

1 ***The Selling of the President 1968***

2 Joe McGinniss

3 1988

4

5 Politics, in a sense, has always been a con game... Advertising, in many  
6 ways, is a con game, too. Human beings do not need new automobiles every  
7 third year; a color television set brings little enrichment of the human  
8 experience; a higher or lower hemline no expansion of consciousness, no  
9 increase in the capacity to love.

10

11 It is not surprising, then, that politicians and advertising men should have  
12 discovered one another. And, once they recognized that the citizen did not  
13 so much vote for a candidate as make a psychological purchase of him, not  
14 surprising that they began to work together...

15

16 With the coming of television, and the knowledge of how it could be used to  
17 seduce voters, the old political values disappeared. Something new, murky,  
18 undefined started to rise from the mists. "In all countries," Marshall  
19 McLuhan writes, "The party system has folded like the organization chart.  
20 Policies and issues are useless for election purposes, since they are too  
21 specialized and hot. The shaping of a candidate's image has taken the place  
22 of discussing conflicting points of view."

23

24 ...  
25 The television celebrity is a vessel. An inoffensive container in which  
26 someone else's knowledge, insight, compassion, or wit can be presented.  
27 And we respond like the child on Christmas morning who ignores the gift to  
28 play with the wrapping paper.

28

29 Television seems particularly useful to the politician who can be charming  
30 but lacks ideas. Print is for ideas. Newspapermen write not about people but  
31 policies; the paragraphs can be slid around like blocks. Everyone is colored  
32 gray. Columnists – and commentators in the more polysyllabic magazines –  
33 concentrate on ideology. They do not care what a man sounds like; only how  
34 he thinks. For the candidate who does not, such exposure can be  
35 embarrassing. He needs another way to reach the people.

36

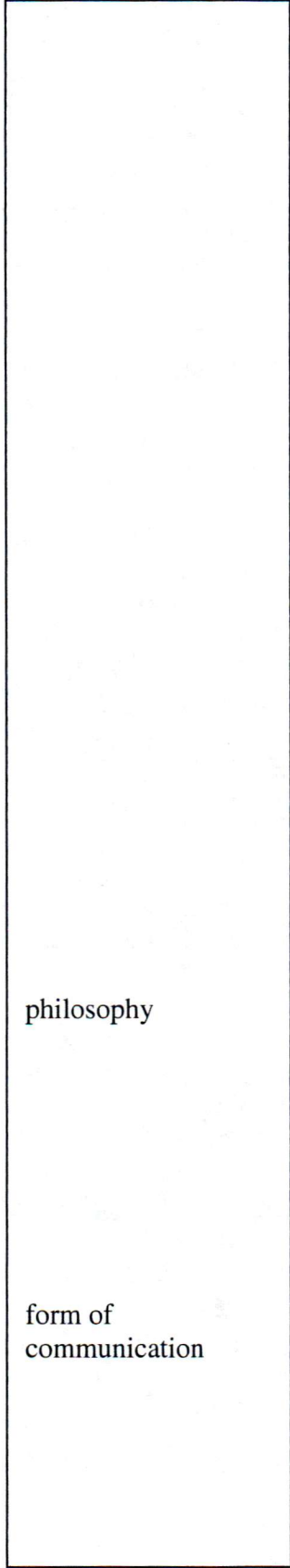
37 On television it matters less that he does not have ideas. His personality is  
38 what the viewers want to share. He need be neither statesman nor crusader,  
39 he must only show up on time...How well does he handle himself? Does he  
40 mumble, does he twitch, does he make me laugh? Do I feel warm inside? ...

41

42 Style becomes substance. The medium is the message and the masseur gets  
43 the votes...

44

45 [At the presidential debate in 1960] it was just Nixon and John Kennedy and  
46 they sat down together in a television studio and a little red light began to  
47 glow and Richard Nixon was finished. Television would be blamed...They  
48 would say it was makeup and lighting, but Nixon's problem went deeper  
49 than that...



philosophy

form of  
communication

50  
51 Harry Treleaven, hired as creative director of advertising...immediately went  
52 to work on the more serious of Nixon's personality problems... "He should  
53 be presented in some kind of 'situation' rather than cold in a studio. The  
54 situation should look unstaged even if it's not."...

55  
56 In 1967, [Raymond Price, who became Nixon's speechwriter] began with the  
57 assumption that, "The natural human use of reason is to support prejudice,  
58 not to arrive at opinions." Which led to the conclusion that rational  
59 arguments would "only be effective if we can get the people to make the  
60 emotional leap, or what theologians call [the] 'leap of faith.'"...

61  
62 "These tend to be more a gut reaction," Price wrote, "unarticulated, non-  
63 analytical, a product of the particular chemistry between the voter and the  
64 *image* of the candidate. *We have to be very clear on this point: that the*  
65 *response is to the image, not to the man...* It's not what's *there* that counts,  
66 it's what's projected – and carrying it one step further, it's not what he  
67 projects but rather what the voter receives. It's not the man we have to  
68 change, but rather the *received impression*. And this impression often  
69 depends more on the medium and its use than it does on the candidate  
70 himself."...

71  
72 "The TV medium itself introduces an element of distortion, in terms of its  
73 effect on the candidate and of the often subliminal ways in which the image  
74 is received. And it inevitably is going to convey a partial image –thus ours is  
75 the task of finding how to control its use so the part that gets across is the  
76 part we want to have gotten across..."

77  
78 "Voters are basically lazy, basically uninterested in making an *effort* to  
79 understand what we're talking about..." Price wrote. "Reason requires a  
80 high degree of discipline, of concentration; impression is easier..."

81  
82 "[Nixon] has to come across as a person larger than life, the stuff of legend.  
83 People are stirred by the legend...not by the man himself. It's the aura that  
84 surrounds the charismatic figure more than it is the figure itself, that draws  
85 the followers. Our task is to build that aura..."

86  
87 "So let's not be afraid of television gimmicks...get the voters to like the guy  
88 and the battle's two-thirds won."

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90 It was as if they were building not a President but an Astrodome, where the  
91 wind would never blow, the temperature never rise or fall, and the ball never  
92 bounce erratically on the artificial grass.

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unspoken, tacit

subconscious