



Finally, cable communications was seen by NATCOM planners as a means of eliminating the propensity of mass media for unnecessarily inflaming emotions about particular events and for raising aspirations and expectations of people beyond what corporate enterprises and government could practically provide. This led in the early 1980's to the custom tailoring of packaged information and entertainment to fit the unique characteristics of particular cultural and social groups. Not that this was unwelcome; the previous decade had seen a widespread clamoring for programming more relevant to the experiences of specific racial, ethnic, and economic urban subcultures. NATCOM enlisted the aid of former advertising and public relations specialists, social and behavioral scientists, video artists, and communications experts to research the needs of various publics and to prepare carefully designed pieces of programming for distribution by cable and cassettes. NATCOM operated in close partnership with the three former broadcast networks which by the mid-80's had turned their investments entirely from broadcasting to broadband communications. These corporations discovered entirely new areas of profit-making by marketing cable hardware and producing programming for video cassettes (particularly with the tremendous demand for violent sports and pornography).

By the mid-1980's the results of the Emergency Housing Act of 1978 were being seen. The Act has provided for the simultaneous construction of forty-five new towns and twenty linear megastructures within megalopolitan areas entirely by rapid industrialized methods. Such a massive urban development effort was unprecedented in scale and scope.

At the same time, national obsession with the automobile was being gradually replaced with an equally if not more intense obsession with personal communication systems. Status began to be measured by the number and type of equipment one could wear or affix to home cable terminals: wall-sized plasma screens, quadrasonic sound systems, biofeedback units,

cameras and video recorders, colorizers, CAI terminals, facsimile attachments, and other paraphernalia. Waiting on the horizon, holography promised yet another addition to personal "telecoms". Not that the automotive corporations simply disappeared; they like former broadcast networks transformed themselves. Megalopolitan living in the 1980's demanded new forms of transportation—personal rapid transit, gravity-vacuum carriers, "people-movers", aerobuses—all of which required both sophisticated transport technology and highly developed and coordinated cybernetic communications systems.

Other corporate institutions were transformed under the impact of universal cable communications. It did not take long for marketing analysts to discover that vastly greater profits could be made by designing information about products and services for particular consumer groups. Even channels devoted entirely to consumer reports, at first resisted by corporate structures, eventually resulted in greater sales, because they further encouraged high consumption patterns. Electronic home shopping with instantaneous credit accounting proved to be a particular boon to commerce as impulse purchases soared.

The 1980's also saw the advent of educational cable networks. Experiments conducted by a number of independent academic centers, and research sponsored by the Department of Communications had proven conclusively that cable communications learning consoles utilizing stimulus-response and reinforcement patterns could significantly increase certain computational and reading skills. It was found particularly suitable for students who showed, through early testing methods, little capacity for more than basic skills. By putting the earlier theories of B.F. Skinner into practice, educational psychologists found that such learning units could also be structured so as to produce a certain degree of satisfaction with a particular role in society. Frustrations and anxieties due to unmet expectations could thus be minimized.

