

people to participate rather than spectate in determining their own present and future.

Once upon a time the Town Hall was the place where all citizens could participate in their own affairs. With the growth of population in urban areas we have to move the Town Hall *into* people's homes. Community channels can be the way.

Summary of Findings

1) The use of ½" VTR with industrial sync for cablecasting is feasible, and the technology is improving almost daily.

2) Truly portable equipment (½") is essential if programming is to escape from the studio to allow people to participate on their home ground. Regulations that would specify the use of 2" VTR only for cablecasting would kill community programming.

3) It is quite possible for "beginners" to produce adequate material after a very short period of practice. The finished product will not have a high technical gloss but this is not of prime importance if the *raison d'être* is "people-participation".

4) Local programmes have proved popular wherever they have been produced, but this novelty could wear off if people are only "programmed-at", and not programmed-with.

5) The present C.R.T.C. guidelines state that a community channel should be provided but there is an inevitable confusion between "community programming" and "local programming".

Community Programming—to us, means that EVERYONE has the privilege of using the local channel. It is not a favour to be granted by the Owner. Community programming means citizen participation—guaranteed by a truly representative body of all social strata that excludes neither the poor nor the police. It MUST mean FEEDBACK and two-way communication. Perhaps it should be called Community Service.

In practice LOCAL PROGRAMMING means coverage of local events by the cable company. The

company decides what goes on the air—and, therefore, what does *not* go on. Some companies are owned locally and open discussion of local community affairs is often avoided because of conflict of interests. Other companies are operated for absentee owners who provide a minimum amount of locally originated programming and *only because this has been suggested by C.R.T.C.* If they own a chain of stations, costs are minimized by bicycling prints or tapes, around their system. Therefore, a given community channel might only get as little as one hour of local material a week—and that hour would have been produced *because* it would appeal to *all* stations.

6) The major part of programming MUST originate in the community. It cannot be provided by outsiders. It is doubtful whether it is sensible for the cable company to be the sole authority which should control all community programming decisions.

7) Feedback should be strongly encouraged as an essential part of community programming—whether this is in the form of wired locations with cameras installed, or videophones, or phone-in audience reactions or open-ended audience participation shows. For example, in Fredericton, a community hall (in a section of the town not yet "cabled") could be wired to become a studio for \$5,000.

8) Minority groups should be encouraged to produce their own programmes for a community channel. This could be done by the provision of federal or provincial grants to help them with equipment and general production costs.

9) Legal liability for a given programme *has* to be transferred from the cable company to the programme originator—not only to get the operator "off the hook", but to ensure "responsible" programming.

10) To ensure that all segments of a community are given the Right to Access—local coordinating bodies have to be created that will not be dominated by political or commercial vested interests. It is pos-

sible that some form of rotating Charter Board as proposed in Thunder Bay could be the answer. This Board would also guard against the abuses of the right to programme by operating as a Review Board rather than a Programming Body.

11) A production nucleus is essential to guarantee production continuity, "adequate" technical standards, and to initiate programmes. In the case of small systems—this could consist of one person.

12) Some way has to be found to finance production. Although the costs can be very low some groups will not be able to afford even these. Three alternatives for financing were suggested by one cable company manager:

1) Increase the subscription rate with the proviso that a determined percentage of the subscription be used for community programmes.

2) Allow "institutional" advertising.

3) Let the station be partly exempt from provincial tax.

We feel that the introduction of advertising on the community channels will inevitably lead to a ratings system—to the detriment of the specialized programming which is one of the community channel's greatest assets.

C.R.T.C. in its recent publication *Cable Television in Canada* suggests \$20,000 as a minimum per annum figure for a simple studio operation. Given this, it should be possible to work out a scale where a system of X number of subscribers (5,000 has been suggested by F.C.C.) *must* provide this basic studio facility and then as the number of subscribers increases so the cable Company must put a proportionate additional amount of money into community programming. However, even below the 5,000 figure we feel that *all* cable stations must provide *some* facilities for local origination even if it is a ½" camera plunged into the head end and a broom closet as a studio.

Throughout the cable flurry I have been haunted by one question. The aggressive marketing of cable and the importance given it by government are out of proportion to its apparent economic or propaganda value. Why are the authorities so interested in installing a coaxial cable into every home in America? Interested enough to donate a channel for community use. Is the value of cable (for government) to provide a palliative, a letters-to-the-editor format designed to absorb the aggressions of disgruntled groups? Does the government think that the hostility-vitiating capacity of community access will pay off in reduced police expenditures? Or, is cable access a loss leader, the free gift that seduces people into the supermarket?

The coaxial cable itself will soon be obsolete for telecast purposes. Lasers and communications satellites offer greater freedom at less expense than services now available by cable. In other words, not only is someone pushing cable awfully hard for apparently meager returns, but the meager returns themselves will cease in a matter of years.

It is becoming apparent that the hidden interest of promoters, is in the cable, and not in the TV. They don't care what kind of *terminal* people want—flowers, TV, or ticker tape, just so long as they can install the coaxial cable. And in order to lay down that cable, they are going to offer every inducement in the book. The cable can handle any kind of data ranging from computer print-outs and burglar alarms to videophone and telephone communications (and not surprisingly, Bell Telephone is fighting desperately to keep its grip on the 2-way tele-communications field.)

In the light of this type of analysis, the economic value of cable becomes more obvious. Most people are buying cable in order to have more feature films to select from, but the renegades need a different inducement to install their cable. So, community cable becomes the free gift and everyone packs into

the information supermarket.

We are running out of room for consumer goods. Products have to be recycled and the great production boom is tapering off. But the geniuses are ahead of us again. Just when the consumer society was getting glutted, they have discovered a range of products that take up no room and destroy no wildlife. They are peddling software. Door to door they come with the innocuous cable, leaving behind a direct line to a cornucopia of consumer software.

The hucksters of tomorrow will make it so easy to purchase software that the consumer society will never have to leave its hearth, home, and coax terminal. Banking, shopping, reading material, films, news and business, will all be pipelined to your home via the handy set of copper wires. The society that consumes together stays together.

And as always, every communications device finds military and police applications. If telephone tapping is a fear, imagine the surveillance made possible by coaxial cable. Even without tapping, the telephone company now has a complete record of every long distance phone call you have ever made from your home. When virtually *all* information an individual receives is processed through a cable, privacy will become a nostalgic memory. By pushing a retrieval button, controllers will know what movies you have selected to see, what books and magazines were printed out for you, at what part of the news you lost attention, who you spoke to and what your facial expression revealed about your attitudes...

Caveat Emptor.

Tom Paskal

But beyond the technological supermarket, there remains an even more profound flaw in the cable vision: and that is, whether we want to replace Johnny Carson with Jerry Rubin, whether we want to develop a brighter, more intelligent, ever more seductive TV, even if it has the purest socialist heart. True, poor people's housing developments don't usually have their own auditoriums, and hence a cable TV town meeting would offer some organizing potential. But why not just build a meeting hall, instead of using twice the resources to construct a TV system?

Television watching is, to begin with, a passive activity. That's why you ought to keep your eye on it. If it is true that passivity, alienation, and a sense of powerlessness are among the most dangerous epidemics in our society today, the television set is suspect at the outset regardless of what's programmed on it.

Ramparts