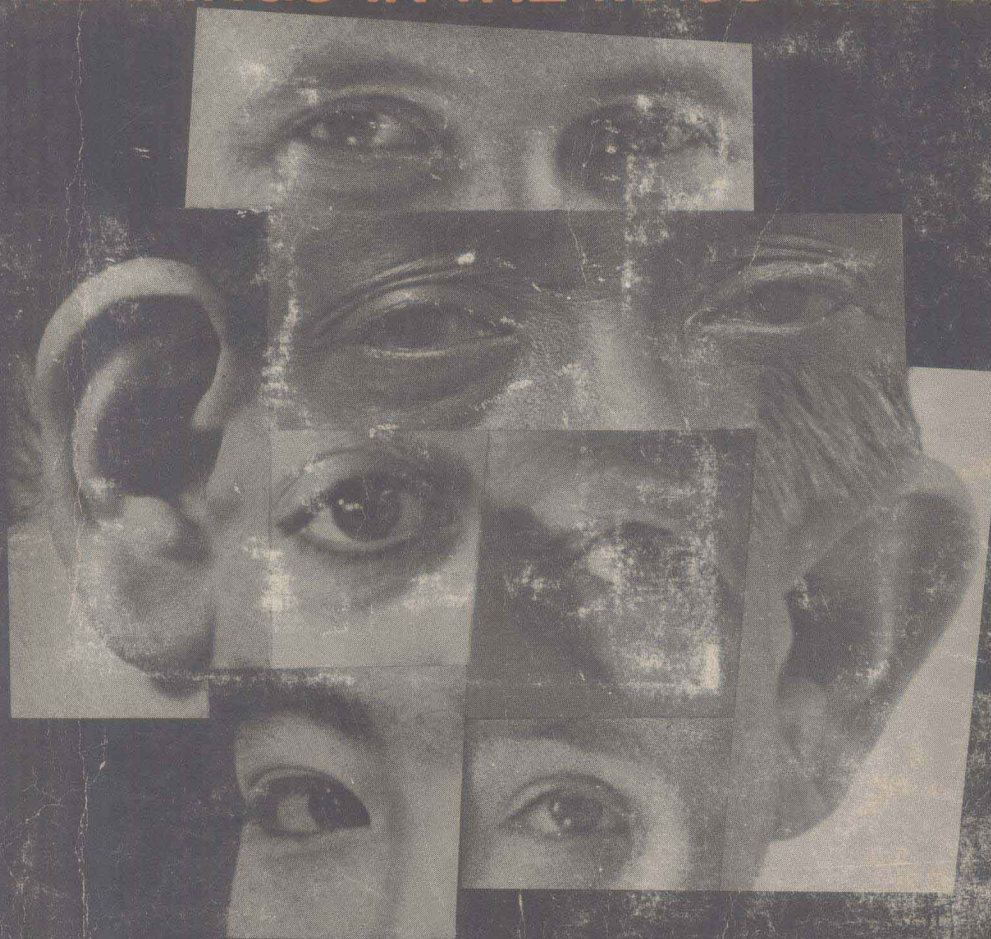


Allen Kirschner  
Linda Kirschner

# RADIO & TELEVISION

READINGS IN THE MASS MEDIA



**Allen Kirschner  
and Linda Kirschner**

# **RADIO AND TELEVISION**

**READINGS IN THE MASS MEDIA**

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*For Stephen, Michael, Scott, and Kenneth.  
May they use the media well  
and lead fuller lives because of them.*

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## **RADIO AND TELEVISION**



## INTRODUCTION

THERE are no experts in the mass media as there are no experts in life. For in the media, as in life, we are all participants. The media are experiences, and they are nothing less and nothing more. The radio or television blaring in an empty room produces merely sounds and images, as the page in a closed book whether it be *Moby Dick* or *Valley of the Dolls* is nothing more than black dots on a white sheet. Only a human being can give it life, turn it into experience. We bring to the book—as to the media—ourselves, all that has gone before to make us what we are. The mosaic of our life combines with the dots on the page or the dots on the screen to create experience.

We watch the same speaker but he is not the same; we hear the same words, but the words are not the same. Some of us cheer, some cry, some laugh. There is no speaker and there is no speech. There is only the viewer, the listener, hearing what he can hear, being who he is.

Once our world was composed of only those things we could experience directly. What we saw, heard, touched, tasted, smelled—these were our world. We talked and listened to our friends who most likely saw, heard, touched, tasted, smelled the very same things. Our world was small. Then came the printing press, and we read, and for some of us the time we thus spent aboard the *Pequod* or the time at Walden Pond came to seem almost as real as the time we actually spent in college or in the army. Then for most of us came the movies. We saw Sheriff Gary Cooper, heroic and alone, confront six (or was it eight?) men in *High Noon* and in our mind he would remain a model of courage and integrity. Finally for virtually all of us radio and television entered our homes and with them the sounds and sights of the entire world became ours. At President John F. Kennedy's funeral we mourned in a way few of us ever mourned for someone we knew. But, of course, in an electronic way we did know him. No longer did experience

have to be direct. What Marshall McLuhan termed "the Global Village" had arrived and we were all part of it. Life would never again be so simple as when we experienced it directly.

Radio and television make us at once a part of the experience and yet remote from the experience. We view "the eclipse of the century" on television rather than from our front porch. Somehow on television it all seems more spectacular. Did we really see the eclipse? Certainly we shall tell our grandchildren we did. What we see in person merges in our consciousness with the dots on the screen until our sense of reality itself becomes blurred.

To be sure, radio and television have enlightened us and entertained us, but they have also confused and changed us as well. Clearly, the traffic reporter in Helicopter 9 tranquilly describing moderate traffic on the Long Island Expressway as we move bumper to bumper is mistaken. Are the reports of "light" casualties in the latest battle in far-off Asia to be believed? The media, indeed, afford us a window on the world that allows us to see and hear. But they also determine the sights we see and the sounds we hear. What happens to us when the window contradicts or offends our sensibilities? How much can we trust the window? How much can we trust ourselves?

We rush home from a demonstration, a ballgame, a speech, in order to "see" the event on the eleven o'clock news. Why? Is it only seeing the image that assures us it really did happen? Is our own reality in such doubt?

Perhaps the problem is not new; perhaps it has always been with us. Certainly Henry David Thoreau was aware of it long before radio and television. Describing one man who after a night's sleep always asked, "Pray tell me anything new that has happened to a man anywhere on this globe," Thoreau commented, "he reads it over his coffee and rolls, that a man has had his eyes gouged out this morning on the Wachito River; never dreaming the while that he lives in the dark unfathomed mammoth cave of this world, and has but the rudiment of an eye himself."

In "the dark unfathomed mammoth cave of this world," we cannot afford to see but with "the rudiment of an eye." Radio and television have the potential to help us see and understand ourselves and our world more completely. They are extensions of the eye and the ear. The entire earth, the moon, indeed, the solar system itself are now within our purview. The electronic media have provided American civilization with its most complex influences as well as with one of its greatest opportunities. How have we used the media? How will we use them?

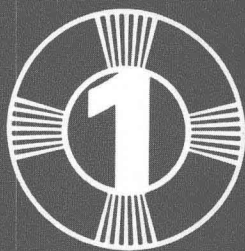
McLuhan says that "television demands participation and involvement

in depth of the whole being." True. But life demands no less. We have created the media; we must take care that they do not in turn create us. Man's inventions and creations should enrich and expand his consciousness not diminish and contract it. Unlike the hero in Frederick Exley's novel *A Fan's Notes*, we must not allow being a fan to become our fate, our destiny, our end. The dots on the screen are not life. If we allow them to become so, we run the risk of losing our own consciousness, reality, and meaning.

That the media offer an escape from self is all too evident. But radio and television are, in the words of the Carnegie Commission Report, an "opportunity unrealized." They can and must offer a growth toward self. They must help man define himself within the confines of his environment.

No, there are no experts in the mass media, and this book will not make you an expert. It may, however, help you to understand more fully not only radio and television but your relationship to these media as well. It may allow you to realize the potential and the danger inherent in the media and to employ them intelligently. It may also enable you to make valid judgments and pose critical questions. Above all, this book will, hopefully, lead you to greater self-awareness, which, of course, should be the object of any book, of any media, and of life itself.





**FORM AND TECHNIQUE**





## **Louis Kronenberger TV: A PROSPECTUS**

*Television was in its infancy, hardly the giant it is today, when Louis Kronenberger, long-time drama critic for Time magazine, wrote this prospectus in 1951. Two decades later, one can read his words of hope and fear, and wonder whether television has indeed become "one of the great milestones" in the history of culture or one of the "gravestones."*

TWO phenomena—a half century apart—have exercised the greatest influence on twentieth-century Americans as social animals. The first was the arrival of the automobile which—aside from its more practical uses—stimulated all America to move about, whether five miles to a picture show, twenty-five to a bathing beach, fifty for the sake of driving or two hundred to call on Grandma. With the coming of the automobile there took place, in the strictest sense, a social revolution. Distance, previously a barrier, was now an incentive; the rare treat became the everyday occurrence; in alliance with the telephone, the automobile could whisk you from the fireside to the ten-mile-distant poker table, from the side-yard swing to the mountains. It was no longer necessary to eat at home, and hence to keep servants, or even to sleep at home or, with the coming of the trailer, even to have a home. One could savor life to a degree never before imagined, and on as free-moving and last-minute a basis as one chose. The whole method of courtship (for buggy riding had been largely rural) was altered, and, scarcely less, the whole enjoyment of sex. The suburbs lost their remoteness; while what had been a day's grudging and dutiful pilgrimage—to visit the sick, the old, the poor, the near-of-kin—could be effected in two or three hours; and where, on a rainy, a snowy or even a chilly night, the half-mile walk to the car line had kept hundreds of thousands at home, they need now only stroll to the garage. While forfeiting nothing as a refuge, home became much less of a prison; and even those accustomed to live snug, in the bliss of carpet slippers, book and reading lamp, relished the chance of living strenuously.