

*Presaging the rise of the New Media*

Written by Paddy Chayefsky  
and Directed by Sidney Lumet  
Faye Dunaway ... Diana Christensen  
William Holden ... Max Schumacher  
Peter Finch ... Howard Beale  
Robert Duvall ... Frank Hackett  
Ned Beatty ... Arthur Jensen  
Beatrice Straight ... Louise Schumacher

"It is the international system of currency which determines the vitality of life on this planet. THAT is the natural order of things today. THAT is the atomic and subatomic and galactic structure of things today. And YOU have meddled with the primal forces of nature. And YOU WILL ATONE. Am I getting through to you, Mr. Beale? You get up on your little 21-inch screen and howl about America, and democracy. There is no America; there is no democracy. There is only IBM, and ITT, and AT&T, and DuPont, Dow, Union Carbide, and Exxon. Those are the nations of the world today." — Arthur Jensen, UBS (United Broadcasting System) Chairman of the Board (of the conglomerate purchasing the network)

An actual, modern-day "Old Media" elitist couldn't have said it better, as a domineering Ned Beatty (playing Arthur Jensen) rips into the self-destructing TV cult icon Howard Beale (Peter Finch)—explaining to the now-cowed newsman the facts of life.

Network is yet another gift of reminiscence courtesy the Turner Classic Movies (TCM) folks: this is Oscar month where TCM offers a wide selection of movie fare that became notable to the Academy Award committee through the previous decades.

Everyone in my generation remembers this decidedly '70s social-message movie's powerful impact. The Boomers were 20-something then, finally showing up as a force in the workplace, which had long been the province of our parents' WW2 generation. Both demographics—the Vietnam War had ground up so many young men, violent crime was rampant, big corporations were having their way with the environment (and everyone else), the post-Watergate inflationary malaise was upon us, those pesky Marxists were still pretending communism would do—felt the chilling reality of what broken-down broadcaster Beale lashed out against:

"You've got to say, 'I'm a HUMAN BEING, Goddamnit! My life has VALUE!' So I want you to get up now. I want all of you to get up out of your chairs. I want you to get up right now and go to the window. Open it, and stick your head out, and yell, 'I'M AS MAD AS HELL, AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS ANYMORE!'"

I don't remember how many people in real life got out of their chairs and went to their windows to yell, but in the movie folks are poking their noggins out in the night, screaming right and left: I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore, I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore, I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore, and so on. It was if the country were going through mass catharsis.

What a trip! It was one of the biggest movies of the year and received 10 Oscar nominations. As a social satire, I rank it right up there with Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*, starring Peter Sellers. A key issue of both movies is who controls information in a free society and who controls information in our society. As with any effective satire, the answers you are driven toward may astonish you, not to mention frighten you.

But *Network* has big entertainment going for it, with a star-studded cast—representing, in another subtle way, the two generations living and working, even cohabiting, side by side. William Holden plays Max Schumacher, a high-level programming executive in the long-respected news organization (clearly patterned after Edward R. Murrow's integrity-focused CBS). He's at the helm when longtime newscaster Howard Beale (Peter Finch)—due to problems with alcohol, depression, and falling ratings—is being unceremoniously

dumped. Yet Howard is not going down without a fight, which means stating how he really feels about being let go on the air. In fact, he announces to a national audience that he will commit suicide on this very stage on the final day of his contract.

Of course, the viewership is floored that anyone would speak his mind, much less promise to perform such a dramatic act. This is the pablum age, we're all children here, we all expect the media to say what is consistent with corporate-government policy. Nothing is supposed to upset us, nothing interfere with the impression that we don't have to do anything, we can just continue playing our video games or fantasy football, and our loving or protective maternal/ paternal government will make things all right. Just do what we're told, be sure to mind our policemen and soldiers, pay our taxes. And Old-Media TV is where most of us learn what the corporate-state expects of us. Any resemblance to Orwell's 1984 is purely obvious.

*The CIA owns everyone of any significance in the major media—William Colby, CIA Director, 1973-1976[1]*

We've all heard the story The Emperor's New Clothes, by Hans Christian Andersen. Well, it should become the overriding parable for our modern age. I've referred to the naked emperor, as have many others, in connection with the Drug War, with 9/11 Truth, and with a host of other government deceits and coverups in our day.

At the beginning, Howard Beale is the "little boy" calling the emperor naked, and as a consequence the ratings of UBS take a dramatic upturn. People like, or appear to respond to, the unvarnished truth. So Howard is given more or less a free rein in a newsroom context. Unfortunately, the entertainment value falls because the news types in those days know practically nothing of focus groups, polls, commercialism... marketing. Enter Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway) up-and-coming, will-run-over-her-grandmother-for-a-rating-point entertainment programming executive. She understands the commercial potential of Howard and makes a pitch to the conglomerate's point man Frank Hackett (Robert Duvall) that she be allowed to take over and produce the Howard Beale Show.

She of course doesn't care a whit that Howard is undergoing an emotional meltdown: her ratings are going to go through the roof! Hackett doesn't care either, money is flowing in from their corporate advertisers. But Max Schumacher, in addition to being Howard's boss, is also his friend; further Max is old-school, he thinks it's important to tell the truth even if it steps on some corporate toes. Married for umpty-ump years in a relationship and a life running out of gas, he's attracted to Diana despite her pit-bull attitude.

Thus, no need to go further. Very good romance, very good movie, very good social commentary: Network fairly anticipates what we see now as wide popular resistance to the Old Media and the powers behind it. The Ron Paul campaign most notably shows how the Internet is becoming the preferred medium of political awareness. The Obama campaign, which has no doubt studied the Ron Paul phenomenon, is likely to ride the New Media into the White House.

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[1] I've used this quote a lot, and it's all over the Web, but I've never authenticated it. It doesn't appear in Snopes as inauthentic. But if anyone has any information that would either confirm or deny the quote, and its context, please be in touch via the forum.

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