

PRESS & TELEVISION

adequate consideration of the public interest. (Clay Felker, owner of the *Village Voice*, which printed the "secret" House committee report obtained by Schorr, admitted that he decided to publish the report without really reading it.) In response to official abuses of power which resulted in a self-aggrandizing "imperial presidency," professional journalists seem to be creating an "imperial press" which is sometimes guilty of the same kinds of excesses that newsmen have been trying to expose.

Political News As TV Drama

"Captives of Melodrama" by Paul H. Weaver, in *The New York Times Magazine* (Aug. 29, 1976), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Television news is "not primarily information but narrative . . . governed not by a political bias but by a melodramatic one," observes Weaver, a *Fortune* editor and former Harvard assistant professor of government. Analyzing nightly news coverage of the 1976 presidential primaries by ABC, CBS, and NBC, he finds the contenders depicted as actors in a gripping drama, starting in the snows of New Hampshire.

Carter, Weaver argues, was "lucky enough and clever enough" to benefit from TV's own biases. The Georgian put his big effort into the early primaries, won them, and thereby was established on TV as "front-runner"—despite later losses. In running "against Washington," Carter was in fact also running against an image that TV, with its simplistic news treatment of government, helps perpetuate. And, because TV likes a candidate who can be portrayed as having been raised out of obscurity by the people, Carter emerged the "good guy."

The problem, Weaver contends, is that TV's biases in coverage constantly intervene between the candidates and the voters, diminishing the voters' ability to choose on the basis of their own perceptions.

The Nature of News

"Novelty Without Change" by E. Barbara Phillips, in *Journal of Communication* (Autumn 1976), P.O. Box 13358, Philadelphia, Pa. 19101.

The nature of daily journalism, with its emphasis on "the concrete, the particular, and the individual," inhibits the development of broad insights into changing American realities, says Phillips, a former journalist now teaching sociology and urban studies at San Francisco State.

After working 13 months at two radio stations, one television affiliate, and a daily newspaper, Phillips interviewed newsmen working in large northeastern cities and surveyed 165 reporters, editors, and producers from various backgrounds. She concludes that newsmen share certain mental habits and a special perspective on social reality which is

PRESS & TELEVISION

dominated by "people," not abstract structures or unseen social forces.

These shared mental habits are linked to the conventions of journalistic writing, constraints of time and space, and an intellectual approach that cuts up reality into bits called "news items" but refuses to fit the pieces into a conceptual framework. "Making connections between events is disallowed by the journalistic format," says Phillips. "Possible links between items, say, one story concerning a 'racial disturbance' and another on high unemployment among black youth, are not suggested." Stories that deal with abstract concepts or developing situations are considered boring. The result is a media mosaic that does not add up to a coherent overview.

Television on the Psychiatric Ward

"Television in the Hospital: Programming Patients' Delusions" by Harriet Wadeson, A.T.R., and William T. Carpenter, Jr., M.D., in *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (July 1976), 49 Sheridan Ave., Albany, N.Y. 12210.

A study of drawings and other art work by acute schizophrenic patients reveals a marked impact of television on delusion-formation, according to Dr. Carpenter, of New York's Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and Wadeson, an art therapist. Their observations were based on clinical and research experience with 55 schizophrenics hospitalized at a National Institute of Mental Health research unit. Provided with drawing materials and encouraged to express themselves, 16 of the 55 (29 per cent) spontaneously depicted delusions associated with programs seen on television. In some instances, these patients' delusions were influenced by other electronic media as well, such as radio and recordings.

One patient watched a program involving a theft and became convinced that a hospital aide, a female patient, and he himself had committed a crime. Another patient was affected by sensational news events to the point of being certain she was one of whatever victimized mass she had just seen. Most of the patients drew pictures revealing that they believed the television programs were transmitted to send them particular messages. In one patient, however, the paranoia had become so pervasive that she believed she was on camera while undressing and that TV commercials displayed prizes for a numbers racket run by the hospital staff.

The authors advocate further investigation of this phenomenon, especially since so many patients chose to weave televised material into their art when it was neither alluded to nor requested. "It is unwarranted to assert that viewing television has a causative relationship to psychosis generally, or to delusion-formation specifically," they say, "but there is a reason to question the wisdom of confined patients spending many hours watching television."