

Gracjan Kraszewski
I miss actual TV

I realized this while trying to watch commentated coverage of the NYE NYC ball drop but being one of those people who probably about ten years ago disconnected from cable and all the channels and all that in favor of watching whatever I wanted to watch on YouTube or via a subscription platform or getting information by way of an in-car podcast I was fast finding myself not simply unable to separate the wheat from the chaff but being just about submerged up to my knees, maybe up to my neck, in chaff. It began around 11:37 PM EST, 8:37 in real time/local time for me because I live in the Pacific Northwest but so I turned on the television monitor and typed 'Times Square New Year's 2026' into the search engine. The first nine videos were nothing more than a livefeed of the place. I was struck by the unrealism. You'd think the medium of camera set in place staring ahead documenting would make you feel as if you were there yourself, but it was nothing like that. I imagine if I was actually there, even wholly immobile, perhaps sitting on a chair and not permitted to move so as to maintain an even playing field with the similarly fixed camera, if the goal here was fairness and equal opportunity, that I'd feel the winter cold on my cheeks and how it can sting your eyes and I'd overhear a bunch of passersby' conversations and smell different types of food and maybe want some of that food and there might be a guy texting twenty feet away and I'd wonder what he's texting and I'd hear how people's shoes, depending on what type of shoes they're wearing, splash into a puddle or glide on a patch of black ice but, as it was, watching the live feed, I felt that whatever this was it was nothing like what it wanted or purported to be.

I remember watching New Year's Eve broadcasts during the Y2K epilogue era, circa 2002-2005, and how the professional journalist people who talked daily for a living, sure, maybe often about dumb stuff or bad stuff or depressing stuff, were, go figure, very good at that: talking. Not just keeping the conversation going against pockets of awkward dead air, that skill seems an entry level one, but how they made you feel like they were all the best of friends and they were having an authentically good time and you would be welcome to join their conversation and maybe become a friend sometime down the line, at minimum you'd leave the evening thinking what cool and interesting people and how nice and cultured they are, and those people up on those stages then were always good looking and well dressed and watching these things made you feel good about humanity, the direction of the country, and pumped up the balloon, if only a little, of your own hopes and ambitions for the future.

So, I was looking for all of that but had found nothing but those 9 livefeeds and exited out of that search path and resolved to start over and it was now about 8:45 local time PST/PNW. When I finally found commentary it was all 'independent' and 'non-traditional media' and 'podcasters' and, worse of all, 'influencers.' I'm all for free speech and expressing yourself and voicing your voice after you've found your voice but I was now feeling the full measure of an 0 for 2. Both times I was looking for professional polish and the warmth of *I do this daily and tonight I'm going to do it solely for the self-esteem of the country* but found, instead, me, cast out

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far on the rough seas of ersatz media like Odysseus after his idiot friend opened the wind bag. So many people who should never record and post anything pretending to be worthy of being a NYE host and making jokes and telling people to like and subscribe and reading comments people were putting into their chat and the comments were stupid and these people, the hosts, had zero charisma and the whole thing just so very much sucked and it made me sad.

Any professor in philosophy 101, when the syllabus turns to the basic principles of logic, will tell you to avoid the false dichotomy fallacy. It need not always be only this or that. But I tell you, from first-hand experience, I lived this in real time, yet again looking up at the time and seeing 8:54, that my only options in the great social media desert were cold, detached still frames or very annoying people more interested in promoting their own brand, whatever that means, than ringing in the new year. That's another point for the early 21st century pros. You never saw them up there, on some stage in Times Square, shilling for this or that snake oil product while they read comments from their former frat brothers while they paused every so often to beg you to follow them. We could not follow these people for we had already arrived, all of us, at the joyous destination of it's not about me, it's not about you, it's not about what no doctor will tell you about how to really reduce joint pain, no, it was about 10,9,8,7,6,5....

And we all laughed and loved and sang Auld Lang Syne to our TVs and not long after went to bed happy and believing that maybe anything was possible, maybe this year would be *my year*.

I didn't get to watch the ball drop. 0 for 3. 9:02 PM PST. I wanted to throw the remote off the wall, but I didn't. I wanted to scream something but when you reach a certain age you realize no one cares and that does not help at all. I turned off the TV—ah, the TV *device* that only streams online stuff, I should specify, it's not actual TV—and made a cup of sleepy-time tea and sat on the couch and thought, 'this is part of a larger problem. This is microcosmic.'

People today lament their grandparents' entertainment lot of only four channels but, you know what (?), I guarantee you anyone who was ever interviewed on actual TV deserved to be there, they had accomplished actual things, they were interesting, the interviewers knew how to conduct an interview, and four channels meant all of the country watched and so you could have things in common with your co-workers, your neighbors, really everyone and/or anyone who you chanced to ask, 'so, did you see ___ last night?'

Now it's not just the complete overabundance of options, that's low hanging fruit enough to criticize, it's the why is this person being talked to/interviewed/put forth for any type of informational consumption whatsoever? 99% of podcasts today—in their 'content' I mean, for the presentation is passable enough, it's not hard to record in 1080 HD, anyone can do that, even on a phone—are trash. The person interviewing is awful at asking questions. The guest is obnoxious. Worse, the guest has done nothing of note. Why is this person on this 'show'? *Because I invited them and they said yes* is not good enough, that won't cut it anymore. Because the whole getting to the root of the problem bottom line thing is we, the populace,

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we don't have time to separate the wheat from the chaff, there's too much chaff, the clock strikes midnight and then you cannot go back in time, it's already done, it's over, what do we do? What, poor us, can we, any of us, do? Where have you gone, polished and well-spoken, well dressed two decades in the bank news anchor of note holding your hot cup of cocoa ready to guide us to midnight safe and sound like the airline pilot for whom you clap, willingly, post smooth landing?

Please come back.