



CBS Television Network. *Longines Chronoscope*, 1951. Digitized still from archival film.

SCREEN PLAY: CHRONOSCOPE, 1951, 11PM

BY ALESSANDRO BALTEO YAZBECK AND MEDIA FARZIN

In Isaac Asimov's 1956 short science fiction story, "The Dead Past," a "chronoscope" was a device for viewing past time—literally, a projector-like machine that could give the viewer access to any moment in the past. The story's protagonist is a historian and academic obsessed with the unrecoverable details of ancient history, who cannot get past the bureaucratic red tape prohibiting access to the chronoscope. The reason for such extreme secrecy is only revealed at the end of the story: a device for viewing the past can also reveal the "living present."

"Well," said Araman, "when did it begin? A year ago? Five minutes ago? One second ago? Isn't it obvious that the past begins an instant ago? The dead past is just another name for the living present. What if you focus the chronoscope in the past of one-hundredth of a second ago? Aren't you watching the present? Does it begin to sink in?"

Nimmo said, "Damnation."

What follows below is a collaged conversation that entangles complementary views on international politics during the Cold War, particularly in relation to Iran. The text is a direct transcription from a series of televised interviews, but the speakers' words have been edited and cut to bring them in dialogue with each other. The work's structure conforms to that of its source material, an American television interview series called *Longines Chronoscope* that aired on the CBS network from 1951 to 1955. On each program, two journalists interviewed a guest who could speak with authority on the issues of the day. Politicians, diplomats, and corporate executives were invited to discuss world trade issues, Communist insurgency threats, mutual defense treaties, and frequently during the year 1951, US access to petroleum resources in the Middle East.

Longines Chronoscope is a document of US television aesthetics in the making. While the speakers' relative transparency regarding their political ambitions feels highly dated, the program's branding and packaging of ideas is a precursor of today's sound-bite politics and what we have come to know as infotainment. The following conversation reorders its source material to highlight the program's role in the "manufacture of consent" and as a sounding board for Cold War discourse. "Unsurpassed dependability and accuracy"—this is the slogan of the program's sponsors, the Longines Watch Company; yet it also can be taken as a statement of the program's intentions. But who gets to "keep" time, and who is entrusted with the authority to chart its coordinates? Whose time is being measured here? What does it speak of today, and what are its resonances for the future?

NOTE

In the transcript below, a cut to another part of the same program is indicated with one slash (/) and a cut from one program to another is indicated with two slashes (//).

The black screens have been added by the authors, and are not part of the original programs' contents.

“[T]he United States must face the prospect of acquiring and holding sufficient additional [petroleum] reserves to supply our military and civilian needs in the years ahead, irrespective of whether such reserves are within the borders of the United States (...)

[Oil reserves] are in fact more important to the United States than to the countries that have them, because they are more vital to the life of the consumer than to the producer. Great Britain has long recognized this principle, and in result we find the British in control of oil fields throughout the world.”

—Ralph Davies, Deputy Coordinator of Petroleum Administration for War to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 15, 1941



FRANK KNIGHT, CHRONOSCOPE HOST: The world's most honored watch is Longines. Longines watches have won ten World's Fair Grand Prizes and twenty-eight gold medals, and more honors for accuracy than any other timepiece.

Longines, the world's most honored watch is made and guaranteed by Longines-Wittnauer Watch Company.

It's time for the Longines Chronoscope, a television journal of the vital events of the hour, brought to you three times weekly, a presentation of Longines-Wittnauer Watch Company, maker of Longines, the world's most honored Watch, and Wittnauer, distinguished companion to the world honored Longines. //

New York City, 1951, 11pm



KNIGHT: Good evening, this is Frank Knight. May I introduce our co-editors for this edition of the Longines Chronoscope: //

MR. HENRY HAZLITT, a political economist of respected judgment and Contributing Editor of *Newsweek* magazine //

MR. L.A. BROPHY, General Business Editor of the Associated Press //

MR. FRAZIER HUNT, famous American journalist, magazine writer and commentator, and

MR. WILLIAM BRADFORD HUIE, editor of *The American Mercury*. //

Our distinguished guest[s] for this evening / are: //

MR. MAX THORNBURG, Wartime Petroleum Advisor to the Department



of State and expert on Middle Eastern affairs, [Senior Vice President, Standard Oil Company] //

MR. CHARLES L. HARDING, Coordinator of Middle East Operations, and member of the board of directors of the Socony-Vacuum and Arabian-American Oil Companies //

MR. HENRY GRADY, United States Ambassador recently returned from Iran //

GENERAL BONNER FELLERS, famed strategist and psychological warfare leader // and / the distinguished British statesman and member of the King's Privy Council, **LORD WILMOT**. //

KNIGHT: In this spontaneous and unrehearsed discussion, the opinions are necessarily those of the speakers. //

WILLIAM BRADFORD HUIE: Lord Wilmot, I believe that you are not now a member of the British government, are you?

LORD WILMOT: No I'm not, I resigned from Mr. Attlee's cabinet at the end of 1947.

HUIE: Are you a member of Commons?

WILMOT: I'm now a member of the House of Lords but for seventeen years I was a member of the House of Commons.

HUIE: Do you mean that you are a Lord and also a socialist?

WILMOT: Yes, I think that is right.

HUIE: Is there any incongruity in the statement?

WILMOT: Not at all, ah— /

HUIE: And here tonight you are expressing your private opinions, I think.

WILMOT: Entirely, entirely. //

HENRY HAZLITT: Mr. Thornburg, in addition to having been the advisor—the petroleum advisor to the State Department, / what has been your experience in the Middle East?

THORNBURG: I spent the greater part of the past sixteen years living and working in the Middle East or in close connection with its problems.



HAZLITT: You were, aren't you, advisor to the Shah of Iran?

THORNBURG: The last five years I have been, most of the time in Persia as advisor to the Persian government, yes. //

HUIE: Mr. Harding, our listeners tonight are of course concerned over the Iranian crisis, and I'm sure they will welcome the information, which an expert like you can give them. Now what do you think is the next most likely development in the crisis sir.

The "Iranian Crisis" of 1951 was prompted by failed negotiations between Britain and the Iranian parliament. By voting to nationalize its oil industry, Iran ended the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's half-century of control over Iran's oil resources.

CHARLES L. HARDING: I think that's a pretty hard question to answer. It looks like the Iranians are pretty determined to exclude the British technicians from their country.

HUIE: And if the Iranians do take such a step and they drive the British technicians out, what will be the result sir?

HARDING: Well I doubt that there'll be very much oil to leave the Iranian shore. I don't believe that they can operate the refinery or the oil industry without the British technicians, nor do they have the tankers nor the markets to move the oil to, so it seems to me that the industry would stay at a standstill.

L.A. BROPHY: With this great installation thus out of commission Mr. Harding, what then do you think will be the effect upon the economy of the European nations and of the United States?

HARDING: Well we won't be short of oil, we still have plenty of oil to supply the needs of our friendly powers and also of the United States. /

HUIE: Is there any danger sir of our troops in Korea suffering from a loss of oil?

HARDING: No I think not.

HUIE: Is that war being oiled from the Middle East or from our own supplies in the United States?

HARDING: I suppose a major portion of those supplies are coming



from the United States, some have been coming from the Middle East.

HUIE: Would you say that the—our enemies, the Chinese Reds, are receiving any oil from the Middle East now sir?

HARDING: Not to my knowledge.

HUIE: Do you know where they are receiving their oil, from where are they receiving it?

HARDING: No, that's a question that we have been trying to find the answer to, I don't know. /

HUIE: General Fellers, those of us who were in the Pacific, of course, remember that you were General MacArthur's Planning Officer, isn't that correct sir?

GENERAL BONNER FELLERS: That is correct, yes, for a time—

HUIE: And you have, are known now as a critic of, ah, some of our war planning. Is that correct?

FELLERS: That is correct, yes.

HUIE: Now, sir, what do you think is the essential problem of our country now, ah, defensively?

FELLERS: We must defend, we must be strong militarily but we must fit that to our pocketbook and we must also have that defense reflect the genius of America. We can no longer match our enemy in manpower. We must substitute brains and genius—

HUIE: Are we, are we opposed now or [do] our potential enemies now have more men that we have? We are outmanned now. /

FELLERS: / We are in very bad shape in Korea, we are outnumbered on the ground and we are outnumbered in the air. //

HUIE: Lord Wilmot, there's been a good deal of criticism in the United States, of what we think is a *soft* British policy toward Red China. /

WILMOT: We have no soft policy, not at all. We are with you as Mr. Attlee said in fighting aggression and we are going to see it through but we do hope that we shall carry the Korean War



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to victory at an early date and victory will be when we turn the aggressor out of South Korea. /

HUIE: Are you in favor now of admitting Red China in to the United Nations?

WILMOT: Certainly not while this aggression goes on, certainly not.

HUIE: Are you in favor of the Red Chinese signing the Japanese peace treaty?

WILMOT: No I don't think so. I think so long as they are carrying out a policy of aggression, which has been denounced by the United Nations, they can have no part in the peaceful settlements of the world. /

HUIE: / There is one other question I'll like to ask Lord Wilmot and that is about Iran. A great many Americans have been struck by the incongruity of your government, where—which has pushed nationalization in Britain opposing the nationalization of oil in Iran sir, ah—

WILMOT: Yes, I expect it does look like that but in fact it's—there is nothing illogical about it. We don't, ah, dispute the right of the Iranian government to nationalize the oilfields, what we do say is, that they should honor their commercial agreements. Now such nationalization has been carried out in Britain, every contract was honored— /

HUIE: / One of the things that that contract calls for is about a 20% profit per year and that the profit perhaps may have been a little high. The reason you have so much trouble in Iran today or that we have—

WILMOT: / 20% is what Iranians get out of this, and they get 20%, on top of the royalties, they get 20% of the total profits of the company although those profits arise, very largely, from trading all over the world, and ah, this agreement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, has meant immense benefits for the people of Iran //

THORNBURG: / but they have been realized by a very small part of the people of Persia, perhaps by 1% or something of that sort.

HUIE: Well how have the British failed specifically now?

THORNBURG: Well, the British have unquestionably, in my view,

interfered with the political life of the country, in such a way as to make it impossible for the Shah to develop a really responsible government in his country, one that would look after the welfare of the people. That is one way in which the British have brought about this crisis that faces us today. //

WILMOT: / It's a tragedy really, that this thing should have been torn up in the way that it has. //

HAZLITT: Well Mr. Thornburg, / what is the next step that Britain can take? What is the next step that the Atlantic Nations can take?

THORNBURG: I don't believe that any step that anyone takes aimed directly at this oil nationalization itself is going to cure the situation in Persia. What is wrong in Persia is that there is no government over there that is responsible to deal with. Now you asked what is likely to happen? Ah, there is virtually a state of anarchy today in Persia and you cannot forecast what anarchy is going to do. One of the things that might happen would be a general revolution of the people, it might be that they would kill a considerable number of the British operators that are in there, there might be a religious uprising, there might be a Communist uprising, anything of that sort could happen today when there is no strong government there to control things.

HUIE: Coming back to the causes of this unrest, this situation that you described, are the Russians partially the cause of it?

THORNBURG: I wouldn't say that the Russians are really the cause of any important trouble in Persia today. They are going to be the only ones who benefit from what is going wrong over there.

HAZLITT: That was something I was just going to ask: isn't the immediate effect that the oil has been in effect lost to the West, for the time being, and isn't it quite probable or isn't the danger very great that it will fall into the hands of Russia within a year or so.

THORNBURG: Unless, a sound government is established in the country, very soon, in my opinion, we will lose Persia to the Communists. Then they will get the oil along with the rest of it. //

HUIE: Ambassador Grady, / did you as our ambassador or did our embassy there understand what was likely to happen? Did you foresee the developments?





AMBASSADOR HENRY GRADY: We realized the great importance of a settlement on the oil question, we felt that that was basic to any economic measures we might take to aid the country and, ah, stem the trend towards communism. /



HUIE: For our audience sir, I did like to review that, ah . . . The British had been paying about 13% and they were offering to pay from 25% to 30% and during that same period, the United States was paying a higher rate [50%] of royalties to the Middle Eastern countries.

GRADY: That is correct.



HUIE: And is it your opinion sir that the British were at fault in not meeting our terms in the Middle East?

GRADY: It wasn't so much a question of meeting the terms regarding royalties but it was a matter of making a number of non-monetary concessions. /



HUIE: I see, now, non-monetary you mean questions of face and other concessions—

GRADY: I mean for example employing more Iranians in the plants, a matter of the prices charged for oil products within Iran, the ah— /



HUIE: As American ambassador, did you urge the British to make those concessions sir?

GRADY: Yes, very strongly. //

HAZLITT: What do you think is likely to be the outcome, Lord Wilmot, if the Iranians persist in their present policy?



WILMOT: Well, I'm afraid that the oil will go to waste and the economy of the country will be ruined.

HAZLITT: Well, don't you think there is a real danger of Russia stepping in there, into that picture and—

WILMOT: Well, I think there is a danger and we are doing our very best and I'm still not without hope of success of coming to a reasonable agreement, which we've offered to do for a long time past. //

BROPHY: Since you need oil to win wars, / Mr. Harding, / what do you think is the situation regarding the present and potential oil supplies of the free nations, and of Communist Russia?

HARDING: Well, I think you might be interested in our best guess there as to the Russian picture, but on the whole we're producing about ten times the amount of oil in the free nations that are produced by Russia and her satellite countries. //

FRAZIER HUNT: Well, General Fellers, are we getting and planning for a real and genuine and adequate defense now?

FELLERS: Mr. Hunt, I think we are not. We are in very bad shape in Korea, we are outnumbered on the ground and we are outnumbered in the air. Our program to hold Stalin out of Russia—ah, Europe if he should attack, is wholly inadequate. We plan and hope to have in two or three years 60 allied divisions, Stalin already has 200. He has 60 satellite divisions, between the Red Army and our troops in Europe, so that there is no way I see that you could call our program adequate! //

HUIE: Mr. Harding, / I'd like to know this sir, if the Iranian oil fields should fall in the hands of Russia, I think most of our people are worried over that contingency, if that should happen, if Russia should move in, ah . . . do you think that it would be possible for Russia to exploit these fields at once?

HARDING: Well, if Russia were to make an arrangement with Iran, then her real problem would be transportation. And she's separated from the oil by this high range of mountains. So I would doubt very much that more than the tiniest trickle of oil would flow overland to Russia— /

HUIE: Now you represent companies sir that are now engaged in other parts of the Middle East in producing oil. What's the situation in regard to your company's and our relations with other nations in the Middle East now?

HARDING: I think on the whole our relations are relatively good. But those countries are watching this Iranian development very closely and I'm sure that depending on this form of solution worked out there it could have an effect on their attitude towards us. /



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HUIE: Mr. Harding, this is a question that I know the military has discussed a great deal. Are the Middle Eastern oil reserves so valuable that we as a nation should even go to war to deny them to Russia? Can we as a nation safely allow Russia to take over the Middle Eastern oil fields?



HARDING: Well, I suppose [it] may be a question of what you mean by “safely.” But certainly those Middle Eastern reserves are most important to us. We need them in the world today. Without the Middle East, now that’s something quite different than Iran, you’re talking about—



HUIE: Yes.

HARDING: You are talking about the total Middle East.

HUIE: I mean if the fire spreads and we lose them all—

HARDING: Then we wouldn’t have enough oil to supply our needs and the needs of Western Europe without *very* severe rationing in this country, if we were to lose the Middle East. //



[Silence] //



HUIE: Mr. Thornburg, / let me ask you this sir: ah, we are, are we more successful than the British in our operations in the Middle East? I mean as—

THORNBURG: Our oil operations?

HUIE: Our oil operations. /



Two years later, in 1953, the CIA’s *Operation Ajax* brought down the elected government of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh.

It was arguably the first successful US attempt at toppling a foreign government.

HUIE: / Are we more successful than the British in our operations in the Middle East? I mean as—

THORNBURG: Our oil operations?

HUIE: Our oil operations. /

[Silence] //

HUIE: What have we done with our oil operations that the Anglo-Iranian has not done?

THORNBURG: Well, the two principal American oil concessions in the Middle East, in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, have had no trouble of any sort. In the first place they have been ready to adjust their royalty payments to the governments and they have done it during this past year, voluntarily, they have increased them very substantially.

HUIE: And the British have not done that.

THORNBURG: The British have not done that. They have been negotiating for two years but, never due to the company's own fault, in my opinion, never came to an agreement.

HAZLITT: Are you speaking of the British policy generally or simply of Anglo-Iranian policy?

THORNBURG: I'm glad you ask that because what I'm speaking of is the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company policy, not British foreign policy generally.

HUIE: But the British government owns the majority of the stock in the Anglo-Iranian—

THORNBURG: The British government owns 52% or 53%, / of course from that point of view it's unfortunate that this tragically unnecessary accident of oil nationalization ever took place. //

HUIE: Mr. Ambassador, this interesting old gentleman Mr. Mosaddegh is now a visitor in the United States.





Do you know him personally sir?

GRADY: Yes extremely well.

HUIE: Is he an able and responsible statesman?

GRADY: He is extremely able. He is a patriot. I think he is misguided in the way he is carrying out the nationalization program. I have told him that a number of times and I told him that as a friend of Iran because I think a failure of this program of his may be very harmful to his country, and a failure to make some kind of agreement with responsible management—some responsible management company to operate because I doubt that the Iranians themselves can operate this industry. Ah, he is, he is honest, ah, he is one of the ablest speakers in the country, very attractive personality, good sense of humor. He is a Persian gentleman. //

HUIE: Mr. Thornburg, / what do you find is hopeful in this picture? What is our solution?

THORNBURG: I don't see much that is hopeful in the oil picture itself. The hope that I do see is almost entirely in this fact: that Persia has in its ruler, the Shah, a young man of admirable qualities who for several years has been trying to establish a decent government in his country.

HUIE: You are an advisor to the Shah, I believe.

THORNBURG: That's right. I have been, I am not now.

HUIE: I see. Are you impressed, with his sincerity and his ability?

THORNBURG: Very impressed, yes.

HUIE: And you think he is the hopeful factor.

THORNBURG: He certainly is. Now, if the Shah had the support of the British government and of our government—

HAZLITT: Well, I'm sorry Mr. Thornburg, but I'm afraid our time is up. Thank you very much for being with us tonight. //

WILMOT: Well I'm very glad to have been here and I'm very glad to have had this discussion.

KNIGHT: Thank you very much indeed gentlemen.

The editorial board for this edition of the Longines Chronoscope was: // Mr. Henry Hazlitt [*Newsweek*], // Mr. L.A. Brophy [The Associated Press], // Mr. Frazier Hunt [independent journalist], and Mr. William Bradford Huie [*The American Mercury*.] //

Our guest[s]: the distinguished British statesman Lord Wilmot, // Mr. Max Thornburg, the noted authority on Middle Eastern affairs [Senior Vice President, Standard Oil Company]; // Mr. Henry Grady, our recent ambassador to Iran; // Mr. Charles L. Harding, Coordinator of Middle East Operations, and member of the board of directors of the Socony-Vacuum and Arabian-American Oil Companies; // General Bonner Fellers, famed strategist and psychological warfare leader. //

Next week the Longines Chronoscope will welcome as its special guest the Chinese ambassador Tingfu F. Tsiang. //

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This is Frank Knight, again reminding you that the Longines Chronoscope is brought to you three times weekly, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, so won't you join us every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening at the same time for the Longines Chronoscope, a television journal of the important issues of the hour. Broadcast on behalf of Longines, The World's Most Honored Watch. //

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New York City, 1953, 11 pm

Eleanor Roosevelt

Former First Lady and US Delegate to the United Nations



EDWARD P. MORGAN: Mrs. Roosevelt, some nights ago, I had dinner with a man and his wife in Spokane, Washington. Quite sincerely but quite seriously they asked me two questions. They said: do these foreigners hate us as much as they seem to? And, are they ever going to be grateful for the things that we do for them? Now you've come back from one of your latest trips in far parts of the world. Could you answer those questions? /



ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: Well, I would not say that foreigners hated us. I would say that, ah, many of them were a little suspicious, that ah, there is . . . / when people say, will they never be grateful for what we've done, I think there is gratitude, but gratitude is sometimes swamped by the sense of, why was this done, was it done in the long run so we could, we who just freed ourselves from political domination be dominated through economics? //

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The transcript above uses excerpts from the following episodes of the CBS television program *Longines Chronoscope*:

JUNE 25, 1951: Lord John Wilmot, British statesman, interviewed by Henry Hazlitt (*Newsweek*) and William Bradford Huie (*The American Mercury*).

JULY 9, 1951: Max W. Thornburg, petroleum advisor, Department of State, interviewed by Henry Hazlitt and William Bradford Huie.

SEPTEMBER 28, 1951: Charles L. Harding, coordinator, Middle East Operations, and member of the board of directors, Socony-Vacuum and Arabian-Oil Company, interviewed by L. A. Brophy (*The Associated Press*) and William Bradford Huie.

OCTOBER 3, 1951: Brig. Gen. Bonner F. Fellers, strategist and psychological warfare expert, interviewed by Frazier Hunt and William Bradford Huie.

OCTOBER 24, 1951: Henry F. Grady, U.S. Ambassador to Iran, interviewed by Frazier Hunt and William Bradford Huie.

AUGUST 26, 1953: Eleanor Roosevelt, U.S. stateswoman, interviewed by Edward P. Morgan (CBS) and Bill Downs (CBS).

Access to footage of the *Longines Chronoscope* provided by the United States National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C.

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Chronoscope, 1951, 11pm is the title of a 24:49 minute video installation by Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck, made in collaboration with Media Farzin, part of an ongoing cycle of works based on the Cold War and its cultural artifacts. The video was first shown at the 12th Istanbul Biennial, in Istanbul, Turkey, September through November 2011.