pictorial representation. There are numerous diagrams of neural networks and photomicrographs of bits of the brains of various animals. All these figures, diagrams, photographs, and pictures have been conceived and layed out with great care, making a book which is thought-provoking before we even read a word.

Frisby has a lot to add to the visual message. The illusions and diagrams are organized to present a particular view of how seeing comes about. Perception is held to consist of a series of operations or “strategies” by which the incoming visual information is handled. Illusions are important because they are “misapplications of perceptual strategies”; they give us a glimpse through the phenomenologically immediate and smooth fabric of perception at the machinery which creates the fine surface. In other words, our visual systems perform so well and with so little effort that only by means of tricks and special effects can we believe that complex processes are involved.

Illusions are used to illustrate a series of lessons about vision. The first is a stern warning against the naïve, simplistic notion that seeing is the creation of a picture of the world in the head. Frisby uses illusions to argue against this view; if what we see is so often distorted, then vision cannot be simply a direct copy. He uses the Escher waterfall as an example, arguing that since we perceive something that is impossible, our perceptual mechanisms must be capable of false descriptions, not merely incomplete ones. Of course, nobody really believes in pictures in the head, but Frisby is using the idea as part of a rhetorical device to set up, by contrast, his own conception of how perception works.

There is a long tradition in psychology for using elaborate metaphors to elucidate the human mind. Freud used a short hydrodynamic model based on the idea of libido as a fluid quantity. Donders treated us as telegraph wires. The Gestalt psychologists suggested that we have analogs of magnetic force fields in our heads. None of these devices has been as rich and fruitful as the comparison of the human mind to the structure of a computer or to the structure of a computer program. But Frisby does not take the computer as a metaphor for mind; rather he suggests that the human being is a form of computer, albeit one of great sophistication. The computer is fed with data in the form of symbols which it then manipulates in its electronics circuits to produce output, also in the form of symbols. The human visual mechanism is also thought of as receiving data, only it is in the form of the structure of light entering the eye. This light contains information about the environment. Once in the eye, this structured light is converted by receptors in the retina into symbols carried by electrical impulses through the nerve cells. The output is the percept.

Central to this view of the mind is a semiotic device. The human visual mechanism is understood to be building up a symbolic description of the environment. According to Frisby, the electrical impulses in the retina resulting from the transduction of the incoming light are symbols. These are not symbols of the kind used in communication, words, pictures, etc. Nor are they symbols in that they are labels for concepts. These are symbols in the sense that a certain neural activity correlates with a certain physical stimulus. Insofar as the relationship is correlational and not denotational, many semioticians would call these “signs,” not “symbols.” However, as this was always a tricky distinction and the results of Frisby’s analysis are interesting, perhaps the point is not worth laboring. The important idea is that if a model of vision, or any other psychological activity, can be simulated on a computing machine, no one can accuse the model of not accounting for the phenomenon. The device forces the theorist to be explicit and precise.

Throughout the book, it is assumed that all human beings see in the same way. In many cases, it is assumed that most vertebrates see in the same way, and much of the evidence is derived from neurophysiological studies of animals such as cats and monkeys. One could not, therefore, use this work as a basis for an analysis of the way in which different cultures use visual symbols, or for any high-level analysis of what constitutes the content of perception. One might be able to use it to compare the wiring of different species. This is only to point out that the analysis is not aimed at revealing our higher faculties, but rather is intended to be a description of the basic grammar of seeing. As such, it is an insightful composite of much that is exciting in current vision research.

Seeing is considered to be a series of mathematical transformations of incoming data. These transformations are described on three levels. First, there is a description...
of the mathematics itself. Frisby explains how it is possible for features consisting of bars, edges, and corners to be extracted from two-dimensional patterns. Second, there is a description of "the visual machinery of the brain." This consists mostly of evidence gained from studies of cats and monkeys who had tiny electrodes inserted into their brains while patterns were flashed in front of their eyes. These studies revealed that in certain areas of the brain, nerve cells seem to be behaving like feature detectors, responding selectively to bars, edges, and the like. The third strand of the argument comes from studies with humans. These usually involve having people stare at patterns for long periods of time after which other patterns look different. For example, wider stripes will appear to be even wider to a subject after he or she has stared at narrow stripes. Such effects are usually interpreted as being due to fatigue of cells in the human brain similar to those found in the cat or monkey brains. This completes the link between the computer, the cat and monkey, and the human.

With this three-pronged approach Frisby often achieves a fine synthesis of current ideas in psychophysics, computer artificial intelligence, and neurophysiology. It is not unusual to blend ideas from these separate disciplines; indeed the disciplines themselves are constantly borrowing from one another, and they have a pool of ideas in common. However, it is certainly an achievement to have made the blend so readable.

Unfortunately, in the chapter on lightness and brightness the approach fails. There is a problem that puzzles vision researchers which can be stated in the form of the following question: "Why does soot look black even in sunlight, when it may be reflecting more light to the eye than snow in an adjacent shadow?" Frisby claims to have the solution. He suggests that the edges, where the light distribution changes gradually, are interpreted as changes in illumination, and this can then be discounted when we calculate the lightness of a surface. He gives shadows as an example of light changing gradually. Abrupt changes in the light entering the eye are to be interpreted as changes in surface lightness. According to this formula the brain has to do to judge the relative lightness of a surface is to discount diffuse edges and take sharp edges into account.

There are numerous situations for which the theory does not work. Consider the corner of a concrete building, one wall of which has the sun shining on it. At this corner there is an abrupt change in illumination, yet there is no change in surface lightness. According to Frisby's view we should see one wall as black and one as white. Of course, we do not; we see both walls as the same gray, and we see that one wall is illuminated by bright sunlight. With respect to shadows, even though they have fuzzy edges, their images on the retina may be sharp, if they are viewed from a distance. Thus, the shadow of a large object, say a tree trunk, will project a sharp edge to the back of the eye when viewed from a distance of a few yards. Clearly, in order to distinguish illumination from surface lightness, we need to do more than just sort out the sharp and fuzzy edges. We have to know about the spatial arrangements of things before we can figure out what parts of the environment are better illuminated; only then can we discount the illumination in arriving at a judgment of surface lightness.

Overall, the book works much better at explaining the illusions which illustrate its pages than in explaining the appearance of objects in the environment, or in saying anything that would be relevant to the student of human culture. Frisby does not use his levels-of-description approach to attempt analysis at high levels. There is little here to tell us how we recognize a friend or appreciate a dance. This narrowness of scope is due to the reliance on neurophysiology and computer models for explanations. These models tell us about organization into visual features, but beyond that neurophysiology tells us nothing; and the computer models, for the most part, rely on findings two generations old by the Gestalt psychologists.

Of course, it is not fair to criticize Frisby for the fact that scientists have not solved all the mysteries of perception, and there is enough current excitement in the areas of neurophysiology and artificial intelligence to warrant a number of books of this kind. Frisby has written a lively, entertaining introduction to these areas. However, the grand scope of the semiotic design which he lays before us at the beginning of the book leads us to expect more. There is a lot known about aspects of perception such as form perception, visual symbols (as they are used in communication), composition in the graphic arts, and space in architecture. The levels-of-description idea would be well suited to dealing with these areas while it is unnecessarily powerful to deal with feature detectors. It is as though, in his enthusiasm about the area of computer artificial intelligence, Frisby had decided to limit his understanding of human vision to what can be programmed into a computer. Indeed, it often seems as though he is more interested in how computers can see than in how people can see, and at the end, while pushing the point that man is a machine, he flips it around and argues that machines can be sentient creatures. The following words are drawn from his concluding paragraph:

...as the pursuit of artificial intelligence proceeds, I am sure we will have to adjust our notions about the nature of man, just as the Victorians had to adjust theirs in the fact of Darwin's theory of evolution. "Man is an animal? Rubbish!" was the irrational, all too common, but also very understandable, reaction to Darwin's ideas. Today the parallel response is: "Man is a machine? Ridiculous!" quickly followed by remarks revealing some sadly ignorant myths—"Machines can't think." "Computers are no more than large, electronic arithmetic calculators." "Machines do only what they are told to do," and so on. Machines are simply not necessarily like that, certainly not present-day sophisticated computers, but this fact is not widely recognized.
Either one is left gasping and horrified by this vision of a new conceptual revolution brought about by computers, in which case the conceptual framework of the book will also be unacceptable—it would be best to leave it on the coffee table to glance through and look at the pictures; or one may be excited and exhilarated by the technological revolution, in which case one may enjoy looking at human vision through the eyes, as it were, of a computer.


Reviewed by Joseph H. Caton
University of Colorado, Boulder

Several years ago, Susan Sontag wrote that "a widely agreed-on" attitude argues that a society can be considered "modern" when "one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images." She went on to assert that within this modern society "the images that have virtually unlimited authority are...mainly photographic images" and that "the scope of this authority stems from the properties peculiar to images taken by the camera" (Sontag 1977:153). She recognized that a modern society communicates largely through visual means, and that an understanding of "the properties peculiar to images taken by the camera" is essential for the understanding of the means of communication within the contemporary world.

It is for this reason that we should welcome two books recently published by David Godine of Boston, both of which represent an attempt to analyze precisely these "properties peculiar to images taken by the camera." Janet Malcolm's Diana and Nikon approaches the issue from the tradition of formalist art criticism; Gisèle Freund's Photography and Society approaches the issue from the tradition of Marxist critical theory. The two books are in a sense complementary, at least to the extent that they represent two of the major approaches to photographic criticism. Both propose certain questions, but Freund's book certainly provides more answers. Perhaps this is because she is not trapped by the dichotomy indicated by the books' titles: that, somehow, the aesthetic aspects of photography should be distinct from the social aspects.

Janet Malcolm's Diana and Nikon is a collection of 11 essays which, with one exception, originally were written for The New Yorker at various times during the past few years. Malcolm is one of the few serious photographic critics working for a major magazine, and as such she has had to make her way into relatively uncharted territory. In these essays, she is certainly searching for the properties peculiar to art photography; she is searching for the identity of the photographic critic as well. It is, however, a very self-conscious quest, and she is candid enough in her preface to admit that in "rereading these essays" she is reminded of "someone trying to cut down a tree who has never done it before, isn't strong, has a dull axe, but is very stubborn" (p. ix). She certainly makes a brave attempt, but unfortunately this particular tree is very large, and one suspects that she is inadvertently using the wrong end of the axe.

Malcolm, like most critics involved with the discussion of the aesthetics of photography, is concerned about the position of the photograph in the world of art vis-à-vis the painting. She distinguishes herself from many less successful writers, however, by the ruthlessness with which she is willing to expose the dependence of certain photographers upon this older and better-established medium. In discussing the work of Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession group at the turn of the century, for example, she unequivocally states that "the most advanced photographers were modelling their work on Symbolist, Impressionist, and Pre-Raphaelite painting" and creating, as a result, "portentous, misty landscapes" and "blurred, symbolic portraits...of sad, gownned women and marmoreal, naked children" (pp. 2-3). And in discussing the work of Edward Weston, Paul Strand, and Man Ray, major figures in the medium 20 years later, she argues that their achievement was largely "to replace the Impressionist, Symbolist, and Pre-Raphaelite models of the Photo-Secession with those of the Cubist, Futurist, Dadaist, Purist, and Surrealist art" (p. 21). Few writers are so willing to devastate the sacred images of any medium.

But the analysis of the relationship between photography and painting that represents one of the strong points of her approach to photographic history paradoxically contributes to her downfall as well. As a historian, she is refreshingly willing to revise the accepted manner of looking at the "classics" of photographic history: many professionals in the field have suspected the strong connection between avant-garde photography and avant-garde painting, but few have been so forthright in their analysis of it. As a critic, however, she has placed herself in an entirely untenable position, as the method of criticism that has most influenced her is one that is inextricably associated with painting. Moreover, it is a method of criticism that developed, at least
to some extent, as a means of coping with the need for painting to define itself vis-à-vis photography.

Malcolm argues in her preface that it is in her ninth essay, "Two Roads, One Destination," that she begins to "untangle" some of photography’s "knottier issues" (p. ix). This statement is an important one, because it is in this essay that she discusses her debt to the two writers, Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, who have been most influential in the formulation of her approach to photographic criticism. Both are closely associated with painting in general and with Abstract Expressionism in particular, and as historical figures both hold unquestioned places in the development of the art of the fifties and the sixties.

She begins her essay by quoting Greenberg’s famous definition of modernism in painting:

The limitations that constitute the medium of painting—the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of pigment—were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Modernist painting has come to regard these same limitations as positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly. Manet’s paintings became the first modernist ones by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the surfaces on which they were painted.

Whereas one tends to see what is in an Old Master before seeing it as a picture, one sees a modernist painting as a picture first. [p.113]

Here, Greenberg has established those qualities which he feels are inherent to painting: the rectangular shape of the canvas, the two-dimensionality of its surface, and the texture of the paint itself. In so doing, he has defined painting’s identity without concern for content and subject matter and, incidentally, has formally distinguished the painting from the photograph.

Malcolm’s essay goes on to refer to an equally seminal statement by Harold Rosenberg, one that emphasizes the particular point in time at which painters began to become fascinated with the very gesture of placing paint on canvas:

The canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze, or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter. [p. 116]

Rosenberg has emphasized the act of painting itself rather than the object produced, and thus, like Greenberg, has defined painting’s identity without concern for subject matter.

The importance of this approach to art criticism is that it provides a means of defining “modernism” in art by analyzing the formal qualities of any one medium. Like the orders in architecture, the sonata form in music, and the meter in English poetry, such formal characteristics can establish the matrix that the artist can work within—or react against. Much of the painting of the fifties and sixties, as a result, can be understood only in the context of a specific painterly tradition that came before it.

The central issue presented by Malcolm’s essays, therefore, is whether it is possible to argue that the modern photograph can be analyzed relative to the tradition of photography in the same way as the modern painting can be seen in relationship to its predecessors. Malcolm attempts to do it; and certainly this search for a formal definition of “modernism” is the unifying theme of an otherwise heterogeneous series of essays.

The problem Malcolm must confront is that the only well-defined tradition in photography is pictorialism, an attitude by which photographs are patterned after the major avant-garde movements in painting. But one of the strong points of her essays is her recognition that such an approach simply means the photograph has been derived from the painting. As there is little in the tradition of “art” photography to which she can turn, she looks instead to the wide body of commercial and amateur photography, arguing that it “seems as if every master photograph strainfully created by an art photography has an equivalent in the unselfconscious vernacular of commercial or news or amateur photography” (p. 64). And it is to this “unselfconscious vernacular” that she turns as a place to find the photograph’s essential nature.

As a result, one of the central themes within Malcolm’s essays is the argument that “photography went modernist not, as has been supposed, when it began to imitate abstract art, but when it began to study snapshots” (p. 113). If Greenberg could point to Manet as the first “modern” painter because of the manner in which he emphasized the two-dimensional surface of his canvas (something previous painters had de-emphasized in favor of illusionistic three-dimensionality), Malcolm points to Robert Frank as the first “modern” photographer, because he “scrupulously shed all the pictorial values of his predecessors.” He shed “composition, design, tonal balance, print quality” and permitted the camera to do “what no art photographer has ever hitherto let it get away with—all the accidents of light, the messy conjunctions of shape, the randomness of framing, the disorderliness of the composition, the arbitrariness of gesture and expression, [and] the blurriness and graininess of the printing.” And she goes on to argue that he thereby “showed photography at its most photographic” (p. 114).
Malcolm follows this same sort of argument in other contexts as well. In her title essay, "Diana and Nikon," she speaks of "the most inartistic (and presumably most purely photographic) form of all—the home snapshot," and discusses its influence on "avant-garde photographers and theorists" who do not see "the endless sprawl of anonymous, commercial, and amateur pictures as a threatening encroachment," but who rather "embrace it as a repository of the revealed truth about photography's proper function and future directions." This allows them, in turn, to replace the "strong design, orderly composition, control over tonal values, lucidity of content, [and] good print quality" of traditional photography with the "formlessness, rawness, clutter, [and] accident" of the snapshot (p. 68). If the serious art photographer of the past might have been inspired by the goddess Diana, the contemporary photographer finds his muse in the Nikon. But the confusion is enormous, a fact that Malcolm recognizes. In referring to "the serious photographer," she writes that "caught between the dead hand of traditional photography and the shaking, fumbling one of the snapshot school, he may well despair" (p. 72). Formalist criticism as applied to photography seems to be able to set a trap for artists and critics alike.

As a means of establishing the identity of the photographic image, the snapshot is undeniably important, and Malcolm is correct in emphasizing its significance. But she goes astray when she assumes that it is "the accidents of light, the messy conjunctions of shape, the randomness of framing," and the "disorderliness of the composition" that are its essential qualities. The snapshot is indeed purely photographic, but not necessarily because of "formlessness, rawness, clutter, [and] accident." Rather, the snapshot takes on its purely photographic characteristics as a means of recording a particular event. It is a visual document, an essential part of birthday celebrations, Christmas parties, and the summer trip to the mountains. Individuals with Instamatics and Nikons capture the object viewed—whether the face of El Capitain in Yosemite or a wedding dress—as a means of keeping it for the future. Actions are caught in a moment of time, frozen, and preserved. The "accidents of framing" and "the messy conjunctions of shape" are a byproduct, not an essential ingredient. If one is trying to define the essential nature of the snapshot, at some point one has to recognize that it is above all a means of recording and transmitting information on a visual basis. Unfortunately, Malcolm, with her predilection for formalist criticism, does not take this fact into account.

It is fortunate, therefore, that the translation of Gisèle Freund's Photography and Society into English has been published at the same time as Malcolm's book. She and Malcolm differ widely in their approach to the subject: whereas Malcolm looks for the essential nature of photography in terms of certain formal characteristics of the snapshot, Freund analyzes the photograph as a means of transmitting, and indeed controlling, information. For her, the processes and mechanisms of photography, as the very title of her book makes clear, are inextricably associated with the society in which they are produced. She begins her book, in fact, with the statement that forms the basis of her approach to all aspects of visual communication: "Photography is a concrete example of how artistic expression and social forms continually influence and reshape one another" (p. vii).

Photography and Society grew out of Freund's doctoral dissertation that was written at the Sorbonne during the thirties. It was, as she has observed, "the first thesis ever presented" (p. vii) on the subject of photographic history; but it has lost none of its relevance in the intervening years. The first section analyzes the history of nineteenth-century photography; it emphasizes not the isolated photographer as "artist" but rather the photographer who has a close association with the changing society that was emerging from the impact of industrialism. Nineteenth-century photography, as Freund explains, "was the child of advances in science and the rising classes [bourgeois] need for a new form of artistic expression" (p. 69). The second section, an addition to her dissertation, concentrates on photography in the twentieth century; here she emphasizes not photography as personal expression, but rather photography as a means of transmitting information to the largest possible segment of the population. "The invention of photography," as she points out, "marks the starting point of the mass media, which play an all-powerful role as a means of communication" (p. 217). Throughout both sections, her central thesis, as a result, is that one must be made entirely aware that photography "has become the most common language of our civilization" (p. 218). And associated with that central thesis is an essential question: if photography is a major means of communication, who determines the information that is communicated?

It is in this context that Freund's own experience comes to the forefront. She is a practicing photographer, and is intimately aware of the importance of the specific information that is transmitted in a photograph. And, as she was a refugee from Nazi Germany, she is also aware of the damage that can be done when visual communications are controlled by a totalitarian regime. In regard to both political and commercial concerns, she is speaking from experience when she writes that "photography's tremendous power of persuasion in addressing the emotions is consciously exploited by those who use it as a means of manipulation" (p. 216). Freund is a vibrant social critic, and much of her book exposes precisely the brutality of those individuals and organizations using photography as a means of social manipulation. Even her chapter titles indicate this concern, as they run the gamut from "Photography as a Political Tool" to "The Scandal-Mongering Press."
Freund is not at all concerned with the formal approach to photography that intrigues Janet Malcolm; rather, she sees herself as an objective observer of her society, in terms of both written and visual analysis. She is in the best sense of the word an "intellectual," in that she has developed an all-encompassing perspective of her own society and of the forces that dominate it. As a result, rather than being attracted to writers who take a formal approach to art, such as Greenberg and Rosenberg, she is influenced by writers associated with the Frankfurt School, such as Walter Benjamin (himself a refugee from National Socialism), as well as by thinkers associated with the early years of sociology, such as Karl Mannheim. She footnotes Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, in fact, when she writes that intellectuals have always had both a role to perform in history and a special function in their own society. Separated by knowledge and culture, they can understand their relative historical position and choose their own course in life accordingly. They can have a more open view of the world, a vision not available to other groups of society restricted by political and social status. [p. 21]

Freund quite clearly identifies with this idea, and both her writings and her photographs follow this objective approach to social evaluation. In fact, if Mannheim's body of work can be described, as it often is, as the "sociology of knowledge," Freund's book can be best understood as the sociology of knowledge transmitted on a visual basis. The photograph is a powerful means of communication and is naturally affected by, and has an effect on, the society in which it is produced. Her book is the best available analysis of this fact; in fact, in France and Germany it has already achieved the distinction of being a "classic." It could easily be used as a textbook for a course on the sociology of visual communication. 

*Photography and Society* does, however, have its drawbacks: as an analysis of the place of photography within the larger social context, it leaves very little room for the analysis of photography as artistic expression, and almost no place at all for an investigation of the concept of an avant-garde. While Freund is willing to argue that photography "provides a means of expression for millions of amateurs" [p. 200], she finds it fundamentally unnecessary to discuss the role of the photograph within the world's museums and cultural institutions. Are we to assume that art photography has become so concerned with formalism that it has no relationship to society? This attitude might be justified if one has read nothing except *Diana and Nikon*, but, in reality, there are large segments of photographic history that are closely associated with both artistic and social concerns. Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitzky were intimately involved with revolutionary ideas in Russia during the twenties; Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange

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**Reference**

- Sontag, Susan  
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Front Cover: Nos. 248, 249. GRAND CAÑON (1871), looking down from over the Lower Falls, west side. 7 x 9½ inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 28. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 86.)