5.

The Peek-a-Boo World

Toward the middle years of the nineteenth century, two ideas came together whose convergence provided twentieth-century America with a new metaphor of public discourse. Their partnership overwhelmed the Age of Exposition, and laid the foundation for the Age of Show Business. One of the ideas was quite new, the other as old as the cave paintings of Altamira. We shall come to the old idea presently. The new idea was that transportation and communication could be disengaged from each other, that space was not an inevitable constraint on the movement of information.

Americans of the 1800’s were very much concerned with the problem of “conquering” space. By the mid-nineteenth century, the frontier extended to the Pacific Ocean, and a rudimentary railroad system, begun in the 1830’s, had started to move people and merchandise across the continent. But until the 1840’s, information could move only as fast as a human being could carry it; to be precise, only as fast as a train could travel, which, to be even more precise, meant about thirty-five miles per hour. In the face of such a limitation, the development of America as a national community was retarded. In the 1840’s, America was still a composite of regions, each conversing in its own ways, addressing its own interests. A continentwide conversation was not yet possible.

The solution to these problems, as every school child used to know, was electricity. To no one’s surprise, it was an American who found a practical way to put electricity in the service of communication and, in doing so, eliminated the problem of space once and for all. I refer, of course, to Samuel Finley Breese Morse, America’s first true “spaceman.” His telegraph erased state lines, collapsed regions, and, by wrapping the continent in an information grid, created the possibility of a unified American discourse.

But at a considerable cost. For telegraphy did something that Morse did not foresee when he prophesied that telegraphy would make “one neighborhood of the whole country.” It destroyed the prevailing definition of information, and in doing so gave a new meaning to public discourse. Among the few who understood this consequence was Henry David Thoreau, who remarked in Walden that “We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate.... We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the old world some weeks nearer to the new; but perchance the first news that will leak
through into the broad flapping American ear will be that Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough.”¹

Thoreau, as it turned out, was precisely correct. He grasped that the telegraph would create its own definition of discourse; that it would not only permit but insist upon a conversation between Maine and Texas; and that it would require the content of that conversation to be different from what Typographic Man was accustomed to.

The telegraph made a three-pronged attack on typography’s definition of discourse, introducing on a large scale irrelevance, impotence, and incoherence. These demons of discourse were aroused by the fact that telegraphy gave a form of legitimacy to the idea of context-free information; that is, to the idea that the value of information need not be tied to any function it might serve in social and political decision-making and action, but may attach merely to its novelty, interest, and curiosity. The telegraph made information into a commodity, a “thing” that could be bought and sold irrespective of its uses or meaning.

But it did not do so alone. The potential of the telegraph to transform information into a commodity might never have been realized, except for the partnership between the telegraph and the press. The penny newspaper, emerging slightly before telegraphy, in the 1830’s, had already begun the process of elevating irrelevance to the status of news. Such papers as Benjamin Day’s New York Sun and James Bennett’s New York Herald turned away from the tradition of news as reasoned (if biased) political opinion and urgent commercial information and filled their pages with accounts of sensational events, mostly concerning crime and sex. While such “human interest news” played little role in shaping the decisions and actions of readers, it was at least local—about places and people within their experience—and it was not always tied to the moment. The human-interest stories of the penny newspapers had a timeless quality; their power to engage lay not so much in their currency as in their transcendence. Nor did all newspapers occupy themselves with such content. For the most part, the information they provided was not only local but largely functional—tied to the problems and decisions readers had to address in order to manage their personal and community affairs.

The telegraph changed all that, and with astonishing speed. Within months of Morse’s first public demonstration, the local and the timeless had lost their central position in newspapers, eclipsed by the dazzle of distance and speed. In fact, the first known use of the telegraph by a newspaper occurred one day after Morse gave his historic demonstration of telegraphy’s workability. Using the
same Washington-to-Baltimore line Morse had constructed, the Baltimore Patriot gave its readers information about action taken by the House of Representatives on the Oregon issue. The paper concluded its report by noting: “... we are thus enabled to give our readers information from Washington up to two o’clock. This is indeed the annihilation of space.”  

For a brief time, practical problems (mostly involving the scarcity of telegraph lines) preserved something of the old definition of news as functional information. But the foresighted among the nation’s publishers were quick to see where the future lay, and committed their full resources to the wiring of the continent. William Swain, the owner of the Philadelphia Public Ledger, not only invested heavily in the Magnetic Telegraph Company, the first commercial telegraph corporation, but became its president in 1850.

It was not long until the fortunes of newspapers came to depend not on the quality or utility of the news they provided, but on how much, from what distances, and at what speed. James Bennett of the New York Herald boasted that in the first week of 1848, his paper contained 79,000 words of telegraphic content—of what relevance to his readers, he didn’t say. Only four years after Morse opened the nation’s first telegraph line on May 24, 1844, the Associated Press was founded, and news from nowhere, addressed to no one in particular, began to criss-cross the nation. Wars, crimes, crashes, fires, floods—much of it the social and political equivalent of Adelaide’s whooping cough—became the content of what people called “the news of the day.”

As Thoreau implied, telegraphy made relevance irrelevant. The abundant flow of information had very little or nothing to do with those to whom it was addressed; that is, with any social or intellectual context in which their lives were embedded. Coleridge’s famous line about water everywhere without a drop to drink may serve as a metaphor of a decontextualized information environment: In a sea of information, there was very little of it to use. A man in Maine and a man in Texas could converse, but not about anything either of them knew or cared very much about. The telegraph may have made the country into “one neighborhood,” but it was a peculiar one, populated by strangers who knew nothing but the most superficial facts about each other.

Since we live today in just such a neighborhood (now sometimes called a “global village”), you may get a sense of what is meant by context-free information by asking yourself the following question: How often does it occur that information provided you on morning radio or television, or in the morning newspaper, causes you to alter your plans for the day, or to take some action you
would not otherwise have taken, or provides insight into some problem you are required to solve? For most of us, news of the weather will sometimes have such consequences; for investors, news of the stock market; perhaps an occasional story about a crime will do it, if by chance the crime occurred near where you live or involved someone you know. But most of our daily news is inert, consisting of information that gives us something to talk about but cannot lead to any meaningful action. This fact is the principal legacy of the telegraph: By generating an abundance of irrelevant information, it dramatically altered what may be called the “information-action ratio.”

In both oral and typographic cultures, information derives its importance from the possibilities of action. Of course, in any communication environment, input (what one is informed about) always exceeds output (the possibilities of action based on information). But the situation created by telegraphy, and then exacerbated by later technologies, made the relationship between information and action both abstract and remote. For the first time in human history, people were faced with the problem of information glut, which means that simultaneously they were faced with the problem of a diminished social and political potency.

You may get a sense of what this means by asking yourself another series of questions: What steps do you plan to take to reduce the conflict in the Middle East? Or the rates of inflation, crime and unemployment? What are your plans for preserving the environment or reducing the risk of nuclear war? What do you plan to do about NATO, OPEC, the CIA, affirmative action, and the monstrous treatment of the Baha’is in Iran? I shall take the liberty of answering for you: You plan to do nothing about them. You may, of course, cast a ballot for someone who claims to have some plans, as well as the power to act. But this you can do only once every two or four years by giving one hour of your time, hardly a satisfying means of expressing the broad range of opinions you hold. Voting, we might even say, is the next to last refuge of the politically impotent. The last refuge is, of course, giving your opinion to a pollster, who will get a version of it through a desiccated question, and then will submerge it in a Niagara of similar opinions, and convert them into—what else?—another piece of news. Thus, we have here a great loop of impotence: The news elicits from you a variety of opinions about which you can do nothing except to offer them as more news, about which you can do nothing.

Prior to the age of telegraphy, the information-action ratio was sufficiently close so that most people had a sense of being able to control some of the
contingencies in their lives. What people knew about had action-value. In the information world created by telegraphy, this sense of potency was lost, precisely because the whole world became the context for news. Everything became everyone’s business. For the first time, we were sent information which answered no question we had asked, and which, in any case, did not permit the right of reply.

We may say then that the contribution of the telegraph to public discourse was to dignify irrelevance and amplify impotence. But this was not all: Telegraphy also made public discourse essentially incoherent. It brought into being a world of broken time and broken attention, to use Lewis Mumford’s phrase. The principal strength of the telegraph was its capacity to move information, not collect it, explain it or analyze it. In this respect, telegraphy was the exact opposite of typography. Books, for example, are an excellent container for the accumulation, quiet scrutiny and organized analysis of information and ideas. It takes time to write a book, and to read one; time to discuss its contents and to make judgments about their merit, including the form of their presentation. A book is an attempt to make thought permanent and to contribute to the great conversation conducted by authors of the past. Therefore, civilized people everywhere consider the burning of a book a vile form of anti-intellectualism. But the telegraph demands that we burn its contents. The value of telegraphy is undermined by applying the tests of permanence, continuity or coherence. The telegraph is suited only to the flashing of messages, each to be quickly replaced by a more up-to-date message. Facts push other facts into and then out of consciousness at speeds that neither permit nor require evaluation.

The telegraph introduced a kind of public conversation whose form had startling characteristics: Its language was the language of headlines—sensational, fragmented, impersonal. News took the form of slogans, to be noted with excitement, to be forgotten with dispatch. Its language was also entirely discontinuous. One message had no connection to that which preceded or followed it. Each “headline” stood alone as its own context. The receiver of the news had to provide a meaning if he could. The sender was under no obligation to do so. And because of all this, the world as depicted by the telegraph began to appear unmanageable, even undecipherable. The line-by-line, sequential, continuous form of the printed page slowly began to lose its resonance as a metaphor of how knowledge was to be acquired and how the world was to be understood. “Knowing” the facts took on a new meaning, for it did not imply that one understood implications, background, or connections. Telegraphic
discourse permitted no time for historical perspectives and gave no priority to the qualitative. To the telegraph, intelligence meant knowing of lots of things, not knowing about them.

Thus, to the reverent question posed by Morse—What hath God wrought?—a disturbing answer came back: a neighborhood of strangers and pointless quantity; a world of fragments and discontinuities. God, of course, had nothing to do with it. And yet, for all of the power of the telegraph, had it stood alone as a new metaphor for discourse, it is likely that print culture would have withstood its assault; would, at least, have held its ground. As it happened, at almost exactly the same time Morse was reconceiving the meaning of information, Louis Daguerre was reconceiving the meaning of nature; one might even say, of reality itself. As Daguerre remarked in 1838 in a notice designed to attract investors, “The daguerreotype is not merely an instrument which serves to draw nature ... [it] gives her the power to reproduce herself.”

Of course both the need and the power to draw nature have always implied reproducing nature, refashioning it to make it comprehensible and manageable. The earliest cave paintings were quite possibly visual projections of a hunt that had not yet taken place, wish fulfillments of an anticipated subjection of nature. Reproducing nature, in other words, is a very old idea. But Daguerre did not have this meaning of “reproduce” in mind. He meant to announce that the photograph would invest everyone with the power to duplicate nature as often and wherever one liked. He meant to say he had invented the world’s first “cloning” device, that the photograph was to visual experience what the printing press was to the written word.

In point of fact, the daguerreotype was not quite capable of achieving such an equation. It was not until William Henry Fox Talbot, an English mathematician and linguist, invented the process of preparing a negative from which any number of positives could be made that the mass printing and publication of photographs became possible. The name “photography” was given to this process by the famous astronomer Sir John F. W. Herschel. It is an odd name since it literally means “writing with light.” Perhaps Herschel meant the name to be taken ironically, since it must have been clear from the beginning that photography and writing (in fact, language in any form) do not inhabit the same universe of discourse.

Nonetheless, ever since the process was named it has been the custom to speak of photography as a “language.” The metaphor is risky because it tends to obscure the fundamental differences between the two modes of conversation. To
begin with, photography is a language that speaks only in particularities. Its vocabulary of images is limited to concrete representation. Unlike words and sentences, the photograph does not present to us an idea or concept about the world, except as we use language itself to convert the image to idea. By itself, a photograph cannot deal with the unseen, the remote, the internal, the abstract. It does not speak of “man,” only of a man; not of “tree,” only of a tree. You cannot produce a photograph of “nature,” any more than a photograph of “the sea.” You can only photograph a particular fragment of the here-and-now—a cliff of a certain terrain, in a certain condition of light; a wave at a moment in time, from a particular point of view. And just as “nature” and “the sea” cannot be photographed, such larger abstractions as truth, honor, love, falsehood cannot be talked about in the lexicon of pictures. For “showing of” and “talking about” are two very different kinds of processes. “Pictures,” Gavriel Salomon has written, “need to be recognized, words need to be understood.” 6 By this he means that the photograph presents the world as object; language, the world as idea. For even the simplest act of naming a thing is an act of thinking—of comparing one thing with others, selecting certain features in common, ignoring what is different, and making an imaginary category. There is no such thing in nature as “man” or “tree.” The universe offers no such categories or simplifications; only flux and infinite variety. The photograph documents and celebrates the particularities of this infinite variety. Language makes them comprehensible.

The photograph also lacks a syntax, which deprives it of a capacity to argue with the world. As an “objective” slice of space-time, the photograph testifies that someone was there or something happened. Its testimony is powerful but it offers no opinions—no “should-have-beens” or “might-have-beens.” Photography is preemminently a world of fact, not of dispute about facts or of conclusions to be drawn from them. But this is not to say photography lacks an epistemological bias. As Susan Sontag has observed, a photograph implies “that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it.” 7 But, as she further observes, all understanding begins with our not accepting the world as it appears. Language, of course, is the medium we use to challenge, dispute, and cross-examine what comes into view, what is on the surface. The words “true” and “false” come from the universe of language, and no other. When applied to a photograph, the question, Is it true? means only, Is this a reproduction of a real slice of space-time? If the answer is “Yes,” there are no grounds for argument, for it makes no sense to disagree with an unfaked photograph. The photograph itself makes no arguable propositions, makes no extended and unambiguous
commentary. It offers no assertions to refute, so it is not refutable.

The way in which the photograph records experience is also different from the way of language. Language makes sense only when it is presented as a sequence of propositions. Meaning is distorted when a word or sentence is, as we say, taken out of context; when a reader or listener is deprived of what was said before, and after. But there is no such thing as a photograph taken out of context, for a photograph does not require one. In fact, the point of photography is to isolate images from context, so as to make them visible in a different way. In a world of photographic images, Ms. Sontag writes, “all borders ... seem arbitrary. Anything can be separated, can be made discontinuous, from anything else: All that is necessary is to frame the subject differently.” She is remarking on the capacity of photographs to perform a peculiar kind of dismembering of reality, a wrenching of moments out of their contexts, and a juxtaposing of events and things that have no logical or historical connection with each other. Like telegraphy, photography recreates the world as a series of idiosyncratic events. There is no beginning, middle, or end in a world of photographs, as there is none implied by telegraphy. The world is atomized. There is only a present and it need not be part of any story that can be told.

That the image and the word have different functions, work at different levels of abstraction, and require different modes of response will not come as a new idea to anyone. Painting is at least three times as old as writing, and the place of imagery in the repertoire of communication instruments was quite well understood in the nineteenth century. What was new in the mid-nineteenth century was the sudden and massive intrusion of the photograph and other iconographs into the symbolic environment. This event is what Daniel Boorstin in his pioneering book *The Image* calls “the graphic revolution.” By this phrase, Boorstin means to call attention to the fierce assault on language made by forms of mechanically reproduced imagery that spread unchecked throughout American culture—photographs, prints, posters, drawings, advertisements. I choose the word “assault” deliberately here, to amplify the point implied in Boorstin’s “graphic revolution.” The new imagery, with photography at its forefront, did not merely function as a supplement to language, but bid to replace it as our dominant means for construing, understanding, and testing reality. What Boorstin implies about the graphic revolution, I wish to make explicit here: The new focus on the image undermined traditional definitions of information, of news, and, to a large extent, of reality itself. First in billboards, posters, and advertisements, and later in such “news” magazines and papers as *Life, Look,* the
New York Daily Mirror and Daily News, the picture forced exposition into the background, and in some instances obliterated it altogether. By the end of the nineteenth century, advertisers and newspapermen had discovered that a picture was not only worth a thousand words, but, where sales were concerned, was better. For countless Americans, seeing, not reading, became the basis for believing.

In a peculiar way, the photograph was the perfect complement to the flood of telegraphic news-from-nowhere that threatened to submerge readers in a sea of facts from unknown places about strangers with unknown faces. For the photograph gave a concrete reality to the strange-sounding datelines, and attached faces to the unknown names. Thus it provided the illusion, at least, that “the news” had a connection to something within one’s sensory experience. It created an apparent context for the “news of the day.” And the “news of the day” created a context for the photograph.

But the sense of context created by the partnership of photograph and headline was, of course, entirely illusory. You may get a better sense of what I mean here if you imagine a stranger’s informing you that the illyx is a subspecies of vermiformplant with articulated leaves that flowers biannually on the island of Aldononjes. And if you wonder aloud, “Yes, but what has that to do with anything?” imagine that your informant replies, “But here is a photograph I want you to see,” and hands you a picture labeled Illyx on Aldononjes. “Ah, yes,” you might murmur, “now I see.” It is true enough that the photograph provides a context for the sentence you have been given, and that the sentence provides a context of sorts for the photograph, and you may even believe for a day or so that you have learned something. But if the event is entirely self-contained, devoid of any relationship to your past knowledge or future plans, if that is the beginning and end of your encounter with the stranger, then the appearance of context provided by the conjunction of sentence and image is illusory, and so is the impression of meaning attached to it. You will, in fact, have “learned” nothing (except perhaps to avoid strangers with photographs), and the illyx will fade from your mental landscape as though it had never been. At best you are left with an amusing bit of trivia, good for trading in cocktail party chatter or solving a crossword puzzle, but nothing more.

It may be of some interest to note, in this connection, that the crossword puzzle became a popular form of diversion in America at just that point when the telegraph and the photograph had achieved the transformation of news from functional information to decontextualized fact. This coincidence suggests that
the new technologies had turned the age-old problem of information on its head: Where people once sought information to manage the real contexts of their lives, now they had to invent contexts in which otherwise useless information might be put to some apparent use. The crossword puzzle is one such pseudo-context; the cocktail party is another; the radio quiz shows of the 1930’s and 1940’s and the modern television game show are still others; and the ultimate, perhaps, is the wildly successful “Trivial Pursuit.” In one form or another, each of these supplies an answer to the question, “What am I to do with all these disconnected facts?” And in one form or another, the, answer is the same: Why not use them for diversion? for entertainment? to amuse yourself, in a game? In The Image, Boorstin calls the major creation of the graphic revolution the “pseudo-event,” by which he means an event specifically staged to be reported—like the press conference, say. I mean to suggest here that a more significant legacy of the telegraph and the photograph may be the pseudo-context. A pseudo-context is a structure invented to give fragmented and irrelevant information a seeming use. But the use the pseudo-context provides is not action, or problem-solving, or change. It is the only use left for information with no genuine connection to our lives. And that, of course, is to amuse. The pseudo-context is the last refuge, so to say, of a culture overwhelmed by irrelevance, incoherence, and impotence.

Of course, photography and telegraphy did not strike down at one blow the vast edifice that was typographic culture. The habits of exposition, as I have tried to show, had a long history, and they held powerful sway over the minds of turn-of-the-century Americans. In fact, the early decades of the twentieth century were marked by a great outpouring of brilliant language and literature. In the pages of magazines like the American Mercury and The New Yorker, in the novels and stories of Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, and Hemingway, and even in the columns of the newspaper giants—the Herald Tribune, the Times—prose thrilled with a vibrancy and intensity that delighted ear and eye. But this was exposition’s nightingale song, most brilliant and sweet as the singer nears the moment of death. It told, for the Age of Exposition, not of new beginnings, but of an end. Beneath its dying melody, a new note had been sounded, and photography and telegraphy set the key. Theirs was a “language” that denied interconnectedness, proceeded without context, argued the irrelevance of history, explained nothing, and offered fascination in place of complexity and coherence. Theirs was a duet of image and instancy, and together they played the tune of a new kind of public discourse in America.

Each of the media that entered the electronic conversation in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries followed the lead of the telegraph and the photograph, and amplified their biases. Some, such as film, were by their nature inclined to do so. Others, whose bias was rather toward the amplification of rational speech—like radio—were overwhelmed by the thrust of the new epistemology and came in the end to support it. Together, this ensemble of electronic techniques called into being a new world—a peek-a-boo world, where now this event, now that, pops into view for a moment, then vanishes again. It is a world without much coherence or sense; a world that does not ask us, indeed, does not permit us to do anything; a world that is, like the child’s game of peek-a-boo, entirely self-contained. But like peek-a-boo, it is also endlessly entertaining.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with playing peek-a-boo. And there is nothing wrong with entertainment. As some psychiatrist once put it, we all build castles in the air. The problems come when we try to live in them. The communications media of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with telegraphy and photography at their center, called the peek-a-boo world into existence, but we did not come to live there until television. Television gave the epistemological biases of the telegraph and the photograph their most potent expression, raising the interplay of image and instancy to an exquisite and dangerous perfection. And it brought them into the home. We are by now well into a second generation of children for whom television has been their first and most accessible teacher and, for many, their most reliable companion and friend. To put it plainly, television is the command center of the new epistemology. There is no audience so young that it is barred from television. There is no poverty so abject that it must forgo television. There is no education so exalted that it is not modified by television. And most important of all, there is no subject of public interest—politics, news, education, religion, science, sports—that does not find its way to television. Which means that all public understanding of these subjects is shaped by the biases of television.

Television is the command center in subtler ways as well. Our use of other media, for example, is largely orchestrated by television. Through it we learn what telephone system to use, what movies to see, what books, records and magazines to buy, what radio programs to listen to. Television arranges our communications environment for us in ways that no other medium has the power to do.

As a small, ironic example of this point, consider this: In the past few years, we have been learning that the computer is the technology of the future. We are
told that our children will fail in school and be left behind in life if they are not “computer literate.” We are told that we cannot run our businesses, or compile our shopping lists, or keep our checkbooks tidy unless we own a computer. Perhaps some of this is true. But the most important fact about computers and what they mean to our lives is that we learn about all of this from television. Television has achieved the status of “meta-medium”—an instrument that directs not only our knowledge of the world, but our knowledge of ways of knowing as well.

At the same time, television has achieved the status of “myth,” as Roland Barthes uses the word. He means by myth a way of understanding the world that is not problematic, that we are not fully conscious of, that seems, in a word, natural. A myth is a way of thinking so deeply embedded in our consciousness that it is invisible. This is now the way of television. We are no longer fascinated or perplexed by its machinery. We do not tell stories of its wonders. We do not confine our television sets to special rooms. We do not doubt the reality of what we see on television, are largely unaware of the special angle of vision it affords. Even the question of how television affects us has receded into the background. The question itself may strike some of us as strange, as if one were to ask how having ears and eyes affects us. Twenty years ago, the question, Does television shape culture or merely reflect it? held considerable interest for many scholars and social critics. The question has largely disappeared as television has gradually become our culture. This means, among other things, that we rarely talk about television, only about what is on television—that is, about its content. Its ecology, which includes not only its physical characteristics and symbolic code but the conditions in which we normally attend to it, is taken for granted, accepted as natural.

Television has become, so to speak, the background radiation of the social and intellectual universe, the all-but-imperceptible residue of the electronic big bang of a century past, so familiar and so thoroughly integrated with American culture that we no longer hear its faint hissing in the background or see the flickering gray light. This, in turn, means that its epistemology goes largely unnoticed. And the peek-a-boo world it has constructed around us no longer seems even strange.

There is no more disturbing consequence of the electronic and graphic revolution than this: that the world as given to us through television seems natural, not bizarre. For the loss of the sense of the strange is a sign of adjustment, and the extent to which we have adjusted is a measure of the extent
to which we have been changed. Our culture’s adjustment to the epistemology of

Television is by now all but complete; we have so thoroughly accepted its
definitions of truth, knowledge, and reality that irrelevance seems to us to be

filled with import, and incoherence seems eminently sane. And if some of our

institutions seem not to fit the template of the times, why it is they, and not the
template, that seem to us disordered and strange.

It is my object in the rest of this book to make the epistemology of television

visible again. I will try to demonstrate by concrete example that television’s way

of knowing is uncompromisingly hostile to typography’s way of knowing; that
television’s conversations promote incoherence and triviality; that the phrase

“serious television” is a contradiction in terms; and that television speaks in only

one persistent voice—the voice of entertainment. Beyond that, I will try to
demonstrate that to enter the great television conversation, one American
cultural institution after another is learning to speak its terms. Television, in
other words, is transforming our culture into one vast arena for show business. It
is entirely possible, of course, that in the end we shall find that delightful, and
decide we like it just fine. That is exactly what Aldous Huxley feared was
coming, fifty years ago.