

SCAN LINES

by Joyce Nelson

David Suzuki saves the world

The last place where I would have expected to find a fundamental challenge to the dominant world-view of North American society is on my television set. Sponsored TV – and that, alas, includes PBS and CBC – offers but few alternatives to the various reiterations of the hallowed status quo; though, to be sure, the forms and languages of those reiterations are, in themselves, of interest to any intrepid cultural anthropologist of the media. But, as I say, I do not usually expect challenges to the mainstream to issue through the sponsored airwaves. So it is with a good deal of surprise and even some post-New Year enthusiasm that I launch this TV column by focussing attention on a major prime-time CBC-TV series that dares to question the very basis of our society: its techno-scientific world-view.

Called *A Planet For The Taking*, this eight-part series will begin on Feb. 6 (a Wednesday night) at 8:00 p.m., and continue in that time-slot for subsequent weekly episodes. Regular CBC viewers will recognize that scheduling time as belonging to *The Nature of Things*, David Suzuki's acclaimed science program. And, in fact, *A Planet For The*

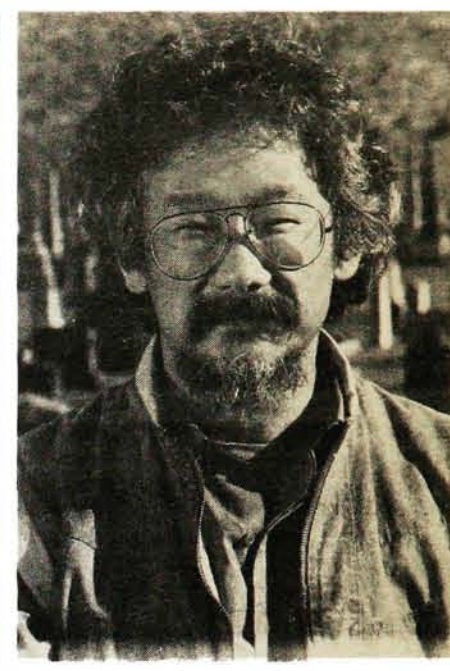
*Taking* has been made by Suzuki and many of the staff for his science series. This special eight-part production differs, however, in that it develops a focussed analysis, a politicized overview and critique of the larger philosophical/cultural framework that encompasses Western science itself. In this sense, *A Planet For The Taking* is an extended essay – something television rarely attempts in any case. That it is also a challenge to mainstream thought makes this series "event television" far superior to the glittering, empty offerings of other networks.

At CBC Production Central in Toronto, where I went to take a look at what was in-the-can for this series, I sensed an unmistakable mixture of excitement and trepidation surrounding the series. The publicist mentioned a possible 9th episode to allow for round-table discussion of *A Planet For The Taking's* pros and cons. After all, the series is "very close to editorializing", she explained.

How like the CBC and how like North American television: terrified at espousing a point of view, terrified at possibly offending anyone, desperately clinging to the obsolete notion of "objectivity" and the even weirder notion that "there are two sides to every issue." There are *multiple* sides to every issue: many facets and dimensions and points of view worthy of exploration. Too often, the problem with TV is that it reduces thought to only "two sides."

But let me reassure any readers quaking at the thought that *A Planet For The Taking* might be political. It is, but so is everything on TV. After all, upholding the status quo is just as political as questioning it. Moreover, this series is so calm, so gentle, that even Ronald Reagan would not be put off, and could even take in some of its perspective. This calmness of approach (at least in the material I was able to view ahead of air-date) is part of the series' appeal. So, too, is David Suzuki himself, TV version of the trusted, benevolent scientist/educator who leads us through the confusing complexities of the nature of things. In the introductory episode of *A Planet For The Taking*, he says: "We share this planet with other creatures... How have we come to see everything on earth as a means to achieving our own ends?" How have we come to desire and depend on "a technological culture that reshapes everything, assuming a man-made world will answer all our needs?" Suzuki's gentle, patient voice and demeanor calmly lead us in.

"This series is about changing directions, changing perceptions," says Suzuki, hinting at the extent to which this series poses an alternative world-view. For this is no mere ecology series. Or rather, it is ecology taken to its heights and depths: a complete rethinking of humanity's place in the cosmos. And that rethinking involves a fundamental questioning of everything that has brought us to a world-view in which we feel "separate from nature," in which we feel so compelled to dominate life through technological prowess that life itself is imperilled. The



● David Suzuki: a radical questioning

titles of the individual episodes suggest the range such a questioning encompasses: "Human Nature", "Myth-maker", "Subdue The Earth", "Who Needs Nature?", "The Ultimate Slavery", "Improving On Nature", "At War With Death", "The Runaway Brain."

Crank up your set for this series. I suspect it will be, in many ways, the most profound and radical programming to come through the airwaves in years. And, believe me, I don't often equate radical profundity with television.

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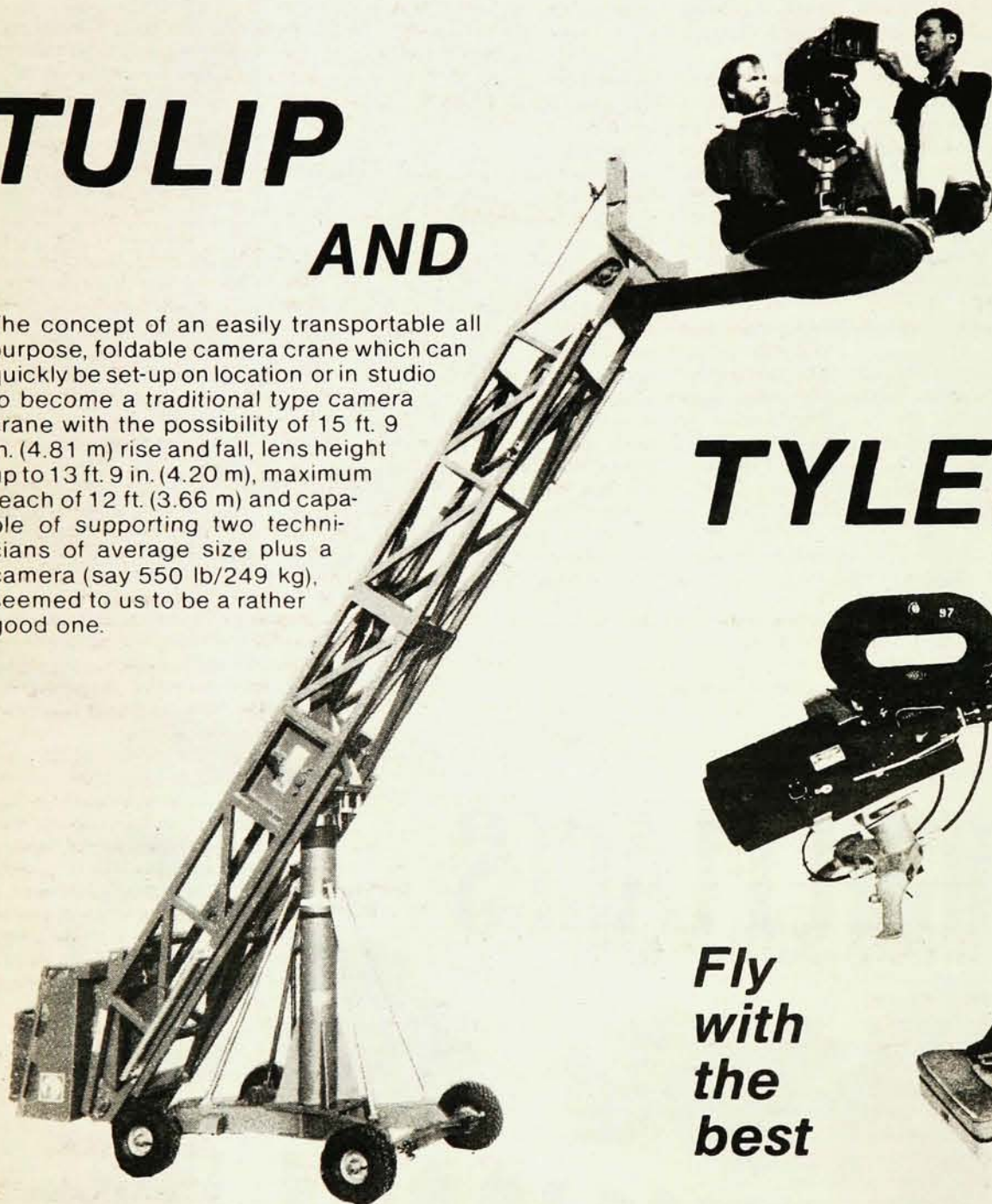






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