CBS Cleans House: Rural Shows Out, Law and Order In

Part I
Part of the problem

SURVIVAL TELEVISION

Broadcast TV has low survival value. Channels and time scarcity mean high money, low access. Either artificial superstars affect behavior, or "announcers" interface between you and the camera facing you, or people who relate to your life style, is impossible. Yet broadcast TV is our most democratic entertainment. Many of us working in portable video do it not just as a means of personal and collective expression, but also as an alternative to the Joey Straightjacket of commercial television. TV is still too powerful a tool to leave to the advertisers alone.

For the past year at Raindance we've been talking about alternate information systems and a decentralized video information communications network. Holding from the feedback we've been getting lately (letters to Radical Software, phone calls, people coming to our Saturday night shows) more and more people are getting into using portable 1/2" video recorders and making tapes of their schools, their streets, their cities, and the people who inhabit them. We've had inquiries from people trying to set up videotape facilities, or groups, or theatres at universities or in communities who would like to see videotapes of other places made by other people.

As with any high survival mode, decentralized TV is of a high variety which just can't be supported by 50 million people like a broadcast television show.

This means that a true alternate network, or distribution system, must respect diversity. It has to be able to pass around one copy of a tape as easily as a hundred, or a thousand.

We would like to set up a model for a videotape exchange and equitable distribution service. We have approximately $3000 to do this experiment. If the model proves viable we welcome anybody to use it in setting up their own distribution network. In this experiment we will be selecting video material and assembling taped information packages somewhat representative of the video information sent to us. In addition we will publish a Process Print-Out detailing what video information tape has been sent to us, who sent it, where we are sending the video information packages, how much we're charging, what our costs are, etc.

With your help we'd like to develop this Video Information-Tape Exchange as an exchange of videotapes which are basically recordings of reality of what's going on around us: information about things that are important for our survival; tapes of people who are getting into things; tapes that will help people watching them to understand and feel the environment and experience recorded on the tape. Because the information is indigenous to real needs, and not produced in anticipation of a commercial outlet, it trends towards high survival value.

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The logical future of a tape exchange/sales network is in video cassette and/or cable television. So we don't know precisely what the future will lie. We don't think we want to do it forever, much have no sense of how to enhance indigenous video production. Right now, mostly money people are at the switches in cable and cassettes. And they seem to help those media develop sensibly. If we have demonstrated a sensible, working model for information exchange then we can to do. Like make tape. Certainly can't see ourselves administering distribution more than a year. We've got other things but we feel that's premature, partly because it would limit our flexibility. Right now though we less a few years. We have thought of setting a self-destruct limit like the Whole Earth Catalog .

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