

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Made for TV

Unlike conventions,
television helps debates

Video didn't just kill the radio star. It killed the Republican and Democratic National Conventions, too.

But you knew that. We, the media, have told you over and over. And then, just in case viewers were straining to hear actual parts of George W. Bush's or Al Gore's speech over the past months, the media broke in again, just to tell them how orchestrated those speeches really were.

No use berating a point already berated. Better to look at what the television created for politics in the wake of the rhetorical conventions: the televised debate.

The tube is the perfect medium for mediated argument. Through it, the number of memorable moments far outweigh any of their convention counterparts. Since 1960, when sick-looking Richard Nixon flop-sweated his way to a loss against John F. Kennedy, debates have stuck in our heads, because, well, just a bit more of the candidate is tested in such a scenario than at the podium of the convention.

Our outgoing President Clinton was among its masters, scoring points every time his hand hit the podium. There was Walter Mondale's direct attack on Ronald Reagan, after which Reagan immediately began to right his ship.

And has anyone ever forgotten Adm. James Stockdale's "Why am I here?" answer in a 1992 vice-presidential debate? Or when Sen. Lloyd Bentsen condemned Dan Quayle by saying, "Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy" in 1988, a moniker that has stuck with him ever since?

Whereas pre-television debates were played out at county fairs or to slightly larger audiences over the radio, televised debates are universally accessible.

And thanks to a berating media, a serious hiccup in a debate isn't likely to be forgotten. While the Internet grows, only television shows the candidate's knowledge and delivery thereof, which is seriously tested in the debate format.

It will play a significant role in the 2000 election as Gore has established his strong debating skills already, specifically in a one-on-one battle with Ross Perot on the North American Free Trade Agreement. He won that battle on CNN.

Questions loom about Bush's knowledge, and his persona in Republican primary debates was severely overshadowed by the brittle directness of Sen. John McCain and media personality Alan Keyes. In the three debates scheduled for the fall, Bush will be perceived at a disadvantage, which might well be an actual disadvantage.

Gore, on the other hand, has frequently said he'd like to debate every week. His party acceptance speech emphasized substance over style, and debates are certainly not the canned attitude of the convention. And nobody wants to look like Nixon.

Do candidates prepare answers for debates? Sure. Do they rehearse them over and over to the point of regurgitation? Of course. But in the moment, those answers often change, and campaign strategists, no matter how savvy and sophisticated, cannot prepare for everything. Neither can the presidential hopefuls.

There remains the slightest hint of chaos in the debate format. What television can do is expose it. In the rubble of a scripted, boring convention arises an equally scripted debate. But when the script goes awry - and in our estimation, chances are good that it might - video can deliver to all of America, so that it escapes the attention of no one who truly wants to know.

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Neal Obermeyer/DN

Playing numbers over cute

Hi. This story, my story, has a plan. For what purpose - to what greater good - remains to be seen by me, by you. I'm reading you, reading me.



petaluma watson

I really, really, really, really need you to understand one thing.

I am beautiful. Gorgeous. Exquisite. Resplendent. Alluring.

My beauty is worth five syllables: pulchritudinous. It is worth an ominous, all-encompassing definition: the real thing.

It is not the pithy beautiful-on-the-inside thing. No, I'm the conventional kind, tall and peachy pretty, which existed well before we described ugly people's cool personalities with the same word. Which, when you think about it, is just a way of mocking them, of separating them further from me, for you.

For my numerical equivalents, (self-generated, I might add):

I'm an 11 in a dress. A 9 in shorts, an 8.89 in panties. (The result of slight hail damage, despite my penchant for working out, I cannot get rid of it). A 9.5 with my hair up, a 10.5 with it completely down (for a 10.0 mean!), a 10.2 with my neck completely exposed, a 9.5 completely naked (Boring!), 9.8 con turtleneck.

Winter wear: 9.9, cheap halter tops: 9.76, retro t-shirts from the 1980s Goodwill rack: 10.23.

A 10.4 with my butter soft leather multiple compartment front zip pocket shoulder bag. A 9.6 with the quite unfortunate silk sari tote bag with embroidery and beadwork that my mother felt compelled to buy me for the summer but was too gaudy by my simplistic beauty standards.

My beauty is fact. Like shrimp contains iodine. Accept this. Not blindly, and not forever. For I will prove it.

Lying about this fact destroys the purpose about writing at all, because I'm here to talk beauty's burdens (oh drama!) as I best see them. And I do see them (oh cheap, brooding wisdom!).

I know what you're thinking, chunky-wunky girls of the world, slurping on coffee right now or munching on those baked, not fried, chips that you hope and pray will reduce your water weight but won't because you went back for another bag later in the day.

Oh, I know. I so know. I'm sitting right behind you. Just over your shoulder. Right here. I'm reading you, reading me. So I am going to try my best. To educate you. About me. Because eventually, you'll turn around. And you have to know what to do.

Because I am beautiful, I don't always think in punctuation. The really pretty girls, understand, can mess with the English language as they please as it is the invention of men, whose fallibility in my presence is complete and unequivocal.

So if this bothers you then it's better off you read about someone else other than me because you don't see yourself like I do.

The beauty reference is for your attention. To make the words count. I'll use you like that just this once to get you hooked. I'll use you more, but, at very least, it will be something else.

Because not knowing kills you. You have to know everything. The day doesn't fulfill itself otherwise.

Especially guys. Chicos. You will glimpse at the tall, luscious women on campus and ponder: *Is that her? Is she looking at me? Did I remember to use my face wash? What about my jasmine-scented body wash? If she were to suck me off right on this spot here, would it stink like an earthworm?*

And for girls, please God, talk about me. Make me your pinata. Then throw up the candy. It is, after all, all about you. Because it's all about me.

What I'm playing on here is your curiosity. Not of me. But of your own unwitting fame. Imagine it: You, the leading role in my somber opera of words.

As for the rest ... Some will fight for me more. Some will assert I don't exist. Some will not care.

The believer. The uncertain. The non-believer. Of the religion that is me.

Now I'm not talking about being a cute girl. There are lots of cute girls here, and by here I mean here. Everywhere.

Cute - in that you can be thumped and you'll make a nice squishy noise because you're just plump enough to baste in a couple Thanksgivings.

Cute - with chubby, happy faces, smoking cigarettes.

Cute - with bangs. Cute - with cheap lingerie and floral print dresses unless your boyfriend buys it.

Cute - as you have a silent, mentally-entrenched comeback for every fear - a preconceived hatred for every girl that exists above or below you on the beauty food chain.

Cute - as in we can relate to you. And your problems, too.

Cute - and your hopes, your fears, your insecurities and your single finger purges. The experience of being you. You want it - you - within our reach so that when you cry, we feel the tears - a campus wide, operatic congregation to preach to.

I have no relation. I am a creation of singular mold. An icon. You are not like me. Let it go.

My point: that you understand this burden, because none of you could, save a few. And those few don't yet see the designed trap (oh foreboding enlightenment!).

My fantasies cannot be indulged, enveloped in a world of selfishness, where the selfishness of others meets head on with my own and we sneak off together, mentally intertwined as I get a five-minute shrink and they get face time with me that translates to a free image booster when they are amongst others.

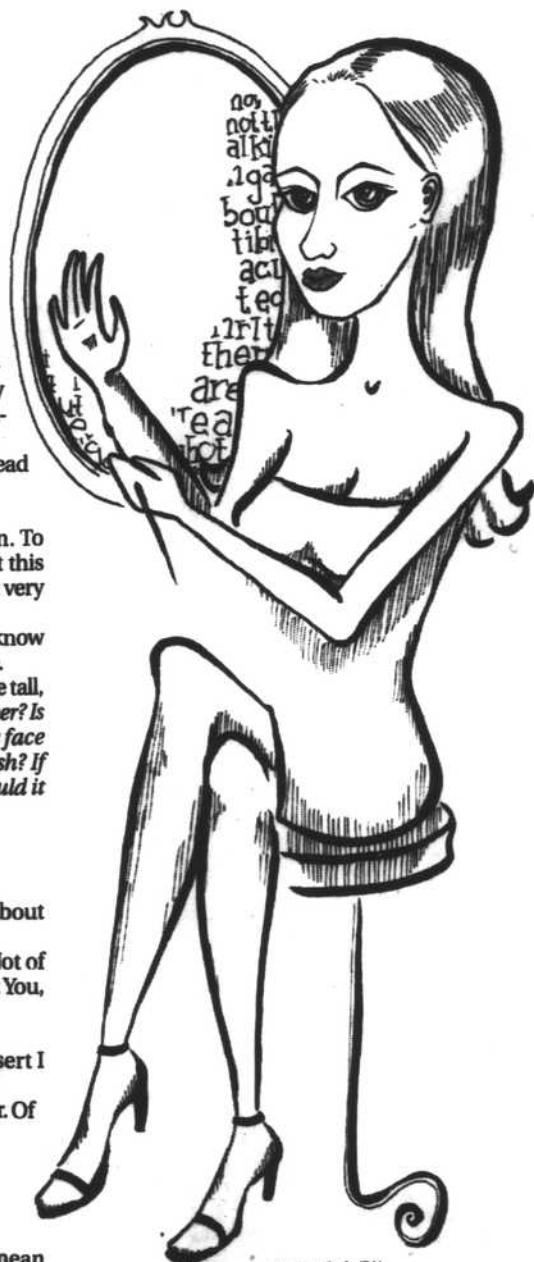
Look at me, they think. I'm talking to her. Yes, look at them, looking at themselves.

And if it isn't happening, they imagine such a process. I am the yellow haze of mind clutter when you close your eyes. I am the accent of purple that follows in pulse waves, like scattered shot.

I am inescapable. Even from myself. Not only because I beg to be seen, but because you want me seen. In real time or imagination, whatever suits the moment. So there it is.

I see all of you on display, your every move of me, thousands of moves in advance, like one of the chess prodigies. You cannot know mine, because I still am free to choose, still fully aware that there is nothing to restrict me.

In my mind. Or yours. And I'm telling you. It's a burden.



Megan Cody/DN

Politicians work only for the rich

Major political parties only represent the elite.

Seldom do I see something on TV that makes me want to retch. I watched a half hour of the Republican National Convention and nearly lost a kidney.

I've never heard such a thorough garbling of the English language out of so many mouths. Nothing but an endless stream of patriotic aphorisms, knotted together with a tepid morality, a God bless this, a God bless that guy, blah blah blah. I'd rather someone defecate on my ice cream.

Take the bitter words above. You may apply them equally well to the Democratic National Convention that played out in Los Angeles. I do not reserve my venom for just the Republicans. I plan to give equal time to the Democrats.

My cynicism is almost crippling when it comes to politics. And I am not alone. Fifty-five to 60 percent of those eligible will not vote in November. That many people are so disgusted that they will speak with their enormous morass of silence that festers in the nation's subconscious.

The media gives this issue some minor attention. They even briefly mention one of the reasons for this pandemic of non-participation: There is no one to vote for.

But why? Surely our wonderfully democratic primaries chose the most able men for the job. Surely everyone is energized by the candidates and their broad visions for an improved America.

Absurd. Anyone with the IQ of a turnip knows that neither candidate - George W. Bush nor Al Gore - is anything but an elitist, chosen from the ranks of the elite to do one thing - serve the elite.

Why else would monolithic corporations, financial backers and political action committees pour nearly \$100 million dollars into the Bush campaign and nearly \$50 million into the Gore campaign? The race hasn't even started yet! Because these contributors expect something in return: big favors, preferential tax codes loaded with exemptions and a pro-business, anti-labor administration.

You have no voice in politics if you happen to belong to the bottom 80 percent of Americans in terms of income and real wealth. No matter how much either party promises change, benefits and goodies for people like you, you cannot and must not believe it. They are lying.

Both parties are committed to serving the elite, but they're masterful at convincing average Americans to vote for policies that solely benefit the wealthy by demonizing the powerless: immigrants, welfare mothers, addicts and the poor. Pardon my bitterness, but it's justifiable.

Americans need to demand substance - serious change. It is an insult to our morals and intelligence for two parties to serve us nondescript, lukewarm, taffy-brained candidates and expect us to have a real debate over who is more qualified, has the more cohesive vision and will do the most good. Both are slugs and should be treated like the invertebrate gastropods they are.

I will vote for Ralph Nader in November. I don't care about stealing votes from Gore. I don't care about helping Bush win. I don't care! If Nader weren't on the ballot, I wouldn't vote.

At least he has addressed the issues that really matter: disparity in wealth between rich and poor, homelessness, health care and the corporate ownership of America, to name a few.

These are conditions that truly affront my ethics, more than any sex scandal. Bush will not restore integrity to the office because he won't change anything, except perhaps how deeply the government kisses corporate ass. Gore will not do anything because he is a cyborg and has run out of his special fuel.

The 55 percent of you who weren't going to vote this fall: I say stick a fork in the eye of the establishment. Vote Nader. I dare you.



Seth Felton