

Now let us look more closely at television. None of us need instruction on the nature of the fleeting, disjointed images that worry George Kennan. We see them every night, and over two generations they have become our memory bank, our popular history.

More interesting to me is the ethic that informs the image-producing intelligence.

Television inherited its definitions of news from print journalism, where they evolved as merchants of news better understood how to harness human curiosity for profit.

In my first days at Reuters News Agency in London, I was instructed that news is the doings and sayings of famous people, the rise and fall of governments and economies, wars, revolutions and disasters, man-made or natural. Modern media observe this definition, some with serious intent, some frivolously. There are still good newspapers to serve Mr. Trudeau in lieu of outmoded diplomatic dispatches!

Television journalism is both serious and frivolous. Its journalists may have serious intentions, but they are often trivialized by the commercial imperatives that have made the short attention span and kaleidoscopic presentation so characteristic of the medium. But that almost doesn't matter: McLuhan's aphorism, "the medium is the message," only grows truer.

Like Canadian foreign policy, television journalism came of age in the Cold War. The milestones in my career were a series of Cold War flashpoints, from the Hungarian Uprising to the Reagan-Gorbachev Summit. At dawn on an August morning in 1961, I was at the Brandenburg Gate as the East Germans erected the first barriers that became the Berlin Wall. There were a few cameras present. You needed to be there to experience it. In 1989, when the Wall came down, I was in New York, watching the incredible pictures like everyone else. Some colleagues asked whether I regretted not being there. I did, but also realized I didn't need to be. Live television can almost duplicate the actual experience.

For all those decades, the Cold War framed the world view. But suddenly, like governments and scholars and foreign offices, the media were cast adrift from these secure moorings and needed a new way of looking at the world. Television, in particular, has found it in humanitarianism.

As the collapse of the Berlin Wall showed, this period has coincided with the arrival of marvellous new technology, especially lighter cameras, requiring lower intensities of light. Even amateur home-video cameras can take pictures acceptable on the air. Portable satellite-uplinks make it possible to broadcast, and for star anchorpersons to perform, instantly from anywhere.