VIOLENCE AND TERROR IN AND BY MEDIA

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The abduction of one government official and the murder of another in October 1970 gave the Front de Liberation du Quebec the leverage to communicate its manifesto to the public of Canada and the world. This challenge to control of mainstream media plunged Canada into its worst peacetime crisis. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau invoked, and Parliament approved (with 190 in favor and only 16 New Democratic Party members opposed), the War Powers Act. Hundreds were arrested, liberties were suspended, and the press was muzzled for over five months.

The structural consequences of the "October Crisis" for Canadian broadcasting were described by Raboy (1990, pp. 204-208). The purpose of my paper is to reflect on its significance for the fragility of legal protections even in the most liberal democracies. More specifically, it is to examine the uses of media violence and terror in governance, research, and policy.[1]

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Much of the controversy over press coverage of terrorism revolves around who should control the news -- authorities or media. The contest is reminiscent of the symbiotic relationship of cooperation and conflict between the medieval court, which ran the state and the army, and the Church, its cultural arm. Mass media, cultural arms of modern establishments, private and public, are more flexible than their predecessor. They can internalize permissible dissent (and marginalize others) gaining credibility, markets, and power in the process. They can tolerate and contain (even create or coopt) challenge as long as they call the shots, select the context, and project their point of view.

Live coverage of terrorists, forced manifestos, extensive publicity of unrest and protest, in other words anything that lets insurgents speak for themselves, risks wresting control of cameras and context, even if briefly, from the system. When that

[1] For an extended summary and analysis of research on media violence and terror see Gerbner (1988).

happens the state (army or police) threatens to crack down or actually steps in to restore control and settle political scores, often larger than the provocation warrants.

Highly publicized insurgent terrorism served to justify the imposition of military dictatorship, followed by even greater state terrorism, for example, in Argentina and Turkey. Onyegin's (1986) study of the Turkish case shows how killings were lumped with legitimate strikes and protest demonstrations to criminalize and stigmatize political opposition and pave the way for the military. But the relatively crude and unpopular military rule may give way to cultural pressure. Anxious and insecure people lacking clear-cut political alternatives may accept, and even welcome, crackdown by "democratic" authorities if it can be presented as relief from a terrorist or other criminal menace.

The historic struggles for participation, representation, and power are shifting from the old military and political arenas to new cultural spheres. We have entered an era in which control by camera is gradually reducing the need for control by armed force.[2] "Arms control" and reduction become possible as cultural controls (often more efficient and certainly more entertaining) gain in effectiveness.

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Comparative studies of labeling and coverage of terrorism reveal unreliable statistics and blatantly political uses. The authoritative chronology of transnational terrorism by Mickolus (1980) showed that the frequency of incidents peaked in 1972 with 480 that year, and subsequently declined. Nevertheless, U.S. media and government policy put increasing emphasis on terrorism, justifying interventions in the strategic Middle East. There was no comparable coverage of much more widespread state and anti-state terrorism in many countries of Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

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[2] The "dominos" of Eastern Europe fell ever more rapidly as television cameras, not guns, were turned the "wrong" way. Even in Romania, where armed resistance was attempted, showing the execution of the Ceausescus on national and world television put an end to it.

Although international terrorism receives most attention, Bassiouni (1981, 1982) and others point out that terrorist acts in a national context far outnumber international ones. "Disappearances," bombings, kidnappings, and state violence in many countries, often unreported, claim thousands of times more victims than do well publicized acts of international terror.

While the physical casualties of highly publicized terrorist acts have been relatively few, the political and military uses have been far-reaching. Less than 1 percent of all casualties of international terrorism in 1985 were American, but they prompted the forcing down of an Egyptian airliner and the bombing of Tripoli (probably based, as it turned out, on false intelligence).

Wurth-Hough (1983) documented the role of U.S. network news coverage of terrorism in selecting events and defining issues according to political preference. Paletz, Fozzard, and Ayanian (1982) analyzed the *New York Times*' coverage of the I.R.A., the Red Brigades, and the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional (FALN) from July 1, 1977 to June 30, 1979 and found no basis for the charge that coverage legitimizes the cause of terrorist organizations. On the contrary, 70 percent of the stories mentioned neither the cause nor the objectives of the terrorists; almost 75 percent mentioned neither the organization nor its supporters; and the 7 percent that did mention names placed them in a context of statements issued by authorities.

In another study of U.S. network news, Milburn et al. (1987) noted the frequent omission of any causal explanation for terrorist acts, and the attribution of mental instability to terrorists and their leaders. (Similar acts directed against countries other than the United States were more frequently explained.) The implication, the researchers noted, was that "you can't negotiate with crazy people."

Knight and Dean (1982) provided a detailed account of how the Canadian press coverage of the siege and recapturing of the Iranian embassy in London from Arab nationalist "gunmen" served to assert the efficiency and legitimacy of violence by the British Special Forces. In the process of transforming crime and punishment into a selectively choreographed newsworthy event, the media "have to some extent assumed the functions of moral and political -- in short, ideological -- reproduction performed previously (and limitedly) by the visibility of the public event itself." It is not accidental, the authors claimed, that highly publicized and "morally coherent"

scenarios of violence and terror have made public punishment unnecessary as demonstrations of state ideology and power.

Typically isolated from their historical and social context, denied description of conditions or cause, and portrayed as unpredictable and irrational, if not insane, those labeled terrorists symbolize a menace that rational and humane means cannot reach or control. Paletz and Dunn (1969) studied the effects of news coverage of urban riots and concluded that the attempt to present a view acceptable to most readers failed to illuminate the conditions in the black communities that led to the riots. News of civil disturbance shares with coverage of terrorist activity the tendency to cultivate a pervasive sense of fear and danger, and of the consequent acceptability of harsh measures to combat it.

De Boer (1979) summarized survey results in five countries and found that although terrorists claimed relatively few victims, the media coverage cultivated a sense of imminent danger that only unusual steps could overcome. Six or seven out of ten respondents in the United States, the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany favored the introduction of the death penalty for terrorists. Similar majorities approved using a "special force" that would hunt down and kill terrorists in any country; placing them "under strict surveillance, even though our country might then somewhat resemble a police state;" using "extra stern and harsh action" unlike against other criminals; and "limitations of personal rights by such measures as surveillance and house searches" in order to "combat terrorism."

The symbolic functions and political uses of "wars" on drugs and "drug lords" have joined images of violence and terror as highly selective and ideologically shaped portrayals. They serve as projective devices that isolate acts and people from meaningful contexts and set them up to be stigmatized and victimized.

Stigma is a mark of disgrace that evokes disgraceful behavior. Labeling some people barbarians makes it easier to treat them as barbarians would. Classifying some people criminals permits dealing with them in ways otherwise considered criminal. Proclaiming some people enemies makes it legitimate to attack and kill them. Calling some people crazy or insane makes it possible to suspend rules of rationality and decency toward them. Labeling a person or group terrorist seems to justify terrorizing them.

Persons, groups and causes stigmatized are obvious targets, but the real victim is a community's ability to think rationally and creatively about conflict, injustice, tragedy. But stigmatization and demonization are but triggers. The cultural context in which they can precipitate social paranoia and political crisis is the historically unprecedented discharge of media violence into the mainstream of common consciousness.

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Humankind may have had more bloodthirsty eras but none as filled with images of violence as the present. We are awash in a tide of violent representations the world has never seen. There is no escape from the massive infusion of colorful mayhem into the homes and cultural life of ever larger areas of the world.

Of course, there was blood in fairy tales, gore in mythology, murder in Shakespeare. It is a violent world. Systematic torture, "death squads" and other forms of terror rule many states. Wholesale violations of human rights keep Amnesty International busy. Media spotlight, selective as it is,[3] makes massacres and genocides more difficult to hide. Such facts are often invoked to argue that violent story-telling is not new and that it still did not make us into monsters.

Well, that may be debatable. The U.S. is the undisputed homicide capital of the world. We also lead all industrialized countries in jailing and executing people.[4]

[3] Political and other priorities make media attention to loss of life around the world not only selective but also unequal. The CIA-assisted bloodbath of about 500,000 "communists" in Indonesia in 1965, probably the worst massacre of post-World War II history, received scant notice. The whole world witnessed the Tiananmen Square massacre, but the bloodier crackdown in Burma, without cameras, had no world-wide witness. Studies of disaster news conclude that in terms of media space and time allocated to it, the death of one Western European equals three Eastern Europeans, nine Latin Americans, and 12 Asians. (Adams, 1986)

[4] One of every 133 Americans will become a murder victim. (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics Technical Report, March 1987, NCJ-104274.) The U.S. rate of killings is 21.9 per 100,000 men 15 through 24. The rate, for example, for Austria is 0.3, for England 1.2, and for Scotland (highest after the U.S.) 5.0. (National Center for Health Statistics study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and reported in *The New York Times*, June 27, 1990, p. A10.) Between 1985 and 1989 the number of homicides nationwide increased 22 percent. (Congressional hearings reported in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* Aug. 1, 1990.) The U.S. rate of incarceration is 407 per 1000,000 citizens. This compares to 36 in The Netherlands, 86 in West Germany, and 100 in England. While the prison population in the U.S. doubled in the 1980s, the crime rate rose 1.8 percent, suggesting that the "need

There is no evidence that capital punishment is a greater deterrent than a life sentence (Phillips and Hensley, 1984, p. 109), or that it relates to lower crime rates.(Gartner, 1990.) Cross-cultural comparative studies suggest that killing - both legal and illegal -- and "the need to incarcerate" stem from common cultural roots. "Acts of violence," concluded criminologist Gartner (1990, p. 102) " may be a part of a common cultural desensitization..."

Mass-produced violence as an integral part of the common cultural environment becomes an element of socialization and an issue of social policy, as well as of psychological disposition. The audio-visual realism, stable formulas, steady flow, and critical mass of television violence especially represent a change in the symbolic life-blood of human development. To explore its policy implications, we shall examine legitimations, rationalizations, symbolic functions, political uses, media tactics, and research approaches, and look at its consequences for the democratic process, as well as for the quality of human responsiveness, in the world.

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Violence is a legitimate and necessary cultural expression. It is a dramatic balancing of deadly conflicts and compulsions against tragic costs. Even catering to morbid and other pathological fascinations may have its poetic or commercial license. Historically limited, individually crafted and selectively used symbolic misanthropy is not the issue. That has been swamped by television violence with happy endings produced on the dramatic assembly-line, saturating the mainstream of our common culture.

Audience appeal and broadcaster greed are said to play a part in the prevalence of violence on television. But neither these nor other historic rationalizations can fully explain, let alone justify, drenching every home with graphic scenes of expertly choreographed brutality.

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to incarcerate" is out of proportion with the actual crime rate but is a political response to culturally generated insecurity and demand for repression. (See, for example, a study by criminologist Nils Christie reported in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 5, 1990.)

The incremental profits of manufacturing and exporting such a troubling commodity (as distinct from other dramatic qualities of programs) is hardly worth its human and institutional risks and costs. Most highly rated programs are non-violent. Using "sex and violence" appeals in program promotion has little effect on ratings (Williams, 1989). Economies of scale in cheaply produced violence formulas may have some financial advantages to program producers. But there is no general correlation between violence and the ratings of comparable programs aired at the same time.

Why would mainstream media, the cultural arms of established society, undermine their own security for dubious and paltry benefits? Why would they persist in inviting charges of inciting to crime? Why would they suffer public and legislative criticism and face international condemnation? James D. Halloran (1977) suggested an answer when he wrote that the conventional hand-wringing about the media overkill, focusing only on imitation and incitation to crime, misses the point. His own research on protest demonstrations showed that in featuring even trivial or irrelevant violence, the media achieve certain "positive" symbolic values; positive, that is from their own standpoint, whatever the costs to others (and to society) may be.

A "positive" value equal to that of profits is, of course, power. Any marketplace is an arena of power as well as of profits. Left to itself it tends toward monopoly, the total concentration of power. No credible evidence or conventional rationalization can dispel the suspicion that a marketable taste for violence is acquired through assiduous cultivation rather than free and broad choice, and the need for it is political as much as (or more than) financial. Politics is the art of getting, holding and wielding or catering to power. Violence is its cheapest and clearest symbolic expression.

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Violence in its most reliably observable form is a physical show of force. It is making one do or submit to something against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed. It demonstrates who has the power to impose what on whom under what circumstances. It illuminates the ability to lash out, provoke, intimidate, and

annihilate. It designates winners and losers, victimizers and victims, champions and wimps.

In real life that demonstration is costly, risky, and disruptive. In story-telling it is usually clear, compelling, and instructive. Violent stories can, therefore, serve important socio-political functions. They symbolize threats to human integrity and to the established order. They demonstrate how these threats are combated, how order is restored (often violently), and how its violators (though rarely its violent enforcers) are punished. Far from only inciting subversion, they display society's pecking order and show how it deals with attempts to subvert it. In tragedy, rare in commercial entertainment, the hero dies but the idea lives on to triumph perhaps another day; it's up to us. In formula violence with happy endings, offenders die but the hero lives on to protect good people another day. Who is who and what is what depends on who has the right looks and the badge; the story-teller keeps us well under control. Crime may not pay in the world of dramatic fiction, but violence always does -- for the winner. A tragic sense of life -- energizing, empowering -- does not deliver viewers in the mood to buy.

The power to define violence and project its lessons is arguably the single most essential requirement for social control short of its military deployment. The ability and unrestricted right to mass-produce and transport it into every home may be a decisive (if unacknowledged) concentration of culture-power in democratic polity.

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Media violence is a political scenario on several levels. As a symbolic exercise, it is a demonstration of power: who has it, who uses it, who loses it. As a subject of media research, it has been a source of funding, supplying ammunition for various positions in a debate purportedly about violence but really about media control and reform. The media themselves shape and manipulate the terms of the debate on behalf of their own political agendas. Legislators milk it as long as there is political juice in it.

The assassinations of President John Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led to the establishment in 1968 of the

National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. Its Mass Media Task Force commissioned me to provide a reliable analysis of violence on television. That was the beginning of what has become the longest-running ongoing media research project called Cultural Indicators. The project relates the analysis of television content to a variety of viewer conceptions and social consequences. It has provided research support for movements for media literacy, critical analysis, and reform, and some protection to broadcasters against unjustified claims and scapegoating.

The Task Force Report by Baker and Ball (1969) presented our analysis. It established a standard format for tracking violence in network drama and revealed the high level of its frequency, a level that has not changed much over the years. Equally important was its systematic description of television violence not as a simple act but as a complex social scenario of power and victimization.

Media coverage of the report mentioned only the amount of violence, followed by charges and denials of violent imitation and incitation. The pattern of press reporting of media violence research, to which we shall return, focused on the potential threat individual acts of aggression and violence might pose to law and order. The social dynamics of violence and victimization, with its suggestion of power-play and intimidation, were of no media interest.[5]

The Task Force called for remedial action by government and the media which, like many others that followed, went unheeded. But it moved Senator John Pastore to ask President Nixon for a larger investigation to safeguard public law and order. That investigation resulted in what are generally called the Surgeon General's Reports.

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A Scientific Advisory Committee to the United States Surgeon General found indications of a causal relation between violence on television and "aggressive behavior" among some viewers. (Comstock, et al., 1972.) In 1980, another Surgeon

[5] For a fuller description of the "politics of media violence," on which parts of this paper are based, see Gerbner (in press).

General's Advisory Committee was formed to review and summarize progress since the 1972 Report. (Pearl et al., 1982) Both reported that television cultivates exaggerated beliefs about the prevalence of violence and heightens feelings of insecurity and mistrust among most groups of heavy viewers, and especially among women and minorities.

The Cultural Indicators research, the source of these conclusions (see Gerbner, at al., 1986a,b), also found that viewing cultivates a commonality of perspectives among otherwise different groups with respect to overarching themes and patterns found in many programs. That tends to erode traditional differences among divergent social groups. The outlooks of heavy viewers are closer to each other than are the outlooks of comparable groups of light viewers.

Subsequent research refined, and extended these findings into many areas of television "cultivation." (See Morgan and Signorielli, 1990.) These studies and their implications represent a new approach to media effects research, with special relevance to violence.

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Research on the consequences of exposure to mass-mediated violence has a long and involved history. Most of it focused on limited aspects of the complex scenario. It has been motivated (and dominated) by institutional interest in threats of individual imitation, incitation, brutalization, subversion. Much research has concentrated on observable and measurable psychological traits and states -- such as aggressiveness -- that were presumed to lead to violence and could be attributed to media exposure.

Research on aggression has been the most prominent "media violence story." Although ostensibly critical of media, it may have been the preferred story because it is the easiest to neutralize and the least damaging to basic institutional interests and policies.

Aggressiveness is an ambivalent concept with positive as well as negative connotations. It is a traditional part of male role socialization. Its link to most real violence and crime, which is socially organized and systemic rather than personal

and private, is tenuous, to say the least. It can even be argued that too many people submit too meekly to exploitation, injustice, indignity, and intimidation.

Approaches that focus on aggression and lawlessness view violence from the law enforcement point of view. They distract attention from official violence and state terrorism, and from economic and social conditions most closely related to individual violence and crime.

Traditional effects research models are based on selectively used media, messages, and campaigns. They fail to take into account the crucial difference that television is a relatively non-selectively used medium. Most people watch television by the clock, not by the program. Universal exposure to televised images of violence goes on from cradle to grave. They focus on selective exposures "causing" attitude change, viewer preferences, etc. They miss the essential and unique feature of television culture: its universal, stable and pervasive cultivation of conceptions about life and social relationships in large communities over long periods of time. The television answer to the age-old media cause-and-effects question "what comes first, the chicken or the egg?" is: the hatchery. Television is at the center of the new cultural hatchery.

The recurrent notions of "powerful" audiences "resisting" cultivation, producing their own "popular culture" and their own "uses and gratifications" are also irrelevant to the issue of television cultivation. They focus on differences in perception and response but ignore or minimize the new commonalities television cultivates, commonalities decisive for broader issues in matters of public policy.[6]

Seldom asked and rarely publicized are these broader policy questions. They deal with victimization and control, as well as with aggression. The key question is

[6] Todd Gitlin (in press) writes: "...Some of yesterday's outriders of youth culture have become theorists scavenging the clubs, the back alleys and video channels for a 'resistance' they are convinced, a priori, must exist. Failing to find radical potential in the politics of parties or mass movements, they exalt 'resistance' in subcultures, or, one step on, in popular styles, or even -- to take it one step further --in the observation that viewers watch TV with any attitude other than devoted rapture. 'Resistance' -- meaning all sorts of grumbling, multiple interpretation, semiological inversion, pleasure, rage, friction, numbness, what have you -- 'resistance' is accorded dignity, even glory, by stamping these not-so-great refusals with a vocabulary derived from life-threatening work against fascism -- as if the same concept should serve for the Chinese student uprising and cable grazing."

not what "causes" most violence and crime, as that goes far beyond media. It is: what contribution does constant exposure to certain scenarios of violence and terror make to different groups' conceptions of their own risks and vulnerabilities, to a society's approach to conflict, to the distribution of power, and to the likelihood of its abuse.

These questions do not fit the typical media violence story. They are more likely to challenge their assumptions and expose their social and political functions. It is not surprising, then, that they are seldom asked, rarely publicized, and, as we shall see, sometimes strenuously resisted.

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Our children are born into a symbolic environment of six to eight violent acts per prime-time hour (where four-fifths of their viewing is concentrated), four times as many in presumably humorous children's programs, and two entertaining murders a night. Contrary to the hype that promoted them, most actual uses of cable, video, and other new technologies make the dominant patterns penetrate even more deeply (but not more cheaply) into everyday life.[7]

Television viewing is a time-bound and relatively non-selective activity. One must give credit to the creative artists and other professionals who seize opportunities -- few and far between though they may be -- to challenge and even counter the massive flow of formula programming. But most people watch television by the clock, not by the individual program.

The over-arching dramatic messages and images found in many programs tend to cultivate common conceptions most relevant to public policy-making. Violence is the most vivid and prominent of these inescapable presentations. Studies by Sun (1989) and Signorielli (1986) show that the average viewer has little opportunity to avoid frequently recurring patterns such as violence. Large

[7] Two-thirds of home video recording is of network programs. Video rentals bring movies rarely permitted on television and usually restricted (R-rated) in cinemas into the home for unrestricted viewing. Yang and Linz (1990) found that in a representative sample of 30 such videos only one did not portray violence, and six out of ten included sexual violence.

audiences watch violent programs scheduled in time periods when large audiences watch television.

The world of prime time is cast for its favorite dramatic plays -- power plays. Men outnumber women at least three to one. Young people, old people and minorities have many times less than their share of representation. Compared to white American middle-class heterosexual males in the "prime of life," all others have a more restricted and stereotyped range of roles, activities, and opportunities, and less than their share of success and power. But they have more than their share of vulnerability and victimization.

The cultivation of conceptions of self and society implicit in these portrayals begins in infancy. For the first time in human history, major responsibility for the formative socializing process of story-telling has passed from parents and churches and schools to middle class professionals working for a small group of distant conglomerates who have something to sell, as well as to tell, and who can tell it and sell it all the time.[8]

The moderate viewer of prime time sees every week an average of 21 criminals (domestic and foreign) arrayed against an army of 41 public and private law enforcers. There are also 14 doctors, 6 nurses, 6 lawyers, and 2 judges to handle them. An average of 150 acts of violence and about 15 murders entertain us and our children every week, and that does not count cartoons and the news. Those who watch over 3 hours a day (more than half the people) absorb much more. Graze the channels any night for just fifteen minutes. Chances are that you can linger over bodies (on or off screen) who had been threatened, terrorized, beaten, raped, killed and perhaps mutilated. And they will not be just anybodies. Most likely they will be bodies of women, violated often just as curtain-raisers to the real "he-man action."

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[8] Just as some liberal intellectuals find it difficult to accept severe limitations to their cherished concepts of pluralism and choice available to most people, many writers who see television as just another artistic outlet like books or movies, find it difficult to accept the responsibility of the creator for what is a native environment rather than a freely chosen artistic product. The biographer of Stephen J. Cannell, writer of some of the most violent television programs complains that "It is difficult to imagine any other medium in which the artist is burdened with as much guilt and social responsibility by as many people as on television." (Thompson, 1990, p. 42.)

The violence and terror we see on television bears little or no relationship to their actual occurrence. Neither their frequency nor their nature resemble trends in crime statistics. They follow marketing strategies that call for injecting relatively cheap dramatic formulas into otherwise dull "action programs." But, as we have suggested, the action goes far beyond markets and profits.

Ours analysis has found that exposure to violence-laden television cultivates an exaggerated sense of insecurity, mistrust, and anxiety. Heavy viewers buy more guns, locks, and watchdogs for protection than comparable groups of light viewers. A sense of vulnerability and dependence imposes its heaviest burdens on women and minorities. The pattern of violence and victimization projects a mean world in which everyone is at risk (though some more than others). Its calculus of danger and ratio of winners and losers sets up a structure of power that puts every social group in its "place." Happy endings assure the viewer that although evil and deadly menace lurks around every corner, strong, swift, and angry solutions can be had for the asking. Contrary to charges of liberal bias, our research shows that the political correlate of television viewing is the virtual collapse of liberal orientation. (Gerbner, et al. 1982.)

These are highly exploitable sentiments. They contribute to the irresistibility of punitive and vindictive demands and slogans ranging from "lenient judges" to capital punishment. They make the politics of Willie Horton and Willie Bennett possible.[9] They lend themselves to the political appeal of "wars" on crime, and drugs and terrorists that heighten repression but fail to address root causes. Typical media publicity about and legislative responses to media violence cater to the same impulses.

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[9] Willie Horton was of course the furloughed criminal in the contrived Bush 1988 campaign commercial. Willie Bennett was a real near victim of the "Stuart case" in Boston in 1989. When Charles Stuart described a black man as the murderer of his wife, a small army of police invaded and terrorized black neighborhoods and picked up Bennett as a likely suspect, while demands for more jails and the death penalty echoed in the hysterical media coverage. Stuart identified Bennett in a police lineup as the killer; that turned out to be Stuart himself.

Riding the wave of citizen activism and reformist zeal of the late 1960's, Senator John Pastore espoused television violence as his "issue" and held a series of legislative committee hearings on it. In a climactic session in 1974 I reported our findings of both the incidence of violence and an indication of what some consequences of exposure might be. But the cultivation of insecurity and dependence seemed too complex and "academic" for Pastore. He kept pressing for an answer to the usual law-and-order question: "Does it lead to violent behavior?" Pastore's support was needed for the renewal of our research grant. He pressed until I gave him the answer he wanted.

A decade of commissions, research reports and committee hearings had produced nothing. A short-lived "family hour" (which only its originator, CBS, ever observed) resulted in an anti-trust legal challenge and quick retreat even from existing network codes of broadcast standards.

Upon Pastore's retirement, a House subcommittee headed by Lionel Van Deerlin took up the television violence cudgels. A group of newly elected and more independent-minded and militant members and staff than previous committees, armed with critical research, decided to cut through the ritual.

Dragging their reluctant chairman along, the "Young Turks" produced a well-documented draft report. It was the first time that a committee attempted to draft a report, let alone legislation. Furthermore, the draft called for an investigation of the structure of the television industry as the only way to get to the roots of the "violence problem."

When the draft mentioning industry structure was leaked to the networks, all hell broke lose. The National Association of Broadcasters threatened reprisals on other bills dear to Van Deerlin's heart, including a rewrite of the Communications Act of 1934, the basic law of American broadcasting. Members of the subcommittee told me that they had never before been subjected to such relentless lobbying and pressure.

The report was delayed for months. Van Deerlin caved in and tried to downplay the recommendation. The staffer who wrote the final draft was summarily fired. The day before the decisive vote, a new version drafted by a broadcast

lobbyist was substituted. It ignored the evidence of the hearings and gutted the report, shifting the source of the problem from network structure to the parents of America. The press featured the watered-down version as "the anti-violence report."

The surrender was in vain. The rewrite bill was still scuttled. Van Deerlin was defeated in the next election. The broadcast reform movement collapsed. Foundation support for citizen action dried up. Advocates for the public interest were paralyzed when "deregulation" dismantled most protections built up through the years.

The "Young Turks" of 1977, smarting from their defeat and dismayed at the collapse of their public constituency, made another attempt in 1981. Under the leadership of then Congressman Timothy Wirth a series of hearings attempted to revive the media violence issue. Many of the actors of 1977 were trotted out on the same stage. Our Cultural Indicators Violence Profile was introduced showing record levels and continued cultivation of insecurity and mistrust, the "mean world syndrome."

But this was the 80's and the "public trust" concept of the Communications Act was in full retreat. Instead of all major networks, as at previous hearings, only CNN covered the hearing and only because its president, Ted Turner, was the lead-off witness. The hearing was billed "a forum for dialogue among interested parties," and went nowhere. There was no general press coverage, no report, and of course no bill.

Only one reference was made to our most telling basic findings. Representative Cardiss Collins, the only woman on the subcommittee, noted that our "research shows that when women and minority types encounter violence on television they are more likely to end up as victims than the majority types." Then she said: "You stated, 'The real questions that must be asked not just how much violence there is, but also how fair, how just, how necessary, how effective, and at what price.'" And she wondered aloud: "Are you saying that the price to the well-being of our society is much too high?" (Hearing, 1982, pp. 230-231.) No one on the subcommittee followed up her question.

The last substantive remark of the hearing was made by Representative Al Swift, who, recalling the fiasco of 1977, concluded that "We ought to be careful in our frustration of what television is doing to us that we do not take an axe to the tail of the tiger and think we have accomplished something. We may have accomplished a little bit, but it is the other end of the tiger that is ultimately going to get us." (Hearing, 1981, p. 235.)

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The tiger is riding high. The cultivation of mistrust and paranoia in everyday life robs civilization of its civility. Hospitality and kindness to strangers seem quaint if not irresponsible anachronisms. Children learn early to beware of adults and to stop for no one on the highway. When a 6-year-old Italian girl whose father fell unconscious at the wheel ran bleeding and crying on the highway for 30 minutes while cars zipped by, the shock prompted a searching of souls, and of media. "We have begun to show the cold glacial face for which only recently we used to rebuke other countries that once were richer than ours," said an article in *Corriere della Sera*. *L'Unita* lamented that in the age of television "A sheet of glass has been interposed between us and the world that once and for all eliminates real, tangible, and sensitive awareness of others." (Reported in *The New York Times*, July 19, 1990, p. A1.)

A never-to-be-declared state of symbolic emergency is pitting white male heterosexual "prime-of-life" middle-class power against the majorities of humankind living in the ghettos of America and what used to be called the Third World before the Second collapsed into the First. (Perhaps we should just call it the Other World.) The Cold War may be winding down; the war against poverty definitely has. The cultural props for imperial policy are shifting from their anti-communist rationalizations to a sharp and selective offensive against real and concocted terrorists, narco-terrorists and other dark demons, helping to mobilize support for taking charge of the unruly at home and abroad.[10]

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[10] How selective the menace can be is suggested by the fact that we invade and take control of overly independent Panama (coincidentally, soon to take possession of the Canal) presumably to kidnap a head of state and former CIA-client now charged with narcotics traffic, but release Orlando Bosch who blew up a Cuban airliner killing 73 civilian passengers aboard (*The New York Times*, July 18, 1990, p. 1.).

Movies of the decade follow, or lead, and , in any case, cash in on the trend. With theatrical distribution dominated by a few chains, local moviegoers have less and less to choose from. The company that gave us "Rambo" produced the 1990 block(and head)buster "Total Recall," the CIA "action comedy" "Air America," and the suggestively titled "Basic Instinct" telling the story of a coke-snorting and extremely trigger-happy cop in love with two bisexual women. Next on the no-risk production line is "Terminator II" with Arnold Schwartzenegger who got $10 million for "Total Recall" (on which the company made $100 million in one summer).[11]

Escalation of the body count seems to be one way to get attention from a public punch-drunk on global mayhem. Robocop's" first rampage for law and order in 1987 killed 32 people. The 1990 "Robocop 2," targeting a 12-year-old "drug lord," among others, slaughters 81. The sick movie "Death Wish" claimed 9 victims in 1974. In the 1988 version the "bleeding heart liberal" turned vigilante disposes of 52. "Rambo: First Blood," released in 1985, rambled through Southeast Asia leaving 62 corpses. In the 1988 release "Rambo III" visits Afghanistan killing 106. The daredevil cop in the original "Die Hard" in 1988 saved the day with a modest 18 dead. Two years later, "Die Hard 2" thwarts a plot to rescue "the biggest drug dealer in the world," coincidentally a Central American dictator to be tried in a U.S. court, achieving a phenomenal body count of 264. [12]

If the Cold War turns into a new Holy Alliance, as those who declare themselves its "winners" seem to hope, the superpowers can concentrate on securing their ever more precarious hold on the remaining privileges and shrinking resources of a world liberated from some bankrupt forms of domination but increasingly free and open to symbolic invasion. The floodgates are opening for unrestrained

[11] Reported in "From Rambo to Riches," *Newsweek*, July 30, 1990, p. 41. Taking no chances on popularity and profit, Carolco Pictures, Inc. arranges guaranteed foreign and domestic distribution and saturation promotion before the movie is even produced. "When we 'green light' a movie," said the head of the studio, "we are in a total no-risk situation or very close."

[12] Count by Vincent Canby (*The New York Times*, July 16, 1990, p. C11) Canby observed that William Wellman's 1931 "Public Enemy" shocked viewers and critics (*The Times* reviewer noted its "general slaughter") despite the fact that each of its eight deaths takes place offscreen. But, Canby observes, "death and mortal injury were treated with discretion then, at least in part because the then-new Production Code took a dim view of mayhem for its own sake."

penetration of media violence "Made in the USA" in the name of democracy. Few countries are willing or able to invest in a cultural policy that does not surrender the socialization of their children and the future of their language, culture, and society to "market forces." That is more likely to contribute to the resurgence of neo-fascism than to that of open, diverse, and humane democratic cultures around the world.

The mass production of images and messages of violence plays a perhaps small but critical part in the new imperial network. The questions we must ask are those of Congresswoman Collins: How just and how necessary, not just how much? And, how long can the "benefits" outweigh the costs and the risks? Isn't the price much too high already?

Bombarding viewers by violent images of a mean and dangerous world remains, in the last analysis, an instrument of intimidation and terror. It makes legal repression more easily provoked and accepted. Even more troublesome is the thought that legal formalities may no longer be necessary.

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