

D ESCALATION IN A SATELLITE AGE -- Mark Starowicz

We are not going to get the genie back in the bottle. Live television is with us, for better or for worse. I sat through an interesting discussion at the Banff television festival but there was a hapless hour of debate, which rotated around the idea that perhaps we should delay a live signal by two hours before allowing it on the air. And that was perhaps the way to tame the beast. That shows a profound misunderstanding of the existence of about a hundred networks around the world, each one of them slaughtering each other to get onto a satellite circuit.

The issue is not to hold back the news, but how to assure its accuracy. A morality accompanies *live* just as a morality accompanies *montage* -- the construction of previously recorded pictures. An example of unethical *live* would, in my mind, be the period of the TWA hijacking when there was a cluster of hostages kept for the longest time in Beirut, then a cluster were brought out to Larnaca. They were allowed access to cameras after a few days and so one had scenes of tired and hopelessly frightened people in Beirut being asked, "What do you think the Secretary of State ought to do?", "What have you got to say to Cyrus Vance?" and "What do you think the President should be doing?" That is unethical escalation and stampeding of the political process. You don't ask a mother whose kid has just been run over by a car what her analysis of the judicial system should be. The morning shows, almost all of the American morning shows, originated live from Larnaca a couple of days later to meet more returning hostages. They brought with them relatives of the hostages. On the surface, it might appear to be a charitable act, but it was a way to guarantee access to one of the people going down the ramp. "I've got Uncle Harry here, he wants to talk to you," and you'd have these reunions.

All of that, I think, is an unethical and immoral theatricalization of the news, exploitation of life for purely sensational purposes, and preying upon people's emotions. Whom you go to live, and when and why become critical ethical decisions which could occupy us for a week, and will probably occupy the profession for the better part of a decade.

We can't throw the baby out with the bath water, although I didn't see the Yeltsin-Gorbachev forum because I was in Borneo of all places, the one place CNN