

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

There's No Business Like Show Business. – The title of a song from the musical comedy, "Annie Get Your Gun", by Irving Berlin

La Danse Macabre – The title of a musical tone poem by Camille Saint-Saens

When a dog bites a man that is not news, because it happens so often. But if a man bites a dog, that is news. John B. Bogart

*All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players. Shakespeare*

My name is Morgan Winthrop. It is not the name given to me at birth. That was much too pedestrian for someone in my position. I am currently in charge of the electronic media section of a mega multi-national and multi-industry corporation. I think that my department is of paramount if not of critical importance to the conglomerate. After all we are its public face.

I have a bizarre tale to tell. It is made more so because I am mainly responsible for it. A little background is in order.

As I am sure that most are aware, television has gone through many technological changes. These modifications in the hardware wrought transformations in what it aired, in other words in the corresponding software. The early black and white days of television mirrored a simplistic and morally pristine approach to programming. Most of the shows with mass appeal attracted the lowest common denominator in the audiences both nationally and internationally. In any case and even at its onset there was no doubt that this revolutionary new medium was going to have a universal and profound impact. It certainly has, does and will in ways we cannot, as yet, imagine.

Perhaps the most important immediate transformation occurred when color was introduced and when the number of TV networks exponentially increased, giving rise to specialty channels. With it came the realization that that television had quickly gobbled up nearly every form of entertainment, especially from the world of literature, movies, theater, variety, game and talk shows and live sports. Perhaps it was the latter that whetted the public's appetite for reality TV.

Topics that had been taboo such as graphic sex, foul language and homosexuality were commonly aired. With the advent of sophisticated mobile television cameras, reality TV became the vogue. This was a radical departure from the jaded shows of the past in which average persons were confronted by Judges and or glib hosts usually provoking them to behave in an outrageous fashion. For a brief period of time, high definition television with the remarkable picture clarity that characterized it provided educational shows of the highest order. Unfortunately, but fortunately for me, it did not last long.

It was at this point that I realized that, something that had been in the works for many years had become the most watched of programs, namely The News. The News had replaced traditional entertainment. Indeed it had become the new form of entertainment, the new diversion and distraction. Exactly why this occurred is still debatable. Perhaps it

was because the technology allowed the camera to go where it never could or was never allowed to before. Perhaps it was because the public had an insatiable appetite for gore, scandal, silly titillation, invasions of privacy, murder trials with bizarre twists and the peccadilloes of the rich and famous. Simply put, traditional programs had become repetitive and boring. The one thing about the News, as it reflected reality, was and is its unpredictability. This became the classic example of life imitating art.

However my discernment about the News was not unique. Others were coming to the same conclusions. I had to introduce something that would change the very face of the News. I had learnt that the electronic research teams of my company were working on developing holographic TV. I immediately sensed its potential. Upon conversing with the scientists involved I discovered that this could quickly bring the viewer to the scene of action. Up to that time the News was conveyed to the viewer in the living room or den. Now it might become possible to do the exact reverse, that is bring the viewer to where the story was taking place. With the home seemingly altered to mimic the locale of the story the viewer believed that he/she was taking an active part in the unfolding story. This was a revolutionary concept never before even imagined. The scientists succeeded far beyond their expectations. Not only the audio-visual senses, but all five were involved. The holographic illusions included the sense of touch, smell and taste so that that it became well nigh extremely difficult to distinguish between reality and fantasy. The rest is history.

Initially we were overjoyed. Never before had the News been as graphically generated. Spectators could appreciate the artistry of a gourmet meal as well as smell and taste it. They could know the fear prevalent on the battlefield as well as at the sites of horrible atrocities. Old-fashioned pornography simply disappeared. In other words, viewers not only felt that they were no longer passive bystanders but could become active participants in ways that they thought they chose. The response was overwhelming. Money poured in. Attempts by our media rivals and by regulatory authorities to censor or stop our productions were futile. The public just would not stand for it.

Was there a fly in the ointment? There always is. First, those familiar with journalism remember the days when it appeared that nothing newsworthy was occurring. The nature of our television news makes it imperative to fill those empty or boring slots. Just like the journalists of old, we frequently resolved the problem by being creative, in other words by embellishing some innocuous event. In turn this approach led rapidly to the invention of events that had never taken place. They appeared so real that everyone, including the experts, just assumed they were factual.

In and of itself, this would not have had dire consequences. However there is an old scientific law, which asserts that the observer has an effect on what is being observed. What happened with our public was that they were being affected by the experience and, in turn, manipulating what they were observing. Once some sort of equilibrium had been attained, no one could ascertain what was real and what was fictitious. A sort of mayhem resulted. Everyone was now quasi-living in a world of their making and no two were exactly alike and yet there appeared to be some inexplicable interactions between some of them.

No one was immune including those, like me, who had been principally responsible. For example, I created what I thought was the perfect world, based on my version of the "Golden Rule" which was simply that, by law and nature, human behavior was governed

by the stricture, that "an individual's or group's actions was never for its benefit but always for the welfare, assistance or profit of others. Thus I lived a dream life of perfect harmony, at peace with my fellow humans and the environment.

All the necessary details for this Utopia were part and parcel of my illusory world, an illusion which was shockingly brought home to me when a terrorist bomb blew up on TV near my auto. I am currently in a hospital. My chances of survival are slim. I just do not know whether this is real. I hope not.

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Oct. 26, 2004

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Author's Acknowledgement: My friend Arthur Cordell made a change in the last paragraph. It definitely improved the ending.