



ALTERNATIVES for ALTERNATE MEDIA[®] PEOPLE'S VIDEO THEATRE HANDBOOK



by Ken Marsh

A four part view need be employed in approaching the problems of activating an information flow: 1) creation of hardware stations; 2) production of information; 3) methods of distribution; and 4) modes for integration information into the reality.

When People's Video Theatre began operating in early June 1970, specific objectives were outlined to define its aims as a model for community hardware stations (theatres) capable of sustaining themselves economically. PVT is conceived as a means for exposure of community people's ideas, goods and services to be supported by those using it. Toward the development of video journalism, PVT serves to explore more responsive handling of information in working with groups and covering their needs. The facility itself exists as a studio for groups to use. The audience participation in feedback—Live forums—has already provided a demonstration of the video process to hundreds. A video library now exists for use at other hardware stations.

The material input to create the theatre was \$2000 worth of equipment, loft space (\$200 a month) and tape (\$10 per twenty minutes in volume purchase). The commitment of initially two people's time and energy has now expanded to three and will soon involve more. Thus hardware stations can be set up, established by any who call themselves a group and can, by servicing a constituency, develop support activities for economic survival.

During the month of August 1970, PVT began a three-hour taping in Washington Square Park which was under construction. Only one-third of the park was open to the many youths, senior citizens, bums, Italians, blacks, summer students and travellers who use the park. Out of the week long production came a fifty minute document identifying the who and what of the park. Indication of a tense situation was evident from the expressed antagonisms of each group for the others. PVT took six minutes of those antagonisms and put that together with another six minutes of people answering questions related to the park's partial closing and how that crowding condition was contributing to the overall tension. This twelve minutes was exposed to an invited audience made up of a police representative, social service department representative, local political people and some press. Responses to the tape were then collected, consisting of statements from the social services representative, members of the Washington Square Park's Council and the Chairman of the Architects Committee from the local planning board. This added to the original tape was shown to the public in the park on a Saturday afternoon during which time PVT collected feedback. The latter seeking to illicit positive input as to how the situation might better be dealt with.

This represents PVT's first attempt at video mediation. The process is conceived to deal with issues in creating lines of communication between antagonist groups whereby each can experience the information of the other without direct confrontation: therefore working for and towards a resolution of conflict through dialogue. Several types of

antagonists can be identified. Establishment Agencies (EA), whether private or public, are one. Local Power Groups (LPG) whether political, cultural or commercial, are another. Thirdly, are Citizen Consumers (C-C), the people in the street, which all of us are in many cases. An issue can exist related to any and/or all of these groups or can be localized within any one: example: city agency versus senior citizens, political party versus political party or youth versus senior citizens.

The process firstly finds an initiator, the EA, LPG or C-C that will be exposed to the antagonist element(s) for response. The cycle of "statement-exposure-response" essentially defines the video mediation procedure. A group may initiate the process by illiciting from an antagonist group, the first statement to which it will respond. This might apply to EA's or LPG's that are anticipating a conflict or issue or wish to mediate a conflict as a neutral party.

Passive participants of the elements can also be identified and involved through video polls and surveys carried on in the streets. That information can be input to the principal antagonist's dialogue. PVT believes that the above describes production techniques as significant to the making of programs as the coverage of an event, packaging of educational materials, creation of entertainment tapes, etc. The function of a communications resource—a medium for idea interaction—is to put forth new frameworks for information handling being response to the process and problems of interaction.

The people are the information; media processes can reach out to their needs. Procedures for helping a group define and refine its statement, whether an initial or response statement involves utilizing the video system. Video rules of order governing debate, even within a group to get itself together, need be developed. Playback can be utilized to periodically punctuate debate for identifying points of agreement and disagreement by reviewing what has been discussed. A time structure facilitates cutting down irrelevant dialogue. The role of mediator functions best to guide interaction toward the creation of a concise, clear statement-tape, comprehensible to the antagonist group(s).

Approaching the problems of distribution brings to mind the portability of the hardware. Either via battery or AC line the equipment can be taken out on the street, into parks or to the community group meeting halls. A mobile unit might be created with the bare minimum of a car or small truck with an inverter to operate the equipment off the auto-battery, placing the monitor and VTR in the trunk. The camera can as well be operated with that power. Checking with local authorities, as to permits for street or park showing, is in most locales necessary. As to tape libraries and exchange policies between hardware stations, tape costs for copies is the essential problem. This remains to be worked out. Different relationships can develop between different groups.

The fourth and final area of concern is integrating information into the

reality. PVT's thinking has produced several comprehensive proposals titled Environmental, Cultural and Campus Mediation Projects. The proposals outline procedures for setting up networks to collect and expose particular areas of information focusing on particular areas of human concern. For example, the Environmental Mediation project describes creating a number of communication districts in New York City manned by youth crews, who are given a number of tapes on environmental issues. The tapes would be produced in cooperation with the city and citizen ecology groups. Environmental forums would be conducted by the district crews within their districts, collecting responses to the various issues exposed on the tapes. This information would be fed back to the city and ecology groups and be responded to by definition of new programs for how local groups can deal with their problems related to the environment. The overall collection of information could be utilized as an encyclopedia of the NYC environment available to others for reference. It could supply the basic content of environmental curriculum for school use on all levels, etc.

The Cultural Mediation program is conceived as a state-wide mediation project. Cultural districts would be created and crews would collect the information of cultural activities within their districts. They would act to expose within their districts these activities to groups not heretofore aware of them. Upon completion of surveying each district an exchange of taped information would commence between districts all the time utilizing the feedback collection technique to involve and develop audiences. This bulk of information also would comprise an encyclopedia of the NY state cultural scene and be useful as a cultural curriculum for schools and a better roster of groups for public funding agencies who support the arts, etc.

The Campus project simply proposes establishing video theatres on all campuses, each capitalizing on their own wealth of information by producing educational and informational tapes. These could be exchanged via distribution centers that would purchase the originals from the originating campus. The center would then make copies and distribute them at low cost to other campuses. Collective tape buying because of volume needs could cut costs considerably. Even equipment costs could be cut because, again, of the volume buying. The problems of organizing this effort are immense. We feel it is important to expose this potential before the assault of marketeers pitching second-rate cassette and video package hits the universities. Students, through campus unions, have the option to select and fund the best systems which include production as well as playback abilities.

In conclusion to this section, PVT has recently begun to identify other media groups working in print, film, and on radio. And all media cooperation is obvious and necessary. Even, when possible, establishment media should be approached. The essential blood of media, information, flows in many forms. We might even say the first and foremost mediation project might be carried out on Media itself. All media to the people.

TELEVISIONARIES versus TELEVISIGOTHS

by David Silver

Television is so bad, its vision has so much turned into zombiland, that you tend to dismiss it as utterly lost. Glen Campbell, Tom Jones and Johnny Cash continue appearing on each other's shows endlessly and the News gets slicker. Why bother?

Because television is in fact a pure medium karmically created for expanding the awareness of masses of people. It is an eye in society. It is a means of furthering the reduction of dualism in perception, alienation from Nature, and the competitive fascist disease that informs the system. Its priority use is as the medium through which to disseminate radical information: to show what's really going down. The best way to fight the ego-dominated, class-conscious, pitting one-man-against-another establishment media is with the same media used as a hiping device—that is, a way of getting TV information out that will allow people to see the truth unadulterated by the commercial consideration.

Right now we have the chance to use an advance in technology as a radicalizing, humanizing process. There are cassette machines, soon to be on the market, that will attach to the TV set a home and allow you to choose your viewing. Logically this should supply the freer kind of information flow that happened to music after the invention of the LP. Cable TV is already upon us, with the potential of opening up channels in any given area. But if the present establishment powers seize hold of these new conduits for communication there will be retardation rather than progress. There will simply be more of the same and ultimately the creation of a society with so much mind-destroying television that the utter dehumanization of the spirit will be inevitable.

Cut to 6:30, July 4th, 1984:

The family is seated around a three-foot-in-diameter space in the living room floor where exists the three dimensional holograph TV set. Suddenly a tall sexy newsreader appears in the spot in full 3D Touchicolor. He reads the News in a smooth, seductive voice.

"Good evening... welcome again to the Channel 73 News. Easy-going pollution warnings for Denver, Saigon, Brussels, Seattle and Melbourne... HAVE YOU TRIED WASHINGTON, the new Anglo-Japanese GoodVibe pill?"

Don't forget, HASHIHIGH brings you up by taking you down to GoodVibe country, whatever the monoxide count. You can be sure to be breathing fine with HASHIHIGH... Gas Mask red alerts are reported for the Boston/Washington conurbation, for New Delhi and Bogota... HASHIHIGH, remember not only brings you the News, it brings you freedom from the 'air-downs'... Goodnight."

The newsreader drops a pill and the mother of the family drops one at the same time. He bends to his knees like a slowed down Chubby Checker twist... they both begin to pant... just as their lips are about to meet he disappears and the womanly calm returns to her previous viewing position...

So. While the commercial madness scrambles to get Jackie Gleason, Ringo Starr and Oh Calcutta! onto cassettes, we should be obtaining the wherewithal to create an alternative TV. Students were shot at Kent, but Life Magazine bought the truth and gave it to us as that week's Big Story. We must take the media into our hands so that there is no control or ownership of information.

Sony portable video machines are now available and in fact there are a lot of them around, lying unused in Universities that have in general forgotten what to do with their resources. These machines are easy to operate and therefore we, the people, do not have to be trained as TV producers (as if anyone can) to use them. Groups have already been formed that are free from capitalist pressures to make television whether there are immediate outlets or not—Video-freex and Raindance in New York, for instance. More groups must be formed all over the country, formed with intention of covering the immediate reality around them that the network cameras never seem to find. Then we can not only see into the beyond Amerika but allow others in on the information. The truth isn't anybody's property.

At the Goddard College Alternative Media Conference, several groups of video freaks opened themselves up to each other and formed a Data Bank. That is, they decided to pool their video material and create a situation where there can be swapping of tapes, coming together of different production units and, perhaps most important

of all, a Collective Video Bank that anyone who needs the information can draw from. This data collective will contain all the visions, guerrilla reportages and godknowswhat that people are into and going through. It is now the job of this radical 'network' to acquire the hardware (cameras, playback machines and video tape) and make 'actual' a system which gets the information flowing freely. Cops bullying or murdering blacks, shiny corporation buildings fronting for pollution factories, strikers being shot at, people being killed at rock festivals, AND on the other hand Buckminster Fuller, survival kits for living in an inhumane society, rock and jazz music being formed and performed, encounter sessions where we see real people going through real changes...

People should acquire the portable equipment by whatever means they can and start taping—then send it to the data bank, perhaps swapping that for other stuff taped thousands of miles away. Camera units must be loaned or given to ghetto dwellers, factory workers, freaks, artists, mental institutions, jails, travelling neo-Kesey bands of bus dwellers—PL and yogis both. Then we not only have television creating the vitally necessary free flow of information but acting as mind-blowers, electronic therapists for anyone who perhaps would benefit from digging him or herself on a monitor. Self awareness via TV

could be one of the most important functions of the medium in the seventies; what golf pros are doing now with the equipment could be put to use immediately to help the underprivileged, the unhealthy, the oppressed in general get back into their selves. As the video bank grows so will its usefulness, in ways that are not even possible to imagine right now.

Those interested in the meaning of the word 'alternate,' some of whom were at Goddard, want to see the media opened up to everyone's eyes, thereby avoiding, destroying the energy-killing paranoia of feeling that the networks own the air. It is shortsighted to believe that the networks have all the power... as the technology advances, old modes of communication channelling, become obsolete: already many colleges have the equipment both to produce and play back half-inch video tape; there are video theatres like Global Village opening; the cassette home viewing scene is about to happen—it is therefore imperative that there be liberated production groups working right now on building up stockpiles of information that people can use to educate themselves and those less privileged.

The Anti-Network then creates a readily available mass of information, the presence of which in the society both freaks out the fascists and substantiates the reality of a counter-culture and an on-going

revolution. The Big Eye Big Brother Kafkaland that could well happen in toto in America can be aborted by opening up the immensely powerful TV medium. But quickly. Before the incoming of the plastic, inordinately cruel, computerized apocalypse of soft repression takes over and erases the potentially liberated minds of modern man.

It is stupid to big-deal about circumstances brought about by a somewhat unreal conference in the hills of old Vermont, but it is a crime not to stress the urgency of the situation as regards the brainwashing of a nation by the use of media. Therefore, it is only sensible to bring our visions out into the open right now and let people know that they are realizable if we only seek alternative modes of communication. Television either will become the Eye of Big Brother or the eyes of our brothers—the former to dehumanize us, the latter to humanize us. Television unfettered stands as a witness and as a friend to truth and a powerful enemy of distortion, hypocrisy and cruelty. As TV's technology improves, so does its potential pacification, but so does its potential for jolting people into seeing what's going on.

Totalitarian, sexy fascism (the kind that needs no Hitler, needs instead the mindfuck power of juxtaposing the war dead in Vietnam with feminine hygiene spray ads) comes out of artificially

created realities—the commercial media shape the minds of the public not under the weight of moral conviction but under the amorality, self-perpetuating criteria of making money and having power over people under you. Truth doesn't sell Lavaris. So the newsreaders will remain calm and still tie their ties properly as the tactical nuclear weapons start being used, as laser guns start popping up here and there, as listed dissenters ('ideological criminals') are locked away or murdered, as blacks are blatantly discriminated against and enslaved anew. So Dick Cavett still tells jokes in between getting into handsome intensities with Margaret Mead or whomever.

The alternate media must give as many cameras away as possible—this is the only liberation of the media that will actually change the state of things. The real community must become the program manager. Collective ignorance cannot be destroyed by involving yourself in the pitifully ad hoc, unmotivated-except-by-profit and ego-gain machinery of corporate businesses thinly disguised as communications media. A vital TV collective doesn't need NBC—all it needs is a commitment to getting the recording equipment into the hands of the radically aware, the humane, the visionary, the man in the street.

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U.S.C. Piece May '70 Environmental Performance by C. Bensingier