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*Composite Restatement.* Francis Bennion. Video cassette. Oyez Longman Publishing. 1982. £95 or, rented, £25.

In the beginning the law came by the spoken word, and then by the word graven on stone. Afterwards the law was preserved on papyrus, on parchment and on paper. Nowadays audio tape preserves the very voices of the legislators, and the floppy disc of the new technology preserves the law for retrieval literally at a touch. As for the video tape, it allows commentary and illustration, in the way literally encapsulated in this cassette. So the heading is 'Review' rather than 'Book Review' — though indeed a cassette may perhaps be classified as an electronic book. The main difference between the conventional volume and the cassette is that the hand can choose and the eye leaf over the pages of a book, while the cassette requires for communication another implement of the new technology — the video viewer.

In making this cassette, as in other matters, Mr. Bennion is something of a pioneer, presenting his views in this relatively novel form for legal subjects, but a form which is becoming increasingly common for entertainment, and therefore likely to be more frequently used for individual or group instruction. Mr. Bennion's application of the video technique to the statute law is a use which can conveniently be considered as a multiple matter of substance, presentation and impression.

At the outset Mr. Bennion points to the bulk of the statute law, as shown by the public general acts and statutory instruments for 1980, while on its form he cites the familiar example of the provision relating to employed and insured persons in the National Insurance Act 1946. Drawing on his experience as a parliamentary draftsman, he draws attention to the detail of bills and the pressures of the Parliamentary time-table, especially when there are amendments, and points to the Renton Committee's call for simplicity and clarity in legislative language. He instances tax matters as examples of settlement by agreement because of statutory complications. Then the National Insurance Act example is described as using 'defined terms,' while the definition of burglary in the Theft Act 1968 is pointed out as an 'overloaded formula.' The 'application technique' is used for other Parts of Acts, or for the extension of an Act to Scotland or Northern Ireland.

As for media coverage, this may govern the order of provisions in a Bill, as where the most important one is put in the first clause, or perhaps a more contentious one put into a Schedule. Parliamentary procedure governs both the form and the scope of a Bill, and thus its structure, though the latter may be assisted by the use of typographical aids. The 'scatter' of statutes on a specified [*sic*] is exemplified by the 63 statutes on the United Kingdom statute book relating to housing in England and Wales, with 14 sections relating to overcrowding.

Having outlined these defects in the statute law, Mr. Bennion turns to his method of composite restatement, drawing an analogy with the use of individual building bricks, suggesting that the method could be used both for the 'overloaded formula' and the 'defined term,' to set out separate provisions.

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The main illustration used is the Consumer Credit Act 1974, where the arrangement, numbering and annotation of the provisions of the Act are used as aids to the reading of those provisions. Mr. Bennion concludes by stating that the adoption of the method of composite restatement would be both of general benefit and an aid to clarity.

Turning from this necessarily compressed version of the substance of what was said and seen, the form is clearly a suitable one for a discourse of this kind. There is an appropriate opening shot of Westminster, with the familiar sound coming from the Clock Tower, but the main scenes are of Mr. Bennion seated, again appropriately, in front of a shelved series of statutes. There is neither table nor desk, so that the speaker talks directly to the viewer, with occasional full-screen texts with 'voiceovers.' The effect is not one of formal consultation, nor of a tutorial, but rather of an expository narration in an informal conversational tone. And, importantly, the colour is aptly chosen and does not distract from the flow of the argument.

As for matters of impression, the first point is a very obvious one — that the video technique is being used to compress into something over half an hour the views which Mr. Bennion propounded in his book on *STATUTE LAW* (1980; reviewed by Lord Cross in [1981] Stat.L.R. 122-128), especially Chapters 11 (Factors that Block Comprehension) and 27 (Aiding Text-Comprehension (2) Composite Restatement). The presentation of these views, in permanent audio-visual form, is the essence of the technique of the video cassette, which in this instance was usefully used.

Accompanying the cassette is a useful two-page handout explaining the cassette and summarising the relevant views expressed in *STATUTE LAW*. Taking together this summary, the published chapters and the cassette itself, it is possible to make some points on the contents of the cassette. The first point is the perpetually difficult one of balance in subject-matter. Slightly more than half of the cassette is devoted to deficiencies of the statute law, while the explanation and illustration of the composite restatement method occupy the remainder of the time. Would it have been possible, without doing injustice to Mr. Bennion's views on the first part of the subject, to reverse the amount of time taken? Again, if Mr. Bennion's acronym CADS (Compression, Anonymity, Distortion and Scatter) had been used more frequently it would have underlined the points he was making.

The corollary of the points just made is that there would be more time to deal with the technique of composite restatement, perhaps with more examples and visual illustrations. And mention of visual illustrations leads to another query — whether the proportion of these to direct narration might have been increased. There was some necessary and useful repetition of the full-screen texts, but some of the points might have been emphasised by further texts, or perhaps by such aids as showing the detailed list of Housing Acts and the provisions relating to overcrowding.

It is relatively easy to pose such queries and make such points from the other side of the screen, and it is perhaps rare for a reviewer to make use of a control group. However, it was possible to show the cassette to a group of legislation students and to collect some of their reactions. A comparative point made was the relatively extensive use of video cassettes made in medical education; another was the use made on the cassette of the material in *STATUTE LAW*, and a

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question was asked about the audience to which the cassette was addressed, particularly in view of the reference to practitioners at the conclusion of the cassette. But the reactions to the cassette led to a broader discussion on such topics and the relationship between composite restatement on the one hand and consolidation and codification on the other. And what author — or cassette presenter — could ask more than his work stimulated discussion among students, especially students of his special subject, in this case the statute law?

It is a novelty — and certainly a first for the *Review* — to be reviewing a cassette rather than a conventional publication, making the kind of production points which the producer presumably considered, and noting the narrator's presentation of views which he has expressed elsewhere but has necessarily had to compress into the frame of the viewing screen. But developments through the documentary film and then the television documentary (and especially the Open University programmes) have been paralleled by the activities of such bodies as audio-visual units in universities, making cassettes as aids to learning. For legal subjects the variety of methods of

presentation — the interview, the discussion, the simulated scene with client or in court — provide a variety of ways of communication. And in the present instance the straight talk to camera, with textual inserts, has been used as the channel for conveying views and information. Are there, or will there be, other examples of using the new technology in this way, in the service of the statute law?

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