

Selectovision

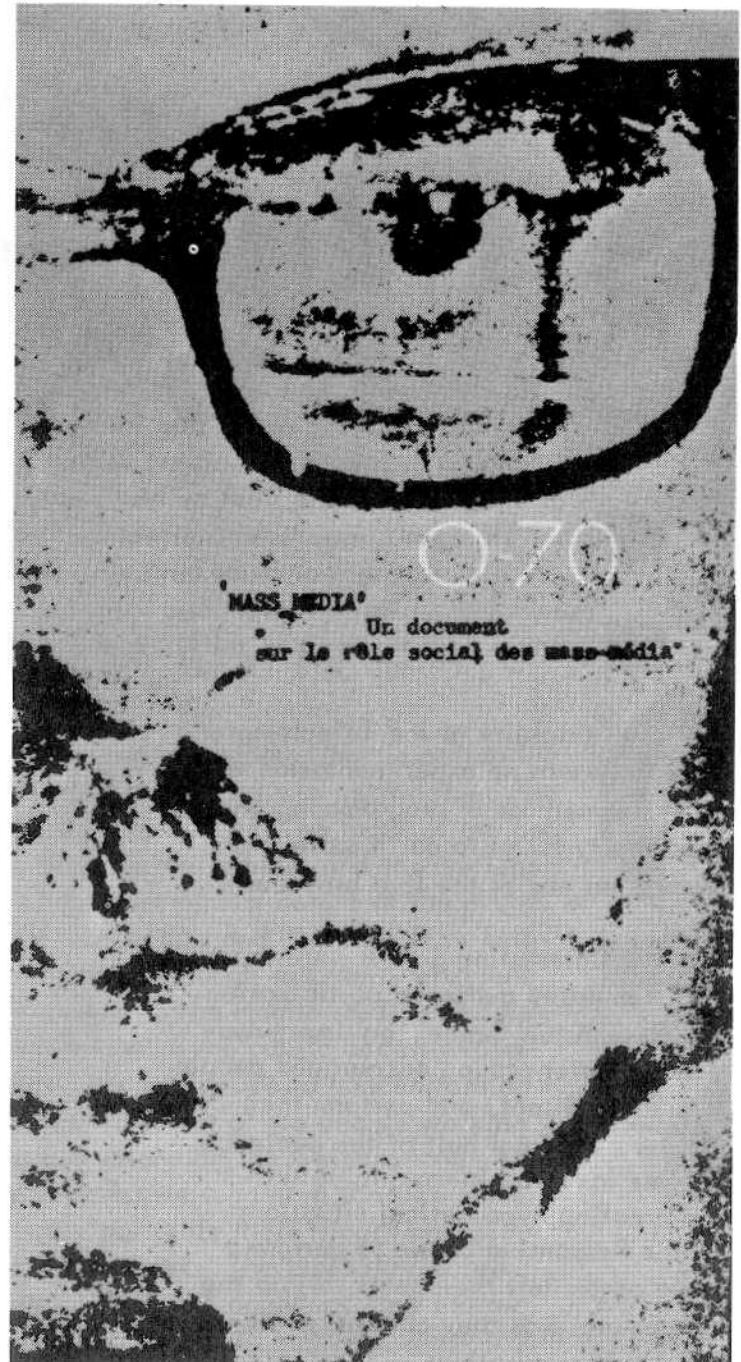
Early this fall in the town of Beloeil, Quebec, a marathon of activity drew to a close at cable station BHMO, and most people involved agreed that Selectovision seemed to be a fine, healthy baby. This pilot project represented the first real test of an experimental programming technique born of collaboration between Videographe (the video workshop founded by the National Film Board of Canada) and Videotron, owner of BHMO.

Selectovision is an experimental programming technique which gives the audience the ability to indicate their viewing preference from a list of 80 titles of videotapes produced by citizens of local and surrounding communities. This list of titles was prepared by Yolande Valiquette, coordinator of the project, from the library of Videographe, from the tapes of producers she found in the Quebec area, and from tapes which were submitted to her. Copies of the list were distributed to the viewers of Videotron's BHMO system prior to the ten-day experiment. Those who wanted to indicate a choice were invited to call the station and speak to the on-air announcer. Two channels were utilized in this experiment. The announcer received the calls, compiled requests, and interviewed guests on channel 9, while the tapes which seemed to have the biggest demand were shown on channel 11. The programming began September 22nd 1972 and continued, from 2 pm to 2 am each day, until October 1st.

Aside from the obvious attempt to provide the viewers with a mechanism to indicate their programming preferences, the project also sought to demonstrate to the viewers how citizens like themselves had used the videotape medium. The hope was that these production examples would stimulate those in the audience to express themselves through the same medium. With further development the com-

munity could eventually feed their Selectovision catalogue from local productions of videotapes. This could be called the major aim of Selectovision.

Participation in the show extended into the studio also. As the experiment unfolded, many different kinds of people came into the studio operation. First, there were the regulars; the camera operators, the technicians, announcers, telephone operators, etc. Then there were those who made one or two appearances such as the tape producers, other guests, and spectators who, enthused by the experiment, came to help, talk, or submit video projects. Finally, there were the

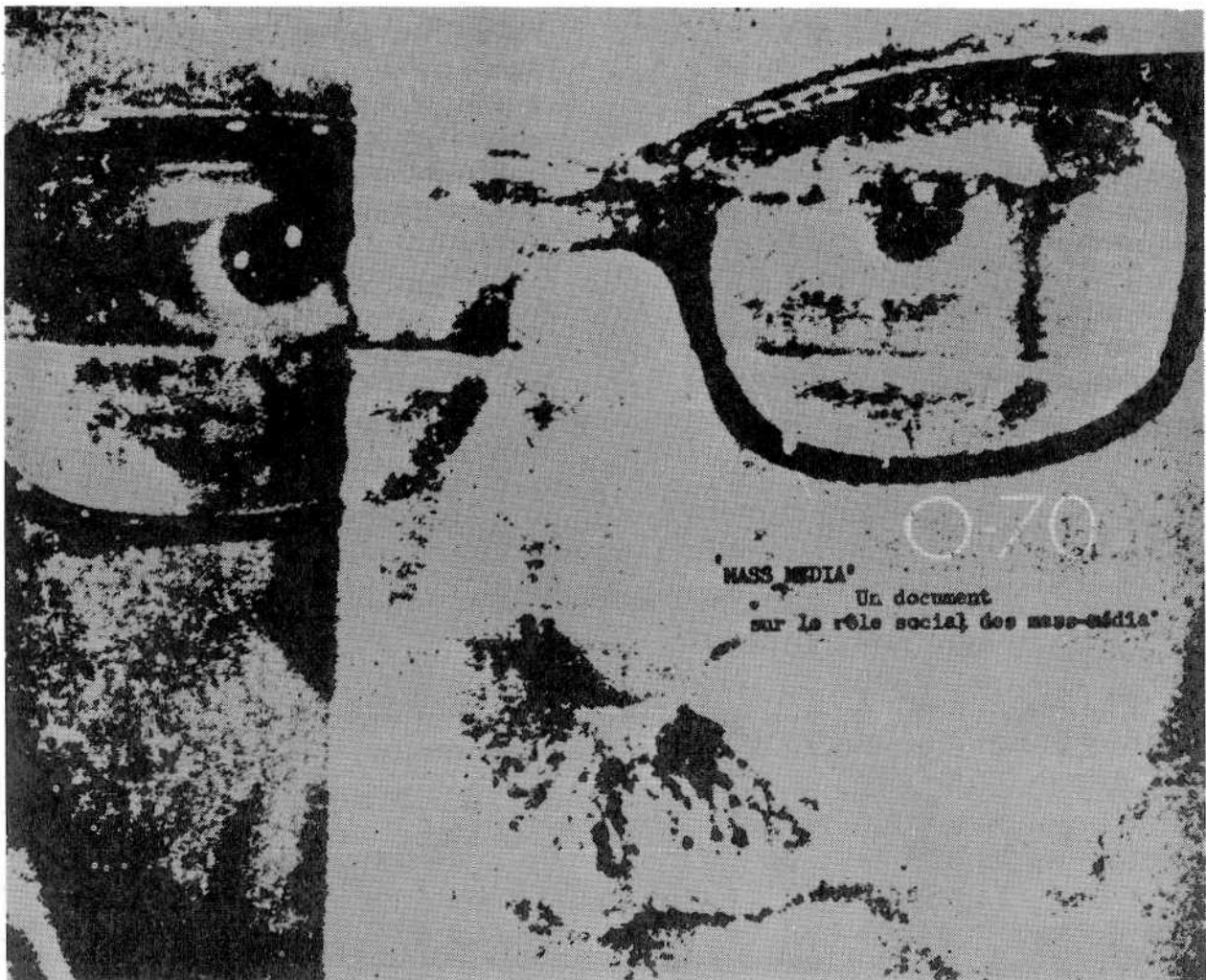


curious who just came to watch.

There was, for example, a young boy who came to present a proposal for a video tape and soon found himself on the air being interviewed by the coordinator about his project and receiving his first lesson in the use of the equipment. On another occasion two young boys visited out of curiosity and quickly found they had become the telephone operators for the rest of the day. In general, spontaneity was encouraged to the point that by the end of the experiment a group of young people had virtually taken over most of the studio and the operations such as camera work, tabulating results, answering phones and being guests. One woman who had never before done on-air announcing discovered that she also had no one to interview during the afternoon, quite fascinating interviews with her neighbors who were calling in to request tapes. Of the many things learned, a few things merit closer attention. One is the role of the announcer, or animateur. The import-

ance of his rapport with the audience has already been suggested. In general, the behavior of the animateur and the selection of this person depends a great deal on the kinds of people who telephone the station and on the mood he can maintain according to the time of day. The freedom he gives those with him on the air to express themselves can frequently set the tone for the viewers who are weighing participation in the show.

Another point of interest is the use of two channels, one for the studio activities and the other for tapes. It appears that in some cases this tends to separate the audience into groups who watch both channels and those who watch one or the other. This did not become a problem in terms of audience participation. In fact, for those stations who cannot or will not allocate two channels, using one channel and alternating the studio action with the tapes to be viewed may be quite satisfactory for their purposes.



The type of cable programming that Selectovision represents is often referred to as "community programming" presumably because on one hand it involves local people in the production itself, and on the other it reflects the software that people find important enough to produce. In the case of Selectovision the software came mostly from the library of Videograph. Such a Library was generated over a long period of time by local people who were drawn to the Videograph facilities. This type of show can use up tremendous amounts of programming and the temptation is to go even further and use libraries of programming generated by professional artists for "community programming" to be truly such, a significant amount must come from the local community, otherwise we are left with the typical formula of the audience passively viewing the productions of "professionals." It is easy for an audience to fall into this unless they are actively encouraged to produce on their own. The advantages are obvious for the cable operator and for the people, but it requires a long, patient educational and outreach effort toward the local residents to get them to put their rich and varied feelings into the form of videotape programming. If they see that it is in their interest to continue this activity, then "volunteerism" might very well become a sustaining resource.

So far, the results of the experiment have made it clear that there are people who will show themselves in order to do pro-

gramming as a consequence of this kind of production technique. Since Selectovision there has been a sharp rise in the number of serious individuals and groups who have submitted proposals to the outreach component of BHMO in order to make tapes. An equally serious educational program to help them learn how to make tapes coupled with the entertaining forum provided by the Selectovision show, will continue to bring real community programming closer to reality, and avoid the possibility of "selectovision" becoming a visual disc jockey technique. Perhaps one concrete direction in which to go at this time is to take those anonymous voices on the phone and get them together, face-to-face at a meeting place.

For the moment, plans for Selectovision are to keep it as a weekly evening feature. As a further experiment the programming will include besides local videotapes, some studio production and summaries of local events of the week. All of these documents will then be added to the list of software. We are hoping that the regular momentum that is steadily generated will maintain the interest of the population in Selectovision and cause it to become a real tool of communication and progress.

For additional information on Selectovision contact:

Yolande Valiquette
Coordonnateur de Selectovision
334 Emery Street
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

