



The Unreality Industry: The Deliberate Manufacturing of Falsehood and What It Is Doing to Our Lives

By Ian I. Mitroff, Warren Bennis

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The claims made for television when it was a fledgling industry in the early 1950s have virtually all proven false. TV was to be the great entertainer-educator, an electronic marvel that could reach into the lives of millions and, over time, elevate their tastes and sensibilities. As we now know, of course, the entertainment component of this equation has so thoroughly dominated every aspect of TV and the mass media that most everything has been reduced to simple, slick, and powerful images. As Fred Friendly once remarked, "commercial television makes so much money doing its worst, it can't afford to do its best."

This is the state of things in America on the eve of the twenty-first century. And as Ian I. Mitroff and Warren Bennis show in this fascinating and profoundly disturbing book, the situation only promises to get worse. Already, newspapers and magazines such as *USA Today* and *Business Week* have adopted a sort of television look, helping to blur the line between reality and fantasy that the authors believe is a frightening hallmark of contemporary life. Surveys show that up to 50% of those who watch crime re-enactment programs such as "Rescue 911" believe they are witnessing "the real thing." And consider, for example, the prospect of "virtual reality," where people can place themselves "inside" TV; in the not so distant future, the authors suggest, consenting adults will be able to slip into undergarments lined with sensors and miniature actuators and, while whispering endearments, enjoy "sex" over the phone. What becomes clear as we read *The Unreality Industry* is that the deliberate creation of unreality is one of the most pivotal social forces shaping our time.

Mitroff and Bennis explore in detail the pervasive and dangerous effects of television on American culture, arguing that we have fallen victim to the invented unrealities passed on through the mass media. Focusing on TV as the major culprit of a problem that threatens to spiral out of control, they point to specific issues such as the selection of political candidates, celebrity worship, and the choice by political and business leaders to offer the public pleasing visual images rather than real solutions to a variety of economic and social problems. The authors present a number of suggestions for corrective action, among them an impassioned plea for the *uncommercialization* of the television news, programs which continue to resemble more and more the satirical "game show"

version of the news in the movie *Network*.

The only book to address what is perhaps the most pressing social issue of our time, *The Unreality Industry* should be required reading for anyone concerned with the extent to which the "American Dream" has become just that.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A "collision course with reality" caused by our inability to grasp the complexities of the post-WW II world has created a fantasy industry designed to provide escape from domestic and global problems, according to this important, hard-hitting study by two professors of business administration at UCLA. This billion-dollar industry, they charge, injects entertainment into every aspect of life, blurring the boundaries between fact and fantasy. Indicting TV as a major villain, Mitroff and Bennis argue that long-range thinking on vital ethical issues has been replaced with repetitious, comforting platitudes that erode society's moral fabric. A need for quick solutions, and a national belief in indefinite material progress, the authors maintain, lead people to confuse bigness with strength, quality for quantity, and celebrity for the leadership that is needed to restore a national vision.

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From Library Journal

This book focuses on how the mass media foster and encourage the state of unreality. Unfortunately, some thought-provoking points are cloaked in sweeping generalizations and unfounded conclusions: "Television news, like all TV, presents itself in a grossly simplified, if not distorted, way. All issues are stripped down to a few catchword phrases and simplifying sentences." At times, this book suffers from the same malady. Bennis, also author of *On Becoming a Leader* reviewed in this issue, p. 159.-- Ed. , and Mitroff discuss issues ranging from "Boundary Warping: Unreality's Primary Mechanism" to "The Metaphysics of Sappiness." While the authors explore some significant issues in media criticism, they ramble and preach aplenty.

- *Jo Cates, Poynter Inst. for Media Studies, St. Petersburg, Fla.*

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Review

"A provocative analysis of TV's effect on society. The authors leave the reader wondering how we can forestall the negative impacts, if not control, that television has on the construction of 'unreality.' Worrisome is the idea that television has become the mirror that will shape America's future."--Yvonne Becerra, University of Houston

"An excellent and very valuable book."--Robert M. Hall, Flagler College

"Mitroff and Bennis have brought into focus the hazard to our psychic health that lies in the blurring of the line between reality and unreality. It is a timely and important book and may help to pull us back from the brink of our national plunge into fantasy."--Daniel Schorr, National Public Radio

"An important, hard-hitting study."--Publishers Weekly

"The Unreality Industry comes along not a moment too soon. Written with lucidity and economy, the book reveals precisely where America is headed. Whether or not our drift toward unreality can be reversed or even slowed, we cannot know. But with this book, we have no excuse for not knowing what is happening and why."--Neil Postman, New York University

"Belongs in that small circle of literature that helps us see what we could not perceive before."--Everett M. Rogers, The Annenberg School of Communications

"Warren Bennis saw 25 years ago what has only now come into view for the rest of us. He is the embodiment and guru of the current revolution in Western management...our first revolution in 40 years."-- Tom Peters, author of In Search of Excellence

"Excellent companion to a class text."--Carol Cooper, Southwest Baptist University

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rebecca Kurtz:

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Robert Hensley:

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Robert McCauley:

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