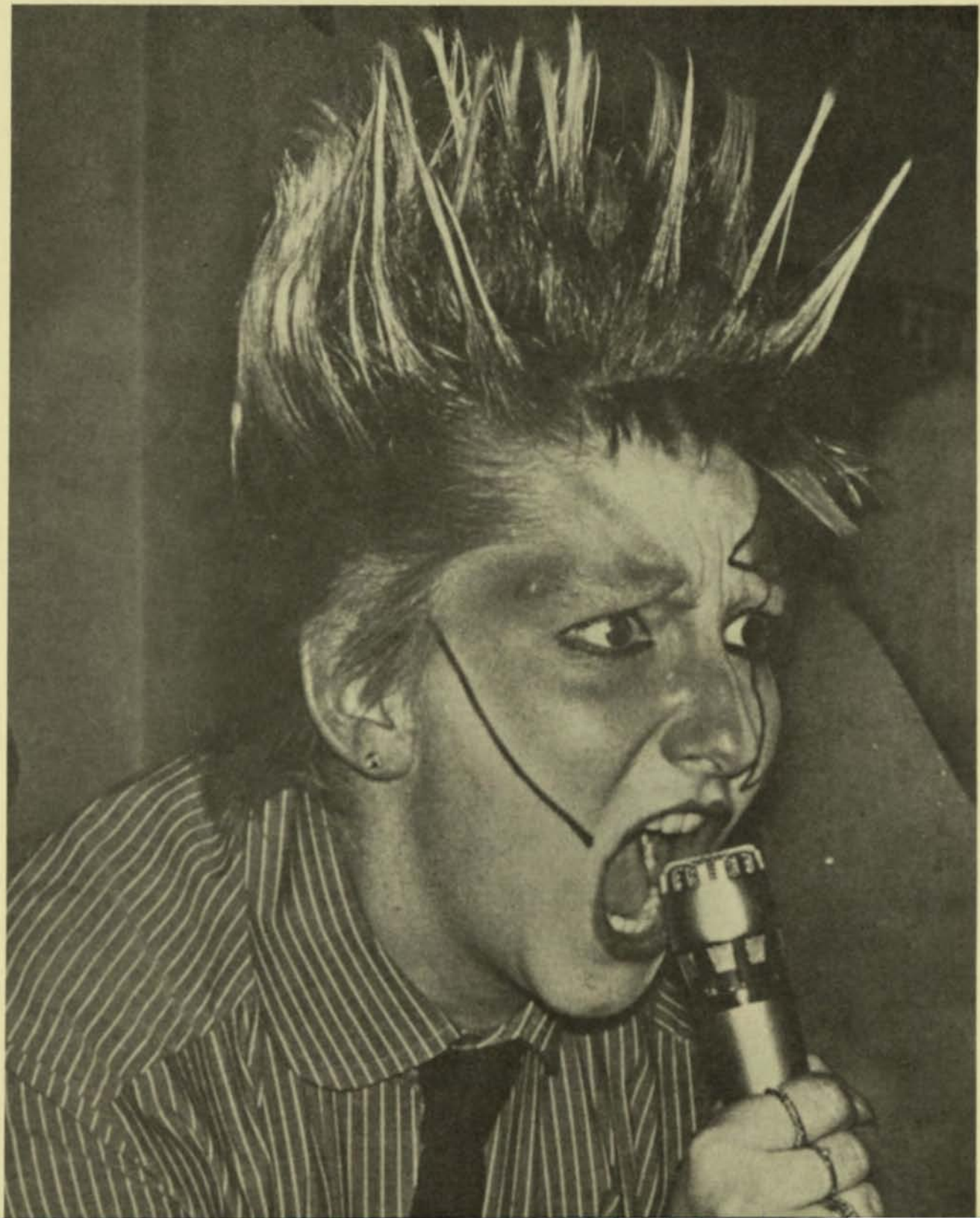
Volume IV, Number 2

THE JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS



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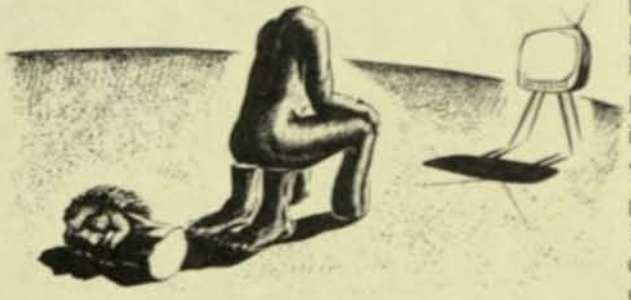

J.F. Batellier

Editors -- Sandy Emerson and Marcy Darnovsky

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Cover: photo of Amyl Nitrate from *Punk Rock* by Virginia Boston (Penguin Books, 1978).

Feedback

Instead of an editorial telling you what we think, we are presenting a selection of letters from readers who've told us what they think. We appreciate this feedback, and we intend to include comments and critiques from readers as a regular part of the **Journal.**

Dear JCC:

Your graphics are getting a little *wacko* ! And quite far out.

I'm not sure they are at all becoming to the "technology" you are trying to represent.

The issue is one of *alternatives.* The graphics presented in your latest issue (IV,1) do not show alternatives but systems of thought most of us, who think ourselves civilized, are attempting to change.

The technology you approach is subtle. And quite threatening, if portrayed in non-positive terms.

I say all this without having read more than a paragraph or two of the magazine. I just skimmed through, as I would most magazines, and the overall image of the magazine is "Bomb the Shits!" Those big-moneyed baddies are only out to rape our pockets and build their fiefdoms!"

Well, that's one of the beautiful things about our system. It allows us to compete. Naturally, we haven't got the financial or the political resources to match wits, but we are very clever, and getting smarter every day. My feeling is that we had better learn to play ball their way. And when we beat them at their own rules we control the technology . . .rather, its use. Positive networking in the communications industry is a field that is largely unexplored by those professionals who cater to the alternatives movement.

The second wave is here, folks, and the big ones ain't far behind. So let's clean up our act.

Yours truly,

David Ellsworth,
Rice Lake, Wisconsin

Dear JCC:

I guess I ought to apologize for never having got back to you on EIES when you messaged me back around the turn of the year, but frankly it's just not my kind of conferencing and what little use I made of it during my freebie "introductory" month was disappointing. Too much extraneous stuff to wade through and none of the fascinating messiness of people actually interacting in real time.

The principal motivation for this letter is my disgusted reaction to Alan Roberts's diatribe in your latest issue. It is so damn tiresome to hear people who maintain not only such a double standard as to be unable to see how a free market helps them while they are lambasting its risks elsewhere. He makes the ubiquitous assumption that technical fixes, imposed by law, can cure the beast. That like intubating the patient who is already clinically dead.

The second column of page 14: "No capitalist system can maintain itself today without the constant and massive intervention by the State in the daily workings of its economy". If he will now concede that such a definition of "capitalism" is *not* one of a free market and then get on with reading some of the recent Libertarian sources (I recommend his starting with Robert J. Smith, some of Roy Childs or Jeff Riggenback in the *Libertarian Review,* or perhaps even Robert J. Ringer's new book) then he might be able to see that profits are not dirty and private ownership is OK, etc.

All best,

Avery R. Johnson
Nashua, N.H.

Feedback **is continued on page 40.**

How Polish Workers Made the News

by Howard Besser

The two and a half-week occupation of the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk Poland in August of 1980 is widely recognized as a turning point in the liberalization of the Polish government and the opening up of Polish society. Most analyses of recent events in Poland have dealt with the impact of the workers' struggle on the government. Here I will discuss how the workers' organization of communication during the shipyard occupation altered their social relationships.

As a traveler on a two-week visit to Poland in August, several days of it in Gdansk, I noticed a number of rather unconventional structures and uses of communication. Many of them tended to make communication less hierarchical and more personal.

Background

On July 1, 1980 the Polish government raised the price of meat. Immediately a strike broke out in Lublin where workers demanded higher wages to pay for the hike in food prices. The strike was quickly settled when the government granted wage concessions. But for several weeks afterwards, as word of government concessions spread to other towns, workers elsewhere walked off their jobs, making demands similar to those won in Lublin.

News about the strikes got around by word-of-mouth and the underground press, which had been formed mainly by intellectual dissidents in the wake of the uprisings in 1976 for the express purpose of informing people of labor unrest in Poland.

By the end of July, this massive wave of rebellion had receded. But on August 14, workers occupied the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk.

As the strike grew to encompass the entire Gdansk area, the authorities did everything they could to cut off its communications with the rest of the country. For most of the two and a half-week strike the government would allow no telephone, telegraph or mail service between this area and the rest of the country. For the first week, none of the traditional forms of mass communications (Polish newspapers, radio or television) published any mention of the events in Poland. But word did get out through the workers' own efforts and eventually the government found that it could no longer ignore the situation. So on August 22 it began covering the strike (in negative terms, of course) on its own broadcast media.

Though the government cut off telephone and telegraph service leading to the Gdansk area, it didn't tamper with communications within the Gdansk area itself, or with communications throughout the rest of the country. Only trunk lines leading to Gdansk were cut. Thus, local telephone and telegraph service operated normally within the Gdansk region, and all facilities operated normally throughout the rest of the country, as long as people didn't try to contact Gdansk.

No attempt was made to physically quarantine the Gdansk area. There was a significant movement across the paths of the broken communication wires of people who gathered information (using various means to collect it) on one side of the barrier and carried it to the other side (distributing it by various means).

Another method that helped to bridge the communication gap was the Western press. Journalists already in Poland when the occupation began were allowed access in and out of the Gdansk area. Most news services would make daily runs from Gdansk to Warsaw,

1. For a more complete account of the recent history of the Polish underground press and its role in the summer 1980 strikes, see Tadeusz Walendowski's "The Polish Summer of 1980" in *Columbia Journalism Review*, Nov/Dec 1980, pages 31-35.

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Striking workers at the Gdansk shipyard reach out for freshly-printed bulletins that inform them of the latest developments in the negotiations with Party officials.

Columbia Journalism Review / Gamma Liaison

where they could transmit reports to their main offices which in turn could broadcast them over the airwaves back into Poland. Though the Soviets tried to jam Western news broadcasts entering the USSR, the Poles made no such attempt. Thus, it was possible for people both in Gdansk and the rest of Poland to hear news of what was going on in Gdansk from Western broadcasting stations. Significantly, this was also information that had been physically carried over the barrier of cut lines.

The strikers quickly saw the advantage of the presence of the foreign press and literally catered to the hundred or so journalists in the shipyard.. While strikers often had to wait in line an hour for a meal, journalists were served finger sandwiches with cheese (and even meats) fifteen hours per day. Only press, delegates and a few other privileged people were allowed access to the central building where the Inter-Factory Strike Committee (MKS) met.

The desire to have the press there and happy was not based solely on getting news of the strike into the broadcast media. The workers also felt that the presence of a large press corps might act as a deterrent to a suppression of the shipyard occupation that would certainly have been bloody had it occurred. As one delegate confessed to us softly very late one night, "We're glad that THEY know that all of you foreigners are here."

By August 14, a few enterprises were already on strike. But soon after the takeover of

the shipyards, workers throughout the Gdansk area began to lay down their tools. Within a few weeks, work had stopped at over 500 enterprises. To coordinate the strikes and factory occupations the workers formed the Inter-Factory Strike Committee (MKS) to take on all major coordinative functions, from feeding and clothing the 16,000 workers occupying the Lenin Shipyards to formulating demands and negotiating with the government. But the major function of the MKS was to help facilitate the flow of opinions among those involved in the strike.

Inside the shipyard

The MKS, composed of representatives of all striking enterprises in the greater Gdansk area, met daily in a central building in the Gdansk Lenin Shipyards. Debates on how to manage the workers' struggle went on all day and into the evening hours.

Probably because distrust of the party and the government was so high, there was a concerted effort to insure as wide a dissemination of as much information as possible, and as much participation as possible in the decision-making process. Proposals were brought to the floor of the MKS meeting room and debated among the delegates. All these proceedings, even the negotiations with the government, were broadcast over loudspeakers that the workers had hooked up at the factory gates. This system allowed almost all the workers occupying the shipyards and anyone from the surrounding area who cared to come to the shipyard gates to hear the entire proceedings.

Most people gathered at the gate areas, the occupying workers on the inside and others on the outside. (Only very limited travel was allowed through the gates.) When the general MKS sessions recessed for long or even for brief times, a microphone was hooked into the speaker system at each gate. This "open mike" allowed the people around each gate to debate among themselves what the MKS had just been discussing or other subjects of their own choosing.

Of course, wires couldn't be strung to all the struck and occupied workplaces, so other methods of communication had to be found. Many of the enterprises instituted a system of "rotation of delegates." Each delegate would serve for several days and go back to discuss the MKS proceedings and questions with his or her co-workers. Then a new delegate to MKS would be chosen.

Shipyard workers peer into the meeting room of the Inter-Factory Strike Committee. photo by Howard Besser

The number of tape-recorders on the floor of the MKS was absolutely astounding. Even though a large bulk-recording area had been set up to encourage delegates to record the proceedings for the people they represented, it was not large enough.

Although the workers had no printing technology at all at the start of the shipyard occupation, the MKS tried to print a daily bulletin. Several days after the strike began, intellectual dissidents brought their press to the shipyards and showed the workers how to operate it. It was a very old hand-operated machine (one cannot just go to a store and buy a press in Poland, nor easily import one from abroad), and each sheet had to be waved in the air for several minutes to dry before being read. The quality of the image was very poor by American standards. But it was all they had, and it was basically readable.

When the bulletins were printed, shipyard workers grabbed them up before they had even dried. Some would take them to the gates of the shipyard and fling them over to the waiting crowd where they were snatched up and read aloud. The bulletins would be posted every 50 yards or so along the wall of the shipyard, and we constantly saw people gathered around them copying down information to take back to their homes, villages and workplaces.

For the first few days of the strike negotiations between the government and the strikers' representatives were broadcast live to the entire shipyard area. It was probably one of the few times in history that people had the opportunity to actually hear both their government and their labor representatives negotiating over the future of their lives. They were able to get a much more accurate picture of what was happening in the negotiation room than would have been possible from accounts handed from person to person -- many of whom would have had a vested interest in changing the story. This form of information flow made it difficult for either the government or the representatives to distort the "truth."

Everyone seemed to distrust the government. When an offer was made for free elections within the existing government-controlled unions (as an alternative to the Free Unions the MKS was demanding), a gigantic roar of laughter, quickly followed by cat-calls, swept the crowd of about 500 where we were standing. Not surprisingly, the government demanded that the negotiations be returned to private. Several days later, they were.


STRAJKOWY BIULETYN INFORMACYJNY
SOLIDARNOŚĆ

Gdansk strikers printed their own news bulletins

The only traditional broadcast communications received on a large scale in the Gdansk area were the nightly BBC and Radio Free Europe news programs. Every night people gathered around the few radios that had been brought to the MKS floor. Since these Western stations were fairly accurate in reporting the daily events they had participated in, and since they knew that the Polish and Russian stations were telling lies (or saying nothing at all) about the same events, the workers tended to regard *everything* that these Western sources said with much less skepticism than they would the Eastern sources.

One-way or two-way?

In developed countries, most news is received either directly or indirectly from a one-way communications system, generally via broadcast or print media. Though a one-way communications system is a convenient method for getting information distributed quickly, it is controlled by the very few transmitters and is not responsive to questions from the receivers.

In Poland, for example, when the government finally decided to send out information on the strike, it reported that the Gdansk workers were "malicious hooligans and anarchists" who wanted to terrorize the rest of the country and turn it into a capitalist state. Food was rotting in ships in the harbor, the government broadcasts said, and the masses were starving in

Gdansk. Despite the ubiquitous distrust of the government, many Poles swallowed at least part of this, and warned us not to go to Gdansk. We went anyway and found food more plentiful and the atmosphere more pleasant than elsewhere in Poland.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger would go so far as to say that one-way systems do not really constitute communication at all. "In its present form, equipment like television or film does not serve communication but prevents it. It allows no reciprocal action between transmitter and receiver; technically speaking, it reduces feedback to the lowest point compatible with the system." In fact, he finds them to be the mirror of power relationships in society. "The technical distinction between receivers and transmitters reflects the social division of labor into producers and consumers, which in the consciousness industry becomes of particular political importance. It is based, in the last analysis, on the basic contradiction between the ruling class and the ruled class -- that is to say, between monopoly capital or monopolistic bureaucracy on the one hand and the dependent masses on the other."[2]

Both the low-participation media (one-way) and the high-participation media (two-way) have their functions. Wilbur Schramm, citing Cantril's and Allport's findings, concludes that, "Low-participation media would seem to commend themselves for swift and widespread communication of information to individuals -- for example, as newspapers and radio communicate latest information on the environment." Higher degrees of social participation tend to create a sense of involvement, a group bond, a circular pattern of influence and decision making. They provide maximum feedback. Thinking back to the social functions of mass communications, . . . the high-participation media would seem to commend themselves particularly for the task of correlating society's response, for the process of exchanging and sharpening opinion."[3]

The communications channels used by the Gdansk workers certainly follow this pattern. Denied access to the commonplace one-way communication channels, (newspapers, radio, television), they formed new channels based on a much higher degree of participation. Very few "gatekeepers" (those who filter information between the transmitter and receivers, such as reporters, editors, and cameramen) were involved.

The people in the Gdansk area who came to the shipyard gates to receive information about the progress of the strike weren't satisfied to passively listen to reports from the MKS in the center of the shipyard. Not only were they constantly interacting and commenting to each other, they also had the opportunity to become broadcast transmitters themselves on the open mike. They sent their opinions to the people surrounding them and also back to MKS members, completing the second half of the two-way communications.

When delegates brought audio tapes of the MKS proceedings back to their enterprises, their fellow workers were able to go far beyond passively receiving these messages. They could ask for further, more detailed information. Or they could ask that their comments and opinions be transmitted back to the MKS through their delegate. Those with strong opinions were likely to become delegates themselves, reducing the possibility that their messages would be confounded by someone else. Though the delegates did play the role of gatekeepers, they made every possible attempt to

photo by Howard Besser

Poles gather around bulletins posted by striking workers on the walls of the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk.

2. Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. "Constituents of a theory of the media" in *The Consciousness Industry: on literature, politics and the media*, New York: Seabury Press, 1974, page 97.

3. Schramm, Wilbur (ed), "The nature of channels" in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954, page 89.

Striking workers listen intently to Radio Free Europe and BBC broadcasts about events in Gdansk. Official Polish media didn't mention the shipyard occupation for a week, and then tried to discredit it. photo by Howard Besser

minimize the gatekeeper's function of paring down information. And most importantly, these gatekeepers met face-to-face with the information receivers, and were subject to question or even replacement by them.

The daily bulletin was distributed primarily to the people inside the shipyards and to those just outside the gate. Though the print media is a strongly one-way form of communication, in this case it engendered two-way communication. When the bulletins were thrown into the crowd outside the gate, the first person to snatch up a bulletin would begin to read it aloud, becoming a receiver and a transmitter at the same time. The discussions of the bulletin that followed, some of them over the open mike, had a good chance of eventually getting back to the bulletin editors. Reading the leaflets became a social activity.

Posting bulletins on the walls outside the shipyards was another one-way channel that engendered two-way communication. Instead of being read in isolation (as print media usually is), these posted bulletins attracted groups of people that discussed their contents. Strong reactions could be transmitted over the open mike. Many people came from other parts of Poland to read these bulletins and participate in the discussions around the gates of the shipyards. In Gdansk they would sometimes act as transmitters, but would generally receive information. Back at their homes and workplaces, these people would transmit the information they had received in Gdansk to their friends and acquaintances. These transmissions were also two-way, since the person who had visited Gdansk could be questioned about information s/he neglected, and someone else could even be sent to Gdansk for more information. Here again is a very libertarian form of gatekeeper.

The Polish government's efforts to sever normal channels of communications during the Gdansk strike led to new forms of communication, many of which developed as two-way rather than one-way channels. The number and function of gatekeepers that separate people from information was minimized, and participation was maximized. In short, the Polish people began to explore new channels leading to a democratization of communication. o

Media Makers in Bonzoland

by Dee Dee Halleck

The election of the first American president thoroughly schooled in the consciousness industry throws into sharper relief some of the contradictions of cultural work in this country.

The past few years have seen a growing collaboration between independent media makers and traditional media reformers. Much of the reform work has centered on gaining "access" to "alternative" channels -- cable public access and public broadcasting. As these "surplus" sources dry up, the battlefield will have to move to the larger structures of mass culture: Hollywood, the networks and the consciousness industry conglomerates. As far as the New Right is concerned the "alternative media" is the opposition, and the institutions that have supported it should be hastily dismantled.

Independent film and video producers have been funded in the last ten years by liberal government agencies like the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment on the Arts, and the various state and regional arts and humanities councils. The funding was sporadic and extremely competitive, but steady enough to enable a group of self-proclaimed "independent" or "alternative" media producers to receive production funds and even distribution assistance.

What was in it for the liberals aside from the glory of seeing their agency's name roll by on the credits? The Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the whole system of arts councils (founded by Nelson Rockefeller) realized early on the advantages of keeping artists happy, pacified and coopted.

photo by Joey Kane

Under this system, even people expressing counter-views in the media arts could find some support and some audience, isolated and elitist though it might be. This removed most of the incentive for attacking the culture industry and questioning the dominant forms of media expression. The institutional patrons of the arts discovered, however, that selection of grants by administrative decree elicited protests and bitterness from the artist community. To maintain credibility they set up broadly representative panels of artists to distribute the money. These "peer panels" diffused the dissatisfactions and disappointments attendant on the selection process.

But maintaining credibility was not without contradictions. The "democratic process" in the arts bureaucracy has funded a growing number of "social change" works. It has also enabled artists to become familiar with the nature and intricacies of the funding process. In fact, centralized art funding has goaded the development of organizations of

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Dee Dee Halleck is a member of a non-profit group involved in telecommunications research and experimentation.

artists, with newsletters, publications, and an intense involvement in the legislative process.

As past president of the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (a trade organization of over 1000 producers), I was involved in forcing the so-called "public" television system to support independent producers. In a battle that took several years and numerous trips to Washington, our group tried to use the liberal language of the national Communications Act and the enabling legislation for Public Television to demand structural changes. In effect, we were trying to implement the rhetoric of "diversity" and "public service" that runs through these legislative documents.

We testified at hearings, researched and put out publications to prove that American Public Television denies access to producers -- often the very producers who receive arts council and endowment funds. Productions from the American alternative media community are often screened on German and Scandinavian television and appear in countless European festivals. But they are practically never shown on the tax-funded public channels in the US.

Instead, oil companies and other multinationals like IBM underwrite hackneyed Edwardian dramas from the BBC. The "Petroleum Broadcasting System" seems to prefer the brocades of English drawing rooms to the more ragged homespun -- and often keenly critical -- social documentaries that young American media artists produce.

The foundations realized early on the advantages of keeping artists happy, pacified and coopted.

We went directly to Congress with our complaints. By exploiting the disdain of the general population (less than one percent watch prime time public TV) and by pandering to the frankly chauvinist preference for American-made productions, we were able to establish in law that a "substantial amount" of the available money be spent on independent American productions, selected by peer advisors.

It may take litigation to properly define "substantial," but this new law signals the beginning of involvement by producers in the fiscal arrangements of public broadcasting. The law is supposed to include funding until 1982, though Reagan's budget cuts may eliminate it. But so far, interestingly, in bringing the axe down on public television it is funding for national programming and not for independents that has been singled out for elimination.

The legislative effort marked the beginning of a new coalition between independent producers and other groups working on media reform. Any diminution of these funds should bring a hue and cry from this vocal community of independent producers and media reformers.

The labor movement, which has been highly critical of public television, cooperated in the Congressional discussions. Progressive church movements that have worked in media reform were grateful to have independent producers join their ranks. Women's groups and minority coalitions helped to push not only for equal opportunity clauses, but for the funds set aside for independent productions, seeing in our work a real hope for media accountable to their communities.

By working together, these groups won Equal Employment Opportunity provisions, a mandate for independent productions, and the inclusion of strict measures for making all meetings and financial records of public television stations open to the public. This access to the decision making processes of local stations may be the most important of the victories, especially as federal program support dries up. If community groups recognize their rights they can use this new tool for forcing accountability from local broadcasters.

Cooperating with labor groups on legislative issues is only part of an increasing collaboration between media producers and labor. Several recent films, such as *Union Maids, The Wobblies, Rosie the Riveter* and *Babies and Banners* document early labor struggles and are helping to revitalize grassroots rank and file union activity.

Independent producers have been eager to develop new relationships with labor and community groups and on occasion have used money from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to promote distribution of this type of work. This has provoked the ire of the right-wing Heritage Foundation, which has singled out for attack the use of NEH money for the funding of film screenings for women office workers. But even if these Endowment funds are withdrawn, the contacts have been made, and many independent producers are finding labor organizations more consistent and

Protests in New York against *Fort Apache: the Bronx.* photo by Joey Kahn

steady supporters than government agencies.

Cable television has been another area of contention for media reform groups. Permits to build cable systems are generally granted by towns or cities, and cable companies compete for the license by attempting to prove their willingness to assist with community service. (On occasion they also resort to buying off council members' votes.) Local groups have taken advantage of these proceedings to force stringent local access requirements.

The stipulations placed on cable franchises have included everything from reserving several channels for open access programming (you bring in the tape, they'll put it on for you) to furnishing complete color video studios with staff for community use on a first-come, first-serve basis. Some towns have wisely allocated a percentage of the operators' gross to local productions so that as profits increase community media service can likewise be extended.

One ploy used in response by the cable systems is to con the town into accepting a piece of fancy equipment such as an elaborately equipped mobile TV van. The franchise doesn't say anything about maintenance, however, and these high tech vans are soon in the dump yard while the cable company continues to rake in profits. But franchise stipulations which are carefully planned and vigilantly monitored can result in a truly viable community access television system.

In Saint Johnsbury, Vermont, for example, local teenagers have produced for several years a regular series of shows on issues of special interest to their peers: teenage pregnancy, the draft, alcoholism, police abuse of loitering laws. The teenagers are spurred on by graduates and faculty of nearby Goddard College's Community Media Program and are funded by town taxes, a jobs-for-youth program, and the local cable company under its franchise agreement. The shows they make are proof that television can be produced by people without professional training in ways that can begin to replace the alienating aspects of the tube with relevant programming and the strengthening of community.

The Saint Johnsbury situation is an exception and the Goddard input is a critical factor, but it serves as a good model for community organizers. As cable gets more lucrative and there are more companies vying for the various franchises, it gets easier to include community access provisions. Precedents like Saint Johnsbury have become important bargaining chips for other groups demanding access.

Concrete issues like the drafting of a community franchise give a focus to media reform activities. Political organization around media issues has had to fight the prevailing ideology of most of communications academia and research -- a lingering McLuhanist reverence for omnipotent technology and a naive faith

that "information" per se is good: the more the merrier; let a thousand flowers bloom. The argument is always, wait until we get enough channels, or enough satellites, or enough video disks. But we are beginning to wake up to the realization that 400 AM radio stations only means 400 AM radio stations playing disco music. Video disks may only provide page referencing to the latest Star Wars, and cable may only give us four episodes of Gilligan's Island to choose from.

Media workers -- producers, directors, technicians, writers and actors, those who work independently and those inside the commercial apparatus -- could conceivably exert more control over what they produce and how it is distributed. The recent strike of the Screen Actors' Guild gave actors a share of the profits from the distribution of their work on video disk and Betamax tape. Future labor disputes in the cultural sector might begin to address increased workers' control over editorial processes.

Some sections of the media reform movement have cooperated in resistance to media stereotyping. It started when gays and lesbians successfully protested against the movie *Cruising*. Chinese and other Asian Americans have likewise protested against recent Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan releases. And in the South Bronx a group of vocal Puerto Ricans virtually halted the filming of "Fort Apache", a Paul Newman feature which attempted to make Western-type heroes out of the local anti-Latino police force.

These groups have exerted effective pressure and in all three cases forced changes in the shooting scripts. But the more important results were the discussion and confrontation of the stereotyping and exploitation of minorities by the mass media. The traditional liberal community has reacted with trepidation to what they dub "infringement of First Amendment principles," but this controversy requires a deeper analysis, for it points out the difficulties of equating individual and corporate rights. Power has to figure into the equation somehow. What kind of a chance does the Puerto Rican community in the South Bronx have to tell its own story? Time-Life and Warner Communications, the multinationals who made and distribute "Fort Apache," have unlimited resources. Simple incantation of the First Amendment does not address the realities of corporate power. Active organizations of the *subjects* of mass culture can be a formidable new wing of the media reform movement.

Other areas for exchange and cooperation are being developed internationally, especially the movement of the non-aligned countries at the World Administrative Radio Conference and within UNESCO (the McBride Commission) toward a New World Information Order. We in the U.S. ("free-flow" notwithstanding) need our own new information order. We may have much to gain by allying ourselves with those members of the Third World who are working to develop human and progressive media. By struggling to change the culture here at the center of production, we can weaken the imperialist strategies of the media corporations.

It is a difficult battle, and more so as the ultra-right takes command of the American political process. Although liberal-dominated

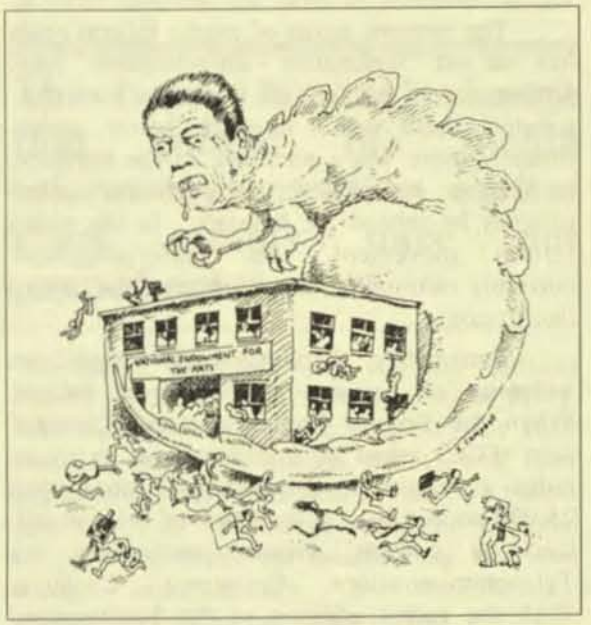

illustration by Steve Campbell

government agencies may have found "alternative" and "independent" expression necessary to their system of cooptation, with the installation of Ronald Reagan and his legions the very term "alternative" becomes oppositional. The day after the election, the vigilantes of reaction declared at a press conference that the Pacifica Foundation [a network of community radio stations] would be a prime target of budget cuts.

The siege has begun. Government and institutional funding for "social change" and "alternative media" will shrink if not disappear. In the coming years independent producers will get poorer as their grants dry up. Lean and hungry, they may become dangerous if their organizing focus shifts from negotiating access for marginal works to challenging the basic structures of corporate culture and mass media. o

The Uses and Limits of Media Reform

by Timothy Haight

The media reform movement began about fifteen years ago with a series of important victories. Now it is almost dead. The major battles of the past several years have been lost, while the victories have been trivial.

The present status of media reform reads like the old "fortunately - unfortunately" joke: Unfortunately he fell off the barn roof, fortunately there was a haystack below, unfortunately there was a pitchfork in the haystack, fortunately he missed the pitchfork, unfortunately he missed the haystack. In the media reform movement, the "unfortunatelies" currently outnumber the "fortunatelies" about two to one.

Fortunately, there has been a significant widening of participation in media reform. When the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) asked for comments on its recent radio deregulation proceedings, more than 25,000 poured in -- at least half of them mobilized by citizens' groups, particularly the Telecommunications Consumer Coalition. With the recent addition of the Steelworkers' Union, that network now boasts more than 140 member organizations. Other unions, including the United Auto Workers, the AFL-CIO, the International Association of Machinists, the National Education Association and the Screen Actors' Guild, have joined this or other coalitions for media reform in recent years.

Unfortunately, the FCC recently voted six to one to deregulate radio in spite of all this activity, and the dissenting Commissioner has since resigned. Reagan is expected to be able to appoint new commissioners to six of the seven FCC seats during his first term, a prospect that led *Broadcasting* magazine to gush, "Soon, broadcasters will feel they are experiencing an early spring."

Fortunately, lobbying in Congress by citizens' groups has had some success. Largely because of pressure from media reform groups, Lionel Van Deerlin, the former House Communications Subcommittee chairman, was unable to get a raft of pro-broadcaster changes to the Communications Act out of his own subcommittee in 1979.

Unfortunately, the FCC has taken on Van Deerlin's deregulatory fervor without waiting for a new law, and most of his ideas are being reintroduced in smaller bills to a much more conservative Congress. The new chairman of the Senate Communications Subcommittee, for example, is Barry Goldwater.

Fortunately, the National Task Force for Public Broadcasting and other groups succeeded in 1978 in changing public broadcasting law to include new requirements for citizen participation and more funding for independent producers. Unfortunately, most of these favorable changes have been reduced to meaninglessness by the bureaucratic maneuvering of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the public television stations. Independent producers got nothing like the money Congress had intended, and there is no evidence of increased citizen participation.

Now Reagan's budget-cutters plan an immediate 25% reduction in federal public broadcasting support, with further cuts in future years. Other cuts for agencies which have supported independent producers, such as the National Endowment for the Arts, are also in store.

Fortunately, several media reformers managed to work their way into government agencies such as the FCC, the Federal Trade Commission, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the Board of Directors of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. These "insiders" have been

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helpful, particularly in the area of minority group ownership of radio stations. Five years ago there were a handful of black-owned stations; today there are more than a hundred.

Unfortunately, most if not all of these "new bureaucrats" will have been forced out of their jobs by the Reagan administration by the time you read this.

Fortunately, not all media reform takes place through the government. The media reform movement has been able to reduce the number of television shows with excessive violence, for example, by pressuring sponsors. The National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, in cooperation with groups such as the American Medical Association, the national PTA and the American Association of Chiefs of Police, monitored television shows to identify the ten most violent programs and then coordinated a letter-writing campaign to the presidents of the sponsoring corporations. Some of the offending programs have disappeared from the air.

Media reform groups have also managed to exert some influence on the content of programming by contacting broadcasters directly. The National Organization for Women has convinced some affiliates to check with them about network programs of interest to women, and the National Gay Task Force has been able to put some limits on the offensive stereotyping of gays on TV.

In several cities such as San Francisco, Chicago and Boston, local media reform groups have provided counseling to community organizations to help them get air time, present their views and publicize their activities.

Unfortunately, these successful tactics of basically liberal media reform groups are now being effectively copied by the "new right." The latest and possibly the largest media reform group, the Coalition for Better TV, claims 200 constituent groups which it identifies as mostly "pro-life" and "pro-family." Several of these groups, particularly the Moral Majority (which furnished the Coalition's executive director), were quite active in support of the Reagan candidacy. These "new right" media reformers will be pressuring the same broadcasters as groups like NOW, but from opposite directions.

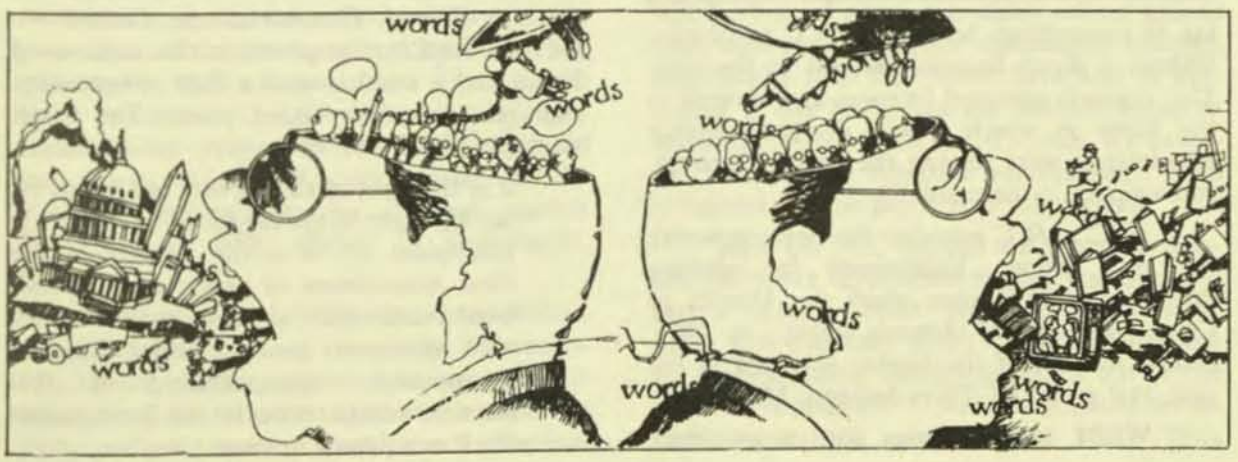
Changes in the political weather are to be expected, of course, and rough seas are no reason to abandon ship. But liberal media reform is plagued with more severe structural problems that give us reason to rethink our tactics.

The problem that is simplest to define is lack of funds. Some foundations, including the Ford Foundation, have withdrawn their support of public interest law firms in communications.

The hopes for real change that buoyed the media reform movement in earlier years simply have not panned out.

The Media Access Project and the Citizens Communications Center, the two major firms, have been unable to attract support for their activities from the general public, and their clients have rarely been able to raise the necessary legal fees. For some time, the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting has been trying unsuccessfully to become a membership-supported organization. It survives only because of funding from its "parent" organization, Ralph Nader's Center for Responsive Law.

Beyond the money problems there is the



frustrating feeling of always being on the defensive. Participation before the FCC is a distant, arcane and time-consuming endeavor, and one that makes it difficult to maintain grassroots support.

Finally, quite apart from the new threats from Reagan and the right, there is the realization that most hopes for real changes in media that buoyed the movement in earlier years simply have not panned out. Some important battles have been decisively lost: a right to purchase air time regardless of whether the broadcaster agrees, a First Amendment right of access to the media, FCC enforcement of citizen group/broadcaster agreements dealing with programming, and FCC-mandated cable access channels.

All this frustration compounded by the Reagan onslaught makes it tempting to simply give up. But the cycle of victory and defeat which we have experienced holds important lessons in the fight for democracy in communications. Before we can suggest new tactics, however, we must review what we have been through.

The beginnings of media reform

In the postwar period, questions of fairness and access were discussed only within the FCC, since representatives of the audience had no legal standing before the Commission. The media reform movement marks its birth from a breakthrough court decision in 1966, *United Church of Christ v. Federal Communications Commission (UCC v. FCC)*, that granted standing in proceedings before the FCC to citizens without a direct financial interest in the case. This decision admitted listeners and viewers to the arena in which it was decided whether broadcasters were serving the "public interest, convenience, or necessity."

The concessions offered by the privately controlled media have been trivial.

UCC v. FCC provided the opening wedge for legal action. Enthusiasm for working through the FCC grew when the District of Columbia Court of Appeals finally, in 1969, denied renewal of the license involved in the case, that of WLBT-TV in Jackson, Mississippi.

WLBT was notorious for its anti-black programming and practices, and the revocation of its license was very much a part of the advance of the civil rights movement. But the fact that the court's ruling had involved the content of WLBT's broadcast was immensely significant, especially since the FCC had usually avoided that area in the past. The WLBT case held out some hope that stations could be held accountable for what various groups in society saw as discrimination against them in coverage and portrayal.

Dogs in Birmingham, 1963. photo by Associated Press

At the same time that WLBT was working its way through the courts, the legal case for "access to the press as a First Amendment right" was developing. The basic idea was that the increasing concentration of the media coupled with its protection by the First Amendment had resulted in the control by the communications industry of the circulation of ideas in society.

In 1969, the same year that the D.C. Court of Appeals ordered the FCC to revoke WLBT's license, the U.S. Supreme Court decided the case of *Red Lion Broadcasting Co., Inc. v. Federal Communications Commission.* Parts of the Court's opinion in that case raised hopes that a trend toward a First Amendment right of access was taking place. The Court wrote, in part,

> It is the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount. . . It is the purpose of the First Amendment to preserve an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will ultimately prevail, rather than to countenance monopolization of that market, whether it be by the Government itself or a private licensee.

As Donald Gillmore and Jerome Barron have noted in *Mass Communications Law*, "One immediate result of the *Red Lion* decision was the release of a pent-up demand for individual and group access to television. The volume of access and fairness complaints rushing into the FCC was truly remarkable." In addition to the general demand for access from groups concerned with issues ranging from cigarette smoking to the Vietnam war, the civil rights movement continued its momentum following WLBT.

At KTAL-TV in Texarkana, Texas, a petition to deny a license renewal and subsequent negotiations with the station resulted in an agreement in which "the station committed itself to hire blacks, to treat various sides of controversial issues, to provide public service announcements on the activities of black organizations, to make no unnecessary references to race, particularly in connection with crimes, and to consult continuously with all of its constituency." (Ford Foundation, 1974:15).

Widespread disruption is necessary to wring concessions from those possessing power.

After this successful negotiated settlement, the Ford Foundation gave the Office of Communications of the United Church of Christ funds to mount a large string of such challenges throughout the South. With this, the media reform movement swung into high gear.

The limits of the '70's

However, the drive for access was not to proceed much further by way of the FCC. The advances of the sixties reached limits in the early seventies. The principle of broadcaster accountability evoked by the WLBT case did not prevail in a 1975 case brought by the National Organization for Women against WRC-TV, an NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C.

In that instance, NOW monitored WRC's programming and found the station discriminatory toward women -- it withheld and distorted news about the women's rights movement, virtually excluded women from serious programming, and portrayed women primarily in domestic, romantic and nonoccupational roles.

photo by United Press International

Police use electrified cattle prods. Plaquemine, Louisiana, 1963.

But the FCC did not find these problems of representation and portrayal to be within its scope of authority. In the strain between two conflicting principles -- editorial autonomy and non-discrimination against segments of the audience -- a norm had been established. WLBT's behavior was not permissible; WRC's was.

In the battle for right of access, too, the early seventies was a time of reduced expectations. Another norm was established -- that some attention to balance in the presentation of controversial views of public importance could be required of a licensee, but that it was not mandated by the First Amendment. No right of access to broadcasting exists independent of statute, and any law requiring such access to the print media is unconstitutional.

The practice of negotiated settlements was a third area of conflict. The KTAL-TV case was the first of a series in which reform groups were able to gain greater concessions through negotiations than they would have won by prevailing at the FCC. But the stations began to complain. After the KTAL-TV case, for example, *Broadcasting* magazine editorialized, "This is legitimizing the payment of a blackmail."

Soon the FCC decided that it should regulate the entire agreements process and began to review station-citizen group settlements to make sure that they didn't "take responsibility for making public interest decisions out of the hands of a licensee." Some negotiated settlements have been voided by the FCC. Thus

another temporary opening wedge was closed.

These decisions by the FCC and the courts have made one limit quite clear. The principle of the "editorial discretion" of broadcasters is to be challenged only in the most extreme cases. The airways are seen not as a public forum but as a resource lent in exchange for behavior which is broadly accountable to the FCC.

Matters of portrayal, selection and emphasis, which are the essence of control of information, are left up to the broadcasters. The only exceptions to the policy involve the narrow enforcement of the Fairness Doctrine, the election-specific provisions of the Equal Opportunities rules and the occasional removal of a license for behavior so extreme as to be considered "discrimination" against a segment of the audience. The evolution of this policy has been the main trend at the FCC, and it is now attempting to increase even further the control of broadcasters through various attempts at "deregulation."

It is my contention that this pattern of initial victory and hope followed by limitation is *central* in the struggle between media reformers and broadcasters over the past years. This is not to ignore the gains in employment and ownership by minorities that have been made. But while these advances are valuable, as are any increases in affirmative action, I see them more as part of a general trend in employment and ownership than as a signal victory in communications.

The major issue in communications has been whether the general population has any power to hold the concentrated privately controlled media accountable -- and the outcome is that the population has very limited influence indeed. The concessions that have been offered have been trivial when contrasted to this basic societal problem.

If one subscribes to the general view that there is a loose alliance between the institutions of the media and those who control wealth and power in the society, the interesting question is how the media reform movement came as close as it did to gaining some form of popular access.

How Media Reform Evolved

The best model I have found for understanding the evolution of the media reform movement is presented by Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward in their book, *Poor People's Movements.* It is appropriate to include media reform in this class of movements, usually populated by such struggles as the labor, civil rights and welfare rights movements, because the recent history of media reform is an extension first of the civil rights movement and then of others such as the women's movement and the anti-war movement. It was within these larger political contexts that decisions about media reform were made.

illustration courtesy IDOC

The Piven and Cloward model posits that the normal channels of political participation do not allow for satisfying poor people's needs. In most historical periods "an elaborate system of beliefs and ritual behaviors," often referred to as culture or superstructure, reinforces inequality and discourages rebellion. But when the conditions of the society change rapidly in a way that destabilizes the lives of large numbers of people, the controlling influence of the culture breaks down. Then, some turn to disruption in the service of their demands.

Normally, those choosing disruption form relatively small and isolated groups. In this case the government responds by ignoring the disruption or by repressing it with force. But sometimes, particularly during unstable periods, ignoring or repressing the dissidents risks spreading the conflict to a wider segment of the population. Government becomes particularly

concerned with the possibility of losing its own legitimacy and therefore it chooses to make concessions.

The concessions it makes, however, are the result of a process of negotiation and cooptation. The goal and the usual outcome is that mass support for the movement declines, militants are made to seem unreasonable in light of the concessions, and other groups, jealous of the advances made by the protesters, often form some kind of "backlash."

Meanwhile, the formal organizations which have developed to represent the mass movement often become agents for managing the return of protest to the more usual forms of participation. A period may follow when some of the concessions are withdrawn, while those which are discovered to serve a useful purpose in maintaining the new status quo -- such as labor unions enforcing plant discipline -- remain.

One of Piven and Cloward's central theses is that widespread disruption is necessary to wring concessions from those possessing political and economic power. In contrast to the "organizing" model, in which discontent leads to the formation of bureaucratic groups which focus the power of the oppressed, Piven and Cloward maintain that the greatest concessions are usually gained *before* these groups achieve official status. A major error, they believe, has been to credit the victories of disruption to formal organizations such as labor unions, civil rights organizations or welfare rights groups.

The early success of media reform organizations occurred because of the disruptive power of the civil rights, anti-war and women's movements. In order to bring the debate into official channels, government and foundations provided entree and funding to new national media organizations with expert staffs.

These groups translated the potential power of the movements into a set of government policies. The policies were vague, requiring great amounts of negotiation and expertise to work out their concrete results. Especially with the general decline in "movement" activity, a widening gulf opened up between the national organizations and the grassroots supporters who had been the source of their power. Then, as the credibility of "the myth of the marching millions" declined, the power of the media reform groups also shrunk.

The organizations developed to represent the movement often manage its return to the more usual forms of participation.

What remained? First, through the procedural opportunities that had been won, groups retained a foothold for interaction. There is still some leverage from the ability to mount license challenges, for example.

Second, the groups posed the threat of further undermining broadcasters' and policymakers' credibility by publicizing violations of the rhetorical commitments they had made.

Finally, to the extent that they maintained any connections with the grassroots, media reformers served as bellwethers of possible adverse opinion about proposed policies.

What was lacking, however, was the basic political power to put media reform's priorities high on the policy agenda, except when its concerns overlapped with general drives, such as for affirmative action. Moreover, the simple survival of the media reform groups came to depend on the continuing largesse of foundations or on various government schemes for reimbursement or funding of participation. This led to greater concern about maintaining legitimacy with funders and policymakers -- with corresponding changes in organizational agendas.

illustration courtesy IDOC

It is important to stress that it was not merely the decline in activism that isolated the national media reform organizations. It was also the acceptance of procedural ground rules as the price for entree into the policymaking system. These rules bound groups to undertaking time-consuming processes which made it impossible to deliver victories at the pace widespread public enthusiasm demanded. What grassroots organization can wait three or four years for the FCC staff to bring an issue to the Commission?

Further, the terms of debate became arcane. In the act of explaining legal approaches, media reformers found themselves sounding like FCC bureaucrats. They had trouble finding a fit between their gut concerns and the terms in which issues had to be brought to the FCC to gain a hearing.

When telecommunications policy became a crucial area, media reform groups were unable to keep expanded access part of the debate. The focus shifted to considerations of how policy could be developed to aid the floundering economy by supporting the telecommunications industry. Media reformers become consultants in this discussion.

Media Reform Today

What should the media reform groups do now? First of all, they should realize that popular control of content in the media is not going to be achieved through the legal and regulatory process in the current political situation. The initiatives in this direction that began with the idea of "access as a First Amendment right" and with the WLBT case are finished.

Second, to the extent that media reformers wish to reconnect to their sources of popular support, they must ally themselves with groups seeking substantive changes in society. They could, for example, advise the anti-nuclear or anti-abortion movements on matters of mass communications law and publicity.

Third, some hit-and-run tactics such as attempting to get funds from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for independent producers may make sense. The aim is fairly concrete and the institutional terrain is more favorable than that of a general shotgun attempt at more access. The limited popular support possible for such an issue may be compensated by the intensity of the involvement of those who have a direct financial stake in the matter.

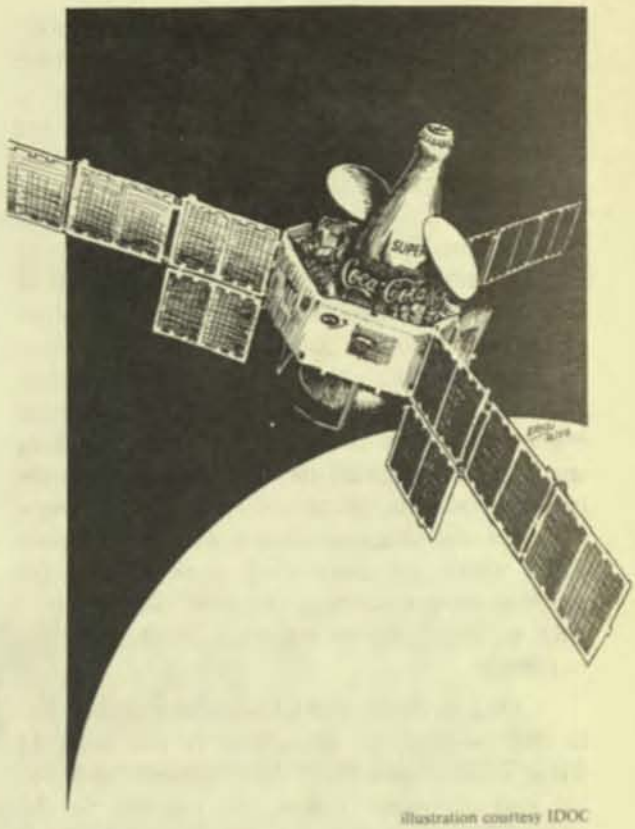


illustration courtesy IDOC

Finally, media reform groups could spend some time studying the needs of individuals and groups for new kinds of communications technology. New telecommunications technologies offer the promise of better ways to communicate and organize, but they could also become just like all the "old" technologies in the corporately controlled system that media reform groups have been trying to change.

So far, the typical approach has been to advocate policies, such as FCC requirements for cable access channels, to provide general structures within which new public uses of technology could evolve. But without a clear understanding of people's communications needs, these structures often remain empty of participation and eventually fold under industry pressure. Until these new public uses have an active and enthusiastic constituency among the population at large we cannot expect them to survive.

Achieving this means tying policies for communications systems with short-range rewards for users. If media reform groups are to assist in bringing this about they must become closer to these users and their needs, rather than becoming technology-centered and policy-centered. In issues of new technology as well, then, the best thing media reform groups can do is to get closer to the grassroots,

perhaps through the kind of consultant-advocate relationship suggested above.

What Not to Do Next

Now that Reagan is president, the current against access, accountability and democracy in communications has turned into a tidal wave. How can we fight back? We must use what we have learned. What principles can we draw from the evolution outlined above? Here is the beginning of a list.

1. Stop trying to challenge editorial autonomy.

The court battles of recent years have made it completely clear that this approach doesn't work. Instead of trying to force editors to grant us access, we have to persuade them.

2. Stop trying to change the media through government.

On all but the most trivial issues, the government has refused to take significant action. Even when liberals were in control, the main consequence of working through government channels was the cooptation of the media reform movement and its isolation from the broader movements that gave it strength.

3. Stop trying to organize an independent media reform movement.

As NCCB's failure to support itself through mass membership makes clear, media reform for its own sake is a very difficult issue around which to organize. As the old media reform saying goes, "The media is everybody's second issue." People get angry about the media when they see themselves and their own issues being distorted.

Moreover, dealing with the media in isolation leads to structure-oriented and technology-oriented thinking that minimizes the basic conflicts in society. Too often, we end up with utopian schemes for access or cooperative ownership that go nowhere because they find no strong constituency.

4. Don't accept foundation support you can't afford to lose.

Big foundations try to be more flexible than the government in adapting to new social problems. But their basic goal is to find harmonious solutions in keeping with the gradual evolution of the status quo. So their agendas change as different hot spots flare up. The result is the "minority of the year" phenomenon: blacks, then Latinos, then women, then the disabled, then senior citizens. Efforts to meet funding criteria set outside the movement almost always lead to floundering. Much better to work at the level of the grassroots movement whose substantive goals persist from year to year.

5. Don't adopt the government's rhetoric.

It is tempting to use words like "reform" and "the public interest" in an attempt to gain legitimacy and entree to regulatory proceedings. But the result is a loss of the oppositional stance that gave the movement its power in the first place.

6. Don't ignore partisan politics.

The Reagan election has forced community organizers all over the country to realize that while they were setting up co-ops and special interest lobbies, the right was organizing voters. The right is in no way embarrassed about being both explicitly conservative and concerned about communications. We must do the same. We must decide on our basic societal goals and work toward them, both in special interest organizing and in broader politics. The magnitude of this problem dwarfs the specifics of changing the media. Failing to go beyond coalitions around issues abandons the territory of broader politics to the right.

These six principles are based on an examination of the history of media reform. I feel they are part of what we can learn from our own mistakes. But we can also learn from areas in which we have not yet acted.

Reforming the New Media

While we have been trying to change the media, a new information environment has come upon us. We now have to help our constituencies deal with the computerization and electronic networking of the world.

The traditional constituencies of the media reform movement are already being squeezed by expanding corporate use of the new information technologies. For labor, the application of robotics creates unemployment and the regimentation of the workplace. Protest movements are being put under more efficient surveillance. Poor people are facing new barriers to credit and new communication costs as the telecommunications industry gears up to serve the corporate user at the most competitive price.

We are used to thinking about communications as a process by which we deal with conflicts in society. But it is becoming the terrain on which those conflicts -- be they of class, race, sex or nationality -- will be decided. o

Where Were You When the Spit Hit the Fan?

by J. Punk

When the mode of the music changes,
the walls of the city shake.

Martha and the Muffins.

You don't need a stethoscope to hear them walls shakin'. In San Francisco, for example, punk/wave bands played at a club for deaf people and were received rather well. The music was so loud the deaf folks could feel it coming through their eyes, no doubt. Once again parents have something to scream about and kids have an energetic music that they know drives adults up the walls. But is it new? Billy Joel isn't the only one that's confused about rock'n'roll these days. I'm not so sure about it all myself.

The current wave first gained a following in New York about 1975. A little club on the Bowery called CBGB opened up with the intention of presenting traditional american music. Country, blue grass, blues. Legend has it that Tom Verlaine was walking by one day on the way to a rehearsal of his band, Television. He saw the club and asked the owner if Television could play there. The club's owner said yes, and before you could say black leather jacket, he was up to his ears in rock'n'roll bands.

Glam rock was on the way out back then, and the critics were tired of heavy metal morons jerking themselves off at 96 decibels. The CBGB bands were like a breath of fresh air, if what they breathe in New York is air at all, but that's beside the point. The first wave in the new music included Patti Smith, Mink DeVille, The Shirts, Tuff Darts, Laughing Dogs, Blondie and of course da Ramones, all of whom have gone on to fame and some kind of fortune.

In winter of '75 da Ramones went to England to play a few dates. Within weeks, everyone who could hold a guitar was pounding out three-chord pop ditties, forming a band and spitting at the audience. Some British establishment types sneered at the bands' amateur enthusiasm in print, calling them "punks," and punk rock was born.

J. Punk, who is usually known as J. Poet, is a Berkeley free-lance poet, writer, and music critic. For another view of the punk music scene, see **"The Boy Looked at Johnny" : the Obituary of Rock and Roll,** by Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons (Pluto Press, 1978).

photo by Nancy Nadel / courtesy East Bay Express

The U.S. version of punk/wave was fairly tame. Except for a few people with artistic pretensions like Patti Smith and Tom Verlaine, the music was entertainment, not art or social protest. Not so in England, where things are a bit grimmer. The British bands took da Ramones' breakneck rhythms a step further, added lyrics with lots of social content, and began to affect bizarre dress and hair styles. In early '76, the Sex Pistols came on the scene and the rest is history.

Rock became dangerous again, to some extent. It was hip to be socially aware again, after almost six years of rampant what's-in-it-for-me-ism.

At first the record companies licked their chops. The Next Big Thing had arrived. In New York and London almost any band that played short fast songs got signed. But the majors probably didn't bargain for Johnny Rotten.

Rotten and company cussed on TV, threw up on little old ladies and coined the words "boring old farts," (which pertained to any record recorded before 1976.) They made exciting music. Rotten's demented laughter on the beginning of "Anarchy in the U.K." sent chills down millions of backs, and sent another million kids running for guitars and basses.

Lots of people couldn't understand what was going down, even people who had been politically active themselves. When The Clash sang "Hate and War" some asked why they were so negative. "Take a look around you!" was the answer.

Of course, the majority of people, including musicians, don't want to take a look. Right from the beginning the "movement" split into four rough categories: pure pop, the usual pap that reinforces society's standards; art rock, more consciously "poetic" and oftentimes pretentious; political punk, similar to the protest songs of the '60's but much more politically aware and pessimistic; and nihilistic punk, loud, vicious outpourings of "anger" that tend to reiterate the worst sexist, racist, capitalist cliches under the guise of being "revolutionary."

For the sake of this article you can chuck category one into the trash pile. Pop music is always commercially viable to some extent and these bands are looking for major deals with big record companies. They're the ones who say, "What's new wave? We're not new wave, we just play rock'n'roll." If the major labels decide "new wave" is the next big thing, these guys and gals will all be screaming, "We're new wave, we were new wave before you were new wave!"

The arty, political and hard core punks realized that they didn't have a chance to get anything resembling a record contract, and with certain exceptions they were right. This has led to more and more of these bands putting out their own records on their own labels. The last two years have seen the greatest outpouring of independent labels in the history of rock. Anybody with a song and a few hundred bucks can manage to cut a record and foist it off on the public.

Sometimes these self-made records have led to major recording deals, but usually the bands have an anti-commercial attitude which presents them with a common conflict. At this point in history the revolution hasta make a profit or it will fade away. So how does one make an anti-commercial record commercially viable?

One group of people handling this question is the Rough Trade Collective. Rough

Trade started out in February '76 as a record store and one of the first places in England where one could go to hang out with punks and swap band personnel. Later they were the first to sell the new spate of independent singles coming out almost daily. As their reputation spread they began to distribute the new singles to other stores. Slowly they began to build a network of new wave/punk stores in England and western Europe, and recently they opened an office in the Bay Area to serve the growing anti-commercial network in the colonies. They will help almost any band get its record into distribution, provided the songs aren't, in their opinion, racist or sexist.

The International Record Syndicate is a company doing something similar. IRS was started by The Police, a reggae/wave band who couldn't get signed in England. They put out a song called "Roxanne" on their own "Illegal Records" label, which did well enough to get them a deal with A&M records.

IRS used their influence with A&M to get them to start a shoestring distribution network to put punk/wave singles, ep's and albums into "reputable" stores. It is interesting to note that both IRS and Rough Trade have yet to lose money on anything they've distributed. It would seem there must be quite a few people out there who aren't getting their needs met by middle-of-the-road radio stations. For the first time in quite a while I'm getting optimistic about popular music.

Perhaps this article has seemed a bit diffuse so far. Remember I'm talking about a "movement" that's been slowly growing for more than five years and it would be impossible to get into every aspect, positive or negative, without spending lots of time and hundreds of pages. So let me close by telling you a few things that I find hopeful in the new trends.

Foremost is the tenacity of the new bands. In years past the music industry has come along and co-opted and destroyed everything from rockabilly to disco, leaving the musicians no choice but to go along with it. Punk/wave has not died. Although the record companies turn a blind eye upon them, the bands persevere. Groups like Joy Division, The Slits, the Dead Kennedys have all sold substantial numbers of records without air play, without big record deals and with a minimum of (often bad) press.

The Ramones

photo by James Lee Soffer / courtesy East Bay Express

Many of the punk/wave bands are politically sophisticated. They aren't painting pictures in black/white, good guy/bad guy terms. They have realized that things aren't going to change overnight and they're digging in for a long stay in the trenches. Like the people at Rough Trade and IRS they know that the only way to go is a slow steady change. Becoming a million-selling artist isn't going to change anything necessarily.

The combination of feminism and punk on the consciousness of women has resulted in more women than ever before joining and leading bands. I'm not talking about yer traditional sex object fluffheads like Blondie and Pat Spandex either. Groups like the Slits, Martha and the Muffins, Pretenders, and Girl School are presenting the image of human beings who happen to be women, not "girl group" stereotypes who lull the masses with the hidden message that nothing's changed.

In England, reggae has a big cult following among white musicians. In the U.S. bands like The Police, The Specials and Bob Marley's Wailers have made inroads with the reggae and reggae-influenced sounds. As disco died, or moved on to the shopping malls, its rhythms and beat have been absorbed by the European pop/wave people to the extent that it's now OK again to make uptempo danceable music. In short, black and white forms of music are moving together again. Punk/funk bands are proliferating and maybe we're about to see the end of de facto segregation in pop music.

Last but not least is the burgeoning tendency towards intelligent lyrics. Despite press to the contrary, even the lyrics of most '60's songs were politically naive and simplistic. Now we are entering a time when even the average grammar school child is aware of the social, economic and spiritual problems that confront us. Sophistication is the word and even the songwriters are beginning to explore nuance without pounding you over the head.

One of the first bands of the new wave to break through to mass appeal was the Talking Heads, a band known for their integrity and intelligence. When their leader David Byrne was asked about the band's appeal, he said, "I think the American people are a lot smarter than the record companies think they are." o

The Slits *Punk Rock* / Virginia Boston

Memo from Mercury:

Information Technology *is* Different

by Gordon B. Thompson

The new is usually perceived in terms of the old. Just as in the early days of the railway, when the engines were called "iron horses," so we have named computers in a way that suggests that they are merely some kind of number cruncher. With good communications, the computer becomes something new and very powerful. This combination which is without precedent, is the basis of a new technology, the son of industrial technology from whence it grew. Like a son, it can be developed to be just like its father, or it can be encouraged to achieve its own unique potential. . .

Why is it that our economy seems so moribund in the presence of a new technology of such potential? Successful industrial economies the world over are experiencing deeply rooted problems [that can't be solved] with further intensifications of industrial technology. The structural shift in these economies towards an information base and the emergence of information technology have not been accompanied by anything like the. . . socio-economic breakthroughs that might be expected of it. Unlike its industrial antecedent, information technology has not produced a period of rising real wages in the presence of rising costs. [In fact] this technology may exacerbating existing economic problems.

Innovative applications of information technology that are wealth creating and socially beneficial seem to be constrained from occurring. Our centuries-old experience with the trade of hard goods, our dedication to industrial technology and our poor understanding of wealth creation seem to be among the constraints. . .

Massive production and consumption of identical products for each consumer characterize the book industry, the record industry and the television and film industries. The potentially important and new aspect of information technology has little to do with this. . . concept.

Unfortunately, the full significance of this important differentiation has not been widely perceived. As a result, the potential of services where the output delivered to the user is personalized and tailored to suit his own particular characteristics and needs is ignored, and attention is directed towards those information activities that either support or mimic the industrial technology era.

Information frequently fits the "public good" classification of conventional economics, where the marginal cost of adding another consumer, even if he is a "freebie," is zero; and such a consumer does not reduce the quantity available to the other users. Once produced, public goods have a marginal cost equal to zero.

In the economic sense, the public or private state of a good is usually thought to be a property of the good itself. Information technology has a surprise for us. Two information-retrieval systems for the home market can be described that would at first glance appear to differ only in technical details. They can contain exactly the same content, but the content in one case acts as a public good and in the other case as a private good. Both of these systems exist today as market trials in Great Britain. The first is Teletext, a broadcast-type system that transmits its entire library sequentially, piggybacked onto regular television services broadcast either over the air or along a CATV cable. The desired parcels of information are snatched up by the Teletext receiver and

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This article is an excerpt from chapters four and five of a 62-page pamphlet available from its publishers, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2149 Mackay St., Montreal, Quebec H3G 2J2.

Gordon Thompson is an engineer with Bell Northern Research who frequently writes on the relationship between information technology and society.

displayed on the screen of the user's television. The underlying network structure is that of a one-way broadcasting service. The name Teletext is a generic term for the class of systems of which the British Broadcasting System's Ceefax was a prototype.

The alternative, Videotex, delivers the requested information via the switched telephone network to the Videotex receiver, where the data are formatted for display on the user's television screen. Here the underlying network is the complex, mesh-like one of the telephone. Again, the name is a generic term. In this instance, the British Post Office's Prestel (originally Viewdata) is the prototypical example.

In theory, the content for these two systems could be identical. The user's control boxes could be similar. The organization of the information in the systems could be identical, hierarchical and menu-ordered, for example. The billing in the Videotex case would be simple, immediate and accurate, because it would be done in a manner resembling that employed for the calculation of long-distance telephone calls.

The Teletext-type system has problems with billing, precisely because it has forced the content into being a public good. By presenting the entire library as a giant "information smorgasbord," Teletext has neither control nor record of who chose what from that smorgasbord. The only way billing can be accomplished, beyond some flat-rate formula, is for the user's equipment to also be the record keeper. Periodically, the user's records would be collected and a bill prepared. A number of schemes have been proposed for accomplishing this, each adding costs [that] are externalities imposed by trying to operate a market in a public good. . .

In the Videotex-type system content behaves like a classical private good. Since all users enter the system via an interface with a computer, it is an easy matter to deny service to non-eligible users. Furthermore, adding additional users entails enlarging the user interface facilities of the computers used in the system, and so marginal users rival bona fide users for service. Since the properties of exclusivity and rivalry are present, the system offers its

content as a private good, not as a public one. Theoretically, this opens the way for the establishment of a proper market. . .

Markets never run for free. There is always a cost. Here, in the example of Teletext and Videotex, we have the cheap technological solution of Teletext that creates externalities, and the rather more expensive Videotex-type system that does not need to generate the externalities at all if the billing is done properly. The question becomes whether to invest in a cheaper system and suffer the continuing externalities, or to invest somewhat more in the first place and avoid them. . .

Beyond this "cost of operating a market" argument lies the cost to the society of underencouraging its potential contributors, of underproducing quality content, and so of limiting the value of the whole enterprise because of the arbitrary decisions that operation of public goods market always involves. Because we have no real idea of the potential magnitude of this cost, we had best be careful, for it could be the significant item in the equation. This could be where the real wealth creation is buried in the information society. . .

Information technology's greatest potential is an ever-improving, mesh-like network linking us together in rich, complex and supportive ways. The socio-economic consequences of choosing to develop the new information services on an inadequate network structure could virtually eliminate the opportunity to establish a meaningful, wealth-creating information society smoothly evolved from our present state.

An information market-place ideally should allow anyone to offer ethereal goods, or information, for sale. The fact that information is a somewhat recalcitrant economic good means that a complex and intelligent market-place will be required. . . The simplistic view that any universally available information-retrieval system would solve the problem is just that -- simplistic. For a market place to function efficiently, it must deal in goods that behave principally as private goods. The particular distribution mechanism supporting the information market-place must be wisely chosen, for there are cost-attractive systems that will not allow their information content to behave as a private good. . .

Attention may be an information-related commodity that is sufficiently rare as to warrant allocation via a market. If so, then an information market-place should accommodate both a mode of operation where attention is traded and another for information. It is unlikely that there is any significant middle ground, for indifference is certainly not a rare resource, and clearly no technological aids to the production of indifference are required.

The reward given to successful contributors to an information market-place can be viewed as a form of attention. Certainly, authorship rewards are likely to be rather scarce and require careful allocation. This approach would reward most that author who succeeds in providing the material that is used the most. Perfectly conventional, so far.

Consumers would be charged a flat rate for unlimited access to this sector of the system, for their attention is the good that is exchanged, with the authors competing for it. This treatment would generate the most revenue for the more popular contributors.

Less popular and more specialized contributors would be found in the "pay for what you get" section of the system. Here, the cost per page will be considerably higher than in the other section. The contributor must decide whether to place his material in the low-price,

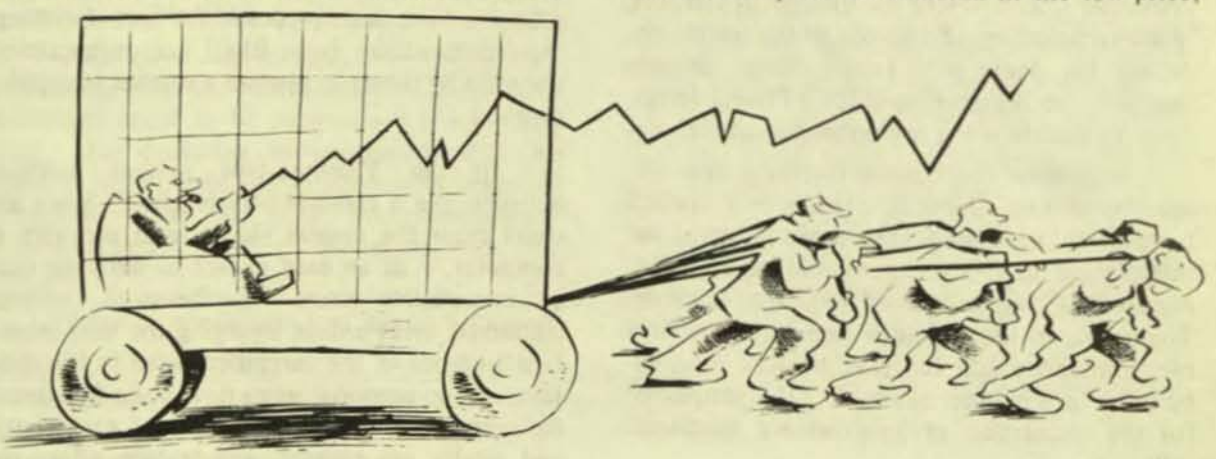


illustration by J.F. Batellier

heavy-use category or in the high-price, low-use one. Storage charges for content would be adjusted to maintain a reasonable balance, with charges for the high-price, low-use sector being quite low compared to the other sector.

In the low-price, heavy-use sector, the total revenue available to all the contributors is fixed at the total of the flat rate fees collected from all users. In the other sector, the pot size is a function of the user activity. In the first sector, the contributor's objective is to win revenue away from other contributors, while in the second sector, the objective is to win revenue from the individual users.

The resulting content will likely be quite different in the two sectors. . . As time goes by, the interesting and economically significant material is likely to emerge in the high-price, low use sector.

Since a market-place requires information about the products that are being traded, there is a requirement for information about information. This can never be "perfect" in the economist's sense, for if it were there would be no need for the end-product. Information about information will have some of the aspects of advertising. Since it must protect the information being offered, and yet generate demand, great skill will be required. It must match both the consumer and the product, and hence may be just as varied and user specific as the information itself.

The entrepreneur who can develop cataloguing information about a chemical data base, for example, in terms that electrical engineers can manage, stands to benefit from its use, as does the purveyor of the more specific original data base. This role resembles in some ways the role of broker or retailer in conventional trading relationships. . .

[In today's market,] General Motors "appoints" dealers to supply information about their new cars and otherwise assist potential customers in coming to the "correct" decision. This structure can be maintained so long as General Motors restricts the set of customers with which it will deal directly. In an information market-place, "General Information Corporation" would not so restrict its trading. The information market-place would feature an automatic accounting facility that makes the handling of a multitude of minuscule transactions as easy as the handling of a single large transaction. This removes the necessity of hierarchical distribution networks. . .

Independent entrepreneurs, having a full acquaintance with General Information's products, would offer proprietary indexing and search routines better suited to the unique needs of particular customer groups. If such an entrepreneur did a better job than General Information in terms of matching the product descriptions and indexing structures to the needs of particular users, he could expect to earn a revenue from the use of his service. . .

McDonald's "Infoburger" is already available on our news stands.

The brain is infinitely more complex than the stomach. It is relatively easy to assemble a list of things that have broadly perceived high utility for serving the needs of the relatively simple stomach. Individual tastes are easily accounted for through the inclusion of a minor degree of choice in the menu offered at a restaurant, for example. . . Taste for brain food is far more individualistic than taste for stomach food. . . A given information package will appeal to only a few individuals, and many such packages must be prepared to give a collection of information any utility to a user population. No simple menu will suffice. McDonald's "Infoburger" is already available on our news stands. No new technology is needed for this market.

The intellect. . . will require a rich fare indeed, even individually tailored, if information is to be the new good that is sold in a technologically sophisticated information marketplace that serves needs beyond those now served by news stands and conventional libraries. This rich demand and the resulting rich supply situation will lead to the emergence of information brokers. . . Authorship will likely evolve into an activity that is widely diffused throughout the population. General Information would inhabit the high-usage, low-price sector of the split system, while the richer, more complex fare would develop in the other sector. . .

The pluralism that is inherent in the information marketplace is an important key to overcoming the little understood constraints that appear to be inhibiting the application of new technology in both socially and economically beneficial ways. The challenge is to develop infrastructures required to make an information market-place develop and prosper. o

Dear Mercury:

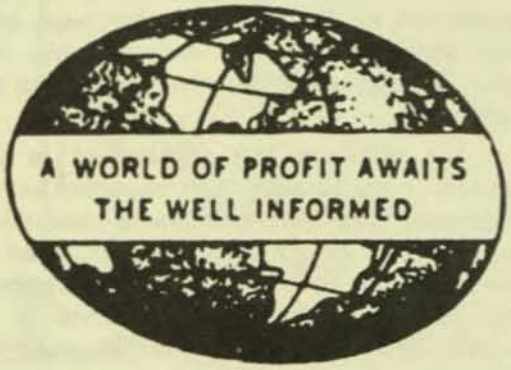
Information is More Different than You Think

by Michael Goldhaber

Gordon Thompson is correct: new communications technology does make possible a new and desirable social order. He is right (if redundant) about the potential for "an ever improving mesh-like network linking us together in rich, complex and supportive ways." He is right that information makes a poor commodity (in his words, it's a "public good") in that under normal circumstances its price tends to zero. But he ignores the implications of these points and proposes, in my opinion, merely an expensive way to make sure there is no new social order.

For thousands of years the major human activity, dominant in all societies, was the production and consumption of food -- mostly in small family or community units. For the past century or so, the industrial production of commodities of all sorts for the market has become dominant. The development of new technology now means that in the not-too-distant future the dominant activity may become the creation, transmission, pursuit, contemplation and use of information.

Such an information society could be a vast improvement for several reasons. First of all, it's easy to reproduce information at negligible material cost. So there would be no need for scarcity -- either real or artificial. Everyone could have all the information they wanted without depriving anyone else. With the free and unlimited exchange of information -- including knowledge, ideas, even fantasies -- the possibility of real democratic control over the whole complex of social decisions emerges.



Most importantly, a whole new level of social interaction becomes possible. Instead of interacting with others only through the "cash nexus" of buying and selling and earning wages, each person can be part of a complex and free-flowing conversation, where each bit of dialogue will be between mutually interested participants.

When information is received it is also created, because it is interpreted and ordered according to each person's prior information and current needs and ideas. In a dialogue, commerce -- paying a money price -- is replaced with something much better. The creator of information who expresses something needs and usually wants in return acknowledgement, response, criticism, suggestions and questions. In other words, as Thompson rather confusingly puts it, the provider of information wants something rare -- attention, both passive and active.

So a dialogue can be an equitable exchange without each person having to make sure they get goods of equal monetary value. An information society transcends the marketplace and many of the ills of the market: production for profit rather than to meet wants, corruption, planned obsolescence, unemployment, poverty, economic insecurity, monopoly power, alienated labor. All these are inevitable by-products of a market economy. Surely we should look toward overcoming them, not toward perpetuating them.

At present much information is produced for a market by consultants, computer software companies, the media, educational institutions and so on. Even attention is sold, in forms such as advertising time and psychiatry. But there is enough non-market exchange of information to make its superiority clear. For example, libraries, bulletin boards, public meetings,

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coffee houses and non-commercial radio are places where information is available to all for free.

Thompson writes as if there were no alternative to a market economy. Perhaps he hasn't thought of any. Thus he uses the language of classical economics -- "marginal utility," "private goods," "public goods," etc. -- as if these were eternally necessary concepts. In fact they became important only in historically recent times and there is no reason to believe they are adequate for all reasonable futures.

It ought to be clear that if Thompson's ideas worked, his expensive system would restrict information to those who can already afford it. It would unnecessarily perpetuate inequality. But as he describes it, his system can't work. If some "entrepreneur" tries to sell information at a certain price, nothing will prevent another "entrepreneur" from slightly rearranging the same material and selling at a lower price. A "free" market of information implies free information. Only a highly artificial, well-policed monopoly system can prevent that in the long run.

Whether the new technology fulfills its promise or gives us a police state of regulated reproduction of information is a political question. Only by recognizing the possibilities do we have a chance of choosing between these futures. By ignoring the option of a non-market society, Thompson illustrates how the current controllers of information engage in this politics.

The road to a new social order may be a rocky one but the beauty of the information society model is that the politics of getting there should and can be consistent with the goal. Disciplined and centralized parties or armies are not the way to move toward decentralized democracy; access to the new information technology also makes them unnecessary for political struggle.

Probably some variant of what Thompson proposes will be built in the next few years. Precursors exist already. But the inherent weaknesses of systems like Thompson's can make fertile ground for political discussion and can point the way to their transformation to a non-market system.

Such a discussion ought to take into account as well that higher and higher productivity means fewer people will have to work at producing our material necessities. Will most people be relegated to unemployment or low status on welfare, or will society be restructured so that goods may be shared? In the latter case, everyone would be equally free to develop their creative abilities and contribute to the information network. The absence of a market would not have to mean that "authors" would starve; they would all be able to pursue their communicative and creative urges independent of concerns about making a living.

In putting forward this vision in contrast to Thompson's, I don't want to suggest that a non-market information-centered society would have no problems. In fact there are several potential rough spots that bother me. But it does seem that in such a society, institutional barriers to desirable changes would be considerably weakened.

The challenge of the new information technology is not to fit it into the mold of a market economy but rather to free it -- and maybe us in the process -- from the constraints of market forces. The challenge is to clarify and extend the options of transcending the market which the new technology allows. Both by example on a small scale and by analysis over the next few years, those of us who are moved by this vision can make it a real and understandable possibility for the public at large. I think it will prove to be overwhelmingly desirable. o

Are Neighborhoods Obsolete?

by Terry Hoffer

The spatial patterns of American cities are going to become more diverse and more space consuming than any we've known in the past -- no matter what urban sociologists, land use planners or politicians try to do about it.

The concept of the "neighborhood unit", which was a model first described over 50 years ago, should be examined for its appropriateness to the modern social setting. The change in the pace and the scale of human interaction from that of the agrarian past to that of the present is such that long standing traditions in city planning can no longer be taken for granted.

In the past, the ideas of region, city, and neighborhood have been inextricably tied to the idea of *place*. Each was perceived to have a distinct pace, scale, and pattern of social organization with a definable geographical area necessary to its existence. In view of the difficulties and costs of communicating and traveling more than short distances, the region, city, or neighborhood was dependent on long-established traditions of face-to-face contact in the network of family, work and social relationships.

Today, however, the human social experience is radically different from that of the past. Where cultural values had been centralized within the confines of place they tend now to be decentralized, characterized not by continuous spatial relationships but by the limitations of accessibility. In industrialized western society, the individual who does not have access to private or public transportation and part of the spectrum of communications devices (telephone, telegraph, teletype, radio, television) is the exception. As a result, the networks of interaction among individuals and various groups are becoming functionally intricate and more spatially widespread than any of the past.

Old symbols of urban order, based upon distinct geographical units, are giving way to emerging systems of social organization which are reducing the value of such concepts. Today, when human experience is extending so far and at so rapid a rate, it is clear that city planners should not waste their time reinforcing the dimensions of nonexistent places.

City planners are still trying to fit modern systems into pre-modern molds.

Until recently, it has seemed that city planners have been bound by traditional perceptions of the social order. Substantive theory for city planning has been at a minimum. Data banks have contained relatively little information relevant to modern urbanism. Citizen consciousness has only recently begun to accept planning as something other than the loss of rights and privileges. With proper recognition of the new social structure, which has limits defined by accessibility rather than by geographic boundaries, planners will seek growth management strategies that will permit greater human interaction as well as the protection of existing valuable resources.

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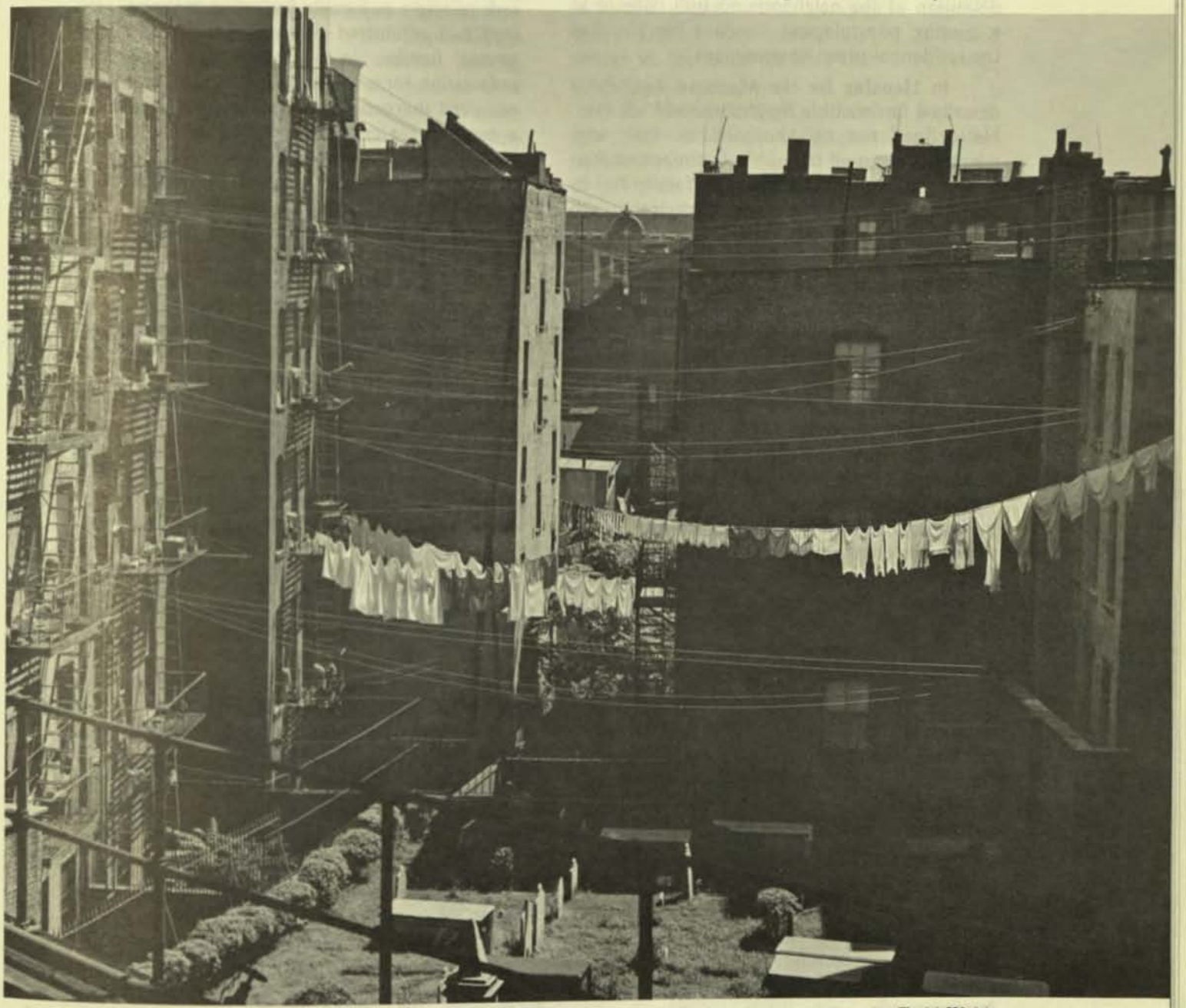
The neighborhood concept

By the end of the nineteenth century American philosophers and sociologists concurred that wildfire population growth centers bred disease, crime, and delinquency, housing stock unfit for human occupancy, lack of political representation, and loss of human identity. Compared to the peace and space of the rural settings that many new residents remembered from their recent past, the rapidly growing cities were foul indeed.

The response, for all who could afford it, was flight to the suburbs. Open space, light, air, safety, and the opportunity for self government were the main attractions. However, it was only a matter of time before those idyllic suburbs were little better than the original nucleus, since they had been created without control over physical design or appropriateness.

In Great Britain, where a similar situation occurred, Ebenezer Howard suggested a planned solution emphasizing the town and country relationship. His "garden city" was designed for healthy living and industry, with a population ceiling to allow a full measure of social life while preventing overcrowding.

American reformers were concerned not only with healthy living but also with political



View from Chatham Square El Station, New York, 1946. photo by Todd Webb

representation. They sought to revive "Jeffersonian democracy." For example, sociologist and social reformer Jacob Riis proposed solutions to city problems through alternatives to tenement houses. Community centers and settlement houses were advocated, as were the organization of citizen committees, public planning commissions, and zoning laws. Terms such as City Beautiful, City Efficient, or the all inclusive City Improvement were all used, but the universal emphasis was on order and the development of some sort of pattern in the urban area. In 1923 Clarence Perry, an early worker in the American community center movement proposed the now traditional definition of the neighborhood unit concept as a guiding principle and standard for planning the residential urban environment.

In **Housing for the Machine Age,** Perry described in detail his Neighborhood Unit Plan. He defined the neighborhood as "the area which embraces all the public facilities and conditions required by the average family for its comfort and proper development within the vicinity of the dwelling." Perry had studied the success of the British town-country development and sought to design similar self-contained units for healthy living. Perry was familiar with the small, American, rural villages with their family traditions, a common way of life, a closed network of work, family and social relations, and a common destiny where neighboring was a byproduct of life itself. Personal interdependence resulted in loyalties far stronger than any produced through even personal friendship. If neighborhood units could be determined and spatially designated in the sprawling city, the alienation or sense of powerlessness that an individual supposedly felt in the city could be avoided.

Characteristics of the neighborhood

In the ensuing years, the implied characteristics of the neighborhood unit remained essentially unchanged in city planning doctrine: child centeredness and preference for child rearing families; homogeneity in the interests and tastes of residents; an elementary school as an institutional nucleus of the community; pedestrian access to the community's facilities; common open spaces for recreation; privacy; and active participation in the local civic arena with the community group maintaining respected representation in the larger political bureaucracy.

The assumptions that a "neighborhood unit" structure 1) IS conducive to optimum family and child development; 2) DOES further citizen interaction and community participation; 3) IS functionally adequate and able to contain most daily activities; and 4) that the activity patterns and social interaction for which the neighborhood was intended in 1923 is the one desired and carried on by the majority of households, remained at the center of city planning doctrines and have gone largely unchallenged for nearly half a century.

It was not until 1948 that one Reginald Isaacs, planning director at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago, attacked the neighborhood unit principle as a guide for urban planning. His staff had conducted thorough activity analyses among families in Chicago's south side in preparation for a redevelopment plan there. He criticized the notion of a self contained unit as a panacea for emerging social disorganization. How, he asked, in the light of a typical family's daily activities, can a physically or socially defined cellular framework be superimposed on the city with any intention of including all the "facilities and conditions" required for that family's development? The very nature of the metropolitan region led him to believe that the neighborhood concept was an improbability and that where such neighborhoods were attempted the underlying motivation was socio-economic segregation ("the fear of Negro, Polish, Irish, or Jewish infiltration as a basis for developing community solidarity.") In Isaac's estimation the "neighborhood" was not a pattern toward which people naturally gravitated nor was it necessarily a desirable one in metropolitan Chicago.

In retrospect, Isaacs stands out as one of the earliest critics of accepting on good faith the heritage of planning the future from the past. Today, the wrangling continues. As neighborhood unit proponents continue to advocate normative standards of this kind, we must reconsider their environmental context and reassess their utility.

Rethinking neighborhoods

The contrast of the common image of the rural village with the modern urban social setting is distinct. Urban populations are enormous. No individual can possibly know more than a small percentage of the inhabitants. Relationship by intermarriage loses its impor-

tance in the community as a whole, although it may have remaining influence in some areas. Mobility of goods and information is fast and relatively simple. Public and private transportation is available. Occupations are diverse, often specialized. Few are inherited positions. The production, distribution and consumption of goods represents a complex organization of interrelated businesses unlike that of working the land. Home has virtually no relationship to workplace and with members of the family performing different specialized functions their jobs are often spread out over the entire city.

The social hierarchy of the city is complex and impersonal. Individuals are replaced by classes and a variety of social groups. One rarely knows many people well. Opportunities for social movement are widespread and an individual is evaluated for what he is, or what he has, rather than by the status that he inherits from his family. Social control is far less effective than that of the village since face to face relationships and intimate knowledge of another's business cannot take place across a population of such size. Anonymity is more easily obtained and people not fitting the norm survive quite easily among the masses.

Obviously, the village of the past and the city of the present have little in common.

Even when the comparison is limited to the village and the urban "neighborhood" (of 5,000 individuals more or less) few similarities appear. Physically, there will be no recognizable comparisons. Even the most superficial study of social organization will reveal major differences. The urban "neighborhood" is not an entity, in and of itself, as is the village. The "neighborhood" offers only a limited range of necessary functions whereas the village provides them all.

The differences, however, are far more than merely those of size or availability of services. The key difference is the change in the pace, and the scale, and the pattern of human life.

It has been argued that those changes are perfectly clear and well understood. However, if they were well understood city planners would not still be trying to fit modern systems into premodern molds. Over time, the human social experience is a process of continuous interactions between an individual and his/her surroundings. The point in time when that individual could survive in absolute independence, free of any societal inputs, is buried deeper in the sands of time than stone chopping tools.

As the technological limits of access to other individuals, places, products, and information are approached, and human institutions and values are adjusted accordingly, the "neighborhood" seems a highly outdated concept. In view of the evidence, city planners should not continue to insist on the virtues of the "neighborhood" as a pattern of settlement and land use. Such an overriding absolute for urban spatial form is inappropriate for the requirements of the modern integrative social experience. We must look for a style of city planning that permits greater freedom for human interactions. The most difficult step (and perhaps the most important) will be to loosen the grip of deep seated doctrines from the past, resensitize ourselves to the process of change, and consider the need for alternatives and solutions in the light of a future that will be enormously different from the past. o

illustration by J.F. Battellier

Let Your Fingers Do the Talking:

The Community Computerist's Directory

by Jeff Love and Steve Pizzo

As an organization the "community computerist movement" is in its infancy. It is made up of those who believe that information is a right, not a commodity, and that advanced technology, specifically computer technology, should serve people rather than enslave them.

The availability of computer technology to the public holds great promise. Besides the ability to do repetitive chores, organize data into useful information and provide endless entertainment, the personal computer can be an information and education resource and an effective communications tool. Potentially it can give the individual the power to break out of the information-as-consumer-goods bind enforced by the mass media by allowing selective information gathering and research from the keyboard. Computers can be put to work for people-oriented projects ranging from providing needed local services to national campaigns.

Community Computerist's Directory

A few years ago owners of small personal computers formed small hobbyist groups and hardware-oriented user groups that exchanged software and kept in contact through small newsletters. They broke the ground for those of us who followed: the contact they maintained with one another was a major factor contributing to the growth of the community computerist's movement. Many of their newsletters are now national magazines still dedicated to a particular machine or area of computer applications.

The Community Computerist's Directory was conceived as a networking tool, a way of cutting through the machine orientation of the computer media and encouraging people to contact each other. The first edition was published in 1979 by Bill Hill, who runs the Library for Social and Technological Alternatives in Fairfax, California. It was a simple xeroxed collection of names and addresses and business cards of people who had attended the West Coast Computer Faire in March of that year.

Bill called it the "almost instant people index" since participants wrote in their names or pasted down their business cards and, if they wished, added some personal comments, right at the fair booth. Bill xeroxed the entry pages and sent them out to those who had made a $2.00 donation.

In August of 1980, at Bill's request, Jeff Love and Stephen Pizzo took over the Directory. The January '81 issue is a four-by-eleven inch booklet with over 200 listings in zip code order and an alphabetical index.

In preparing the issue we mailed an extensive questionnaire to computer owners throughout the U.S. and included a free listing form. We asked participants to describe their interests, services and products in detail and reproduced the forms in the Directory. The Alpha-Micro User's Society thought the Directory was such a great idea that they mailed out a thousand questionnaires to their members.

The response to the survey, although too small for statistical significance, showed a great deal of interest in sharing expertise and resources. Many people indicated a willingness to teach what they knew or to help with problems with a particular system or language. The systems listed ranged from IBM mainframes to Apples, TRS-80's and home brews.

People from many walks of life and political persuasions participated. The response was greater than we had expected and proved to us that there is indeed a need for a people-and-applications-oriented directory.

Jeff Love and Stephen Pizzo are associates in Alternet, Inc., a project developing a network of computer and information centers in Sonoma County, California.

Why a directory?

The Community Computerist's Directory is an attempt to aid the real force behind the current information revolution -- the people who are buying, using and experimenting with computers. Specifically, it is a publication dedicated to helping computerists find each other across the boundaries of machine-oriented groups and publications.

The directory can be used for finding people with similar interests, projects, information or expertise. You could find someone with a computer he or she is willing to share or someone with whom to share your system; you could find both resources to fill your needs and people who need your resources.

The telephone book gives access to all owners of phones by listing their names and phone numbers. The Community Computerist's Directory is a similar resource, but instead of names alone, each listing includes:

- Name, address, phone number
- Occupation, group affiliation
- Keywords
- List of hardware owned
- Micronet, Source or other telecommunication IDs
- 500 characters of text.

The text can include a participant's projects, interests, needs and resources, or a general statement of thoughts about the use of computers. In this way the Directory is becoming a public forum.

What's next?

The Directory is rapidly evolving into a particularly useful tool. The next edition will include a "yellow pages" section that will list products and services for small independent business people. A listing of 500 characters will cost $10.00 per issue.

The next Directory will also provide extensive cross-indexing to aid in finding who or what you need. It will be indexed not only by zip code and last name, but also by key words related to the text of the listing and the hardware owned.

Inclusion of data base ID numbers will facilitate electronic conferencing and mail between Directory subscribers. We are also planning to add lists of clubs and user groups, publications, computerized bulletin boards and whatever other useful information we can gather. We see the Directory as the glue that can hold together the rapidly expanding network of computerists. After all, what good would phones be without phone books?

We are woefully undercapitalized for this project and are struggling along with appallingly little knowledge of publishing. We would sincerely like to hear from any readers who can offer knowledge or advice in these areas. Regardless of these limitations, we are already at work on the next issue.

Copies of the January '81 Directory and entry forms for the next issue, which will be out in July '81, are available from :

The Community Computerist's Directory
P.O. Box 405
Forestville, CA 95436
ph: 707-887-1857

The cover price of the CCD is $3.50, but the January '81 issue is now available only by mail for $4.00 (including postage.) Listings for the July issue must be received by May 30. o

Free Advice on Computers

by The Community Memory Project

Lots of community groups, service groups, research organizations, and political groups either need or think they need access to computer technology. Since we here at Community Memory know a bit about the subject, we decided to constitute ourselves as an ad hoc standards/advice committee and publish this article. It isn't very detailed, but we hope it might help prevent two events which we would consider unfortunate:

1) The purchase by community groups of the "wrong" equipment and/or the "wrong" software. "Wrong" could mean either unnecessarily powerful or not powerful enough, or obsolete or soon to be obsolete.

2) A situation where everyone has different, incompatible equipment and programs. This would considerably reduce the possibilities for resource and information sharing, and force individuals and groups into unnecessarily private relations to their equipment. If, instead, we take advantage of existing industry standardization, we can not only share information and programs more easily, but we can also organize mutual aid networks, for example to share hardware repair skills and pool spare parts.

Who are we?

If it has occurred to you that the new information technologies may hold a potential for the socialization of information which is not likely to be realized within the present social context, you are right. The various corporate information utilities being developed today (e.g. Viewdata, The Source, Qube) have in common a hierarchical structure -- the few originate information, the many consume it. Such interactivity as is allowed to enter these systems is constrained to "audience response," and is usually structured to promote consumption (e.g. shopping by TV).

We are a small group of programmers, engineers, journalists and politicos who would like to see the technological potential for interactive, community-empowering and decentralized communications realized as soon as possible. We have spent a good deal of time over the last few years developing some of the software tools necessary to bring about a public access information system that we call Community Memory. As soon as we get the money together, we will be bringing up a demonstration system in the Bay Area.

We should make it clear from the start that as an organization and as a group we are about communications, not computers. All of our energy and hardware is dedicated to development and we do not provide computer services of any sort. We have an unfortunate tendency to yawn when people talk about their bookkeeping needs.

We are excited by the use of computers to make publishing and other forms of information sharing easier. We do have a lot of experi-

The Community Memory Project is a non-profit group developing a computerized community information network.

ence with computers of all sizes and shapes and are very willing to share our knowledge provided it does not prevent us from doing our main work. In fact, under pressure from our friends and our stomachs we've developed a unified information management system (to be discussed later) which we hope will be a major help to a small organization trying to work with lots of information. It will even help to do the books.

Standards

Computers are not necessarily labor saving devices. They can cost an organization a lot of work and a lot of money. They can lead to economic disasters, such as the $30,000 one that befell the Pacifica station KPFA when it moved its subscription lists from one computer system to another. The best way to optimize the use of computers is through the sharing of expertise, hardware, programs and data. Via time-sharing or data centers the use of a computer and its keepers can be easily shared among a number of organizations. This is standard practice for businesses.

However, the use of smaller "personal" computers is frequently organizationally easier. In this realm sharing depends upon standards, upon everyone doing things in a common, compatible manner.

Standard hardware means that when your machine breaks (as it will) you know whom to borrow from and where to get the box of junk fixed. Standard operating systems mean that you can use the pretty package they developed down the street without investing half a person-year into rewriting it.

Carefully chosen **programming languages,** though not necessarily standard, mean that programs you create can be used by others even though they do not have compatible hardware or operating systems. A standard programming language means that the work of developing large programs and systems can be divided among many organizations and that old work can easily be reused in new projects.

A standard **style of programming,** for those of you who plan to develop your own programs or enhance others' programs, also greatly aids the sharing of parts of systems and makes it easier to comprehend and use each others' programs.

In particular, using a **standard information management system** would make it possible easily to share and publish data, and to share the large workload of building and maintaining databases. For example, every switchboard and organizing group in a city could keep track of only a few areas of information, yet the composite of everyone's work would be highly complete and available to all the organizations. Specialized application programs could be built on the information system for such things as bookkeeping or data analysis, and these could also be shared.

Creating standards is hard, time-consuming work consisting of balancing information, needs, egos, and prejudices. Organizations thinking of using computers in their work should first find out what other groups they know of are making similar plans. Joint planning can result in an efficient, cooperative computer system for managing information and office work for many groups.

In the meantime, though, we'd like to make some recommendations.

There are two general categories into which you can fit yourself and/or your group. You may be a small organization interested in bookkeeping services, word processing, creating medium sized databases or juggling medium sized amounts of data. "Medium" size means a mailing list of fewer than 10,000 names, or dealing with documents with an average length of fewer than 10 pages, or creating short resource lists on discrete topics as opposed to indexing a library of thousands of items. Handling medium-sized amounts of information makes you a "low-end" user, and this letter may be of some use to you.

On the other hand, you may be planning on moving around a lot of information. Perhaps you want to set up a community data center, cultivate some huge special interest database, or start a communications network. If this sounds like you then equipment more powerful than what we are describing here may be in order.

Hardware

Low-end users who decide that they need computers should, in our view, purchase a computer built around both a Z-80 processor and a S-100 bus. We are recommending this as the standard for the simple reason that most software activity is in the Z-80/8080 area, and that the S-100 bus is the closest thing going to a micro-computer hardware standard. Organizations using the S-100 bus will be able to borrow hardware from each other.

Apple, which builds around both a non-standard bus and a 6502 processor, has carved out a market for software, memory and peripherals which cannot be shared among the majority of business level or professional level micro-computer users. Pet and Atari are also 6502 based computers. If you already have an Apple, you can if you wish, convert it into a Z-80 for about $300 with a Softcard conversion card from MicroSoft. This includes the CP/M operating system costing $150 so it's a good deal. You may also wish to purchase one of the cards available (see any issue of Byte magazine) for expanding the screen size of the Apple to the standard 24 by 80 characters (these are also about $300.00). Likewise a TRS-80, though it is cheaper than most other Z-80 based micros, does not use the industry standard S-100 bus and thus any memory or peripherals not manufactured by Tandy cannot be used with a TRS-80. Your computer should have at least 48K of core memory, and 64K if you can afford it. Most decent programs will run in 48K, but the extra room provided by having 64K usually makes the price difference worth it.

As far as disk storage goes, we recommend that low-end users purchase a pair of full sized, (8-inch) double density floppies. Eight-inch floppies are the most commonly used type of disk, and thus the easiest to trade information on -- also they are large enough to support most uses. Eight-inch double density floppies are known as the "CP/M standard format."

Some systems come equipped with only 5 1/4 inch floppies, which are often sufficient and still quite common (and cheaper). In our view quad density (double sided disks) is a troubled technology, and we cannot yet recommend it.

Groups that need larger disk capacity than that provided by dual density floppies should consider the purchase of a hard disk system, probably of the "Winchester" type, with a size of about 5 or 10 Megabytes. You will need one floppy disk drive for data transfer to other machines, even if you start off with a Winchester. If you want to use that floppy for backup too, then it had better be full sized -- otherwise you will need some kind of tape drive for backup.

If you have need for more powerful equipment, you should consider purchasing a member of the LSI-11 "family" or one of the new 16 bit processors such as the Intel 8086 and the Z-8000. These are more powerful than the 8 bit computers discussed above (for the record, there is also a 68000 coming along to modernize the 6502/6800 line), and also more expensive. If you need equipment like this you will definitely need to research it carefully. In our opinion the LSI line is by far the most established; the LSI-11/2 is a fine development machine. Organizations needing a multiuser system should consider the LSI-11/23. The other 16-bit processors will probably be cheaper than the LSI-11 but do not yet have the variety of available software or stable suppliers. This will change in the not too distant future.

In the loose end department: you should get a 120 character printer and a 24 by 80 screen. Color is nice, but you certainly don't need it, and color video terminals give off more soft X-rays than regular ones. Cheap fast printers cost a thousand dollars. Fast typewriter quality printers cost three thousand dollars. Therefore consider getting an Anderson Jacobson modified IBM selectric which is slow but produces good copy and only costs about a thousand.

Software

a) Operating Systems

Of the 8 bit operating systems widely used today, the most standard, with a great deal of software written to conform to it, is CP/M. The TRS-80 will run it, although you will need a special version configured to get around a peculiarity in the way it allocates memory. (There is a fix available.) However, CP/M will not be the standard forever. Just as Unix, an operating system developed a few years ago at Bell labs, is fast becoming the "standard" operating system for larger machines, (in the non-IBM world) the "Unix-like" systems being developed for micros are certain to displace CP/M in that area. Conversion to these systems will be especially easy because they tend to be written explicitly to maintain CP/M compatibility, though this may not be true of all of them. Since they are just coming on the market, we cannot yet say which work.

If you decide to use Pascal (see below), you should know that one very common version, UCSD Pascal, is not only a language but a whole operating environment -- including an operating system, editors, assemblers, even Fortran. This world is standard unto itself, rather like Apple is with hardware, but the programs themselves are still relatively easy to trade around, since the Pascal language itself is largely standard.

b) Languages

Do not use Basic. It is so inadequate as a programming language that everyone modifies and extends it -- thus it has become completely nonstandard. Programs written for one system cannot be run on another, nor can they always be easily converted. If you want an interpreter instead of a compiler (interpreters are much more interactive and thus easier and more fun to use than compiled languages), we suggest you use one of the numerous Pascal interpreters on the market, or Tiny-C, APL, or Forth.

Pascal is a modern, structured language. It can be learned easily enough by the average human being and is almost adequate and thus almost standard. (It's almost as common as Fortran.)

Tiny-C, while not exactly a standard subset of the full 'C' language, is still easily preferable to Basic. Programs can be easily upgraded to full 'C' and Tiny-C is available on a very large variety of processors and operating systems. It has more of the advantages of an interpreter than most Pascal systems.

APL is for the mathematically inclined and those who want to work matrices of numbers or statistics. It does this kind of work brilliantly and makes the best use of the fluidity allowed in an interpreted language.

Forth is not exactly an interpreted language but it is usable in a very similar manner. It is an unusually organized language whose virtues and disadvantages are not easily comprehended. It is a powerful and extremely portable language, and one dear to the hearts of many computer hackers, but it is not easily ingested by most other minds.

In the realm of compiled languages we prefer the 'C' language to Pascal. This is because it is better suited to the coding of large systems. (Unix itself is written in 'C'.) Its major disadvantage is that there are few good teaching aids and textbooks available for it and it is less kind to the careless or beginning programmer than Pascal. However, it was given a friendlier ideological stamp by its creators (the originator of Pascal wanted to limit the behavior of programmers, and thus it is a more authoritarian language than 'C') and has enough power for any systems task. Consequently, a programmer writing systems level code in 'C' does not have to resort to nonstandard and completely nonportable gimmicks as frequently occurs in Pascal. Several versions of the full 'C' are available for the Z-80. We recommend a version that conforms to the Bell standard version 7 release.

Cobol is also quite standard, but is strictly business applications oriented, and is no fun to use. Fortran is the old standard portable language (it was almost the first) and a Fortran '77 compiler can be found on almost any computer still in production. It isn't much fun either.

Machine language is like Basic. Play with it but don't write any serious programs.

c) Information Management Systems

In our view, the work that is done by one person or organization should, potentially at least, be available to others with shared needs and interests. Thus we feel that all organizations with information management needs should use the same (powerful and modern) database management system. We have written a system with both these requirements and those of the nucleus of the Community Memory system in mind. This system, called SEQUITUR, is part of the new generation of information management tools and is ideal for jobs from mailing list maintenance to the construction of huge and elaborate research databases (e.g. a database on small farms and agricultural development). We would like to make it available to as many non-profit organizations as possible, and will be making arrangements in the future for doing so at as low a cost as we can arrange.

Future association

We hope that the information in this article will be of some use to you. If you are interested in community computing in general, or would like more information specifically about Community Memory, don't hesitate to write us.

Our primary goal is establishing the Community Memory network, and right now we're pursuing a variety of channels to get enough money to bring up a pilot. We would especially like to hear from groups and individuals interested in forming an association to make community data centers and decentralized public communications networks a reality. For more information on Community Memory or the SEQUITUR database management system, write to: The Community Memory Project, 916 Parker St., Berkeley, CA 94710. o

Feedback, cont'd.

Dear JCC:

I feel a compelling urge to tell you how absolutely excellent I consider the latest issue of JCC (III,4) to be. It really knocked me out. You've managed to identify the social, political, economic, creative and technological aspects of information and devise a format which explores all these dimensions and shows the totality without obscuring the differences. I felt stimulated in reading JCC from cover to cover in a way that is pretty unusual in my experience (actually, reading a magazine cover to cover is unusual, let alone feeling stimulated.)

Well, I certainly intend to tell folks about JCC, and if you care to send me some extra copies of this last issue, I will make a point of seeing that they get into the hands of likely subscribers.

Daniel Ben-Horin
San Francisco, CA.

Dear JCC:

The editing [of JCC] has made the writing *translucent,* i.e. neither transparent nor opaque. It obviously aims at recreating a community that has grown apart in recent years. For me -- a sympathetic outsider who came to Berkeley in 1966 and lived through the rebellion -- 90% of the ideas are old acquaintances. In my office we designed project, even a few communes (the name changed to intentional community) around many of them. I was privileged to see "networking" thrive for a while in the alien turf of Teheran, discover Virginia Hines' SP(I)Ns in Hong Kong used for both good and evil, and hear the resonances of Michael Rossman's circularities of yesteryear (when he was inveighing against the conspiracies of the Peace Corps).

I prefer to read things which generate a reasonable frequency of surprises which can then be converted into puzzles. My repertory of puzzles keeps me interested in life around me.... So far JCC has not found the new minds asking important questions with some philosophical, social, cultural, or political depth. They exist in the S.F. Bay area in a higher density than perhaps any other place in the world. I had hoped that some ingenious networker might have found a way to link them together in a way that creativity is channelled toward the building of new systems of thought. Unfortunately, there is not a clue, a basis for surmise, that such networks are coming into being.

Some of my heaviest thinking is directed to *community ecology,* a field that has been incompletely started by scientists. It needs to be filled out ("fleshed" may be a better word) by people in the 20's and 30's who understand the classics, can gauge ingenuity, and can synthesize concepts from disparate images. But none of the links I can detect in JCC would react constructively to what I have written in the area of community ecology. My idioms would misfire, too many ikons are blasted, beliefs are shredded, etc.

Do you have evidence to the contrary? Is there someone willing to take on Erich Janstch's lectures last spring or Boulding's *Ecodynamics,* or "predictors of viability for ad hoc movements" etc., etc.? It should be someone trying out his wings. I meet a few such individual (all preoccupied with work). Can they become a community? Probably we need some focussing event first -- like a famine in China instead of Cambodia.

Yours,

Dick Meier
Berkeley, CA.

Dear JCC:

I enjoy our/your magazine. Enclosed is some money for a year's subscription/donation.

Just having re-read Moshowitz's article in JCC III,1, my first thought was to wonder how he would interpret the possible effects of networking, micro/minis, teleconferencing, distributed systems, and computer graphics. Are these cosmetic surgery or a basis for fundamental change?

I agree that computer impacts cannot be divorced from their social, historical, philosophical, and political context. From this it seems to follow that their uses will reflect the distribution of motives, attributes, and values in society; so we will have large institution, bureaucratic rationalistic uses and a numerically much smaller democratic, non-hierarchical, humanistic area of application.

Which will have the greater impact?

With best wishes,

Peter Wood
San Rafael, CA.

Networking is Boring: Simile

by Efrem Lipkin

It is form without content

It is the slime left by the snails making their nightly rounds

It is the shape of power without its practice

It is less than dry old maiden aunts gossiping on the back porch

It is less than the skeleton left by departed life

It is a paint-by-number set

It is calling someone because you ought

Or because your parents made you come along

Like most of the new age it is flogging a dead horse that you failed to ride while it was alive

It is *not* communication.

Communication is falling in the mud while running to embrace a friend

It is forgetting

It is fighting

It is bleeding

It is playing

It is making decisions

It is not making decisions

It is power

It is the loss of power

It is the gain of power

It is nature's way of telling you to slow down.

It is silly

It is dialectic

It is fun

It is boring.

Efrem Lipkin is a member of the Community Memory Project.

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