

Independents

Smashing Myths About the Information Industry

by Amos Vogel

Few films or videotapes exist which investigate the powerful nature of the print media upon an impressionable public. Have we forgotten that publishers grind their own axes of interest, focussing on or foreclosing information, accordingly? And if not, why do we automatically ingest what the local paper tells us each morning along with our bacon and eggs?

Over the past year, film/videomaker DeeDee Halleck and several collaborators have produced a series of videotapes shown on public access cable and designed to rectify this situation. Titled *Newspaper Tiger Television Production: Smashing Myths About the Information Industry*, the series examines the political, economic and cultural control the print media exert and the extent to which that control manifests itself in the ordinary presentation of information.

Halleck & Co. have chosen an exhilarating, original format: in each half-hour segment, a prominent scholar, artist or critic reads one issue of a particular publication. Then he or she tears it apart...

Participants include author Stewart Ewen (*Captains of Industry*) reading *The New York Post*; the University of California's Herbert Schiller (*The Mind Managers, Who Knows: Information in the Age of the Fortune 500*) reading *The New York Times*; former Warhol star Viva reading *Parent* magazine; *Village Voice* columnist Alexander Cockburn reading *The Washington Post*; writer and peace activist Grace Paley (*The Little Disturbances of Man*) reading *The Scientific American*; sociologist and ex-Allende adviser Ariel Dorfman (*How To Read Donald Duck*) reading a *Marvel* comic; NYU Cinema Department Chairman Brian Winston reading *TV Guide*; anarchist philosopher Murray Bookchin (*The Ecology of Freedom*) reading *Time*; Chicago TV producer Tom Weinberg reading *The Wall Street Journal*; and Hampshire College professor and feminist Nestra King reading *Seventeen* magazine.

Halleck has deliberately given these tapes spartan production values in order to maximize their content: the "reader" is posed against a cardboard "living room" backdrop or a subway set, the floor manager often appears in the picture, someone points to handwritten titles on cards. Even the credits boast of their miniscule budgets: "This show cost only \$139: \$85 for the studio, \$12 for the videotape and its processing, \$22 for the subway set, \$20 for the title

In addition, its board of directors is dominated by representatives of the largest banking interests in the country, several members of the Trilateral Commission, and four members of the Sulzberger family, who own 38% of *New York Times* shares. Schiller culls from a balance sheet and shareholders report that 51% of the *Times'* readership owns shares of stock (5% own over \$25 million worth); a reader profile reveals that 36% consider themselves "amicable," and 46% feel



Herbert Schiller deriding a myth.

cards, and Labor and Guts at no charge."

Each program provides its viewer with detailed information on the corporate structure, reader profile and other basic facts taken from the annual reports of the publication in question. The six *New York Times* tapes are a case in point: Professor Schiller immediately notes that the *Times* also owns WQXR, cable stations, Times Books, Arno Press and numerous other corporations, making it a virtual mass communications empire.

"broadminded."

Schiller concludes that the *Times*, in lieu of a government broadcasting system or newspaper, the *Times*, as the most powerful media conglomerate in the nation, determines "all the news that's fit to print" and thus legitimizes the nature and content of our national agenda.

Perusing one issue of the paper, Schiller analyzes—on a separate tape for each subject—the role and content of the

Times' News, Sunday Magazine, Travel, Book, and Week In Review sections, and its international, Washington, and metropolitan New York coverage. Schiller's concentration on specific sections of the publication forcefully illuminates the subjectivity and narrowness of the news presented, its "trivialization, minimization and diversion" and the shocking dominance of advertisements over copy (often 80% of the page).

At four lbs. and 700 pages (75% of it advertising), the Sunday *Times* reflects the *New York Times'* tradition of catering to "a society which lives and runs on waste." Running about 170 pages, the equivalent length of a paperback novel, the Sunday Magazine legitimizes its subject matter just by printing it and thereby sets national, cultural, and social standards. Schiller argues that advertisers and advertisements determine which publishers, books will be noted and reviewed; and average issue of the Book Review contains about twenty full reviews (or 1,000 per year) while 80,000 books are published annually. Thus Schiller's conclusion, that the *Times* serves as a crucial "control" medium, a gatekeeper that opens doors to a few and keeps them closed to approximately 98% of the rest, appears justified.

Schiller also comments on the extremely deficient coverage of international news, limited primarily to riots, war, coups, or "human interest" items. After months of silence, Brazil, a country with 100 million inhabitants and resources larger than the USA, is suddenly "covered" by a lengthy report on a blood feud in a small town—the equivalent of the U.S. being "covered" in a foreign publication in terms of a shootout in Black Rock.

Cumulatively, Halleck's series demonstrates that the same media conglomerates which publish major magazines and newspapers also dabble in films and television production and distribution. In turn, TV production companies, motion picture studios, computer networks and major cable systems are entering the "periodical" field (newspapers via teletext, magazines via cable channels). As Halleck's series astutely points out, distinctions between the print and visual media are disappearing. Since much information must now be bought via new technological formats, we are turning into a nation of information haves and have-nots. Deregulation of telephone services, radio and satellite broadcasters has all but eliminated free public service communication.

The courageous tapes forcefully raise the question of what could be appearing on television while simultaneously indicating why it does not. To analyze the mass media is one of our most crucial present tasks, but since such criticism must concern itself with what is wrong, it stands less chance of being produced. This series itself is a case in point: Schiller's message appears only in the ghetto of public access cable, not on network or public TV. These systems remain part of the problem rather than of the solution.

Halleck also injects droll moments into her message on the media, such as Murray Bookchin's "reading" of *Time*. Bookchin admits his fondness for the magazine, since it assuages his fear of flying by acting as a sedative and rendering him passive. "*Time*," he notes, "obliterates time. Ultimately, every issue is the same, for it is one gray soup of polluted junk, with no spice or salt, destroying the present, past and future. It comforts, relaxes, and mingles fashions and advertising with Poland and Beatty's *Reds*, which revealed the purpose of the Russian Revolution to have been the discovery of Diane Keaton's identity. *Time* has information but no feelings; it neutralizes everything and omits the world while claiming to report it."

Tiger TV Productions is an outgrowth of Halleck's three year old cable show with Liza Bear called *Communications Update*. It appears biweekly on major Manhattan cable channels, in classrooms of the NYU Cinema Department, Hunter College, John Jay College, University of California at San Diego among others; local video showcases (including a month long run at New York's famed The Kitchen) and on several national cable systems. In addition, the Union For Democratic Communications uses the series in its burgeoning activities and it could easily serve as the basis for an innovative "tele-course."

Ironically, *Smashing Myths About The Information Industry* was listed but not described in two Manhattan cable program guides, so its existence is "known" but hidden from public awareness. Undaunted, DeeDee and her video guerrillas blanketed the *Times* building with leaflets during Schiller's run, and plans are underway to show the series on four to five hundred local and national access channels. The staunch rebelliousness of this video collective allows an alternate way of viewing politics and culture as it breaks down the most inviolate media shibboleths. ☺

FILM/VIDEO SELECTIONS  ELIZABETH SHER © 1982 STUDIOS

SHORTS/INTERVIEWS/FEATURETTES



TOO YOUNG

... your recent film *TOO YOUNG* is really good ... all concerned should be proud of the work ... concentrated and vivid form.

Tom Luddy, Director Special Projects
Zoetrope Studios

... the musicians I know would be delighted to have a film like yours represent them.

Bruce Conner, Filmmaker

... probably the most popular film on the program ... the visual images lent themselves perfectly to the sound track ... perfectly timed, upbeat ...

Freude Bartlett, Distributor
Serious Business Company

EDINBURGH FILM FESTIVAL SELECTION 1982

JUGGLING

ELIZABETH SHER's *JUGGLING* pokes a rye finger in the eye of the women's movement. New Wave singer SUSIE MUTANT stars as the film zips along at rapid-fire pace through every-mother's day.



BEAT IT

What, rubber moles? Painter Elizabeth Sher's exercise in fixation upon physical frustration introduces us to the carnival game of "Whackamole." Players are granted the privilege of bashing the bejeesus out of randomly controlled rubber moles' heads as they dart out of their holes, and you will too just watching this weird action. But, will it ever replace Space Invaders?

Anthony Reveaux

For bookings and information please telephone:

(201) 891-8240

Or write:

LIGHT
P.O. Box 315
Franklin Lakes,
N.J. 07417

Bulletin Board

The Film Society of Lincoln Center and the Department of Film of the Museum of Modern Art announce the 12th annual presentation of **New Director/New Films**, a series of feature films by promising directors whose work is not well-known in the U.S. The series will be held in April, 1983, in New York City. Persons interested in submitting films should contact Adrienne Mancina, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York NY 10019 (212/708-9607) or Joanne Koch, The Film Society

of Lincoln Center, 140 West 65th Street, New York NY 10023 (212/877-1800.)

Films are now being accepted for the **1983 Los Angeles International Film Exposition (Filmex)**. To be held in March, Filmex 83 will include features, documentaries, shorts, animation, student work, experimental, and super-8mm films. The deadline for entries is December 1. There is no entry fee. The **San Francisco Film Festival** will be held in conjunction with Filmex. Entry

forms, regulations, and information concerning both events are available from: Filmex, 6525 Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood CA 90028. 213/469-9400.

The **United States Film and Video Festival** will be held in Park City, Utah January 17-23, 1983. Entry deadline for independently produced film and video works is November 22. Contact: United States Film and Video Festival, Lawrence Smith, 556 East 200 South, Salt Lake City UT 84102. 801/521-2006.

CONTRIBUTORS

Marcia Froelke Coburn writes for *The Chicago Reader*. **Mary Corliss** is a New York-based film critic and archivist. Former *New West* film critic **Stephen Farber** lives in L.A. and contributes to *The N.Y. Times*. **Richard T. Jameson** writes for *Seattle* and teaches film in the Univ. Washington extension

program. **Harlan Kennedy** is a London based free-lance film critic. **Leonard Maltin** is editor of *TV Movies*, Signet, in its sixth revision. **Myron Meisel** is an L.A. writer-producer-lawyer. **Lawrence O'Toole** lives in New York and writes for *McClellan's* and *The Toronto Globe and Mail*. **Chuck Ross** is an L.A. based

writer and guerrilla fighter. **Elliott Stein** lives in New York and writes on film. **David Thomson** is a San Francisco-based film critic. **Mitch Tuchman** is senior editor of the Oral History program at UCLA. New Yorker **Amos Vogel** writes on independent filmmakers. **Dan Yakir** freelances from New York.

PHOTO CREDITS: ABC: page 43, 46 (1, 3). Photo by Jessica Burstein: p. 20. Walt Disney Productions: p. 39 (1, 2), 41 (1, 2). Embassy Pictures: p. 37 (2). Invisible Studio: p. 23, 24. Courtesy Harlan Kennedy: p. 2. MGM/United Artists: p. 34, 37 (1, 3). Photo by Sonia Moskowitz: p. 30. Museum of Modern Art/Films Still Archive: p. 15, 17, 18, 57, 78 (1, 2). NBC: p. 44 (1, 3), 46 (2), 50 (1). New York Film Festival: p. 60, 61, 63, 64. Paramount Pictures: p. 30, 35 (2). PBS: p. 42, 44 (2), 74. Twentieth Century-Fox: p. 37 (5), 56, 59 (3). Universal Pictures: p. 28, 34 (2), 35 (1), 37 (4), 50 (2, 3). Warner Bros.: p. 34 (3), 49, 51 (1, 2), 53, 54, 59 (1, 2). Courtesy Dan Yakir: p. 31.



Blueprint on Babylon

"Would you like to hear about HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY, TEN NORTH FREDERICK, AGONY AND THE ECSTASY, RED DUST, SHOWBOAT, HEAVEN KNOWS MR. ALLISON, NORTH TO ALASKA, A NIGHT AT THE OPERA, SONG OF BERNADETTE, MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET, AIRPORT, LONELY ARE THE BRAVE, SPARTACUS, CROSSFIRE, DEADLINE U.S.A., CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF, ELMER GANTRY, IN COLD BLOOD, BLUE HAWAII, PRINCESS AND THE PIRATE, YOURS MINE AND OURS, THE WAR BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN, BACHELOR AND THE BOBBYSOXER, THE BUSTER KEATON STORY, BIG STREET, I WAS A MALE WAR BRIDE, DEEP IN MY HEART, RANCHO NOTORIOUS, FROM HERE TO ETERNITY, TRAPEZE, THE BIG COUNTRY, PORK CHOP HILL, CAPE FEAR, HOW THE WEST WAS WON, REAR WINDOW, TO CATCH A THIEF, NEVADA SMITH, BOOMERANG!, YOU'RE IN THE NAVY NOW, BROKEN LANCE, THE WILD ONE, ON THE BEACH, THE SHEEPMAN, RIDE THE HIGH COUNTRY, MAGNIFICENT SEVEN, DESTINATION TOKYO, MILDRED PIERCE, THE MOUNTAIN, CLEOPATRA, ANGELS IN THE OUTFIELD, PARTY GIRL from the actual writers who wrote these and countless other great movies," all interviewed by J.D. Marshall in

BLUEPRINT ON BABYLON

Send \$8.50 (plus \$1.00 postage & handling) to PHOENIX HOUSE BOX 1125
Tempe, Arizona 85281 336 pages 7" x 10 1/2" Order Direct Now

J. D. Marshall

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685. Title 39. United States Code) 1. title of publication *Film Comment* 2. date of filing October 1, 1982 3. frequency of issue bimonthly. 4. location of known office of publication 140 West 65th St., New York NY 10023 5. location of the headquarters or general business offices of the publishers 140 West 65th St., New York NY 10023 6. names and addresses of publisher, editor, and business manager: publisher The Film Society of Lincoln Center, 140 West 65th St., New York NY 10023 editor Richard Corliss, 140 West 65th St., New York NY 10023 business manager Sayre Maxfield, 140 West 65th St., New York NY 10023 7. owner The Film Society of Lincoln Center, 140 West 65th St., New York NY 10023 8. known bondholders, mortgages, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities none 10. extent and nature of circulation:

		actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date	
	average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months		
A.	total number copies printed (net press run)	31,194	33,459
B.	paid circulation 1. sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	9,021	9,901
	2. mail subscriptions	16,525	17,395
C.	total paid circulation	25,546	27,296
D.	free distribution by mail, carrier or other means—samples, complimentary, and other free copies	500	500
E.	total distribution (sum of C and D)	26,046	27,796
F.	copies not distributed 1. office use, left-over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing	1,594	2,040
	2. returns from news agents	3,554	3,623
G.	total (sum of E & F)		
	should equal net press run shown in A)	31,194	33,459