

PUBLIC TELEVISION

Politics and the Battle over
Documentary Film

B. J. BULLERT

Communications, Media,
and Culture Series,
George F. Custer, Editor

A controversial study of the making of documentary films in the public television arena.

Public television's original mandate requires the system to address issues of controversy and facilitate the inclusion of voices and perspectives that lie outside the established consensus.

But attempts to include these voices reveal a system riddled with conflicting obligations and agendas. *Public Television* looks at who in the world of public television is powerful, who is weak, and who cares.

Through detailed chronologies, B. J. Bullert traces how independently produced documentaries pushed the limits of public television between 1985 and 1993. She interviews the key players—film makers, programmers, journalists, and representatives of interest groups—to illuminate how together they sought to frame and constrain viewers' perceptions of provocative works. Their stories are set against the backdrop of a larger story about the relationship between federal funding for the arts and public broadcasting and the promise of a democratic society. Bullert brings to light the subtle forces and interests that effectively control the style and content of documentaries that have been broadcast with the PBS logo.

When film makers brought uncommon realities to the public television airwaves, a complex collective response from station programmers, interest groups, journalists, and viewers ensued. *Public Television* charts the communication process through which visions of reality deemed threatening to some are packaged to make them more palatable for public television viewers. All of the documentaries examined—on topics including the nuclear arms industry, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, gay rights, and corporate greed in the era of downsizing—eventually made their way onto public television, most of them on the national PBS schedule. The stories of their journeys, and the way the programs were ultimately framed by the broadcasters and then by the press, show how the collective effort of programmers, producers, interest groups, and journalists tell the public what to think about and how to think about it.

224 pp. 17 b&w photos
Paper, \$20.00s, 0-8135-2470-9
Cloth, \$49.00ss, 0-8135-2469-5
December

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DEFINING CINEMA

PETER LEHMAN, EDITOR

Depth of Field Series, Charles Affron, Mirella Affron,
and Robert Lyons, Editors

The only book to combine essays by classical film theorists with essays about those theorists by contemporary film scholars.

Defining Cinema brings together leading film theorists and scholars to discuss the importance of film theory to cinema studies. Peter Lehman introduces the volume by explaining what constitutes film theory and outlining the major positions within film theory by placing the theorists in this collection and their work within a historical perspective. André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer represent realist film theories, and Sergei Eisenstein represents a

formalist position. Noël Burch and Christian Metz are contemporary theorists who have moved beyond the classical realist-formalist opposition. Burch's theory encompasses films and styles praised by both Bazin and Eisenstein, and Metz helped bring semiotics and psychoanalytic theory to prominence in the field.

The commentaries by contemporary film scholars range from attacking to defending to explicating the various theorists. Dudley Andrew gives an impassioned defense of Bazin, while Noël Carroll offers a sharp critique of Kracauer. Vance Kepley, Jr., explicates Eisenstein's theories in relationship to his films and shows the legacy of those films in film history. Edward Branigan analyzes Burch's early work in a manner that reveals its daring, rigor, and importance. Robert T. Eberwein traces the shift in Metz's work from the early phase based in linguistics and semiotics to the later work based in psychoanalytic theory. Taken together, the essays show that film theory is a lively area of inquiry and debate rather than a simple history of right and wrong positions.

PETER LEHMAN is a professor and director of graduate studies in media arts at the University of Arizona. He is the author of several books, including *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*, and editor of *Close Viewings: An Anthology of Film Criticism*.

224 pp.
Paper, \$18.00s, 0-8135-2302-8
Cloth, \$48.00ss, 0-8135-2301-X
September CUSA

