

# TELEVISION AND THE ARTS

NETWORK NEWS COVERAGE OF ARTS AND CULTURE IN THE 1990s

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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This report was prepared with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and based at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, in association with Columbia's School of the Arts, the National Arts Journalism Program administers fellowships for mid-career and senior journalists in the fields of arts and culture. The NAJP also serves as a forum for discussion of challenging and timely issues at the crossroads of arts and culture, journalism and public policy, through publications, panels and conferences that bring together professionals from these fields.

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## INTRODUCTION

IN THE LANDSCAPE of American news media, nothing comes close to the power of the evening television newscast. The nightly national news programs command the attention of a huge audience of more than 20 million households—roughly the combined daily circulation of the nation’s top 50 metropolitan newspapers. Nothing is “news” until it is mentioned on NBC’s “Nightly News,” CBS’s “Evening News” or ABC’s “World News Tonight.”

But during the past decade the evening newscasts have steadily dropped the arts from their beat.

In 1999, when the National Arts Journalism Program published “Reporting the Arts: News Coverage of Arts and Culture in America,” a comprehensive report on the state of arts coverage around the nation, we decided to dedicate only a brief chapter to television. Our assumption was that the derisory state of arts coverage on TV was by now familiar.

After high hopes some 50 years ago, when television was in its infancy, the commercial networks have proven themselves inhospitable to the arts. Nobody who watches the evening news regularly will be surprised to find that it contains only a modicum of arts and cultural news, most of it geared toward mass-entertainment coverage.

In order to move forward from this impasse, however, it is helpful to have some numbers. A conference on arts coverage in electronic media titled “Convergence: New Opportunities for Arts Journalism” [June 2000] seemed like the perfect occasion to commission a detailed look at how network news covers the arts.

The result is a far-ranging analysis of TV news in the 1990s drawing on a database compiled by

Andrew Tyndall, a researcher who has amassed an archive—both visual and statistical—that includes every weekday evening newscast aired by the networks since 1987.

As expected, some of the findings are sobering. On a typical weekday, for example, the viewer of the evening newscast is treated to an average of little more than 30 seconds of information about arts and culture.

Other findings contain surprises. The most important “culture wars” of the 1990s, in the mirror of the evening newscast at least, were not the high-culture battles over Karen Finley, Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano or even the play “Angels in America.” On television the main controversies raged over sex and violence on television itself, followed by the violent lyrics in rap music.

*On a typical weekday, the viewer of the evening newscast is treated to an average of little more than 30 seconds of information about arts and culture.*

The single most important finding is this: Television has replaced coverage of arts and culture with coverage of media, and particularly the Internet. The lesson? The rise of the new information society may increase access to arts and culture, but for now, the means of art’s dissemination appear to eclipse attention to its content.

## HIGHLIGHTS

ARTS AND CULTURE—including music, movies, television, the visual and performing arts and books—attracted almost 70 hours of network nightly news coverage during the '90s.

This total accounted for just under 3% of the weekday news agenda (ABC, CBS and NBC combined)—more newsworthy than education or religion; less newsworthy than sports.

Arts-and-culture coverage declined as the '90s progressed even as coverage of non-arts media increased. At the start of the decade the arts represented 80% of all media coverage; at the end of the decade, as the Internet attracted more and more attention, less than half.

ABC has covered arts and culture more heavily than CBS or NBC. Almost all of the difference is accounted for in nine high arts forms: classical music, theater, painting, jazz, dance, photography, sculpture, opera and poetry.

Music was the single most heavily covered artistic discipline, followed by mass-entertainment coverage of movies and television. The visual arts, the performing arts and publishing combined accounted for less than 30% of all coverage.

When reporting on the arts, quotes often came straight from the artist—except in the culture wars, when politicians stepped onto center stage.

Even though Robert Mapplethorpe and the National Endowment for the Arts dominated the culture wars in the fine arts, television news concentrated much more heavily on sex and violence in entertainment television, rap music and computer video games.

Singer Michael Jackson's sex life was the top scandal-and-tragedy story. Singer Frank Sinatra had the decade's biggest obituary. Television sex and violence was the story of the decade, followed by annual coverage of the Academy Awards ceremonies. Oscar-winner "Titanic" was the movie with the biggest buzz.

Nostalgia was a dominant theme of all arts-and-culture coverage. Obituaries provided a steady diet of past artistic accomplishments. Music profiles were dominated by memories of decades past—The Beatles and Elvis Presley were favorite subjects.

## THE ARTS VIE FOR ATTENTION

NOTHING CAN BE said to be on the national mainstream news agenda until it is covered by the television networks' nightly newscasts.

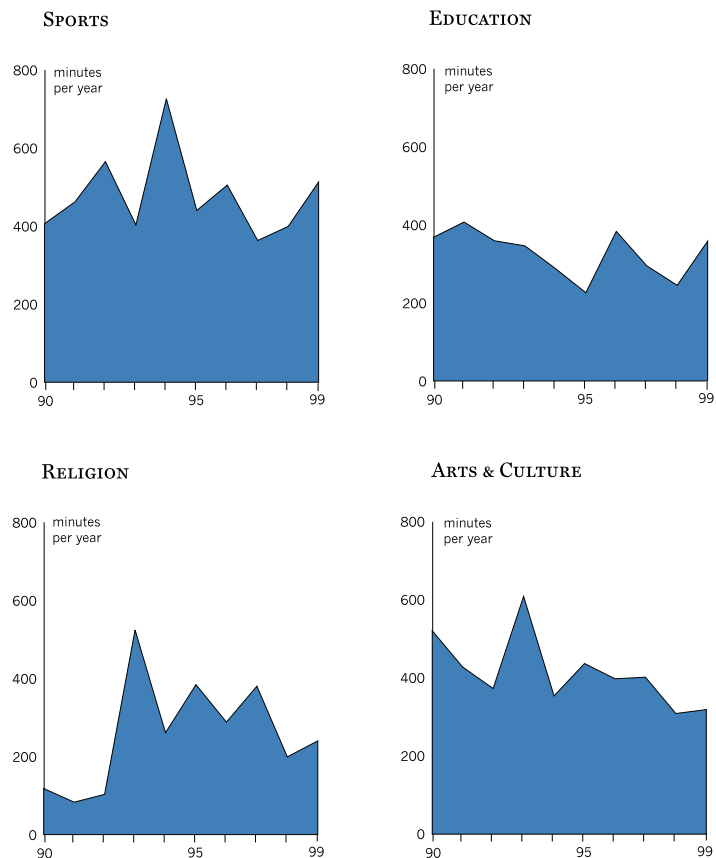
Each evening, the stories covered by the half-hour television newscast of the three broadcast networks represent the distillation of the national and international news agenda. When commercials and internal promotions are accounted for, each newscast contains less than 20 minutes of actual editorial content. In this precious news hole, all sorts of news stories battle for their place in the sun. Wars vie with politics; natural disasters vie with scandal; the economy, healthcare and crime each make their claims.

On occasions, stories from the field of arts and culture make the grade. This report analyzes what makes the arts newsworthy. What arts stories were included in the networks' news agenda over the last decade? What arts issues were most newsworthy? What artistic disciplines attracted most coverage? What types of stories were most likely to be covered?

The network nightly newscasts—ABC's "World News Tonight," CBS's "Evening News" and NBC's "Nightly News"—attract the largest daily national news audience of any single medium. They are a bellwether for the national news agenda. Hard-news-oriented, they are the television equivalent of the "A" section of a daily newspaper. They rarely include the softer, non-breaking features which are characteristic of much arts journalism—creative profiles, cultural trend pieces, reviews and so on. Whenever an arts story gets detailed coverage on the network news, it has truly broken through as mainstream news, not mere publicity or promotion.

### FOUR CLOSING TOPICS

ARTS AND CULTURE WAS LESS NEWSWORTHY THAN SPORTS, BUT MORE NEWSWORTHY THAN EDUCATION OR RELIGION.



Annual coverage (in minutes) on the nightly weekday newscasts of the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC combined) of four topics frequently chosen to close the newscast.

TOP TEN STORIES, 1990	MIN.		
	A heavy year of coverage...one of only two in the decade with more than 500 minutes...Tipper Gore left her mark with stories about violent rap and rock lyrics... Mapplethorpe was the big fine art story.		
	Gangsta rap lyrics are rebellious	21	
	Robert Mapplethorpe photography exhibit	19	
	"Muppets" creator Jim Henson's fatal illness	17	
	Entertainer Sammy Davis Jr. obituary	15	
	Rock lyrics are sexual and violent	12	
	Movie star Greta Garbo obituary	11	
	Conductor-composer Leonard Bernstein obituary	11	
	Writer Art Buchwald sues for plagiarism	10	
Ellis Island Immigration Museum	10		
Fine art auction prices skyrocket	9		
Total: 501 min. (ABC: 204; CBS: 142; NBC: 157)			

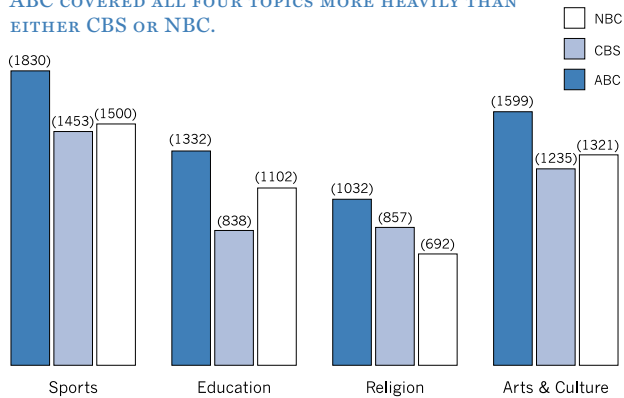
Arts and culture, together with sports, education and religion, form a cluster of topics which are routinely covered toward the close of each night's newscast, when the networks cover ideas, trends and personalities. Taken as a group, these four topics have consistently accounted for approximately 10% of the networks' total news hole. Arts and culture have usually ranked as more newsworthy than education and religion, slightly less newsworthy than sports. All four topics were covered more heavily during the '90s by ABC than by the other two networks.

*Whenever an arts story gets detailed coverage on the network news, it has truly broken through as mainstream news, not mere publicity or promotion.*

So, arts and culture represent a small proportion of the networks' news agenda, about 3% of the total. In an average year during the decade of the '90s, the entire beat—including movies, music, entertainment television, publishing, the visual and performing arts—attracted around seven hours of coverage on the three weekday newscasts combined (out of an annual grand total of approximately 250 hours of editorial content). This translates to a three-network average of less than eight minutes each week—or just over 30 seconds per newscast.

#### FOUR CLOSING TOPICS BY NETWORK

ABC COVERED ALL FOUR TOPICS MORE HEAVILY THAN EITHER CBS OR NBC.



Total coverage (in minutes) for 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC combined, of four topics frequently chosen to close the newscast.

#### TOP TEN STORIES OF THE DECADE

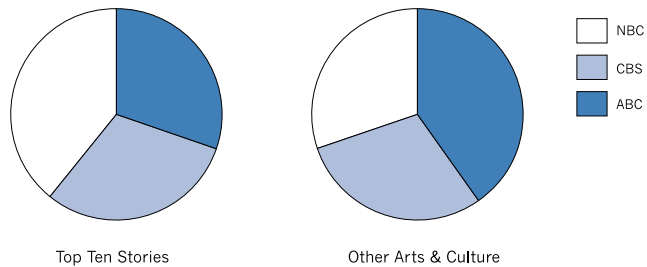
	MIN.
Television sex and violence	190
Academy Awards ceremonies	140
Singer Michael Jackson's sex life	74
Gangsta rap lyrics are rebellious	64
Singer Frank Sinatra obituary	62
Pop group The Beatles profiled	58
Singer Elvis Presley remembered	49
Hollywood movie box-office trends	43
Daytime TV talk shows can be trash	42
Computer video games are violent	39

Total: 4105 min. (ABC: 1576; CBS: 1221; NBC: 1308)

Culture wars over the mass-entertainment media attracted the most persistent attention... three of the decade's top ten arts-and-culture stories concerned TV sex and violence, rap music lyrics, violent computer video games and trashy daytime TV talk shows.

#### TOP TEN STORIES BY NETWORK

NBC PROVIDED HEAVIEST COVERAGE OF THE TOP TEN STORIES OF THE DECADE.



Proportion of total coverage of the top ten arts-and-culture stories of the decade (761 min.) and all other stories (3,388 min.) by the three weekday nightly network newscasts.

## THE MEDIA TAKE OVER

THESE AVERAGES, BASED ON the decade as a whole, disguise a startling change over the course of the ten years. The networks discovered a new beat—the media—which has inexorably subsumed the arts. In 1990 there was no need to use the category because the media were, practically speaking, interchangeable with the arts. At the start of the decade, over 80% of all media coverage concerned arts and culture. All other aspects of the media—journalism, advertising, media businesses, distribution technology, regulation—were ancillary.

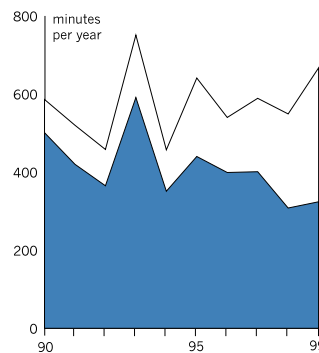
Back in 1990, an arts journalist and a media journalist covered the same beat. It is not as if, back then, movies were not made by studios, music was not distributed by record labels and television entertainment was not broadcast by networks. Of course they were. But the media which carried this creative content were not newsworthy. By the end of the decade all that had changed. In 1999, arts and culture represented less than half of all media coverage.

What happened in the meantime was, above all, the Internet. As recently as 1992 there were no Internet stories on the network nightly newscasts. In 1993, journalists were still dubbing it the “information superhighway.” Since then, Internet coverage has grown as fast as its user base. The rise of Internet stories throughout the decade has been meteoric even if the category is construed narrowly. For example, this study only included stories about online and interactive computer use and the Microsoft browser wars in the Internet category. It excluded stories about non-interactive computers, digital technology and voice-only telecommunications. Even with this conservative definition, this new medium ended the decade dominating all other media coverage.

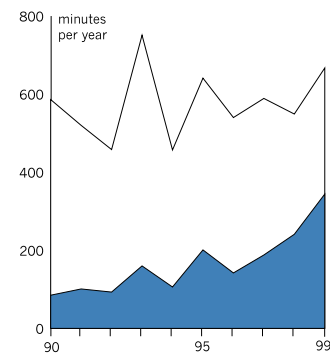
### TOTAL MEDIA COVERAGE

OVERALL COVERAGE OF THE MEDIA SHOWED NO DECLINE AT THE END OF THE DECADE. NON-ARTS MEDIA COVERAGE, ESPECIALLY INTERNET COVERAGE, INCREASED AT THE EXPENSE OF ARTS COVERAGE.

ARTS & CULTURE

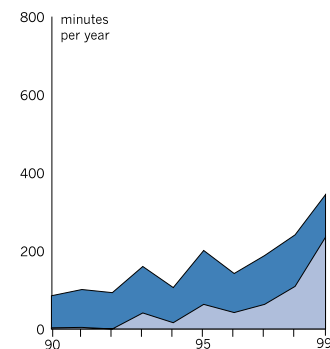


NON-ARTS MEDIA



Annual coverage (in minutes) on the nightly weekday newscasts of the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC combined) of all media stories (in white) divided between arts and culture (blue in top left chart) and non-arts media (blue in top right chart) of which Internet coverage (light blue in opposite chart) is a subset.

INTERNET COVERAGE





TOP TEN STORIES, 1991		MIN.	
	The Gulf War dominated the first half of the year, so all domestic coverage was squeezed...one of only three years in the decade when ABC's arts coverage was not preeminent...nostalgia dominated high art coverage as Carnegie Hall had its centennial.	Movie "JFK"	15
		Hollywood movie budgets tightened	14
		Hollywood hires black moviemakers	10
		Cable TV channel MTV's tenth anniversary	10
		Movie director Frank Capra obituary	10
		Actor Michael Landon obituary	9
		Children's author Dr Seuss obituary	8
		NYC Carnegie Hall's 100th anniversary	8
		Go-go dancing considered by Supreme Court	8
	Singer-songwriter Bob Dylan profiled	8	
	Total: 420 min. (ABC: 141; CBS: 138; NBC: 139)		

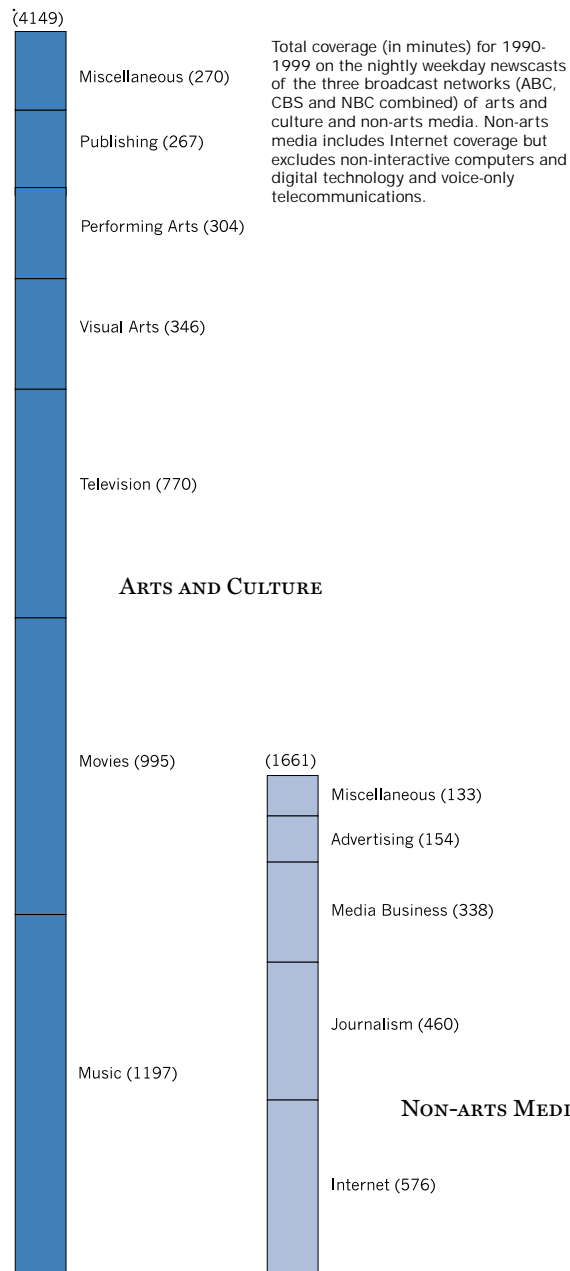
Of course the Internet is newsworthy: it is new; it is complicated; it is lucrative; it is controversial; it is changing all the time. It can be a medium for artistic expression and the dissemination of arts and culture created in other media. But the arts angle on the Internet accounted for only a small part of the coverage it attracted compared with its role as a medium for commerce, for journalism, for pornography, for politics, for interpersonal communication and many other types of information.

The upshot has been that arts-and-culture coverage, always a secondary news beat, has been squeezed even more. The arts ended the decade at the lowest of ebbs: in 1998 and 1999 the beat attracted less attention than in any of the previous eight years. The overall media beat, on the other hand—arts and non-arts combined—was booming. It got more coverage in 1999 than in any year but one during the '90s. The networks ended the decade by switching from artistic content to the new media. Arts reporters found their news hole shrinking; media reporters found it expanding. As the two slogans go, "The medium is the message" trumped "Content is king."

For the foreseeable future, the dynamic changes in the delivery systems for artistic content—the technology, the ownership, the use, regulation and application of new media—will continue to overshadow newsworthy events about the arts. Trends in television news coverage as the '90s progressed pose stark choices for hard-news arts journalists. Must they refashion themselves in the digital world as media journalists? Or, in order to protect what little news hole there remains for the arts proper, should they insist on a clear demarcation between themselves and the media beat?

**TOTAL MEDIA COVERAGE BY DISCIPLINE**

MUSIC, MOVIES AND TELEVISION DOMINATED ARTS-AND-CULTURE COVERAGE. THE INTERNET AND JOURNALISM DOMINATED MEDIA COVERAGE.



# MUSIC, TELEVISION & MOVIES

TURNING FROM THE media to the arts: music was the the single most heavily covered artistic discipline of the the decade. Dividing arts and culture into six broad disciplinary categories—television, movies, performing arts, visual arts, books and music—top-ranked music was followed by movies and television, the two mass-entertainment audio-visual art forms. These three accounted for more than 70% of all arts-and-culture coverage.

At first sight it seems odd that music should get so much attention. Why should an audio-visual journalistic medium focus most intensely on a medium which is auditory only?

*Music, movies and television accounted for more than 70 percent of all arts-and-culture coverage. When the networks were free to cover any art form, they chose music more often than any other.*

It was not that music was making more news. Of all the artistic disciplines, music was the one that was most likely to be selected for feature-oriented non-newsworthy coverage. So the networks' concentration on music was a discretionary choice, not determined by the necessities of external events. When the networks were free to cover any art form, they chose music more often than any other.

## TOP TEN MUSIC STORIES

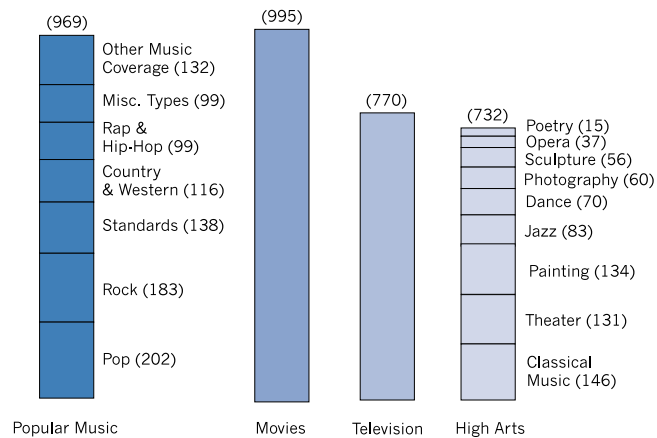
	MIN.
Singer Michael Jackson's sex life	74
Gangsta rap lyrics are rebellious	64
Singer Frank Sinatra obituary	62
Pop group The Beatles profiled	58
Singer Elvis Presley remembered	49
Grammy Awards ceremonies	33
Woodstock Music Festival recalled	24
Music education in schools	19
Singer John Denver killed in plane crash	19
Rock lyrics are sexual and violent	18

Total: 1197 min. (ABC: 467; CBS: 356; NBC: 374)

ABC covered music most heavily...no classical or jazz story qualified for the top ten...music coverage was nostalgic, including previous decade greats Sinatra, Presley and Beatles...where were Madonna (6 minutes) and Kurt Cobain (4 minutes)?

## POP CULTURE VS. HIGH ARTS

POPULAR MUSIC, MOVIES AND TELEVISION EACH RECEIVED MORE COVERAGE THAN NINE HIGH ART FORMS COMBINED.



Total coverage (in minutes) for 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts of the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC combined) of popular music excluding jazz and classical, movies, television and nine selected high arts including classical music and jazz.

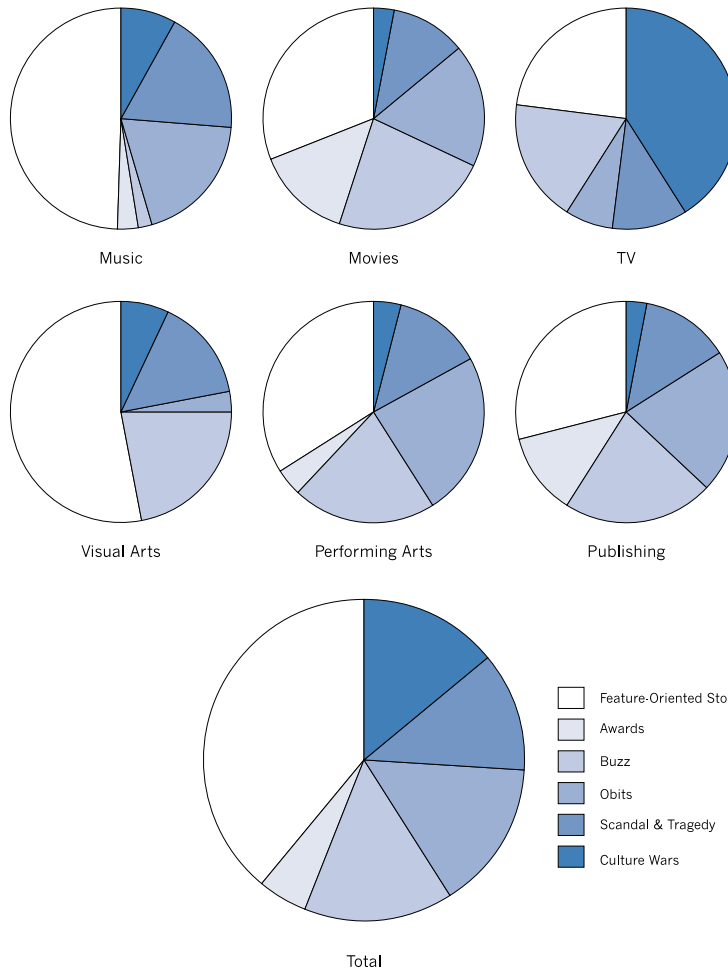
TOP TEN STORIES, 1992

A presidential election year saw the third-lightest arts coverage of the decade...the campaign trail raised rap music (Sister Souljah) and TV sitcoms ("Murphy Brown") into prominence.

	MIN.
Academy Awards ceremonies	23
Gangsta rap lyrics are rebellious	19
TV's Johnny Carson leaves "Tonight Show"	19
Movie "Malcolm X"	18
TV sitcom "Murphy Brown" assailed by Dan Quayle	16
Director Woody Allen accused of molestation	16
Singer Elvis Presley remembered	14
Hollywood movie box-office records	9
Hollywood mogul Hal Roach 100 years old	7
Political comedy popularity grows	7
Total: 365 min. (ABC: 129; CBS: 116; NBC: 121)	

NEWS VS. FEATURES

MUSIC HAD THE MOST FEATURE-ORIENTED COVERAGE OF ALL ARTS DISCIPLINES; TELEVISION HAD THE MOST NEWS-ORIENTED.



Proportion of arts and culture on the three weekday nightly newscasts covered by five types of news-oriented stories or feature-oriented stories in total (4,149 minutes) and by six types of artistic discipline: music (1,197 minutes), movies (995 minutes), television (770 minutes), visual arts (346 minutes), performing arts (304 minutes) and publishing (267 minutes).

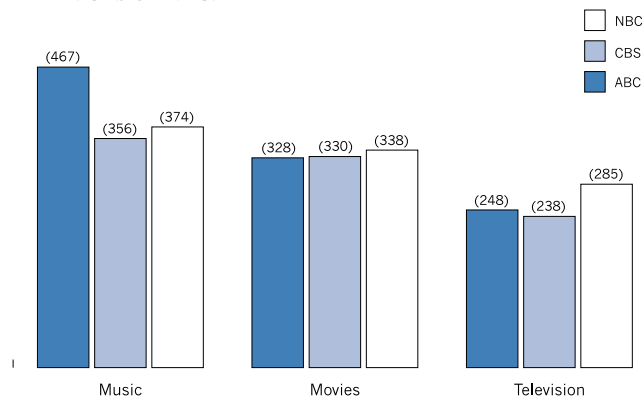
Ironically, the explanation may be precisely that the next two most heavily covered art forms, movies and television, are audio-visual media. In other words, they contain the same mixture of words and images that the newscast itself contains. On the other hand, the protocols of television journalism do not countenance the use of music on the soundtrack to accompany reportage. So coverage of music—even without stimulating visuals—provides a refreshing auditory cue which is missing from the rest of the newscast.

*Of the ten most heavily covered music stories of the decade, there were none from the fields of jazz or classical music, which do not have the marketing budgets to support music videos.*

But by the early '90s the packaging and promotion of the mass-entertainment music industry had changed to solve the problem of the lack of stimulating visuals. MTV was almost ten years old as the decade started, so the music video was no longer a product in its infancy. These videos had developed their own audio-visual style which could add panache to a somewhat staid nightly newscast. Of the ten most heavily covered music stories of the decade, there were none from the fields of jazz or classical music, which do not have the marketing budgets to support music videos. The top two stories—Michael Jackson's sex life and the culture wars over the content of rap music—were highly amenable to stimulating illustration by video clips.

#### MASS ENTERTAINMENT BY NETWORK

ABC, WHICH WAS THE LEADER IN ARTS COVERAGE OVERALL, COVERED MASS-ENTERTAINMENT, MOVIES AND TELEVISION NO MORE HEAVILY THAN CBS OR NBC.



Total coverage (in minutes) for the decade of the '90s (1990-1999) on the nightly weekday newscasts of the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC combined) of music, television and movies.

TOP TEN STORIES, 1993		MIN.	
	The biggest year for the arts in the decade for all three networks...		
	scandal ruled: Michael Jackson's sex life was the blockbuster along with continuing coverage of the Woody Allen-Mia Farrow feud...the culture was shifted from rock music to TV.		
	Singer Michael Jackson's sex life	55	
	Television sex and violence	45	
	Academy Awards ceremonies	31	
	Director Woody Allen accused of molestation	19	
	Computer video games are violent	18	
	Interactive TV of the future	14	
	Holocaust Museum on D.C. Mall	14	
	Grammy Awards ceremonies	10	
Gangsta rap lyrics are rebellious	10		
Toni Morrison wins Nobel Prize for Literature	10		
Total: 591 min. (ABC: 227; CBS: 153; NBC: 212)			

Movies and television were the other two art forms which ensured that arts-and-culture coverage was dominated by mass entertainment. Both were more news-oriented than the “featurey” music beat.

*In total during the '90s, the Oscars attracted more coverage than any other single story except for the culture wars over television sex and violence.*

No annual event attracted more buzz than the Academy Awards. They are the Super Bowl of arts and culture, the one annual occasion on which a national audience focuses on the elite creators in a given medium. In total during the '90s, the Oscars attracted more coverage than any other single story except for the culture wars over television sex and violence. This controversy, starting with the row between Dan Quayle and CBS situational comedy single mother Murphy Brown, spreading to the program rating system and the invention of the so-called V-chip, was the decade's biggest arts-and-culture story and accounted for fully 25% of all television coverage.

#### TOP TEN MOVIE STORIES

	MIN.
Academy Awards ceremonies	140
Hollywood movie box-office records	43
Director Woody Allen accused of molestation	36
Movie "Titanic"	26
Movie "Malcolm X"	21
Movie star Jimmy Stewart obituary	20
Movie "JFK"	15
Hollywood movie budgets tightened	14
R-rated movies watched by teenagers	13
Home video movie piracy	12
Total: 992 min. (ABC: 326; CBS: 328; NBC: 338)	

#### TOP TEN TELEVISION STORIES

	MIN.
Television sex and violence	190
Daytime TV talk shows can be trash	42
Interactive TV of the future	30
Cable TV channel MTV	28
Digital HDTV standards	24
TV's Johnny Carson leaves "Tonight Show"	22
Comedian Bill Cosby's paternity-extortion trial	19
"Muppets" creator Jim Henson's fatal illness	17
TV sitcom "Murphy Brown" assailed by Dan Quayle	16
Children's TV is not educational	14
Total: 765 min. (ABC: 245; CBS: 235; NBC: 285)	

The Oscars each year attracted special attention...ironically, ABC, the network of the Oscars, covered movies no more heavily than CBS and NBC..."Titanic" got the most buzz.

NBC found TV more newsworthy than the other two networks...heaviest coverage was split between negative images of the medium and "gee-whiz" glimpses of the future...MTV had the medium's most prominent programming innovations.

# HIGHBROW POOR RELATIONS

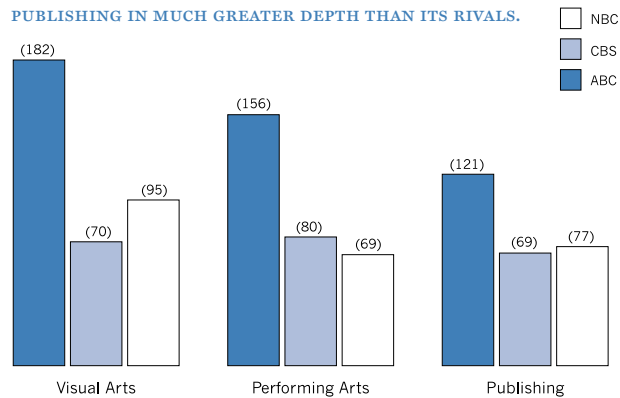
COMPARED WITH MUSIC, television and the movies, the visual arts, the performing arts and publishing were treated as poor relations. Why?

The first explanation is demographic: the network nightly newscasts address a mass audience. Unlike music, movies and television, the audience for the three poor relations tends to be smaller and more elite. In those cases when the selection of arts-and-culture stories was not driven by breaking news, but was a discretionary decision for an arts profile or trend piece, the networks had a choice to make: tell their audience about art forms they were already familiar with, or inform them about more esoteric creative endeavors. CBS and NBC especially tended to opt for mass entertainment. ABC was most inclined to choose the higher arts.

Secondly, since the visual arts, the performing arts and publishing tend to be of less interest to a general audience, they are also less likely to generate the type of controversy which propels an arts story into the top of the newscast. Such stories are not selected at the discretion of the features assignment desk, but are generated because they are making headline news. Arts-and-culture stories rarely break into this category but when they do, this study has isolated three types of controversy which qualify. We label them “scandal and tragedy,” “buzz” and the “culture wars.” The higher art forms count fewer household-name celebrities among their stars so are less likely to produce scandal and tragedy. They have publicity machines which are less adept at creating buzz. And their content, being less widely consumed, is less likely to provoke culture wars in society at large, Robert Mapplethorpe notwithstanding.

## HIGHER ARTS BY NETWORK

ABC COVERED THE VISUAL ARTS, PERFORMANCE AND PUBLISHING IN MUCH GREATER DEPTH THAN ITS RIVALS.



Total coverage (in minutes) for 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC combined, of the visual arts (including painting, sculpture and photography), the performing arts (including theater, dance and opera) and publishing.

## TOP TEN VISUAL ARTS STORIES

Story	MIN.	Notes
Robert Mapplethorpe photography exhibit	19	ABC spent more time on visual arts than CBS and NBC combined...the culture wars over Mapplethorpe's photography were the biggest story...fine art auction prices (9 minutes) got one-sixth of the coverage of Hollywood movie grosses (53 minutes).
Cryptic sculpture at CIA headquarters	10	
Sculptor Christo's outdoor works	10	
"Peanuts" comic strip	10	
Art stolen by Nazis recovered	9	
Boston's Gardner Museum art theft	8	
Painter Pablo Picasso profiled	9	
Fine art auction prices skyrocket	9	
Painter Willem de Kooning obituary	7	
Painter Vincent Van Gogh profiled	7	
Total: 370 min. (ABC: 190; CBS: 77; NBC: 103)		

## TOP TEN PERFORMING ARTS STORIES

Story	MIN.	Notes
Playwright William Shakespeare profiled	13	ABC spent more time on performing arts than CBS and NBC combined...performance was not exactly portrayed as one of the lively arts: heavy on obits and led by William Shakespeare...the end of the Soviet Union threatened the preeminence of the Bolshoi Ballet.
Russia's Bolshoi Ballet	13	
Broadway's Tony Awards	12	
Opera diva Marian Anderson obituary	12	
Comedian George Burns obituary	12	
Modern dance's Martha Graham obituary	8	
Broadway's "A Chorus Line" closes	8	
Go-go dancing considered by Supreme Court	8	
New York City's Metropolitan Opera	8	
Comedian Roseanne Barr butchers anthem	8	
Total: 305 min. (ABC: 156; CBS: 80; NBC: 69)		

TOP TEN STORIES, 1994		MIN.	
	CBS cut way back on the arts to its lowest level of the decade...	Academy Awards ceremonies	23
	the year of the Gingrich Revolution	Race-&-IQ book "The Bell Curve"	21
	saw the most news-worthy publishing event of the decade: "The Bell Curve."	Woodstock music festival recalled	14
		Television sex and violence	14
		Singer Michael Jackson's sex life	13
		FOX TV's "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers"	9
		Thespian John Gielgud profiled	7
		Alexander Solzhenitsyn returns to Russia	6
		Singer Dinah Shore obituary	6
		Author Randy Shilts obituary	6
	Total: 351 min. (ABC: 130; CBS: 91; NBC: 130)		

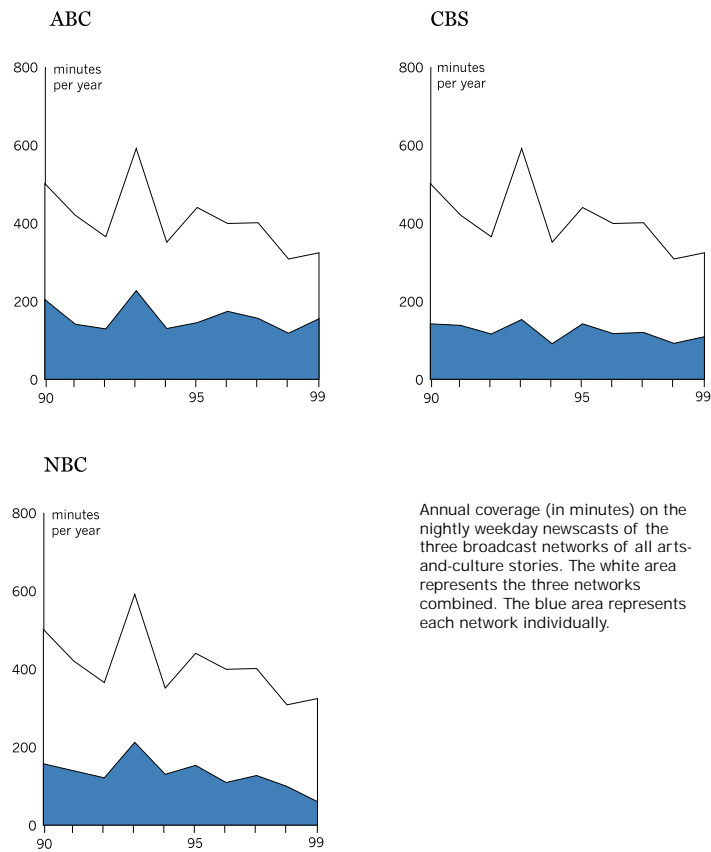
Thirdly, the artworks themselves in these disciplines are less telegenic. By the start of the '90s the art form of the music video had already become well established. Music videos, along with clips from movies and television, offer higher production values than the standard fare of television journalism and are already packaged in a format which allows ease of editing into a produced report. Arts reporting was choc-a-bloc with them, averaging more than four pre-produced clips in each story.

*CBS and NBC especially tended to opt for mass entertainment. ABC was most inclined to choose the higher arts.*

Publicists working in both the visual and performing arts have to make an extra effort to render their product telegenic if they hope to compete with the ready-for-air clips their colleagues working in music, movies and television can offer. As for publishing, which offers neither audio nor visual appeal, the interview format of the morning television news program is much more amenable to an author's publicity tour than the taped reports of a nightly newscast.

### TOTAL ARTS-&-CULTURE COVERAGE

ABC HAD CONSISTENTLY HEAVIER COVERAGE THROUGHOUT THE DECADE; NBC'S COVERAGE DECLINED SHARPLY AS THE DECADE WORE ON.



### TOP TEN PUBLISHING STORIES

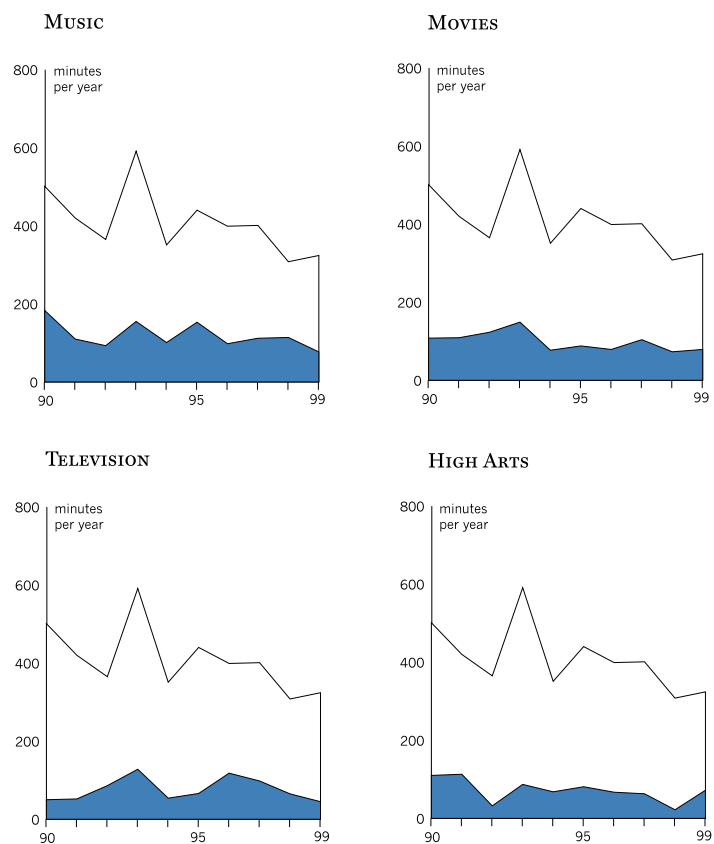
	MIN.	
Race-&-IQ book "The Bell Curve"	21	The book industry's most successful buzz was in
Children's author Dr. Seuss obituary	18	social science ("The Bell Curve") not literature...the
Nobel Prizes for literature	16	perennial Nobel Laureate
Pulitzer Prizes awarded	16	and the Pulitzers are publishing's versions of the
Author Salman Rushdie faces fatwah	13	Oscars.
Novel "Primary Colors" by Anonymous	12	
Alexander Solzhenitsyn returns to Russia	9	
Children's Harry Potter series	7	
Author Alex Haley obituary	7	
Author Randy Shilts obituary	6	

Total: 263 min. (ABC: 119; CBS: 70; NBC: 74)

*Take away these nine higher art forms and there was precious little difference among the three networks' arts-and-culture coverage.*

These obstacles to coverage of high art are not insurmountable, however. ABC's coverage throughout the decade demonstrates that if television journalists commit themselves to covering these less telegenic art forms, they can find a way to present them in their newscasts. We isolated the coverage of nine specific artistic genres which are usually not distributed through mass media: jazz and classical music; theater, opera and dance; painting, sculpture and photography; and poetry. From its base across the street from Lincoln Center—New York City's cultural hub—ABC covered every discipline from this array of the higher arts more heavily than its two rivals. In fact, it is only in these fields that ABC was clearly more arts-oriented. Take away these nine higher art forms and there was precious little difference among the three networks' arts-and-culture coverage.

**ANNUAL TRENDS OF ARTS-&-CULTURE COVERAGE**  
 COVERAGE DURING THE 1990S PEAKED IN 1993, WHEN BOTH MOVIES AND TELEVISION SAW THEIR HEAVIEST SINGLE YEAR.



Annual coverage (in minutes) on the nightly weekday newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC combined, of all arts-and-culture stories. The white area represents the total of all artistic disciplines. The blue area represents each discipline individually. The nine selected high arts consist of classical music, theater, painting, jazz, dance, photography, sculpture, opera and poetry.

**TOP OTHER ARTS STORIES**

Computer video games are violent	39	Computer video games
Talk radio breeds resentment	26	were the new art form of
Holocaust Museum on D.C. Mall	14	the decade...the old
Ellis Island Immigration Museum	10	medium of radio made a
Guggenheim's Art of the Motorcycle	6	comeback through the new
Florence's Uffizi Gallery bombed	6	format of talk.
Getty Museum in Los Angeles	6	
Romanoff jewelry exhibit tours U.S.	5	
(no other stories with at least 5 minutes)		

Total: 2828 min. (ABC: 943; CBS: 901; NBC: 984)



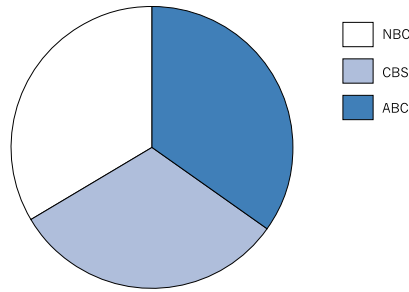
TOP TEN STORIES, 1995

CBS coverage rebounded to its second-heaviest level... the mass-entertainment culture wars turned to daytime TV talk... talk radio was in the spotlight when Bill Clinton linked it to the Oklahoma City bombing.

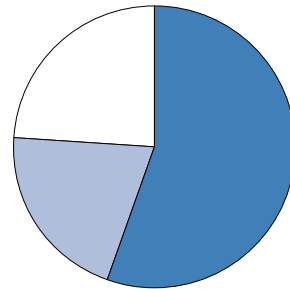
	MIN.
Daytime TV talk shows can be trash	27
Television sex and violence	21
Talk radio breeds resentment	18
Tejano singing star Selena slain	13
Academy Awards ceremonies	12
Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia dies	12
Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame	9
Music education in schools	9
Grammy Awards ceremonies	8
Singer Elvis Presley remembered	8
Total: 440 min. (ABC: 145; CBS: 142; NBC: 153)	

NINE HIGH ARTS

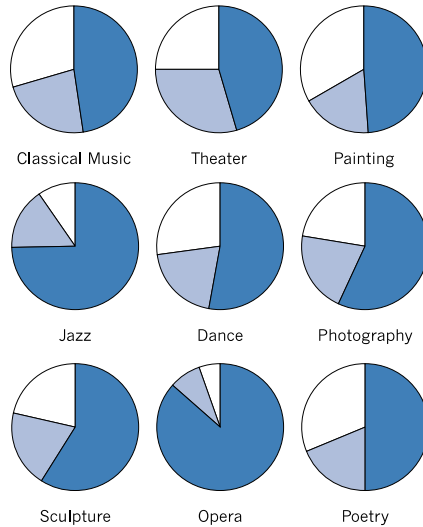
ABC COVERED EVERY SINGLE ONE OF NINE SELECTED HIGH ART DISCIPLINES MOST HEAVILY; IN TOTAL, ABC COVERED THEM MORE THAN CBS AND NBC COMBINED.



Other Arts & Culture



Nine High Arts



Proportion of total coverage of the nine selected high arts (733 minutes) and all other stories (3,416 minutes) by the three weekday nightly network newscasts and of each of the nine arts individually: classical music (146 minutes), painting (134 minutes), theater (131 minutes), jazz (83 minutes), dance (70 minutes), photography (60 minutes), sculpture (56 minutes), opera (37 minutes) and poetry (15 minutes).

## NEWSMAKING EVENTS

WHAT SORT OF arts stories make news? The artistic process is usually patient, time-consuming, contemplative; the artist often seeks to make timeless works, standing outside the fleeting controversies of the moment. The journalist must work with breaking information, on tight deadlines, addressing the immediate crises of the body politic and the often transitory fascinations of the water cooler. Nevertheless, even though much creative activity is antithetical to the priorities of daily mass-audience journalism, across all art forms, a little less than two-thirds of all arts-and-culture coverage was news-oriented and timely; only one-third consisted of features.

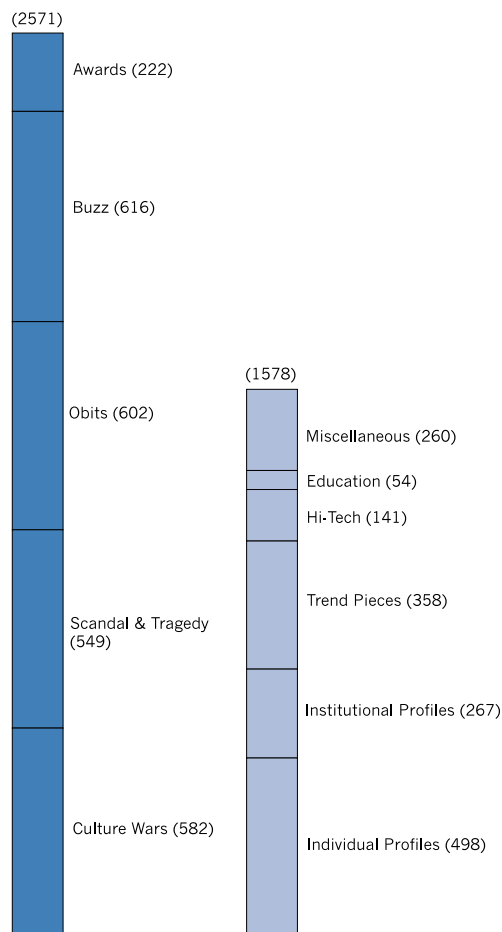
This study has developed a typology of the five ways in which an event in the art world gets transformed into a mainstream news story. We call these five categories: “scandal and tragedy,” “obits,” “buzz,” “awards” and “culture wars.” In these breaking categories, NBC treated the arts as almost as newsworthy as ABC. ABC was the clear leader in arts feature coverage.

**SCANDAL AND TRAGEDY:** The news agendas of the tabloids and the mainstream media overlap when scandalous or tragic events befall famous people. During the '90s, O.J. Simpson, Princess Diana, Gianni Versace and John F. Kennedy Jr. were among the celebrities on the cover of *People* magazine and in the headlines of the network newscasts. Since many celebrities are involved in show business, the arts-and-culture beat would frequently find itself on the nightly news agenda when show-business celebrities were involved in scandal or some other drama. Consider Michael Jackson's sex life, Woody Allen's tempestuous breakup with Mia Farrow, John Denver's plane crash or Jim Henson's sudden fatal infection.

**OBITS:** Obituaries are a staple of arts-and-culture coverage. Their predominance poses a serious structural problem for publicists who seek to use

### NEWS-ORIENTED STORIES VS. FEATURE-ORIENTED STORIES

**MORE THAN 60% OF ALL ARTS-AND-CULTURE COVERAGE ON THE NIGHTLY NEWS WAS NEWS-ORIENTED; ALMOST 40% HAD NO NEWS HOOK.**



Total coverage (in minutes) for 1990-1999 on the nightly week-day newscasts of the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC combined) of news-oriented and feature-oriented arts-and-culture coverage.

TOP TEN STORIES, 1996		
		MIN.
The decline in arts coverage which would continue through the end of the decade begins...only ABC did not cut back...the networks were overwhelmingly concerned with sex and violence on their own airwaves.	Television sex and violence	74
	Academy Awards ceremonies	19
	Novel "Primary Colors" by Anonymous	12
	Music education in schools	12
	Movie star Gene Kelly obituary	11
	Comedian George Burns obituary	10
	Children's TV is not educational	8
	Daytime TV talk shows can be trash	7
	Humorist Erma Bombeck obituary	6
	Bluegrass creator Bill Monroe obituary	5
	Total: 399 min. (ABC: 174; CBS: 117; NBC: 109)	

television journalism as a medium to promote the arts. However hard publicists may work to portray the arts as contemporary, exciting and relevant to a young generation, the message delivered by all those obituaries on the nightly newscasts directly contradicts them. In the '90s, artistic accomplishment—as opposed to artistic controversy or scandal—was often represented as the achievements of old dead people: music had Frank Sinatra; films had Jimmy Stewart; literature had Dr. Seuss; the stage had Marian Anderson.

**Buzz:** For arts publicists, buzz is the opposite of the obit. The arts never seem livelier than when a movie, book or television program takes on a life of its own so that interest in it or debate about it makes news. In the movies, for example, "Titanic" was a business phenomenon because of its box-office grosses; "JFK" was a political phenomenon because of its theory about the presidential assassination. In the world of publishing, "Primary Colors" and "The Bell Curve" had that buzz about them: one for its anonymous author, the other for its—racist perhaps—pseudoscience. Television buzz was more affectionate: the final episode of "Seinfeld" and Johnny Carson's retirement as the host of "The Tonight Show" both became national news items.

**AWARDS:** The easiest way to create buzz is through the annual awards shows, which this study classified in a category all of their own. Each spring, first the nominations and then the ceremonies for the Academy Awards provide the news hook for personal profiles and trend pieces about the movies. Less successful at attracting news coverage were the Oscars' rivals in other fields: the Grammys (33 min.), the Nobel Prize literature laureates (16 min.), the Pulitzers (16 min.—a combination of literature and journalism) and the Tonys (12 min.). Television news virtually ignored its own industry's Emmy awards.

#### TOP TEN SCANDAL-AND-TRAGEDY STORIES

	MIN.	
Singer Michael Jackson's sex life	74	ABC, usually the arts leader, covered these stories least heavily...Salman Rushdie (13 minutes), under threat of death all decade long, got one-fifth of the coverage of Michael Jackson (74 minutes) under threat of a lawsuit.
Director Woody Allen accused of molestation	36	
Comedian Bill Cosby paternity-extortion trial	19	
Singer John Denver killed in plane crash	19	
"Muppets" creator Jim Henson's fatal illness	17	
Author Salman Rushdie faces fatwah	13	
Tejano singing star Selena slain	13	
Rap star Notorious B.I.G. slain	12	
TV host Oprah Winfrey badmouths beef	10	
Writer Art Buchwald sues for plagiarism	10	
Total: 564 min. (ABC: 154; CBS: 199; NBC: 211)		

#### TOP TEN OBITUARIES

	MIN.	
Singer Frank Sinatra	62	ABC specialized in obits... Frank Sinatra got massive coverage in 1998...other obits just outside the top ten included Dizzie Gillespie (11 minutes), Audrey Hepburn (11 minutes), Greta Garbo (11 minutes), Martha Graham (8 minutes), Sarah Vaughan (6 minutes), Marlene Dietrich (6 minutes).
Movie star Jimmy Stewart	20	
Children's author Dr. Seuss	18	
Entertainer Sammy Davis Jr.	15	
Conductor-composer Leonard Bernstein	14	
Opera diva Marian Anderson	12	
Comedian George Burns	12	
Singer Tammy Wynette	12	
Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia	12	
Movie star Gene Kelly	11	
Total: 591 min. (ABC: 264; CBS: 164; NBC: 163)		

#### TOP TEN BUZZ STORIES

	MIN.	
Movie "Titanic"	26	"Titanic" was such a box-office phenomenon that it was newsworthy...the decade's most noteworthy TV episodes ("Murphy Brown" excepted) were Johnny Carson's last and Jerry Seinfeld's last...neither performance nor music made many waves in this category.
TV's Johnny Carson leaves "Tonight Show"	22	
Movie "Malcolm X"	21	
Race-&-IQ book "The Bell Curve"	21	
Movie "JFK"	15	
TV sitcom "Seinfeld" final episode	14	
Novel "Primary Colors"	12	
Movie "Phantom Menace"	11	
Cryptic sculpture at CIA headquarters	10	
Sculptor Christo's outdoor works	10	
Total: 596 min. (ABC: 206; CBS: 168; NBC: 222)		

## THE CULTURE WARS

CONTRARY TO THE widely held perception in the world of fine art, the culture wars of the '90s were not dominated by coverage of Robert Mapplethorpe's photography and the disputes over National Endowment for the Arts funding. Defined as coverage of the debate over how the content of art should be regulated and whether it can have a harmful impact on its audience, Mapplethorpe's allegedly obscene works and allegedly offensive NEA-funded projects were secondary stories.

The debate over the content of artistic works raged much more ferociously in the field of mass entertainment, often triggered by sensational news events which were utterly extraneous to the art world itself. Disputes over the content of gangsta rap music were headline material in 1992 when presidential candidate Bill Clinton lashed out at Sister Souljah. The content of talk radio came under attack in 1995 when its anti-government mood was linked by Clinton to the Oklahoma City bombing. The content of interactive video games made headlines in 1999 when their violence was tied to the student gunmen at Colorado's Columbine High School.

But television news spent most time on the controversy over the content of television entertainment. Was children's television educational enough? Did daytime television talk shows—with Jerry Springer leading the pack—contain too much trash? Television news covered television entertainment disproportionately as a malign cultural influence, with television sex and violence leading all other stories. During the the last decade, the point man leading this debate was 1992 vice-presidential candidate Dan Quayle. The "family values" politician assailed the CBS situation comedy single mother Murphy Brown for setting a bad example for real-life women who might be thinking of having a baby without getting married.

### TOP TEN CULTURE WARS STORIES

	MIN.
Television sex and violence	190
Gangsta rap lyrics are rebellious	64
Daytime TV talk shows can be trash	42
Computer video games are violent	39
Talk radio breeds resentment	26
National Endowment for the Arts	20
Robert Mapplethorpe photography exhibit	19
Rock lyrics are sexual and violent	18
TV sitcom "Murphy Brown" assailed by Dan Quayle	16
Children's TV is not educational	14

Total: 584 min. (ABC: 179; CBS: 212; NBC: 193)

CBS, the network least interested in arts stories overall, covered these stories most heavily...high arts disputes concerning Mapplethorpe and the N.E.A. were overwhelmed by coverage of those from the fields of mass entertainment.

TOP TEN STORIES, 1997		MIN.	
	Non-arts media coverage starts its boom in coverage...the Internet got more time than performance, visual arts and books combined...TV got its V-chip and new HDTV standards.	Television sex and violence	23
		Movie star Jimmy Stewart obituary	20
		Comedian Bill Cosby paternity-extortion trial	19
		Singer John Denver killed in plane crash	19
		Digital HDTV standards	13
		Singer Elvis Presley remembered	13
		Rap star Notorious B.I.G. slain	12
		TV sitcom "Seinfeld" final episode	10
		Academy Awards ceremonies	9
	Hollywood movie box-office records	8	
Total: 401 min. (ABC: 156; CBS: 120; NBC: 127)			

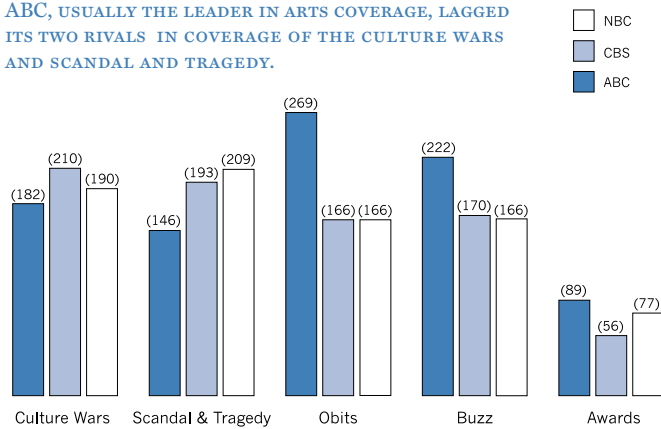
Worries about the fictional sex lives of television characters and fictional violence in television entertainment combined to become the most newsworthy single arts-and-culture story of the decade. In 1996 and 1997, when the debate about the program ratings system and the so-called V-chip technology was at its height, TV sex and violence was the number one story of the year.

*Television news covered television entertainment disproportionately as a malign cultural influence, with television sex and violence leading all other stories.*

There was a certain self-serving quality to this television news coverage of television violence. The political and cultural attack on broadcasters was not only about aesthetics, it was about dollars and cents. If the networks were to be obliged to alter the content of their programming to avoid federal regulation, it might be less popular, and so less profitable. The corporate media—including Hollywood and the record industry—were under fire for placing the drive for profits over artistic taste and social responsibility. Network journalists had a vested interest in the outcome of this debate: if their own bosses lost this battle, their operating budgets might suffer.

#### NEWS-ORIENTED STORIES BY NETWORK

ABC, USUALLY THE LEADER IN ARTS COVERAGE, LAGGED ITS TWO RIVALS IN COVERAGE OF THE CULTURE WARS AND SCANDAL AND TRAGEDY.



Total news-oriented coverage of arts and culture (in minutes) for 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts of the three broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC combined) divided into five types of story: culture wars, scandal and tragedy, obits, buzz and awards.

## FEATURES

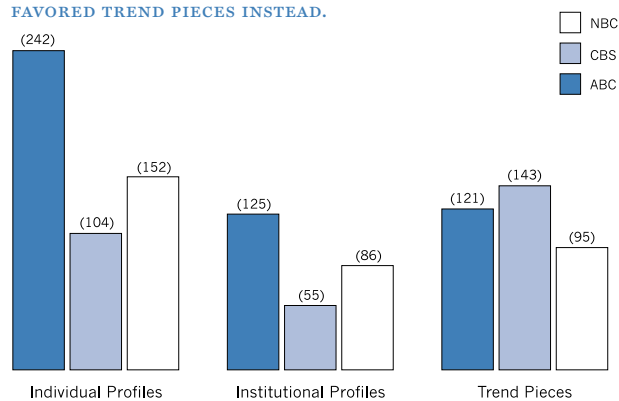
DESPITE THE “NEWS” label that all three newscasts boast in their name, plenty of their content consists of non-breaking features, especially toward the close of the newscast where arts-and-culture stories are more likely to be found.

Almost 40% of all arts-and-culture coverage during the '90s was purely feature-oriented, and in addition some of the news-oriented coverage was in reality not very newsworthy—a feature hanging on a news hook rather than a pure breaking-news story. For example, Academy Awards coverage often included a behind-the-scenes profile of a given nominee; or the contents of an obituary usually mentioned little about the news event itself—the death—and concentrated on a profile of the deceased artist’s career and accomplishments.

*The most commonly used feature format was the profile, which accounted for almost half of all feature-oriented coverage.*

The most commonly used feature format was the profile, which accounted for almost half of all feature-oriented coverage. Profiles could focus either on an individual or group (especially in the case of pop or rock music) or an institution. In many ways, a profile had the same structure as an obit. Obits can be thought of as a profile with the news hook of the artist’s death. ABC, which had the most coverage of arts and culture overall, specialized in all three types of coverage. In fact, almost all of the difference in the amount of time spent on the arts beat between ABC and its two rivals can be

**FEATURE-ORIENTED STORIES BY NETWORK**  
ABC SPENT THE MOST TIME ON BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES; CBS AVOIDED PROFILES AND FAVORED TREND PIECES INSTEAD.



Feature-oriented coverage of arts and culture (in minutes) for 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts of the ABC, CBS and NBC combined, in three selected categories: individual profiles, institutional profiles and trend pieces.

### TOP TEN INDIVIDUAL PROFILES

Profile	MIN.	Notes
Pop group The Beatles	58	ABC filed as many individual profiles as CBS and NBC combined...music and nostalgia—often the two combined—dominated this category.
Singer Elvis Presley	49	
Playwright William Shakespeare	13	
Rock band The Grateful Dead	11	
Band leader Glenn Miller	11	
TV chef Julia Child	10	
Rock band The Rolling Stones	10	
“Peanuts” comic strip	10	
Painter Pablo Picasso	9	
Singer-songwriter Bob Dylan	9	

Total: 504 min. (ABC: 248; CBS: 106; NBC: 150)

### TOP TEN INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES

Profile	MIN.	Notes
Cable TV channel MTV	28	CBS found the category uninteresting...high art institutions and museums were well represented.
Woodstock Music Festival	24	
Holocaust Museum on D.C. Mall	14	
Russia’s Bolshoi Ballet	13	
TV’s “Sesame Street”	10	
Ellis Island Immigration Museum	10	
Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame	9	
Sundance Film Festival	9	
Boston Pops Orchestra	9	
New York City’s Carnegie Hall	8	

Total: 252 min. (ABC: 121; CBS: 50; NBC: 81)

TOP TEN STORIES, 1998	The lowest level of arts coverage in the decade...NBC, which had once rivaled ABC, starts a steep decline in interest...only nostalgia remains strong with Frank Sinatra getting the decade's longest obituary.		MIN.
	Singer Frank Sinatra obituary	50	
	Movie "Titanic"	26	
	Country-&-western singer Tammy Wynette obituary	12	
	TV host Oprah Winfrey badmouths beef	10	
	Guggenheim's "Art of the Motorcycle"	8	
	Comedian Phil Hartman murdered	8	
	Pop group The Beatles profiled	7	
	Pulitzer Prizes awarded	7	
	Sitcom actor Michael J. Fox has Parkinson's	7	
Singing cowboy Roy Rogers obituary	7		
Total: 308 min. (ABC: 118; CBS: 92; NBC: 99)			

accounted for by its extra attention paid to obits, individual profiles and institutional profiles.

There were two other major categories of feature-oriented coverage and one minor one. Trend pieces track the artistic zeitgeist—what's hip, what's hot and what's not. They tended to concentrate on Hollywood: what types of movies were performing well at the box office and what social issues from the society at large were filtering into movie scripts. Hi-tech reports kept abreast of cutting edge—usually digital—formats for presenting the arts. Education was a minor feature category, covering how schools teach the arts.

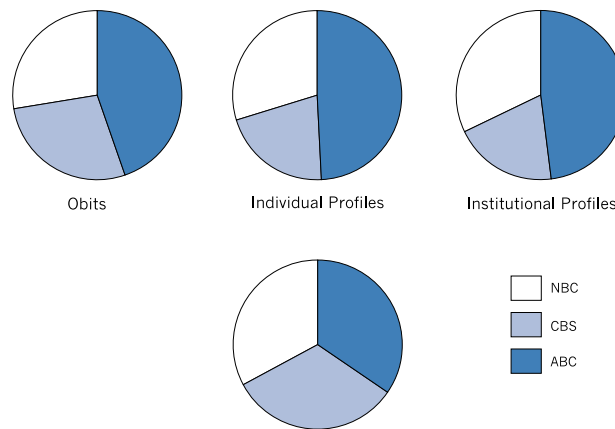
For almost the entire decade of the '90s, anchor Peter Jennings would sign off each Friday's newscast with a profile of ABC's "Person of the Week." Sometimes the figure would be drawn from the week's news, at other times there was no pressing reason to select the individual: a birthday perhaps, or an anniversary or an award. While the person could come from a variety of fields, the arts were regularly included.

In contrast to the topicality of culture-wars coverage or buzz pieces, profiles could have a nostalgic air about them—in particular the nostalgia of the baby boom generation. Music was the favorite topic and on top of the charts were The Beatles, Elvis Presley and Woodstock. Add to this the top music obit, Frank Sinatra.

By the end of the decade, the trend in the networks' story selection conveyed the message that the arts were admirable if backward-looking and threatening if contemporary, and that the future belonged to the new media, not arts at all.

### OBITS AND PROFILES

ABC SPECIALIZED IN BOTH OBITS AND PROFILES; ITS COVERAGE OF ALL OTHER TYPES OF ARTS STORIES WAS NO HEAVIER THAN ITS TWO RIVALS.



Proportion of total coverage of obituaries (602 minutes), individual profiles (498 minutes), institutional profiles (267 minutes) and all other stories (2,782 minutes) by the three weekday nightly network newscasts.

### TOP HI-TECH STORIES

Story	MIN.	Notes	
Interactive TV of the future	30	The non-arts related aspects of the digital revolution attracted much more coverage than the digital arts...hi-tech arts (146 minutes) received one-third of the coverage of the Internet (578 minutes).	
Digital HDTV standards	24		
Music will be downloadable online	13		
Home video movies pirated	12		
Music CDs, audio cassettes pirated	9		
Digital imaging will replace photography	6		
Website cameras deliver real-life video	6		
Hollywood movies develop hi-tech FX	5		
(no other stories with at least 5 minutes)			

### TOP TEN TREND PIECES

Story	MIN.	Notes
Hollywood movie box-office records	43	CBS favored trend pieces... this was a favorite technique for covering the Hollywood zeitgeist.
Hollywood movie budgets tightened	14	
Hollywood hires black directors	10	
Hollywood memorabilia auctions	10	
Country-&-western music more popular	10	
Hollywood movies based on tabloid tales	10	
Fine art auction prices skyrocket	9	
Hollywood movies have green themes	8	
Hollywood movie trailers feature "the voice"	8	
Animated feature films make a comeback	8	

Total: 363 min. (ABC: 125; CBS: 143; NBC: 95)

## WHAT ART DO VIEWERS SEE?

EVEN THOUGH ARTS-AND-CULTURE stories rank low in the competition for newsworthiness, they offer the intrinsic virtue of audio-visual appeal to network news producers. By definition, the field of the arts overflows with sounds and images that are designed to appeal to the eyes and ears of audiences. A network news camera crew does not have to search out stimulating visuals when covering many an arts story—the images have already been made.

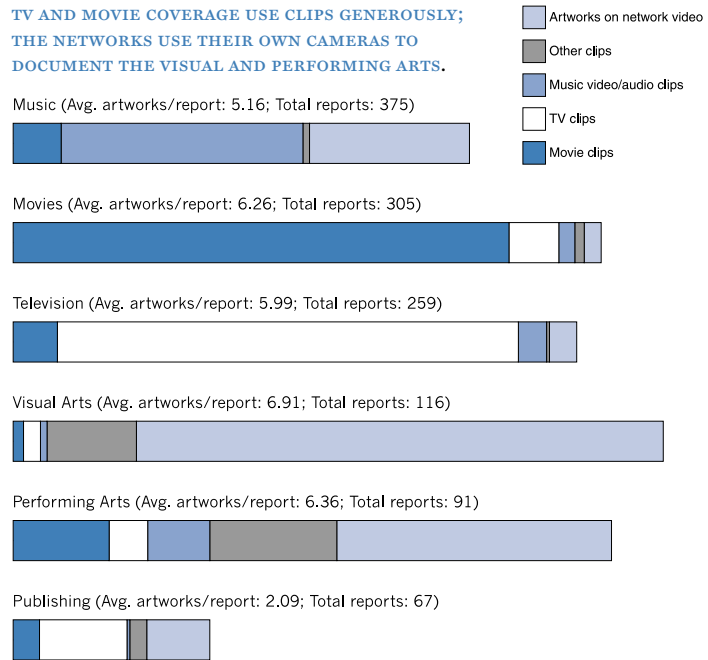
Arts reporting was choc-a-bloc with such pre-produced clips: excerpts from more than four different artistic productions appeared on average in each story. The average arts-and-culture story filed by a reporter (as opposed to the shorter read-only items handled by the anchor) was typically between two and three minutes in duration. Intercut with the reporter's narration and soundbites, there was plenty of art and entertainment. Coverage of movies and television was especially clip-laden. CBS was most enthusiastic about editing excerpts together.

The more marginal the newsworthiness of the story, the more prominent was the ready-made audio-visual material. Harder, more news-oriented stories, such as the culture wars or scandals and tragedies, were illustrated with fewer excerpts. Obituaries, on the other hand, featured a veritable cavalcade of clips, as did coverage of awards ceremonies—think of all that Oscar coverage—and feature-oriented profiles and trend pieces.

Half the time television and movie clips were deployed purely for their visual impact, as a reporter's narration continued on the soundtrack; half the time the excerpt included a portion of dialogue. But what about those art forms which do not offer ready-made telegenic material for an editor to add some dynamism into a news-cast-ending feature? How does television show an audio-visual clip from a book? The lowly sta-

### ARTS ON DISPLAY

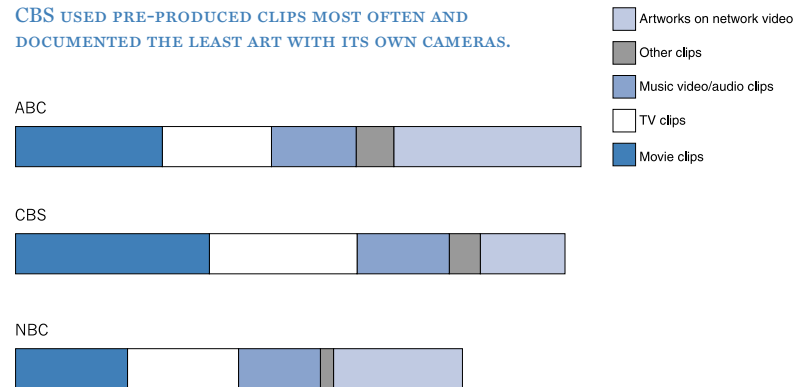
TV AND MOVIE COVERAGE USE CLIPS GENEROUSLY; THE NETWORKS USE THEIR OWN CAMERAS TO DOCUMENT THE VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS.



Average number of film or video excerpts, different artworks and scenes from artistic performances displayed in an arts-and-culture story in each of the six major types of artistic discipline filed by a reporter during 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts of the three broadcast networks.

### CLIPS BY NETWORK

CBS USED PRE-PRODUCED CLIPS MOST OFTEN AND DOCUMENTED THE LEAST ART WITH ITS OWN CAMERAS.



Average number of film or video excerpts, different artworks and scenes from artistic performances displayed in arts-and-culture stories filed by a reporter on each network during 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts.



TOP TEN STORIES, 1999	The non-arts media surpass arts coverage...NBC cuts back to only one hour of arts for the entire year...the Columbine shooting springs the decade's new art form, computer video games, into the forefront of the culture wars.	MIN.	
		Computer video games are violent	15
		Pop group The Beatles profiled	13
		R-rated movies watched by teenagers	13
		Academy Awards ceremonies	12
		Music sales online undercut record stores	11
		Movie "Phantom Menace"	11
		Woodstock music festival recalled	7
		Children's Harry Potter books	7
		Jazz great Duke Ellington's birth centennial	7
TV's Jenny Jones Show lawsuit	6		
Total: 324 min. (ABC: 155; CBS: 109; NBC: 60)			

tus of publishing in the arts' pecking order may be explained by this very impossibility.

Besides ready-made mass-entertainment clips, the news audience also got to see art when the networks' own cameras went into the field to document it. This type of footage is technically known as actuality. The performing arts and the visual arts in particular both relied on actualities rather than clips to represent their works. An average story on the visual arts showed almost six different artworks (paintings, sculptures, photographs and so on) each of which were shot by the networks themselves. CBS, which included more pre-produced clips than its two rivals, displayed fewer individual pieces of artwork and showed fewer performances using its own actuality footage.

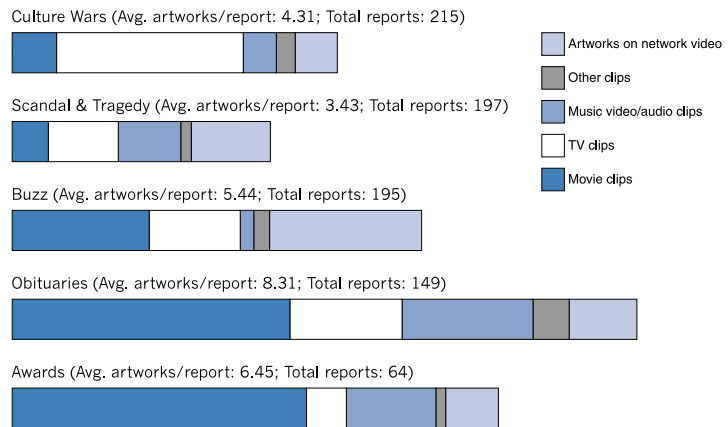
*The more marginal the newsworthiness of the story, the more prominent was the ready-made audio-visual material.*

Music coverage contained a mixture of clips and actualities. Rock videos and other pre-produced audio-visual packages were not as prevalent in music coverage as movie clips were in movie coverage or TV clips were for television. While the achievement of the music industry during the 1980s in transforming its product from audio-only to audio-visual was remarkable, that accomplishment alone does not account for the heavy coverage of music compared with other arts disciplines on the nightly newscasts. The networks also made the effort to document many musical performances with their own resources.

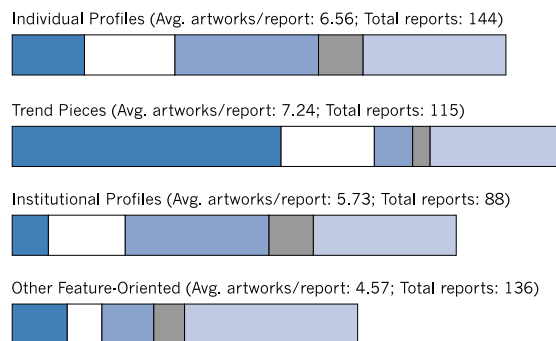
### CLIPS IN NEWS AND FEATURE STORIES

THE MORE HARD-NEWS-ORIENTED THE ARTS STORY, THE LESS PROMINENT IS THE ARTWORK ITSELF.

#### NEWS-ORIENTED STORIES



#### FEATURE-ORIENTED STORIES



Average number of film or video excerpts, different artworks and scenes from artistic performances displayed in eight major types of news-oriented and feature-oriented arts-and-culture stories filed by a reporter during 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts of the three broadcast networks.

## WHO TALKS ABOUT ART?

BESIDES CLIPS OF actual artwork, soundbites were also intercut into arts-and-culture stories. A television news viewer typically hears four soundbites during the course of an item filed by a reporter. They could be quoted from a public speech such as a press conference or a congressional hearing or as a consequence of a question-and-answer session set up by the network. These were the voices the networks chose to speak about arts and culture.

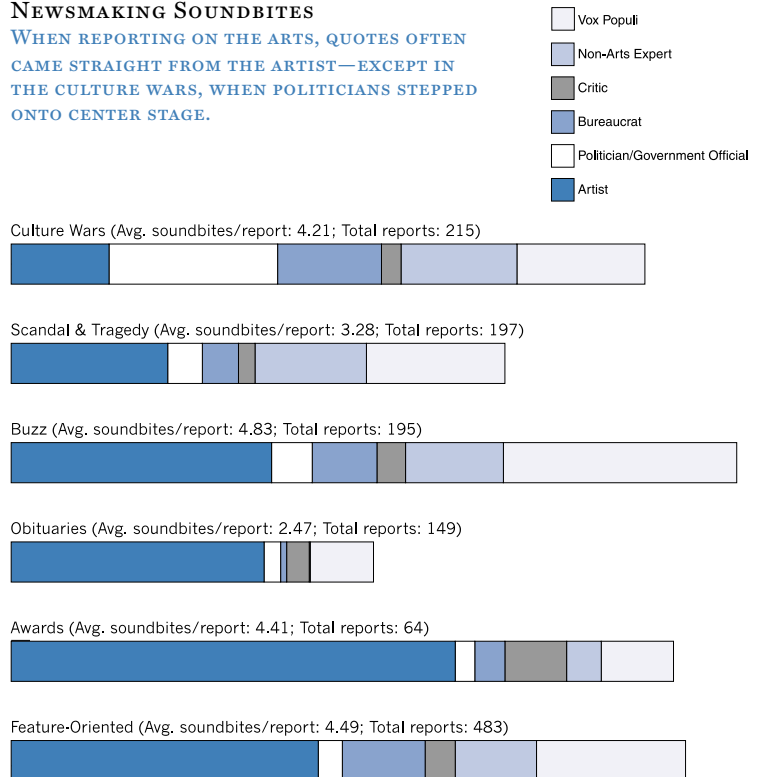
Television news preferred to get its quotes straight from the artist. Intermediaries got short shrift. More than one-third of the time, artists themselves were the ones who were selected to speak. (The term “artist” here includes any creative talent, including performers, writers, directors, musicians and so on.) Artists were quoted three times more often than critics and arts bureaucrats (administrators, curators, managers, executives and so on) and were especially heavily represented in coverage of the higher arts.

*Artists were quoted three times more often than critics and arts bureaucrats, and were especially heavily represented in coverage of the higher arts.*

The culture wars were the big exception. Politicians, who hardly got to comment in any other type of arts coverage, were routinely quoted in culture wars stories and, speaking on behalf of creative institutions, arts bureaucrats were featured slightly more often than artists themselves.

### NEWSMAKING SOUNDBITES

WHEN REPORTING ON THE ARTS, QUOTES OFTEN CAME STRAIGHT FROM THE ARTIST—EXCEPT IN THE CULTURE WARS, WHEN POLITICIANS STEPPED ONTO CENTER STAGE.



Average number of soundbites in five types of news-oriented arts-and-culture stories and feature-oriented stories filed by a reporter on each network during 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts.

Soundbites were a functional alternative to clips. They were more frequently included in the type of story that rarely featured examples of actual artwork, and vice versa. So publishing stories averaged more soundbites than stories about any other artistic discipline. Conversely, obituaries which contained a cornucopia of clips, were light on soundbites.

*Politicians, who hardly got to comment in any other type of arts coverage, were routinely quoted in culture wars stories.*

Artists accounted for approximately one-third of all soundbites; politicians, arts bureaucrats and critics accounted for less than another third. The final third consisted of quotes from people outside the field of the arts: experts from other fields and so-called “real people,” the *vox populi*.

The harder, more news-oriented the arts story, the more likely were experts unrelated to the arts to be quoted. Non-arts experts outnumbered arts bureaucrats three-to-one in coverage of scandals and tragedies. The *vox populi* had the least to say in the high arts, but the most to say when a specific artistic creation attracted a lot of buzz.

## PUBLISHING AND HIGH ARTS

WHEN CLIPS WERE SCARCE, THE NETWORKS RESORTED TO TALKING HEADS.

Publishing (Avg. soundbites/report: 5.01; Total reports: 67)



Nine Selected High Arts (Avg. soundbites/report: 4.21; Total reports: 233)



All Other Artistic Disciplines (Avg. soundbites/report: 3.99; Total reports: 1004)



Average number of soundbites in arts-and-culture stories and feature-oriented stories filed by a reporter about publishing and nine selected high arts (classical music, theater, painting, jazz, dance, photography, sculpture, opera and poetry) on each network during 1990-1999 on the nightly weekday newscasts.

## METHODOLOGY

ADT RESEARCH SEARCHED its database of all stories covered by the three networks' weekday nightly newscasts (ABC, CBS and NBC combined) during the decade of the '90s (1990-1999). First, all stories covering the media were isolated, including arts and culture and non-arts media such as journalism, advertising, media business and regulation and the Internet. In total, 5,810 minutes of media coverage were retrieved.

A subset of these stories— covering the six major artistic disciplines of music, movies, television, the performing arts, the visual arts and publishing and less heavily covered arts topics such as entertainment radio, museums, architecture, arts policy, decorative arts and high fashion—was isolated. Coverage of these arts and culture stories was organized into individual news stories and the amount of time devoted to each story was aggregated. In total, 4,149 minutes of arts and culture coverage was included.

Each story was classified according to its arts discipline (music, movies, et al.) and by story type. Story types were either news-oriented (culture wars, scandal and tragedy, obits, buzz and awards), or feature-oriented (individual and institutional profiles, trend pieces, hi-tech, education and miscellaneous). All coverage of an individual artist was grouped together across the decade. For example, Frank Sinatra's obituary also included some extra coverage devoted to Sinatra before and after his death.

The newscasts' arts-and-culture coverage included 1,304 reports filed by an individual reporter (as opposed to the shorter read-only items handled by the anchor). These reports were retrieved from ADT Research's archive, dubbed onto compilation videotapes, and monitored. The number of times specific works of art were represented (either as various types of clips or by the network's own actuality footage) and the number of soundbites (according to the type of person quoted) were tabulated.

The research analysis for this report was conducted by ADT Research for the National Arts Journalism Program in April and May 2000. ADT Research was founded by Andrew Tyndall, publisher of *The Tyndall Report*, a weekly faxsheet which monitors network television news. Contact ADT Research, 135 Rivington Street, New York City NY 10002. Tel (212) 674-8913. Fax (212) 979-7304. Website: [www.tyndallreport.com](http://www.tyndallreport.com).