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ABSTRACT

On 9 September 1976, the Aspen Institute Program on Communications and Society, the League of Women Voters, and the Post/Newsweek Broadcast Stations sponsored a public meeting in New York. The subject of the meeting was politics and television; the participants were leading political advertisers, journalists, and researchers. This monograph explains the successes and failures of the conference, focusing on the problems that were revealed: the boycotting of the meeting by the three television network news departments, criticism of the analytical work that was chosen as the discussion's departure point (Thomas Patterson and Robert McClure's "The Unseeing Eye"), and polarization of perspectives along professional lines. (KS)

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Issues and Images: Confessions of a Conference Organizer

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Communications and Society

With a foreword by Roland Homet

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FOREWORD

The Aspen Institute's Program on Communications and Society set itself a modest goal for 1976: to make the Bicentennial election of the United States President a model occasion, insofar as the interaction of politics and the media was concerned.

The Program registered at least one notable achievement: changing by legal process the ground rules for media appearances, so that for the first time in 16 years, the American voters could see their major-party Presidential candidates in face-to-face debate on the issues. The *post mortem* analyses of these encounters, and the ways in which they were structured, are currently underway and may well yield suggested improvements for 1980 and beyond. But there is ground for hope that the institution of the Presidential Debates is now lodged in the body of electoral expectations, and will become a regular quadrennial event.

If there were successes, there were also severe disappointments. The Presidential Debates, or more exactly, the petition that made them possible, grew out of a conference of media and political actors and observers convened by the Aspen Program in early 1975. There were two subsequent conferences, each of them co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters and Post-Newsweek Broadcast Stations. The present paper analyzes the third and final conference, held in New York shortly after the conventions as a kind of mid-term assessment of media coverage of the Presidential campaigns.

By all conventional measures, and gauged against our hopes and objectives, the conference was a remarkable failure: boycotted by the three television network news departments, shot through with near-unanimous denunciation of the analytical work we had chosen as our point of departure, and polarized in perspective along professional lines in a manner reminiscent of nothing so much as the craft guilds of the Middle Ages.

In Forrest Chisman's gifted hands, however, the multiple causes of these failures are pursued with a laboratory skill and persistence that at length transmute the dross of the event into the spun gold of insight and understanding. Combining rare analytical skill with deft literary treatment, Chisman explores and illuminates the divergent and often mutually obstructive traditions that separate the fields of practical politics, political journalism, and political science. His findings are important, because so long as these ingrained schisms persist, it is the active participation of the voter and hence the American electoral process itself that will continue to be victimized.

Forrest P. Chisman is a political scientist who has served with distinction as the Associate Director of the Aspen Communications Program for the past two years. It is no disparagement of his many other contributions to say that this sparklingly clear appraisal—for which, along with the preceding conference frustrations, he undertook entire responsibility—represent the crowning achievement to date of his association with our Program.

Roland S. Homet, Jr.
Program Director
Aspen Institute Program on
Communications and Society

On September 9, 1976, the Aspen Institute Program on Communications and Society, the League of Women Voters of the United States, and Post-Newsweek Stations sponsored a large public meeting at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. The subject was politics and television, and the participants were leading political advertisers, journalists and researchers. Cassandras of the conference circuit often complain that the outcomes of such meetings are depressingly predictable, but this one was different. It was full of surprises, at least for those of us who organized it, and those surprises spotlighted some issues about politics and television that appear to merit wider attention.

A Straightforward Job

Our goal in organizing the conference was fairly simple. In November 1975, the three organizations had sponsored a conference on politics and the media which drew a large number of politicians, broadcasters, newspaper people and members of the interested public. It was a useful airing of opinions and experiences, but one group of experts was underrepresented—academic researchers. Over the last few years, a towering pile of research about the effects of political television and the things that cause those effects has accumulated. Unfortunately, little of this work falls within the ken of politicians or media people, let alone the general public, probably because most of it is highly technical and buried up to its neck in jargon. As a result, researchers seldom play a major role in meetings like the one we held in 1975.

During the spring of 1976, however, we learned of an attempt to bridge the gap between the perspectives of academics and of practical people active in politics and television. Two young researchers at Syracuse University, Thomas Patterson and Robert McClure, had conducted a panel survey of voters in Syracuse, New York, during the 1972 presidential general election campaign. That is, they had interviewed the same group of several hundred people at several points between the start of the campaign on Labor Day and its conclusion in November. Moreover, they were conducting a larger study with two other cities in 1976. Rather than relegate their findings to academic journals, Patterson and McClure had written what they believed to be a popular book entitled *The Unseeing Eye*. In language comprehensible to the layman and with very little technical apparatus, they put forward some striking conclusions and supported them with data presented in an understandable form.

Network news, Patterson and McClure said, disserved the American public during the 1972 election. The networks generally presented practically no information about issues or the characters and qualifications of candidates. Rather, they concentrated on "horse-race and hoopla," the day-to-day process of campaigning. Moreover, the public did not pick up even the little electorally relevant information the networks did present. "Consequently," Patterson and McClure wrote, "steady viewers of the nightly network newscasts learn almost nothing of importance about a presidential election." In contrast, they found that political advertising was remarkably successful in conveying information. Although few people changed their voting intentions because of ads, even many short

(30 and 60 second) spots contained substantial information on issues, and people who saw them tended to retain that information. Patterson and McClure asserted, "To put it bluntly, spot political commercials educate rather than hoodwink the voters." The authors concluded that the network news services should rearrange their coverage priorities and that prevailing expressions of discontent with political advertising are unjustified.

We thought this book would be a good focus for a follow-up to our 1975 conference. Its criticisms of the political media were sharply drawn and they were consistent with the complaints of many people with intimate knowledge of the workings of television and politics. For example, in the famous *Playboy* interview, President Carter lamented that "... the national news media have absolutely no interest in issues *at all*." Using the Patterson and McClure book as a focus for our conference would allow us to examine this and other important criticisms of political television and it would also allow us to bring the expertise of the academic community to bear on the kinds of problems we had discussed in 1975. We wanted to find out if the conclusions drawn by Patterson and McClure were justified, and if so, what their implications were. As another agenda item, we wanted to find out how successful Patterson and McClure had been in bridging the gap between the practical world and academe and whether there were any cautionary lessons to be taken from their experiences. We had some fairly specific expectations on each of these points, but we found that, for the most part, we were very wrong.

As a format for the conference, we settled on a day-long session consisting of three panels. The first was to be made up mainly of political advertisers and consultants, the second of the presidents of the three commercial network news departments, and the third, a mixture of the first two panels. Throughout all of the panels, we would sprinkle some academics and print journalists. After a few false starts, we issued our invitations in late July.

Contrasting Replies

Then came our first surprise: The networks wouldn't come. Repeated correspondence and phone calls made it apparent that the network news presidents were unwilling to attend or to designate anyone else from their organizations to attend. In part, the problem was unavoidable schedule conflicts, but a number of network leaders told us quite frankly that they would not attend even if they had the time. The reason they gave was that they thought the research was so shoddy that they did not want to be associated with it, even as critics. We replied that if the research was so bad, someone should come forth to denounce it. This argument proved to be unavailing.

Our second surprise occurred at almost the same time. In contrast to network people, almost all of the political advertisers and consultants we invited were willing to attend. This included both John Deardourff, who was handling advertising for the Ford campaign and Gerald Rafshoon, who was handling it for Carter. Given the pressure of their responsibilities, we had really not expected that they would have the time to come, but they accepted immediately and they actually turned up.

After some thought, however, our perturbation at the contrasting attitudes of the advertisers and broadcasters gave way to a disappointing sense of realism. Of course, we thought, the broadcasters would not come because they were criticized in the Patterson and McClure book, and the advertisers, who were praised, agreed to come so that they could bathe in glory. We had been proceeding on the perhaps academic assumption that if a suitably qualified scholar criticizes someone, that person will feel an obligation to debate the criticism in any available forum, regardless of whether he considers it well-founded. This, after all, is a basic tenet of the collegial pursuit of truth, dating back to the Middle Ages. But we had been naive, we reflected, to suppose that practical men of affairs would embrace some such high-minded notion of intellectual dialogue rather than follow their self-interest in responding to our invitation. So we put together a second panel of print journalists, non-network television people, and academics, and went on with our planning.

Here we were in for a further surprise. When the meeting was finally convened under the crystal chandeliers of the Waldorf's Empire Room, both the advertisers and the journalists supported the networks and attacked the book. Their criticisms were much the same as those of the network news presidents: The book was shoddy work leading to wrong conclusions. While the advertisers were anxious to assert that they concurred with the finding that advertising could and did convey issue information, they thought that Patterson and McClure had gotten to this finding in the wrong way; and, as we shall see shortly, in some respects they were not even satisfied with the conclusion itself.

The attitude of our panelists at the meeting surprised us not only because the advertising people went on the offensive, but also because everyone seemed to think that the work was deficient. We had faith in at least the intellectual reputability of Patterson and McClure's book. The authors are well-trained scholars; parts of the book had previously been published in serious journals without any major dissenting voices being raised; and our own professional judgment, together with that of other professionals consulted, suggested that they had turned out a first-rate piece of work, at least from a scholarly point of view. Was the meeting teaching us that there was some kind of inherent conflict between the academic and practical worlds that Patterson and McClure have stumbled over? In part, but not quite in the way it might seem.

Let's look at the criticisms leveled at the book. They are important not so much because they bear on the merits of this particular work, but because of what they show about the academic, journalistic and political worlds and the relationship among them. Of all the criticisms, three were particularly telling to the layman. First, it was said that the book was too shrill in its attacks on the networks. It overstated its case and often used unguarded language. Second, it was said that the scientific methods used in the book were weak. As a work of scholarship, it did not stand up. Third, it was said that the values applied in interpreting the findings were wrong. Of all these criticisms, the third is perhaps most important, but in order to see it in full perspective, it is necessary to run through the other two briefly.

A Question of Tone

The criticism that the book was too shrill was readily accepted by even Patterson and McClure. They had, they said, tried to write a popular book and to do this it was

necessary to use eye-catching words and hyperbolic statements. In their defense they argued that it is hard to inject life into academic material and that they were justified in "jazzing it up" a bit as long as their facts remained essentially correct.

The conference dialogue on the tone of the book was instructive. On the one hand, it seemed that the practical-world people were operating from a stereotype about what academic work should be like. When Patterson and McClure tried to break into their world of popular communication, they experienced a knee-jerk rejection. On the other hand, it seemed that Patterson and McClure, being basically academics, held an incorrect stereotype of what popular writing should be like. They offended the tacit canons of journalistic ethics. To say that the networks "consistently misuse the medium" and "stuff [the voter's] head full of nonsense and trivia," is clearly sensationalism in the worst sense. It is the kind of writing that responsible journalists outgrew many years ago, and it puts Patterson and McClure in a poor position from which to judge anyone else's journalistic standards.

Regardless of what one thinks of Patterson and McClure's language, however, a fundamental question arises around the issue of tone: If academics are to communicate their findings to the general public, they are obviously going to have to do so in a style other than the pedantic plodding of scholarly journals. In particular, they cannot simply report mathematical relationships; those are meaningless to the public. What the public wants to know is whether, for example, network news presents "a lot, a little or practically no valuable information" about the campaign. These are the terms in which the public thinks about television and politics, and if the researcher is to reach the public he must use these or some close equivalents. But how do numbers translate into these terms? Is, for example, ten percent of programming devoted to issues "a lot, a little or not very much"? This becomes even more puzzling in talking about relationships between two or more variables. Does a correlation of .20 between advertising and information gain indicate that advertising had "a lot, a little or practically no" influence on the public? Patterson and McClure tried to carry out this translation process; apparently they failed, at least as far as the media professionals were concerned. Yet the attempt was worthwhile as a revealing indication of exactly how difficult the problems are. Without doubt, academics will have to experiment further and go through many more disappointing sessions of the sort we held before they find solutions to these problems.

A Question of Method

The criticisms our panelists made of the scientific methods used by Patterson and McClure are in some ways the least interesting to the general public, but they are important, if for no other reason, because they reflect many of the worries that laymen commonly express about public opinion research. As a result they suggest major barriers to acceptance of that research by both ordinary citizens and the political and journalistic elites.

It is hard to be very specific about the methodological criticisms raised at our meeting because our panelists were not specific. Probably the most telling case was made by Edward Ney, president of Young and Rubicam, and a long-time statesman of the

advertising industry. He began by saying that the study was flawed because it had been conducted during only one year, 1972, which was different from 1976 and other presidential campaign years in that there were very few issues in the campaign. The major issue was McGovern's competence. In addition, he said that the research was conducted during only one seven-week period at the end of the campaign, a time when he thought most people had already made up their minds about whom they would vote for. Things might have been different if Patterson and McClure had looked at the 1972 primaries.

Furthermore, Ney said, the research was conducted in only one city, Syracuse, New York, which might not be typical, and it dealt only with network news, neglecting other network public affairs broadcasts ranging from convention coverage to the Sunday afternoon talk shows. He also contended that the questionnaires used by Patterson and McClure were badly designed because they baldly asked people what they had learned from television. Such questionnaires, according to Ney, were overly obtrusive and likely to bring idiosyncratic results, and this was made even worse by the fact that the same people were repeatedly interviewed. Finally, he said, he would be very surprised if, for example, five-minute commercials did not provide at least some information. After all, the candidates are trying to sell themselves, so they have to tell the public something. As a result, he did not think that Patterson and McClure's findings about commercials were significant.

Other panel members added to Ney's criticisms. Some pointed out that simply by studying network news, evening by evening, as Patterson and McClure had done, one could not get a good idea of the cumulative impact of repeated viewing over long periods of time. Perhaps eventually issues do percolate through. Others said that Patterson and McClure had neglected the social context within which media effects take place, such as an individual's predispositions toward certain candidates or issues, his viewing habits and the influence of his family. Still others argued that the important effects of television are long-range in its conditioning of the public to have certain basic expectations about politics and to adopt certain standards of judgment. Finally, there were criticisms that the Patterson and McClure study neglected local television and radio and as a result gave an incomplete view of an individual's media environment.

These are the kinds of solid, common-sense objections that are often raised against public opinion research. We had not expected to hear them at our meeting, however, because they are objections commonly answered by social scientists and we thought that our panelists had heard all these answers at one time or another. Here, again, we were wrong. That is, we were wrong to think that our panelists, who after all are primarily managers or working journalists, would share the methodological sophistication or biases (depending upon how you look at it) of the social science community.

But their criticisms led to another unexpected development: On methodology, a subject of particular concern to all public opinion researchers, Patterson and McClure did not respond very fully to the criticisms leveled at them. Admittedly, they were given relatively little time in which to respond, but apparently academics are less adept than businessmen and journalists at the kind of give-and-take we were engaged in. The researchers did make two cogent points, however.

First, they pointed out that Ney was wrong to say that their questioning was obtrusive because they had asked people what they got from television. They did not rely on the answers to such questions. Rather they judged people's gain in knowledge from television by asking factual questions. For example, they asked for descriptions of the candidates' stands on major issues, and they asked their own issue questions such as, "Would you say that the number of ground troops in Viet Nam has increased, decreased, or remained about the same since the last presidential election in 1968?" They then compared the answers of people with different levels of television exposure. For example, they compared someone who watched a lot of network news with someone who watched very little, and they found that, other things being equal, there was practically no difference in their information gain during the campaign.

Second, Patterson and McClure asked why, if their work was methodologically weak, they had found effects of television advertising but no effects of network news. This point is telling to some extent but, of course, it can also be argued that their findings were something of a fluke.

What Might Have Been

The researchers might have said much more, and I think more should be said to clear up popular misconceptions about the kind of enterprise they and other survey researchers are engaged in. While I, as an individual, think the book is far from perfect, I do think it is at least as good as most going commercial research of its type, especially because, when the hyperbole is scraped away, it makes very limited claims.

Let's look at the criticisms, then. Of course, Patterson and McClure studied only one year and they claim to speak only about that year. Indeed politics in 1976 may have been different from politics in 1972, but at our meeting Patterson and McClure reported findings from their studies of the 1976 primaries which were almost identical to their findings about 1972. Political scientists generally doubt that there are massive changes in American political and social processes over so short a period as four years; that is, they doubt that something true in 1972 would disappear in 1976. Patterson and McClure's work seems to support this doubt. Moreover, their work contradicts Mr. Ney's intuition that there were no issues in the 1972 campaign. Patterson and McClure found that people were able to identify campaign issues (such as Viet Nam and the economy), said they cared about them, and showed gains in information to support their positions.

The contention that the study covered only the general election in 1972 can be answered in similar terms. Patterson and McClure now have data through the 1976 primaries which show similar results. Of course, the verdict is never finally in on any research of this type, but when the same findings show up in two time periods, during two campaigns, the conclusions are about as firmly grounded as any that social researchers have to offer. Similarly, Patterson and McClure must plead guilty to studying only one city in 1972, but that city, Syracuse, New York, is often used as a test market for commercial products and advertisements. It is common practice for commercial researchers to rely on findings from only one "typical" market. Much well-regarded

academic research is also of this type. Moreover, in 1976, Patterson and McClure have studied two different markets—Erie, Pennsylvania, and Los Angeles, California—and have come up with comparable conclusions. Apparently, Syracuse is fairly typical after all.

Mr. Ney's objection that the researchers dealt only with network news is certainly well grounded. Of course, the networks put on many other public affairs shows and it would be interesting to know their effects. Nevertheless, documentaries and the Sunday afternoon talk shows generally have extremely low ratings, and consequently whatever effects they have fall on a very small part of the American public. In the past there has been a theory that this programming has a broader influence, because people who watch it pass on their information and impressions to others. Recent research has cast considerable doubt upon this theory, however, although it is by no means a closed issue. In any event, Patterson and McClure claim to speak only about network news and, as a result, it is hard to see why they should be faulted for studying only that service.

Mr. Ney's contention that the questioning method used by Patterson and McClure was so "obtrusive" as to invalidate their findings, probably would not be accepted by most researchers. True, the questionnaires they used were lengthy, but lengthy questionnaires are commonly used by commercial and academic researchers. In addition, the method of re-interviewing people is also a standard tool of researchers. Numerous studies that compare people who were repeatedly interviewed with people who were interviewed only once or twice have shown very little distorting effect of re-interviewing. Even if there is an effect, the most that can be said is that there is an unavoidable trade-off between getting a lot of information about people over a long period of time and getting a little bit of information about them in one time period. The former may run some risk of bias, but the latter is lacking in depth.

Mr. Ney is right to say that he would be surprised if five-minute commercials did not contain some issue information, but he should be equally surprised that thirty-minute news broadcasts apparently do not.

With regard to criticisms that Patterson and McClure neglected the cumulative effect of network news and the social context within which it is received, they should certainly plead guilty. These are very interesting issues, but social scientists cannot study everything, and the fact that television has long-range effects is no argument against findings about the effects of an important short-term variable: the campaign. The fact that people's receptiveness to television is conditioned by social and psychological factors is no argument against the contention that, regardless of these factors, people seem to be influenced by commercials and uninfluenced by network news. Social and psychological factors are the mechanisms of influence; Patterson and McClure were trying to study the results created by those mechanisms: attitudes and votes.

This is the kind of defense that Patterson and McClure might have offered to the methodological criticisms. Laymen and professional alike can judge whether the defense is adequate. Certainly there are problems with the book, such as its neglect of newspaper and local television, but it is interesting that the academics on our panel found few problems with the method and criticized the book primarily because it was incomplete rather than incorrect.

It is also interesting that, despite their harsh criticisms, the politicians and journalists at our conference did not seem to find methodological shortcomings the primary problem with the Patterson and McClure book. Indeed, Mr. Ney called their conclusions "believable." A more important problem was highlighted by the second panel where, after a flurry of criticisms of method and style, the moderator and respected public opinion analyst, Daniel Yankelovich, asked his panelists whether it was really the findings, as opposed to the interpretation which Patterson and McClure put on them, that were troublesome. The panelists all agreed that it was the interpretation. This was another unexpected development. Apparently the panelists felt that they had to express their criticisms in scientific terms, when, in fact, what was bothering them were the values that Patterson and McClure brought to their work.

This was probably our biggest surprise, because the particular value implicit in the Patterson and McClure book to which almost everyone on the panels took exception was the importance of conveying issue information to the voters. The panelists roundly rejected the authors' criticism of the networks for not providing enough issue information, along with their praise of advertisers for getting an issue message across. This led to a number of press accounts of our meeting announcing that it was one of the few cases in which the networks found defenders at an impartially sponsored conference.

Exactly what did our panelists mean when they criticized Patterson and McClure for insisting on the importance of issues in television news and political advertising? Apparently they meant three things. First, they suggested that Patterson and McClure were naive about how the real world of politics and journalism works. Both politicians and journalists, our panelists said, have found that people are turned off by issues. America does not have an issue politics, in the sense that people vote on the issues. Moreover, even if people were interested in issues, the press could not do much to help them. The press, our panelists maintained, does not set the national agenda. It merely mirrors what candidates do; and if, as in 1972, the candidates do not develop credible or impressive issue positions, there is little that the media can do to substitute for that deficiency. TV power is, as Patterson and McClure have indeed suggested, a myth, but in the panel's view they were wrong to suggest that television can do more. Finally, R. W. Apple of the *New York Times* raised the point that it is probably naive to suggest that people are more informed even if they do know the issue positions of candidates; he cited the example of Roosevelt's election on a balanced-budget platform in 1932 and his immediate adoption of big government spending when he got into office. In general, our panelists contended, Americans vote for candidates on the basis of their estimate of the candidate's character, and fortunately the press is able to convey a good sense of the stuff politicians are made of, even if it can't say much about their issue positions.

In partial contradiction of the first point our panelists suggested that the dichotomy between issues and images (in the sense of ideas about a candidate's character) is a false one, and Patterson and McClure should not have adopted it. To the extent that voters are concerned with issues, it is because they translate candidate positions into ideas about the candidate's image. Likewise, their ideas about their favorite candidate's image

color their attitude toward the issue. The words become interchangeable when one starts to think seriously about the subject. For example, it could be said that in 1972 the "real issue" was McGovern's competence rather than, for example, his stand on the Viet Nam war.

Finally, and most important, our panelists faulted Patterson and McClure in the realm of values. They said that not only do we not have an issue politics, but we should not; not only do the media simply reflect the real world of politics, which is dominated by "horse-race and hoopla," but that is their proper role. Journalistic power is in part a myth because politics, and the reactions of the public to it, are so complex that the responsible journalists can and should do little more than mirror the superficialities. If there is a need for improvement in television, it is not, as Patterson and McClure suggest, for more information about issues, but rather for more attention to candidate images and more coverage of the real events of day-to-day campaigning. This may lead to the coverage of some "psuedo events" staged by the candidates, but then the whole election is a pseudo event staged by the candidates.

We were startled by the reaction of our panelists, because it had seemed to us that Patterson and McClure were on firm ground in preaching textbook versions of democracy and the media. What, we wondered, has happened to the tradition of the crusading reporter, of the investigative journalist, of the William Allen White editor who is, in White's words, "something of a preacher, something of a teacher, something of an autocrat"? We thought the media were supposed to probe, to push, to keep candidates honest and in general to play an active rather than a passive role in the political process. What had happened to all these ideas? In order to get a fix on that, let's take a closer look at exactly what our panelists said in light of some other points of view.

The Real World

To begin with, it is not clear that the hard-headed view of the world our panelists adopted is accurate. Discussions of this subject are generally reduced to *ad hominem* arguments, and in the end, it is probably necessary for everyone to turn to his or her own experience. Nevertheless, a long tradition of academic research has shed some light on the subject. First, with regard to whether America has an issues politics, it was long the view of public opinion researchers that we do not. This view, however, is being dethroned. In an important and highly readable new book entitled, *The Changing American Voter*, three eminent political scientists have recently presented findings based on extensive research dealing with elections from 1952 through 1972. They contend that while the older idea that we do not have an issue politics was appropriate for the lethargic 1950s, a generation of highly politicized people joined the American electorate in the 1960s, and they are very interested in issues. In fact, there is strong evidence that in the 1972 election many of these people made up their minds in large part because of their perceptions of where the candidates stood on issues. The book argues that the only reason political scientists have considered issues unimportant is because most of their work was based on data from the Eisenhower years.

This view is definitely in the ascendant among academics who study public opinion. Many recent articles in professional journals have shown the increasing importance of issues, and all of them date this development from the mid-1960s. In addition, the author of this paper has recently published a book suggesting that even the interpretation of data from the Eisenhower years was wrong, and that it is quite possible that we had an issue politics even then. Are the academics or the shrewd political observers correct? It is at least clear that they have different views of the world, that they are not communicating very well with each other, and that our meeting served mainly to expose rather than to solve those problems.

Second, there is also a contrast between academic findings and practical intuitions with regard to the question of whether the press sets the agenda for American politics or merely mirrors the real events of the campaign. There is extensive literature, primarily by researchers at Syracuse University and the University of Wisconsin, that shows about as clearly as most academics think it can be shown that, at least in the case of print journalism, the kinds of things that the press deems important are the kinds of things that the general public deem important. Moreover, the more people are exposed to the press, the truer this is. One might argue that this is simply because editors and reporters think the same way that everyone else does, but this is not true. Some people with very little press exposure have different priorities than editors and reporters seem to have. And people in different locations, served by different news outlets, also seem to hold differing priorities. It is probably impossible to say definitively whether the media cause these effects, but the evidence is about as strong in this direction as most evidence about the processes of society. Although much of the research on this subject has concerned print journalism, its findings strongly suggest that television news could be an agenda setter too.

The emerging academic point of view about the realities of American politics is well summarized by the authors of *The Changing American Voter*. They write, "The individual voter evaluates candidates on the basis of information and impressions conveyed by the mass media, and then votes on that basis. . . . Elections turn more on the short-term forces in the election—the candidates and the issues as they come across to the electorate through the media."

If one accepts this point of view, then Patterson and McClure cannot be faulted for misinterpreting the real world. Yet in the real world, it is difficult to act on the academic view. There are difficulties, for example, in producing nightly half-hour news shows that delve extensively into issues and also keep their audiences. Certainly, given limitations on time and the visual nature of the media, television journalism is inherently less capable of presenting in-depth explanations of issues, or even of covering the full range of issues superficially, than the print media are. It is, admittedly, a "headline service" which flows swiftly before the consciousness of the viewer leaving little opportunity for digestion or assimilation of complex information even when such information is presented. As Patterson and McClure report, the print media do a better job on issues, and they probably always will. There is a temptation simply to accept this division of labor as foreordained and let television news seek its own level.

But the academic point of view suggests that the division of labor need not be so sharp, and that we should not adopt a counsel of despair. After all, before *Sesame Street*

no one was able to produce a popular educational show for children. Creative people, given a free hand, can accomplish a great deal. Broadcasters can, of course, argue that much of what political candidates say about issues is repetitious and makes for boring television. As F. Gerald Kline of the University of Michigan said at our meeting, however, researchers are beginning to learn that television teaches best by repetition, and that people not only accept but seek out redundancy. Finally, the academic point of view would also suggest that Mr. Apple's argument that people who know issue stands of candidates are not necessarily better informed, leads more logically to the conclusion that the media should do more digging to know the real intentions of the candidates than to the conclusion Mr. Apple drew. This is asking a lot, but the academic view of the real world suggests that, at least in principle, it is possible.

A False Distinction

The suggestion that distinguishing between issues and images is a false dichotomy is rather hard to fathom, whether or not one is an academic. To begin with, almost everyone, including our panelists, seems to be able to make the distinction most of the time and to be pretty well understood. Of course, issues and images may influence each other, but this is not to say that, for purposes of discussion and analysis, it is not useful to distinguish between the two. Certainly academics can and should study the interaction between issues and images and many of them, including Patterson and McClure, do just that.

There is a sense in which our panelists might be correct, however. We can see this by trying to identify issue voting and image voting more precisely. In image voting people's votes would not vary with the issue positions that candidates adopt; in issue voting they would. As just mentioned, researchers have found that votes do vary with issue positions. But what about the argument that this variation is simply due to the fact that people judge what kind of man a candidate is from his issue positions and then vote for him on the basis of the resulting image? Is this image voting? Not necessarily. If people dislike the issue positions a candidate adopts, then presumably they will not consider him the right kind of man. But if they do vote for him because they like his issue positions and consequently have confidence in his ability to take other good positions during his term of office, how does this differ from any reasonable definition of issue voting? On the other hand, in the situation mentioned, people are taking into consideration much more than what a candidate says about issues; they are also considering his general good judgment. How does this differ from any reasonable definition of image voting? In this kind of context it probably does not make sense to distinguish between issues and images at all.

Yet there clearly are important cases, at least at the margins, where the distinction makes sense. If an individual cares nothing about the issues but thinks that the candidate is a good and competent manager (which may have been the case during the Eisenhower years), then we clearly have image voting. If on the other hand, people consider candidates pretty much the same with regard to their managerial ability and personal character but share the views of one candidate whom they support, we clearly have issue voting.

Perhaps there is a muddled middle, but it can be defined and studied, and social scientists do define and study it. Moreover, to call the muddled middle more clearly image voting than issue voting seems unjustified.

Values

Probably the most important, and to those of use who organized the meeting, most disturbing objection to the way in which Patterson and McClure analyzed their material was, however, the accusation that they were applying the wrong values; that politics and the media not only do not deal with issues, but that they should not. We were dismayed to hear the professionals contend this. To some extent, the assertion was based on the assumptions about "the real world" mentioned above. But to some extent it stands on its own. After reflecting on the contention, I find it highly sophisticated and difficult to resolve on its merits. I think it is important, however, that the contention arose at our meeting because it reveals some profound dichotomies among American intellectuals concerned with politics and television that go far deeper than I, at least, had previously suspected.

First, the value judgments of our panelists obviously reveal a dichotomy between the academic way of looking at things and the tradition of practical men. Academics, and political scientists in particular, have a long tradition, dating back at least to Aristotle, of building their analyses around the rational man. This mythic figure who carefully weighs all of the evidence before making up his mind is discussed at length by even those who deny his existence or merit. In addition, academics are professional tinkerers, they like to pull things apart to see how they work and whether they work well. These two proclivities result in academics often using the rational man as a standard of comparison for actual men and political processes, even though most of them would maintain that this is in no sense an endorsement of the rational man's existence. They contend that they are scientists, in the sense that a chemist or physicist is a scientist, and consequently they pride themselves that their work is "value-free." They say their research simply reports facts and refrains from drawing implications as to what should be done about them. After being steeped in a value-free tradition, however, many social scientists eventually come to the point where, like Patterson and McClure, they find it necessary to place their findings in a context of values, if only to make them accessible to a wider audience. Perhaps because of their "value-free" background they may do this carelessly. Casting about quickly, they embrace the nearest available set of values—those of the rational man and the rational process—without much discrimination. At least in part, they try to cover their tracks by stipulating that their presentations are "for the sake of argument" only, but what can come through to the lay reader is a brief for the rational man.

Practical men differ from academics in the sense that they take their values deadly seriously. The values of journalists and politicians about how the political process should run may determine the success or failure of that process and their own careers. In this sense, practical men have no room for the rational man. They have never seen one, and as a result, they do not find much use in discussing him. Finally, practical men are less interested in what makes things happen than with whether the right results eventuate.

If America achieves a healthy political life (and it is certainly healthier than the political life of most other countries) when politicans and journalists work on the assumption that issues don't matter, then why bother about issues? Ushering in an issue politics might only disturb what has been proven to "work."

As a result, we should expect academics and practical men to differ about whether or not the United States should have an issue politics. That difference reflects two profoundly different backgrounds and vantage points.

This brings us to a second dichotomy revealed by the reactions of our panelists: A distinction within the Anglo-American political tradition. In college-level political science classes this dichotomy is usually explained in terms of the thought of the 18th century political theorist, Edmund Burke. Burke, as popularly presented, was a member of Parliament who on one occasion was facing a tough re-election campaign because he had ignored some petitions sent to him by his constituents. In a famous speech, he argued for the distinction between a member of Parliament being what he called a "delegate" and being engaged in what he called "virtual representation." By a "delegate" Burke meant someone who takes his instructions on as many matters as possible directly from his constituents. People should vote for or oppose a delegate depending on whether he has done exactly what they want. By a "virtual representative" Burke meant someone who is free to use his own best judgment about the positions to take and who does not feel bound by specific instructions from his constituency. In voting for a "virtual representative," citizens should consider whether the long-range trend of his activities has basically benefited the nation or not. Given his electoral situation, Burke naturally came out for "virtual representation" on the grounds that it is impossible for the ordinary citizen to fathom the myriad details of statecraft, and that he will in the long run be better served if he leaves a large measure of discretion to his representative.

Both of the positions described by Burke have persisted in American and British political lore, and it seems that at our meeting we stumbled across the same old dichotomy: Our researchers were saying people should vote for a President on the basis of whether they agree with him on the issues and our panelists were saying that they thought the most that people could do is decide whether a presidential candidate is the right kind of man. Generations of political theorists have puzzled over the dichotomy, and the conventional wisdom is that a mixed system, such as most theorists believe the United States has, is best. I suspect that on reflection both our academics and our panelists might agree.

Abstract discussions of this subject, however, commonly lead to polarization. There seems to be an undercurrent of dissension on this issue within the American intellectual community, which is probably repressed only by the fundamentally non-ideological nature of our politics. When ideology comes to the fore, however, as it did during the discontent of the 1960s, appeals for greater accountability of government, on the one hand, and resistance to those calls, on the other, can be seriously damaging. In such situations, it becomes of great importance that, as suggested by our meeting, politicans and media people are on the side of fairly sizeable government discretion, and academic intellectuals in many cases would like to see more popular control. This is probably a dichotomy about which we have not heard the last in American history.

The final dichotomy suggested by our meeting is within the profession of journalism. As already indicated, there are and long have been two journalistic traditions. The first is that of the crusading editor and educator of his community and the second is that of a press purely responsive to newsworthy individuals and to its community. Many people think that passive journalism is peculiar to television news with its national focus and extreme restrictions on time. While it is probably true that television news takes less of an activist position than the print media, we heard at our meeting R. W. Apple and Paul Weaver, two print journalists, defending a passive role for all media; and this position has a long and reputable tradition in print journalism, as suggested by such names of newspapers as *The Mirror*, *The Public Opinion*, and *The Voice*.

In fact, the case for passive journalism was eloquently put by Mr. Weaver in a *New York Times* article published shortly before our meeting. "In real life," he wrote, "the two groups [politicans and voters] are so diverse and complex that an observer can never have more than the sketchiest knowledge of their actions, motives and the like. That is why daily newspaper reporting at its most responsible has traditionally confined itself, when covering politics, to reporting those things that can be known with reasonable certainty: The outcome of elections, what the candidates say and do and the few generalizations that knowledgeable observers believe can be made about motives, plans and other intangibles."

At our meeting, then, it seems that the academics were defending one journalistic tradition and the journalists were defending another. But in this dichotomy, unlike the dichotomy within the political system, the tensions are not suppressed. There are tensions in every newsroom between those who would like to report "just the facts" and those who would like to dig deeper. What is disconcerting is that, if our meeting is any indication, the pendulum seems to have swung toward the former position. In a time of increasing political complexity, media leaders seem inclined to use that very complexity as a reason for not digging more deeply. This contention is borne out by a recent survey of journalists in a number of countries conducted by the *Washington Post* and Harvard University, which indicated that a majority of journalists felt they have too much power and should assume a more passive role. (See *Washington Post*, September 29, 1976.) This is a different thing from admitting that there are limits to how much journalism can do. Undoubtedly there are. It is rather a suggestion that journalists *should not* push their skills to the limits, because they distrust either themselves or their audiences.

Our meeting then revealed some deep schisms within and among the worlds of academics, politics and journalism that we had tried to bring together. In all probability these schisms will not be easily closed: They represent fundamentally different ways of looking at the world. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it should be possible to encompass them within a single polity if there is a spirit of give-and-take on all sides. Compromises are possible, for example, between the active and passive journalistic traditions if some reporters are assigned to get only the bare facts and others are asked to do in-depth studies. It is a cliche that the American political and social systems have a genius for compromise, and in a sense it is a testimony to the continuing vigor of those systems that the world views we found can continue to coexist.

But we should not take their continuing coexistence for granted. The advocates of different traditions at our meeting were strongly polarized: Not only did they stick

vehemently to their own positions, but they seemed genuinely unable to put themselves in each others' shoes. Although a degree of polarization is perhaps inevitable in meetings such as ours, the lack of communication between the participants was profoundly troubling, to me at least. Perhaps it means that we should try to bridge the gap by holding many more such meetings, perhaps it means that direct dialogues between the antagonists are futile. In any event, a much more explicit recognition of the nature of the underlying differences seems a prerequisite to any future efforts at accommodation.

A final lesson of our meeting has to do with the first problem we faced: the non-participation of the networks. Our initial reaction was that they did not show up because they feared criticism. Perhaps that was true in part; but perhaps a more important reason was that they differed fundamentally with our researchers on the dichotomies we discovered. This may have exaggerated in their eyes certain genuine shortcomings in the tone and methodology of the Patterson and McClure work, to the point where those shortcomings seemed to warrant a blanket indictment too obvious to need stating. If this is true, it suggests that the schisms we discovered are very wide indeed. It may be that they are irreconcilable, but to the extent that they prevent honest men from engaging in candid dialogue, they are certainly to be lamented.

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