

Economic Support Systems Cont.

You picks your value and pays your money. The automobile, especially the Model T, represented a major value choice of modern man. It stood for mobility, freedom, and energized the knitting together of a nation. Men moved in autos from farm to industrial town. Only freaks are walking back. Most technology and industry is experience-based rather than information-based. Edison was an experienced craftsman ("Invention is 98% perspiration," he said). But computers and television (enormously successful generators of resources until the cancellation of cigarette commercials) are early examples of the resource possibilities inherent in information. "Information is capital."

There are opportunities for survival resources (things that we can control with respect to outcome, a moral commitment, based on participation in the network). You can rip off broadcast television, film, cassettes.

Your local cable system is going to want to put out bullshit programming and will pay a video group to do that, but only that. You can work for a university TV station, etc. The university, as bad as it is, has exploitable functions: a marketplace for ideas, a source of equipment, money to support people, a generation and inculcation point for people and ideas.

One scheme for developing resources: consulting for the normal system—re hip programming. The hip/alternative network/video group system needs information right now, even if it is delivered via traditional methods. At the same time the alternate methods need development. If a hip show, for instance the Bobby Seale rap out of KQED (called "Staggerlee") comes over TV, people with beer cans in their hands will sit in their normal mesmerized state. It is not information for them, they have no control over it. But getting Bobby Seale out is important. Producing and televising such programs (for a fee) is not just a rip-off, but is important to the subculture. If a commercial station can be convinced that a show with important content can and should be delivered, the value of the show (re info for the subculture) outweighs the harm done by the way it is delivered. The alternate system is living, once again, in the cracks of the majority culture. The danger, of course, is that the alternate system will become so used to the normal system's way of delivery that they no longer search for alternative ways. The search will continue so long as there is dislike for the existing delivery systems.

In short, the need for information (at the moment) outweighs the negative aspects of delivery schemes. Hopefully, the development of alternative distribution schemes will provide "better" information. In the meantime, resources flow to alternate video by consulting: "we will use your channel, but we want to open the locks at our will." But that may well only produce nickels and peanuts, while opening up a large opportunity for straight exploitation of the subculture. In Kesey's words, "Keep away from the media, man, cause that's what done it. . . I know because I've been on the end of it so much. The media does a thing, it's like this. . . ." There is a need to be damned conscientious, to spend enormous amounts of time protecting your flanks, playing around with how to do while not being screwed. That may not be possible for video groups struggling to stay alive. Are there funds for survival or capital return in plugging into the existing system: Broadcast, Cable, Cassette and Film?

FEEDBACK INTO FUTURE ISSUES IDEAS ON HOW TO ESTABLISH THE STRUCTURE OF VIDEO GROUPS, SOCIAL ASPECTS, AND (NOT LEAST) THE ECONOMICS OF ALTERNATE MEDIA (VIDEO GROUPS, ALTERNATE NETWORKS, ACCESS TO SOFTWARE, EQUIPMENT INCLUDING NEW EQUIPMENT DESIGN). PART OF THE GROWTH OF ANY VIDEO THING MUST BE AN ACTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE WHOLE SYSTEM.

The issue: What system to set up, what goes across it (or how it is used) that makes it significantly different or worthy of resource support. Cable may be an output, a way for people, tape, and feedback to come together. Maybe regional centers where people watching video can come back to those making or distributing tape. One of the problems: inaccessibility of equipment. How many people in the movement have compatible portapaks? Maybe 200 providing 5,000 people access via the Whole Earth Catalogue. Everyone has a formula for the success of things. When the telephone first started, runs one such formula, it was used locally in towns, cities and communities. But they couldn't talk to another community. So Bell developed a long line service to link the cities together. The Whole Earth Catalog success, it seems, is that it performs a service; a direct, objective, touch-free service. You read the Catalog, you mail in something, you receive and use it or read and imitate—it is possibility-expanding. It gives its readers an immediate vehicle for access and response. We all feel that about video tape, but we are yet to make it work.

Ira Schneider started this rap with Jerry Kindred and Les Rosen. Allen Rucker, Pat Crowley and Richard Raymond added most. Jerry Kindred did most of the writing.

TOWARD AN INFORMATION ECONOMY

by Paul Ryan

"There is an internally recognized beauty of motion and balance on any man-healthy planet," Keynes said. "You see in this beauty a dynamic stabilizing effect essential to all life. Its aim is simple: to maintain and produce coordinated patterns of greater, and greater diversity. Life improves the closed system's capacity to sustain life. Life—all life—is in the service of life. Necessary nutrients are made available to life by life in greater and greater richness as the diversity of life increases. The entire landscape comes alive, filled with relationships and relationships within relationships."

Dune appendix on ecology

... Been struggling with the economics of alternate video for three years now. In that time I've been involved with one rich patron, a Ford Foundation project in Newburgh, New York, various independent consultancies, and the recent New York State Council on the Arts/Video Movement Game. In most every case financial decisions have been in the hands of people other than those involved in the actual processing of information. In most instances this control has worked against the people involved. Equipment gets shuttled in and out of situations arbitrarily. The glorious turn-on gets no follow through and hopes turn to bitterness. The "if only" syndrome of powerlessness takes over. When you get mixed up with a bureaucracy, the bureaucracy can be depended on to reduce everything to its safe and sorry time grain. If there are semi-creative bureaucrats who have pet projects it's worse. Sitting on fat salaries, they play a sloppy politics of attrition—helping divide up a scene, hitchhiking on people who have been doing it without money. Because they ultimately determine where large sums of money go their ideas and say-so acquire a disproportionate weight. Among those struggling to survive in video the presence of a large sum of capital such as the original quarter million of the State Council brings out the worse of old style politics—non-cybernetic, crude and beyond repair. All this is compounded by the sheer fact of being in the city where it is near impossible to sustain networks of trust relationships. In short, the funding of video by grants thus far has been a bummer—high promise, low yield and all the time eating up people's budgets of flexibility. Nor is the grant scene self-sustaining. After a year you know your mistakes well enough to do it better and there is no bread. Newburgh left a lot of unhappy kids.

Meanwhile, back at the marketplace, Avco, EVR and friends are stockpiling information for home and cable along traditional marketing lines, treating information as capital, not understanding relevance. They continue to hype people to the glories of this bullshit so they will scream sock it to me on through the seventies and make their stockholders rich. By 1980 they will have enough audiences "pinpointed" (a term used in a Rand report on Cable) so that in effect we will move from the saturation bombing of American brain cells via broadcast television to pinpoint bombing via cable and cassette.

Where do you go? Capitalism itself is rightfully under onus with dissidents. Profit-making corporation is an instant turn-off for many of us, save those who have been "cleared" of their "money hang ups" by Scientology. Given the ecological situation, having a lot of money in a Swiss bank so you can buy the best anti-pollutant face mask just doesn't make it.

But then where do you go? As Frank Gillette, the original conceiver of Raindance would say—capitalism is like heating a house with coal. It's dirty, sooty, nobody likes it, it's a pain in the ass to manage, but it keeps the house warm until we find something better. One has only to read Norman O. Brown in Life Against Death on "Filthy Lucre" to realize the enormity of the money-dirt-excrement nexus that has been keeping our house warm. My sense of strategy as to how to move toward the polymorphously perverse resurrected body Brown calls for is by way of an information economy. The movement away from capitalism toward ecological narcissism is, at least in part, the embodying of mind infomorphs. By infomorph, I mean an organism that relates to itself and its environment in a way that respects and optimizes all possible transforms of differences that make differences. It does not identify one variable, such as profit, and attempt to maximize that variable at the expense of the whole.

Our capitalist economy renders life unidimensional—more and more the same: uniformity via homogenous quantification. By contrast an information economy thrives on variety and diversity, quality not quantity, differences that make differences. More simply stated the problem is one of how do you work in such a way that the flow of money follows the desired flow of information and not vice-versa? And how do you insure that there is enough money to do it?

There is a critical mass, a certain amount of machines and money necessary without which there is no way to manage transforms of differences. To cultivate a consciousness congruent with current complexity one must have enough quantifiable resources to pass critical thresholds and recycle what is relevant. Buddhism is beautiful but it is an oversimplification given the need for increasing the diversity of life. Spiritual riches via voluntary poverty may be a cop out. God is not transcendent, he is immanent in our experience, in this planet. We need embodiments of mind, not disembodiments. There is enough to go round. There are enough people interested in relevant communication so that we can begin to pay each other fairly for services rendered. Open accounting will help prevent some rip off. We cannot be giving it away all the time for free in dramatic gestures, while the capitalist economy packages the drama for its own development, giving not a shit for alternate culture. When someone suggested to Warner Brothers that they air Woodstock footage over network television as a serial in keeping with what would be proper electric liturgy he was told, "ah—we're making over 50 million on the movie, don't bother us with that."

We need to think our way through the horns of the profit, non-profit dilemma into an information economy. Deliberate minimization of a variable such as profit (the non-profit ethic) is as dangerous cybernetically as maximizing profit or in the purity of non-profit, but distributed throughout the biosphere in accord with patterns of relevant information flow.

In our current situation there are a number of mechanisms that disenfranchise people from their own money: insurance companies, taxes and an unresponsive government, and educational institutions which thrive on real estate and the power to certify knowledge rather than the ability to process information for people. The great virtue of the Whole Earth Catalog has been no bullshit information based on use and consequence of use. Contrast this with TV advertising that manipulates mythologies up front to trigger consumer response in subliminal ways. In the Whole Earth Catalogue the flow of money began to follow the flow of information.

InfomorphOne Organization of Ignorance

Since only the user is in a position to know what is relevant for him and how he wants to access relevance and information exchange must include the user from the beginning. Much of this happens naturally in just watching different tape and becoming aware of wanting to see more of this and no more of that.

At another level it is necessary to deal with desired information in a more coherent way. A healthy relation to the unknown is critical. Otherwise we grow rigid and die the death of explicitness and repetition. "I love Abbie Hoffman" reruns become reactionary. A mind that concerns itself too much with what it knows cannot maintain a good guessing way. Openness to the unknown is part of having a feel for what is relevant as things develop, a sense of the significant differences while there is still time to make a difference. Such access to relevancy is part of the freedom to self-correct that information economy can supply. What we don't know is an infinite resource, inexhaustibly recyclable. It seems possible to develop out of our ignorance a culture with a fullness of feedback such that we would not be recurrently faced with the choice between cannibalizing the human relations we have or solo-tripping to regions where we cannot relate to those we love nor ask them to trust.

A coherent relation to the unknown is possible through an organization of ignorance. Organization of ignorance is a research technique Peter Drucker explains in Landmarks of Tomorrow by discussing Mendelev's discovery of the periodic table of chemical elements. At the time Mendelev was working only 60 odd elements were known. Rather than trying to puzzle together the known elements, Mendelev began to ask himself what he had to know about what he did not know in order to make sense out of what he knew. He allowed the intervals, the gaps in his knowledge, to play a part in his conceptualization. In other words, he organized his ignorance.

In order to get video going on such a service, we must get the hardware to the people. Just viewing a television set and cassette playback is not enough—the need is for cameras, tape and knowledge of how to use—like learning to write. We need some bold on hardware design, a toebold into reproduction and distribution. But the alternate culture shies away from technology. Technology itself is so far a self-devouring thing. Something is designed and produced, it becomes the demand basis for something that is better. Everyone is waiting anxiously for the cassette, while buying soon to be obsolescent portapaks. Can video survive an exponential rate of obsolescence? Suppose the subculture developed its own gear, how would it avoid the cycle—clever design and distribution promotes stocks and conglomerates. Will some kind of sharing blunt the competitive edge and break the pattern? Henry Ford, Alex Bell, and James Hill had the advantage of a simpler time.

But maybe we are looking in the wrong direction for wisdom. There is recently a lot of speculation on new mediums of exchange (see the discussion of tokens in the January '71 Supplement to Whole Earth). Maybe "access" itself is a higher form of exchange. How does it work to get things done? My information favor to you today will be returned someday by you or someone else—the old blueblood trick.

Everyone is now talking about networks. It seems we need to avoid the "massive encompassing one" or "the one" that would destroy autonomy. If you begin at a particular point with an expertise (Lloyd Kahn and doming) you should work towards orienting your network around that existing interest. Avoid central systems and hierarchies. Networks are not imposed, they happen or grow. But we still need to invent or discover ways to generate the resources by which they can grow or survive. The connecting mechanism should be subtle, preserving the cells. The networks will be different and diverse-sharing, maybe, certain assumptions and says to develop, grow, have.

A recurring conviction. If it is not well done, it will fail. Things that are really good get picked up on. It is not going to happen without responsible competence. It just isn't possible to talk your way into a new kind of life that will allow everyone to be happy, a good attitude is not enough. It is necessary to run bookstores or printing presses, to work hard at generating things that are marketable and saleable if the money part of things go.

For video groups: Just because you've read Radical Software and are into the video thing, don't think people are going to hand you money out of good faith. Video groups must be other than aesthetic dandies. It is so easy to play with video, to make Dadaesque little things by intercutting off-air video with the man on the street. Video must somehow generate a new form of audio-visual information. Too many people are into turn-on television. There is so much that can be used for this purpose with no residual effect or worth. Maybe the difference is between outsider and insider—those who observe and report and those who participate in the process. Availability of easy rip-off mechanisms in video are everywhere. But to do so means selling soul, raping principles, and fouling up the energy balance. The service of telling other people what you as a video group are doing is not that good. Media to the people and CATV raps are too often just hypes. Maybe the only service that a video group can perform on a non-personal level is to supply tapes, but then we run up against the inaccessibility of hardware problem.

It seems to come down to this: when a media or video group arises it must focus its service on its existing community, the local scene where it can actually perform a service within the limits of its energy.

What are the values and beliefs that are shared by video group and its community? In the process of creating networks, we must be very attentive to what the value is that we are sharing. Too many systems seem to have failed by attempting to match a wide variety of values to a large group. People seem differentiated in these matters—a large group of people will have only very few values in common. For most Americans to date, for instance, the value that they have held together is the need to survive economically. As we get beyond that point will social change, personal growth, learning how the world works, and educational development compel people?

If you don't dig the thing that someone else is doing with video, that's cool. They'd like to hear your complaints and consider your proposals. If they don't dig your proposal, go off and do your thing. Especially during the formative phases outside comments have heavy impact, especially if you are willing to share in the creation. But don't pick up on the business of bad mouthing that someone; just begin in another direction if your disaffection is that great. A plurality of solutions appears more viable (and possibly more healthy) than a single all-encompassing one.

Don't feed on. Input into and then use with wise selfishness if you must.

Enough philosophy. Next we'd like to deal with concrete ideas on economics, distribution, and the like—or at least the ground rules for these. If you are really interested write to Media Access Center at Portola Institute, 1115 Merrill Street, Menlo Park, California 94025.

Sample Organization of Ignorance Input

- Hour of the ocean
- Tape of CATV Projects
- Rap with Stewart Brand on Economics
- Rap with a drop out from Scientology
- Interpersonal relations in Commune
- Children in Commune
- Raps for high school kids by college kids on college
- Raps by dropout users about their experiences
- Rap with veterans returning from Vietnam
- Tape in South Vietnam
- Tape from African student on life in Africa
- Daily life tape of situationalists
- Tape on abortion in NYC
- Critiques of Bucky Fuller
- Woman's Liberation Movement raps with women on where they feel its at directed toward men
- Rap with Weathermen
- Rap with people who have left the city living in country, how they are doing
- Edited version of Keep by Frank Gillette
- Raps with people on planting electrodes in brains
- Documentation of Earth works by different artists
- Check out Whole Earth Catalogue and inputs

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ARTISTS' NEEDS

by Eric Siegel

Up until now, the video scene in America has been centered in New York City and San Francisco. It has manifested itself in the form of various video groups or as individuals.

The groups have become somewhat like clans, and in my opinion are quite closed. If you make videotapes and wish to do a good editing job . . . where do you go? Or if you wish to show your work to the public in a theater . . . where do you go?

The existing video groups here (New York) are not into editing individuals' tapes or public showings. So you are forced to join one of the already existing groups or making your own. This is a ridiculous state of affairs to say the least. I now would like to suggest the way I think the video structure should be set up:

1. A special editing lab should be set up in every major city in the world. All equipment can be kept in excellent working condition by two well-qualified people, one an engineer, the other a technician. The lab should be open 24 hours a day. The fee should be low enough for everyone to afford. Something like \$15-\$20. American money per hour. People would be able to call up for an appointment, come down and work the machines themselves if they choose or be assisted by the 2 people present.
2. A public video theater where anyone could rent time to show their tapes to a special audience or party. The theater should be able to hold at least 200-300 people comfortably. It should have a thick rug on the floor and huge video screens on the walls with a stereo high fidelity sound system. Again, rental fees should be reasonable so an individual can afford it. About \$75 per hour. The theater could be open every day. The theater would not have to worry about successful showings because its income would be from the showing fee.

This fee could vary according to the day and time. Saturday night would be the highest showing fee. Something like \$150 per hour. The artist would have to advertise the showing himself and could charge any admission he thinks he's worth. The theater would not take any gate cut so that if the artist becomes successful the artist becomes rich.

This is a reinforcing system. And a profitable one for both parties involved. Advertising could be added with the consent of the showing artist to raise extra revenue. Public service commercials could also be run, again with the consent of the showing artist.

If no one sets this system up—I shall.