

a drawer or placed on a high shelf, out of the reach of children: its physical form, no less than its symbolic form, does not lend itself to exclusivity.

We may conclude, then, that television erodes the dividing line between childhood and adulthood in three ways, all having to do with its undifferentiated accessibility: first, because it requires no instruction to grasp its form; second, because it does not make complex demands on either mind or behavior; and third, because it does not segregate its audience. With the assistance of other electric, nonprint media, television recreates the conditions of communication that existed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Biologically we are all equipped to see and interpret images and to hear such language as may be necessary to provide a context for most of these images. The new media environment that is emerging provides everyone, simultaneously, with the same information. Given the conditions I have described, electric media find it impossible to withhold any secrets. Without secrets, of course, there can be no such thing as childhood.

Chapter 6

THE TOTAL DISCLOSURE MEDIUM

Vidal Sassoon is a famous hairdresser who, for a while, had his own television show—a mixture of beauty hints, diet information, celebrity adoration, and popular psychology. As he came to the end of one segment of one of his programs, the theme music came up and Sassoon just had time enough to say, “Don’t go away. We’ll be back with a marvelous new diet and, then, a quick look at incest.”

Phil Donahue, as of this writing, has a television show that appears five times a week. He is a serious and responsible person who apparently believes that any subject can be—indeed, ought to be—“treated” on television. But even if he did not believe this, he would do so anyway: five shows a week, an hour a day, fifty-two weeks each year, leave little room for squeamishness, selectivity, or even old-fashioned embarrassment. After one has “treated” the defense budget, the energy crisis, the women’s movement, and crime in the streets, one inevitably must turn, whether quickly or slowly, to incest, promiscuity, homosexuality, sadomasochism, terminal illness, and other secrets of adult life. One may even turn to a kind of psychic striptease: the Stanley Siegel show, for example, regularly featured a segment in which its high-

strung host reclined on a couch while a psychiatrist "analyzed" his feelings about his parents, his sexuality, and his precarious sense of personal identity.

For the moment, we must set aside the question of television's trivialization of culture. (What, for example, would Sophocles make of anyone's attempt to take a "quick look" at incest? What would Freud make of psychoanalysis being used as a vaudeville act?) There is a prior question that must be addressed: Why is television forcing the entire culture to come out of the closet? Why has the subject matter of the psychiatrist's couch and the Confessional Box come so unashamedly into the public domain?

The answer, I think, is obvious, although, to be sure, there are those who obscure it by pressing on us naïve theories about the malevolence of television executives. The plain facts are that television operates virtually around the clock, that both its physical and symbolic form make it unnecessary—in fact, impossible—to segregate its audience, and that it requires a continuous supply of novel and interesting information to engage and hold that audience. Thus, television must make use of every existing taboo in the culture. Whether the taboo is revealed on a talk show, made into a theme for a soap opera or situation comedy, or exposed in a commercial is largely irrelevant. Television needs material. And it needs it in a way quite different from other media. Television is not only a pictorial medium, it is a present-centered and speed-of-light medium. The bias and therefore the business of television is to *move* information, not collect it. Television cannot dwell upon a subject or explore it deeply, an activity for which the static, lineal form of typography is well suited. There may, for example, be fifty books on the history of Argentina, five hundred on childhood, five thousand on the Civil War. If television has anything to do with these subjects, it will do it once, and then move on. This is why television has become the principal generator of what Daniel Boorstin calls the "pseudo-event," by which he means events that are staged for public

consumption.¹ The Academy Awards, the Miss America Contest, the "roasts" of celebrities, the Annual Country Music Association Awards, the battles of the network stars, press conferences, and the like exist because of television's need for material, not reality's. Television does not record these events; it creates them. And it does so not because television executives lack imagination but because they have an abundance of it. They know that television creates an insatiable need in its audience for novelty and public disclosure and that the dynamic visual imagery of television is not for the specialist, the researcher, or, indeed, for anyone wishing to practice analytic activity. To use a metaphor favored by Dorothy Singer, Jerome Singer, and Diana Zuckerman, watching television is like attending a party populated by people whom you do not know.² Every few seconds you are introduced to a new person as you move through the room. The general effect is one of excitement, but in the end it is hard to remember the names of the guests or what they said or even why they were there. It is of no importance that you do, in any case. Tomorrow there will be another party. To this image must be added the fact that you will be induced to return by the promise not only of new guests to meet but of the possibility that each of them will disclose a secret of some considerable interest. In other words: Don't go away. Tomorrow we'll take a quick look at incest.

As long as the present system of competitive, commercial broadcasting exists, this situation will persist. One suspects that if every network executive and program director were replaced tomorrow by, say, the faculty of the Harvard Divinity School, television programming would in the long run remain quite close to what it is.³

Like alphabetic writing and the printed book, television opens secrets, makes public what has previously been private.⁴ But unlike writing and printing, television has no way to close things down. The great paradox of literacy was that as it made secrets accessible, it simultaneously created an ob-

stacle to their availability. One must *qualify* for the deeper mysteries of the printed page by submitting oneself to the rigors of a scholastic education. One must progress slowly, sequentially, even painfully, as the capacity for self-restraint and conceptual thinking is both enriched and expanded. I vividly remember being told as a thirteen-year-old of the existence of a book, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, that, I was assured, was required reading for all who wanted to know sexual secrets. But the problems that needed to be solved to have access to it were formidable. For one, it was hard to find. For another, it cost money. For still another, it had to be *read*. Much of it, therefore, was not understandable to me, and even the special passages to which my attention was drawn by a thoughtful previous reader who underlined them required acts of imagination that my experience could not always generate.

Television, by contrast, is an open-admission technology to which there are no physical, economic, cognitive, or imaginative restraints. The six-year-old and the sixty-year-old are equally qualified to experience what television has to offer. Television, in this sense, is the consummate egalitarian medium of communication, surpassing oral language itself. For in speaking, we may always whisper so that the children will not hear. Or we may use words they may not understand. But television cannot whisper, and its pictures are both concrete and self-explanatory. The children see everything it shows.

The most obvious and general effect of this situation is to eliminate the exclusivity of worldly knowledge and, therefore, to eliminate one of the principal differences between childhood and adulthood. This effect follows from a fundamental principle of social structure: A group is largely defined by the exclusivity of the information its members share. If everyone knew what lawyers know, there would be no lawyers. If students knew what their teachers know, there would be no need to differentiate between them. Indeed, if fifth graders

knew what eighth graders know, there would be no point to having grades at all. G. B. Shaw once remarked that all professions are conspiracies against the laity. We might broaden this idea to say that any group is a "conspiracy" against those who are not in it by virtue of the fact that, for one reason or another, the "outs" do not have access to the information possessed by the "ins."

Of course, not every instance of role differentiation or group identity rests on access to information. Biology, for example, will determine who will be a male and who a female.⁵ But in most instances social role is formed by the conditions of a particular information environment, and this is most certainly the case with the social category of childhood. Children are a group of people who do *not* know certain things that adults know. In the Middle Ages there were no children because there existed no means for adults to know exclusive information. In the Age of Gutenberg, such a means developed. In the Age of Television, it is dissolved.

This means more than that childhood "innocence" is lost, a phrase that tends to imply only a diminution of childhood's charm. With the electric media's rapid and egalitarian disclosure of the total content of the adult world, several profound consequences result. First, the idea of shame is diluted and demystified. So that the meaning I am giving to shame may be clearer, it is necessary to introduce a particularly relevant remark by G. K. Chesterton. "All healthy men," he observed, "ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, know that there is a certain fury in sex that we cannot afford to inflame and that a certain mystery and awe must ever surround it if we are to remain sane."

Although Chesterton is here talking about sexual impulses, his point has a wider meaning, and is, I think, a fair summary of Freud's and Elias's views on the civilizing process. Civilization cannot exist without the control of impulses, particularly the impulse toward aggression and immediate gratification. We are in constant danger of being possessed by barbarism,

of being overrun by violence, promiscuity, instinct, egoism. Shame is the mechanism by which barbarism is held at bay, and much of its power comes, as Chesterton holds, from the mystery and awe that surround various acts. Included among these acts are thoughts and words, all of which are made mysterious and awesome by the fact that they are constantly hidden from public view. By hiding them, we make them mysterious; by making them mysterious, we regulate them. In some cases, adults may not even display their knowledge of such secrets to each other and must find relief in the psychiatrist's office or the Confessional Box. But in all cases it is necessary to control the extent to which children are aware of such matters. Certainly since the Middle Ages it has been commonly believed that the impulse toward violence, sexuality, and egoism is of particular danger to children, who, it is assumed, are not yet sufficiently governed by self-restraint. Therefore, the inculcation of feelings of shame has constituted a rich and delicate part of a child's formal and informal education. Children, in other words, are immersed in a world of secrets, surrounded by mystery and awe; a world that will be made intelligible to them by adults who will teach them, in stages, how shame is transformed into a set of moral directives. From the child's point of view, shame gives power and authority to adulthood. For adults know, whereas children do not, what words are shameful to use, what subjects are shameful to discuss, what acts are deemed necessary to privatize.

I should like to be especially clear on this point. I do not argue that the content of shame is created by the information structure of society. The roots of shame lie elsewhere, go very deep into the history and fears of a people, and are far beyond the scope and point of this book. I am, however, claiming that shame cannot exert any influence as a means of social control or role differentiation in a society that cannot keep secrets. If one lived in a society in which the law required people to be nude on public beaches, the shame in revealing certain parts of the body would quickly disappear. For clothing is a means

of keeping a secret, and if we are deprived of the means of keeping a secret, we are deprived of the secret. Similarly, the shameful in incest, in violence, in homosexuality, in mental illness, disappears when the means of concealing them disappears, when their details become the content of public discourse, available for examination by everyone in a public arena. What was once shameful may become a "social problem" or a "political issue" or a "psychological phenomenon," but in the process it must lose its dark and fugitive character, as well as some of its moral force.

It is an oversimplification to argue, as do representatives of the Moral Majority, that such a situation necessarily and categorically signifies cultural degeneration. It is well to remember that different cultures form different taboos, and what is shameful in one often appears arbitrary to another. We also have reason to hope that the transformation of shameful behavior into "social problems" or "alternate life-styles" through public disclosure and consequent rationalization may, in some notable instances, represent a step toward a more humane sensitivity. Certainly it would be hard to defend the proposition that a healthy society demands that death, mental illness, and homosexuality remain dark and mysterious secrets. And it would be even less defensible to argue that adults ought not to approach these subjects in any but the most restricted circumstances. But that the opening of these subjects to all, in unbound circumstances, poses dangers and in particular makes the future of childhood problematic must be boldly faced. For if there are no dark and fugitive mysteries for adults to conceal from children, and then reveal to them as they think necessary, safe, and proper, then surely the dividing line between adults and children becomes dangerously thin. We have here, in other words, a Faustian bargain, and it is very sad to note that the only sizable group in the body politic that has so far grasped the point is that benighted movement known as the Moral Majority. For through them the question has been raised, What is the price of openness and candor?

There are many answers to that question, most of which we do not know. But it is clear that if we turn over to children a vast store of powerful adult material, childhood cannot survive. By definition adulthood means mysteries solved and secrets uncovered. If from the start the children know the mysteries and the secrets, how shall we tell them apart from anyone else?

With the gradual decline of shame there is, of course, a corresponding diminution in the significance of manners. As shame is the psychological mechanism that overcomes impulse, manners are the exterior social expression of the same conquest. Everything from table manners to language manners to the manners of dress is intended to reveal the extent to which one has learned self-restraint; and it is at the same time a means of teaching self-restraint. As already noted, manners or civilité did not begin to emerge in elaborated forms among the mass of people until after the printing press, in large measure because literacy both demanded and promoted a high degree of self-control and delayed gratification. Manners, one might say, are a social analogue to literacy. Both require a submission of body to mind. Both require a fairly long developmental learning process. Both require intensive adult teaching. As literacy creates a hierarchical intellectual order, manners create a hierarchical social order. Children must earn adulthood by becoming both literate and well-mannered. But in an information environment in which literacy loses force as a metaphor of the structure of human development, the importance of manners must decline. The new media make distinctions among age groups appear invidious, and thus are hostile to the idea of a hierarchical social order.

Consider, for example, the case of language manners. Within recent memory adults did not use certain words in the presence of children, who, in turn, were not expected to use them in the presence of adults. The question of whether or not children knew such words from other contexts was beside the point. Social propriety required that a public distinction

be maintained between an adult's symbolic world and the child's. This custom, unknown in the Middle Ages, represented more than a pleasant social fiction. Linguistic restraint on the adult's part reflected a social ideal, i.e., a disposition to protect children from the harsh, sordid, or cynical attitudes so often implicit in brutal or obscene language. On the children's part, restraint reflected an understanding of their place in the social hierarchy, and in particular, the understanding that they were not yet entitled to the public expression of such attitudes. But, of course, with the blurring of role distinctions such linguistic deference loses its point. Today, this custom has so rapidly eroded that those who practice it are considered " quaint." It would appear that we are moving back toward a fourteenth-century situation where no words were considered unfit for a youthful ear.

In the face of all this, both the authority of adulthood and the curiosity of childhood lose ground. For like shame and manners they are rooted in the idea of secrets. Children are curious because they do not yet know what they suspect there is to know; adults have authority in great measure because they are the principal source of knowledge. The delicate balance between authority and curiosity is the subject of Margaret Mead's important book *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*. In it she contends that we are moving into a world of new, rapidly changing, and freely accessible information in which adults can no longer serve as counselors and advisors to the young, leading to what she calls a crisis in faith. "I believe this crisis in faith," she writes, "can be attributed . . . to the fact that there are now no elders who know more than the young themselves about what the young are experiencing."⁶

If Dr. Mead is right—if the elders can no longer be relied on as a source of knowledge for the young—then she has misnamed her book, and, indeed, missed her own point. She has not made a study of the generation gap but a study of the disappearance of the generation gap. For in a world where

the elders have no more authority than the young, there is no authority; the gap is closed, and everyone is of the same generation. And although I cannot agree with Dr. Mead that we have reached the point where "there are . . . no elders who know more than the young themselves about what the young are experiencing," I believe it is clear enough that because of their relentless revelations of all cultural secrets, the electric media pose a serious challenge both to the authority of adulthood and to the curiosity of children. Perhaps because Dr. Mead wrote her book during the emergence of the short-lived but much publicized counterculture movement, she assumed that youthful curiosity would not be impaired by the decline of adult authority. To a certain extent curiosity comes naturally to the young, but its development depends upon a growing awareness of the power of well-ordered questions to expose secrets. The world of the known and the not yet known is bridged by wonderment. But wonderment happens largely in a situation where the child's world is separate from the adult world, where children must seek entry, through their questions, into the adult world. As media merge the two worlds, as the tension created by secrets to be unraveled is diminished, the calculus of wonderment changes. Curiosity is replaced by cynicism or, even worse, arrogance. We are left with children who rely not on authoritative adults but on news from nowhere. We are left with children who are given answers to questions they never asked. We are left, in short, without children.

We must keep in mind here that it is not television alone that contributes to the opening of adult secrets. As I have already noted, the process whereby information became uncontrollable—whereby the home and school lost their commanding place as regulators of child development—began with the telegraph and is not a new problem. Every medium of communication that plugs into a wall socket has contributed its share in freeing children from the limited range of childhood sensibility. The movies, for example, played a

distinctive role in revealing to children the language and strategies of romance; those readers over the age of forty can testify to the fact that they learned the secrets of kissing from films. In today's world one can learn far more than that from a movie. But movies are not free, and it is still possible to bar children from those that display too much carnal knowledge or violence or adult madness. Except, of course, when they are shown on television. For with television there are no restrictions, economic or otherwise, and the occasional warning to parents that the "following program contains adult material . . . etc." only serves to ensure that more, not fewer, children will watch. What is it that they will see? What precisely are the secrets that will be revealed to them?

There are, as already mentioned, all of those matters that fall within the province of sexuality. Indeed, in revealing the secrets of sex, television has come close to eliminating the concept of sexual aberration altogether. For example, it is now common enough to see twelve- and thirteen-year-old girls displayed on television commercials as erotic objects. Some adults may have forgotten when such an act was regarded as psychopathic, and they will have to take my word for it that it was. This is not to say that adult males did not until recently covet pubescent girls. They did, but the point is that their desire was kept a carefully guarded secret, especially from the young themselves. Television not only exposes the secret but shows it to be an invidious inhibition and a matter of no special consequence. As in the Middle Ages, playing with the privy parts of children may once again become only a ribald amusement. Or, if that takes the matter too far, perhaps we may say that the explicit, albeit symbolic, use of children as material for the satisfaction of adult sexual fantasies has already become entirely acceptable. Indeed, conditioned by such use of children on television, the New York State Court of Appeals ruled in 1981 that no distinction may be made between children and adults in addressing the question of a pornographic film. If a film is judged obscene, the

court ruled, then a conviction can be sustained. But if it is not judged obscene, then any law that tries to distinguish between the status of children and adults is invidious.⁷ One might say that such a ruling clears the way for continued exploitation of children. Or, from another point of view, that such a ruling merely reflects the realities of our new electric environment. For there are, in fact, very few expressions of human sexuality that television now regards as serious enough to keep private, that is to say, regards as inappropriate for use as a theme for a program or as the focal point of a commercial. From vaginal spray commercials to discussions of male strippers, from programs preoccupied with the display of buttocks and breasts to documentaries on spouse swapping, the secrets unfold one by one, in one form or another. In some cases, to be sure, a subject such as incest, lesbianism, or infidelity is treated with seriousness and even dignity, but this is quite beside the point.

So that readers will not think these observations are merely the outpourings of a prudish sensibility, I should like to make my point as clearly as I can: The problem being discussed here is the difference between public knowledge and private knowledge, and what the effects are of the elimination of private knowledge by full-disclosure media. It is one thing to say that homosexuality is a sin in God's eyes, which I believe to be a dangerous idea. It is altogether different to say that something is lost when it is placed before children's eyes. It is one thing to say that human sexuality is base and ugly, which, in my opinion, is another dangerous idea. It is altogether different to say that its public display deprives it of its mystery and awe and changes the character and meaning of both sexuality and child development.

I am well aware that the word *hypocrisy* is sometimes used to describe a situation where public knowledge and private knowledge are rigidly kept apart. But the better face of hypocrisy is, after all, a certain social idealism. In the case of childhood, for example, secrecy is practiced in order to main-

tain the conditions for healthy and ordered growth. Childhood, as we ideally think of it, cannot exist without a certain measure of hypocrisy. Let us take violence, for example. There can be no denying that human beings spend an inordinate amount of time and energy in maiming and killing each other. Along with symbol making and toolmaking, killing is among our most distinctive characteristics. I have estimated that in my lifetime approximately seventy-five million people have been killed by other people. And this does not include those killings that are done, as Russell Baker puts it, in the name of private enterprise, e.g., street killings, family killings, robbery killings, etc. Is it hypocrisy to keep this knowledge from children? Hypocrisy should be made of sterner stuff. We wish to keep this knowledge from children because for all of its reality, too much of it too soon is quite likely dangerous to the well-being of an unformed mind. Enlightened opinion on child development claims it is necessary for children to believe that adults have control over their impulses to violence and that they have a clear conception of right and wrong. Through these beliefs, as Bruno Bettelheim has said, children can develop the positive feelings about themselves that give them the strength to nurture their rationality, which, in turn, will sustain them in adversity.⁸ C. H. Waddington has hypothesized that "one component of human evolution and the capacity for choice is the ability of the human child to accept on authority from elders the criteria for right and wrong."⁹ Without such assurances children find it difficult to be hopeful or courageous or disciplined. If it is hypocrisy to hide from children the "facts" of adult violence and moral ineptitude, it is nonetheless wise to do so. Surely, hypocrisy in the cause of strengthening child growth is no vice.

This is not to say that children must be protected from all knowledge of violence or moral degeneracy. As Bettelheim has demonstrated in *The Uses of Enchantment*, the importance of fairy tales lies in their capacity to reveal the existence

of evil in a form that permits children to integrate it without trauma. This is possible not only because the content of fairy tales has grown organically over centuries and is under the control of adults (who may, for example, modify the violence or the ending to suit the needs of a particular child) but also because the psychological context in which the tales are told is usually reassuring and is, therefore, therapeutic. But the violence that is now revealed over television is not mediated by a mother's voice, is not much modified to suit the child, is not governed by any theory of child development. It is there because television requires material that comes in inexhaustible variety. It is also there because television directs everything to everyone at the same time, which is to say, television cannot keep secrets of any kind. This results in the impossibility of protecting children from the fullest and harshest disclosure of unrelenting violence.

And here we must keep in mind that the stylized murders, rapes, and plunderings that are depicted on weekly fictional programs are much less than half the problem. They are, after all, clearly marked as fiction or pseudo-fairy tales, and we may assume (although not safely) that some children do not take them to be representations of real adult life. Far more impressive are the daily examples of violence and moral degeneracy that are the staple of TV news shows. These are not mitigated by the presence of recognizable and attractive actors and actresses. They are put forward as the stuff of everyday life. These are real murders, real rapes, real plunderings. And the fact that they *are* the stuff of real life makes them all the more powerful.

Researchers have been trying for years to determine the effects on children of such knowledge, their principal question being, To what extent does violence, when depicted so vividly and on such a scale, induce violence in children? Although this question is not trivial, it diverts our attention from such important questions as, To what extent does the depiction of the world *as it is* undermine a child's belief in

adult rationality, in the possibility of an ordered world, in a hopeful future? To what extent does it undermine the child's confidence in his or her future capacity to control the impulse to violence?

The secret of adult violence is, in fact, only part of a larger secret revealed by television. From the child's point of view, what is mostly shown on television is the plain fact that the adult world is filled with ineptitude, strife, and worry. Television, as Josh Meyrowitz has phrased it, opens to view the backstage of adult life. Researchers have paid very little attention to the implications of our revealing to children, in one televised form or another, the causes of marital conflict, the need for life insurance, the infinite possibilities of misunderstanding, the persistent incompetence of political leaders, the myriad afflictions of the human body. This list, which could be extended for a page, provides two items of particular interest as examples of how television is unsparing in revealing the secrets of adult life. The first, about which Meyrowitz has written with great insight, concerns the incompetence or at least vulnerability of political leaders. In its quest for material, especially of a "human interest" variety, television has found an almost inexhaustible supply in the private lives of politicians. Never before have so many people known so much about the wives, children, mistresses, drinking habits, sexual preferences, slips of the tongue, even inarticulateness of their national leaders. Those who did know at least some of this were kept informed by newspapers and magazines, which is to say that until television, the dark or private side of political life was mostly the business of adults. Children are not newspaper readers and never have been. But they are television viewers and therefore are continually exposed to accounts of the frailties of those who in a different age would have been perceived as without blemish. The result of this is that children develop what may be called adult attitudes—from cynicism to indifference—toward political leaders and toward the political process itself.

Similarly, children are kept constantly informed of the weaknesses of the human body, a matter that adults have typically tried to conceal from them. Of course, children have always known that people get sick and that in one way or another they die. But adults have found it wise to keep most of the details from children until a time when the facts will not overwhelm them. Television opens the closet door. For my own edification I counted the number of illnesses or physical impairments that were displayed on three consecutive evenings of network television. From hemorrhoids to the heartbreak of psoriasis, from neuritis and neuralgia to headaches and backaches, from arthritis to heart disease, from cancer to false teeth, from skin blemish to bad eyesight, there were forty-three references to the shocks our flesh is heir to. As if this were not enough to make life appear uncertain, if not terrifying, journey, during the same period there were two references to the hydrogen bomb, a discussion of the inability of nations to stop terrorism, and a summary of the Abscam trials.

I am sure I have given the impression to this point that all of the adult secrets made available to children through television concern that which is frightening, sordid, or confusing. But in fact television is not necessarily biased in this direction. If most of its disclosures are of that nature, it is because most of adult life is of that nature, filled with illness, violence, incompetence, and disorder. But not all of adult life. There is, for example, the existential pleasure of buying things. Television reveals to children at the earliest possible age the joys of consumerism, the satisfactions to be derived from buying almost anything—from floor wax to automobiles. Marshall McLuhan was once asked why the news on television is always bad news. He replied that it wasn't: the commercials are the good news. And indeed they are. It is a comfort to know that the drudgery of one's work can be relieved by a trip to Jamaica or Hawaii, that one's status may be enhanced by buying a Cordoba, that one's competence may be estab-

lished by using a certain detergent, that one's sex appeal may be enlivened by a mouthwash. These are the promises of American culture, and they give a certain coherence to adult motivations. By age three our children have been introduced to these motivations, for television invites everyone to share in them. I do not claim that these are mature motivations, and in fact in the next chapter I will try to show how television undermines any reasonable concept of mature adulthood. The point here is simply that the "good news" on television is *adult* good news, about which children are entirely knowledgeable by age seven.

Neither do I claim that children in an earlier period were entirely ignorant of the material of the adult world, only that not since the Middle Ages have children known so much about adult life as now. Not even the ten-year-old girls working in the mines in England in the eighteenth century were as knowing as our own children. The children of the industrial revolution knew very little beyond the horror of their own lives. Through the miracle of symbols and electricity our own children know everything anyone else knows—the good with the bad. Nothing is mysterious, nothing awesome, nothing is held back from public view. Indeed, it is a common enough observation, particularly favored by television executives when under attack, that whatever else may be said about television's impact on the young, today's children are better informed than any previous group of youngsters. The metaphor usually employed is that television is a window to the world. This observation is entirely correct, but why it should be taken as a sign of progress is a mystery. What does it mean that our children are better informed than ever before? That they know what the elders know? It means that they have become adults, or, at least, adult-like. It means—to use a metaphor of my own—that in having access to the previously hidden fruit of adult information, they are expelled from the garden of childhood.