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# PROGRAMME DISTRIBUTION IN THE PRESENT-DAY WORLD

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COMMITTEE FOR OUT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION  
AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Television,  
new broadcasting techniques  
and cultural development

PROGRAMME DISTRIBUTION IN THE PRESENT-DAY WORLD

by

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PREFACE

"The audio-visual era will be entering its third phase tomorrow: as we have not proved capable of mastering it during the two preceding phases, we cannot cross the threshold to the future without asking ourselves certain questions. Having asked them, we shall have to lose no time in answering them, for things move very quickly. Well thought-out answers will not suffice: they will have to be translated into practical measures, individual practices and laws to be voted in parliament" (1).

This extract from an article published in December 1971 in a Belgian daily newspaper re-echoes to some extent the thoughts and fears expressed in the Council for Cultural Co-operation during a debate on what was called "Post-television" (2). Following these discussions, it was agreed that a series of long-range studies on "Television, new broadcasting techniques and cultural development" should be launched during the second quarter of 1971.

Commissioned from eminent European specialists, they have been prepared according to a general plan (3) devised by Mr. Wangermee, Director General of Belgian Radio-Television (French broadcasts), who is in charge of the project. They will be submitted to a group of experts whose conclusions will then be presented to the Council for Cultural Co-operation to enable it to study possible action open to the Council of Europe in these complex fields. The present document is one of these studies, a complete list of which will be found in the Appendix.

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- (1) Leon Thoorens
  - (2) Doc. CCC (71) 15
  - (3) Doc. CCC/EES (71) 73

### The beginnings

Broadcasting would have existed even without wireless telephony. Wires would have been used to transmit music and news. This was in fact done once the telephone was invented. In 1878, at Bellinzona, a performance of Donizetti's opera "Don Pasquale" given in a local theatre, was broadcast in this way. In Budapest in 1891 Theodor Puskas created the "telefonhirmondo", the first spoken news bulletin, offering 200 subscribers regular broadcasts of news (and subsequently, of operas and records) (1).

These experiments were overshadowed by the advantages of "wireless", thanks to which broadcasting soon conquered a wide public. Wireless receiving sets could be installed anywhere without having to be connected to any wired system, and everyone could enjoy the full range of sound broadcast from all over the world. One only has to think of the difference between installing a wireless set and being put on the telephone.

### Radio programme distribution systems

Here and there, however, wireless telephony was supplemented by wire broadcasting (also called radiodistribution or programme distribution), a system of bringing radio programmes into the home by means of wires. There were two main systems: radio relay stations receiving broadcasts and redistributing them on special lines, or the use of telephone wires (2).

These processes were most widely developed in Holland (with more than 600 such relay stations in 1936), Switzerland (with approximately 50,000 subscribers at about the same time), the USSR (with more than 7,000 relay stations), followed by Great Britain, Germany, Hungary and Belgium (3).

Sometimes this system was developed for political reasons: certain governments found it useful to restrict listeners to certain judiciously chosen stations. The wireless had removed frontiers; wire broadcasting put them back. The subscriber was offered - or rather had imposed upon him - only two, three or four programmes. Herein lay the major drawback of the system: the poor choice.

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- (1) HUTH, Arno, La Radiodiffusion, puissance mondiale, Paris, Gallimard, 1937, pp 33 and 183.
  - (2) In this case the subscriber could not use the telephone while he had the broadcast on.
  - (3) HUTH, Arno, op. cit., p. 61

But this limited choice was not imputable to the quality of reception. Wire broadcasting made all the programmes it offered equally audible. And the audibility was excellent. Numerous technical faults and interferences were eliminated; atmospheric and fading were done away with; constant volume was maintained.

Good reception could be ensured anywhere, even in towns (where sources of interference are numerous) and mountainous areas. The fact that wire broadcasting gained ground so rapidly in Switzerland is no doubt partly due to the density of that country's telephone network but above all to the poor wave transmission in mountainous areas.

In addition the system enabled the listener to economise. He no longer needed to buy a receiving set (which sometimes involved a considerable outlay): an electro-dynamic loudspeaker (usually hired) was enough and did not use any electric current. Consumption was therefore sometimes enormous: a survey of listening habits in connection with radiodistribution in Schaerbeek (in the Brussels area) in 1957 stated: "... unless their sets remain switched on without their listening .. 50% of subscribers seem to use radiodistribution as a permanent background. This is far from being the case for listeners as a whole" (1). Thus radiodistribution helped broadcasting to gain ground where expansion was proving difficult. In Belgium "radiodistribution is particularly popular in that part of the country where objective data suggest that broadcasting as a whole has taken least hold" (2); in Belgium again, its decline had begun before the advent of television, the progress and development of wireless broadcasting (in particular the appearance of portable transistor sets) impeding and finally annihilating the temporary expedient which radiodistribution represented.

Wire broadcasting had the further advantage that it enabled relay stations to produce their own programmes as well as passing on those of others.

In the USSR, where on 1 January 1936 there were 613,000 individual wireless sets as against 2,089,000 programme subscribers to wire broadcasting, relay stations felt it their duty to arrange broadcasts of regional or local interest. Although there is practically no other example of this, it shows that it was not technically necessary to await the introduction of frequency modulation before beginning to develop local broadcasting, which elsewhere was hampered by the lack of available wavelengths.

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- (1) Enquête permanente sur les programmes, Rapport No. 9, Mesure de l'écoute des programmes radiophoniques par la radiodistribution, Brussels, INR, 1957 (roneoed) p. 3
- (2) THOVERON, Gabriel, Radio et Télévision dans la vie quotidienne, Brussels; Edition de l'Institut de Sociologie de l'ULB, 1970, p. 233

These various advantages were nevertheless insufficient to boost the development of wire broadcasting on a large scale. It remained an accessory, marginal phenomenon.

It might regain some of its importance by relaying frequency modulation programmes. This was tried out in 1963 by the Dutch Post Office, which aimed to provide the inhabitants of The Hague with twelve FM radio programmes (three German, three Belgian, two English and two French) (1).

At the same time, however, the Post Office was busy making available three television programmes (NTS, BRT and the German First Programme). If wire broadcasting is to recover its position it will be thanks to television.

#### Television programme distribution systems

In television programme distribution viewers' sets are connected to a large common aerial, generally in an extremely favourable situation. The signals received by the aerial are amplified and fed through a network of cables; at intervals along the network the signals (which tend to fade as the distance from the aerial increases) are strengthened by amplifiers.

As it is not possible to convey signals by cable over long distances, hertzian wave relay stations are also set up. Each of these consists of a receiving aerial and a wave beam transmitter. Distant programmes are thus broadcast from relay to relay until they are received by the common aerial connected with the cable network.

Alternatively, television receivers may simply be connected directly to the transmitting station.

Receivers may be simplified sets designed merely to reproduce sound and picture: these "slave units" are supplied by the distribution firm and can receive only the broadcasts which that firm transmits. This system was used in England in the early days of television programme distribution.

In countries where television is already well established, the standard sets already owned by viewers are connected with the programme distribution network.

#### Prospects

Television programme distribution has undoubtedly a more important part to play than radiodistribution had, primarily because of television's limited range of action.

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(1) See Televisie Nieuws, NTS, No. 8

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(a) A wireless set can receive broadcasts from all over the world; a television set gives us an extremely limited number of nearby stations, sometimes only one. The principal advantage of television programme distribution is therefore the opportunity it gives of receiving a larger number of programmes. Radio programme distribution restricted the range of available broadcasts; television programme distribution can considerably increase it.

This explains its popularity in Belgium, which because of its central position plays, as we shall see, a leading part in this field in Europe. Programmes are channelled by cable from France, Luxembourg, Germany and Holland. The situation is similar in Switzerland, which is also centrally situated.

The same reason also helps to explain the system's popularity in the United States, where in many towns more than ten programmes (thirteen in the case of Los Angeles) may be received in this way. And this is only a beginning, for Irving B. Kahn considers that the load capacity of a wide-band cable can be increased to forty or eighty channels (1).

(b) For this reason, television programme distribution may succeed in what in the case of radio generally remained a mere possibility: the creation of original programmes broadcast exclusively by cable from their own transmitter, possibly for restricted regional or cultural groups or minorities on special subjects. The lack of available frequencies poses no problem here.

Highly specialised networks may even be devised, such as the "Stadtinternes Schulfernsehen" at present being prepared by Frankfurt-on-Main, which is to offer 150 schools in the city a selection of ten television programmes (2). It is possible to imagine circuits serving hotel or hospital rooms, offices or factories, theatres, concert halls, youth clubs or cultural centres. Existing film distribution could be revolutionised.

One can also imagine new stations where the public can have its say, some television programmes thus being made by all instead of just a few.

The history of broadcasting techniques shows that they gradually become available to the general public. To produce television programmes is now becoming a possibility for many if not for all: with one or two cameras, a video recorder and an editing desk one can start making a broadcast. In the USA

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(1) See the article "The TV networks shrug off new competition" in Business Week, 27 March 1971, p. 92

(2) "Kabelfernsehen für Frankfurts Schulen", in FUNK-Korrespondenz, Cologne, 19th year, No. 18, April 1971, p. 11



there are already underground groups (such as Global Village, Faindance, Video Freex, People's Video) waging what they call video guerilla warfare. Some are out to create electronic art, for example by deforming the picture through exposing the cathode ray tube in the television set to a powerful magnetic field; others form politico-cultural action groups, inviting people to discuss the shortcomings of the district they live in. For these video guerillas the main problem is how to broadcast their programmes. "Some political groups have already 'diverted' TV cables for their own broadcasts" (1). This is an unsatisfactory situation - could a way not be found of letting them use certain channels occasionally, while making sure that their example catches on and that more and more groups of amateur television-makers follow their lead? Special programmes could be launched to enable them to address themselves to a wide public.

(c) Another advantage which television programme distribution has in common with radiodistribution is the opportunity it gives of improving reception in urban or rural areas where reception is poor or in remote districts.

This is the reason for the popularity of television programme distribution in Japan, where broadcasting to mountainous areas or distant islands has always presented problems, and where more recently account has also had to be taken of complaints from viewers in urban areas. In the towns, where it is sometimes forbidden to set up large common aerials on the roofs of blocks of flats, interference is intense and reception is further hindered by skyscrapers. The construction of a multi-storey block of flats can suddenly deprive a whole district of some programme or other.

The sound and picture quality is normally of a constantly high standard, whatever the atmospheric conditions. We say normally, for in Belgium, as we shall see, some subscribers complain of the mediocre quality of certain pictures received. As already pointed out, signals cannot be sent over excessively long distances without some loss of quality.

(d) Television programme distribution also makes it possible to do away with individual aerials, which have numerous drawbacks. They are ugly and costly - in addition to fitting and insurance costs (the aerial can break loose, especially in a gale, and fall on to the road, injuring passers-by) there are maintenance expenses and, if one wants to ensure good reception, extra costs arising out of the need to have the direction and condition of the aerial regularly checked.

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(1) See in particular "La Guerre des Média" in the magazine Actuel, Paris No. 2, Nouvelle Série, May 1971, p. 16. This issue is devoted to "underground" press, radio and TV.

Even so, television programme distribution is more expensive than the usual system. In Belgium, for example, "the rates applied in Brussels show that programme distribution costs 40-50% more for an individual set and twice to five times more in the case of a collective installation for ten flats" (1). But programme distribution offers many more advantages and involves far fewer worries.

(e) Finally, if television programme distribution develops and if, to take advantage of it, the majority of homes are connected with the distribution cable, the possibilities thereby offered will far exceed those of television as it exists today, indeed of any form of television. The distribution cable whose potentialities bear no comparison with those of the present-day telephone cable - will make possible, for example (and here we list at random some impending developments as well as remote dreams):

- the connection of subscribers with a central video library where they can order television programmes selected from a catalogue. Such a service is planned in the USA, by Paul L. Klein, who has left NBC Audience Research to become Head of Computer Television Inc. (2),
- home newspaper printing - and perhaps at a later stage the printing of private correspondence, bank statements, etc.,
- shopping at home and in the other direction the reading of meters (water, gas, electricity). The cable could thus cut down the number of journeys required and so help to solve urban traffic problems,
- connection of the home with a computer, a teaching machine, etc.,
- "visual" telephones, on which the speakers can see each other,
- and, at the very least, a means of communication would need not be one-way but would give the person on the receiving end the chance to react and express his opinion.

It is possible to know at any time how many people connected by cable with a transmitter are watching a particular programme at a particular time. By measuring the amount of time television programme distribution subscribers spend viewing the person transmitting a broadcast will at least be able to calculate how many people are watching it. Instantaneous and permanent knowledge of the size of the television audience will be possible (3).

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- (1) "Télé distribution" in Ufidec, Information et défense du consommateur, Brussels, No. 64, September-October 1970, p.12
- (2) "The TV networks shrug off new competition" op. cit. p.92
- (3) See note 4 for a report on such measurement.

Viewer participation, an important factor in the success of a television broadcast (1) will be able to be increased for certain games: the public will be able to indicate its preference for a particular song, star or competitor. It will be able to subscribe to a charity, put questions to a specialist or politician or answer competition questions. The telephone makes some of these things possible but it could not, for example, enable a competitor viewing a broadcast to be chosen by lot.

Finally, it may become possible to vote by cable, which would open the door to regular referendums and direct democracy.....

These prospects - or even a few of them - justify the risks involved in investing considerable sums in cable networks. These would not become useless even if broadcasting by satellite or some other means made programme distribution in the strict sense obsolete.

These prospects may be considered with either optimism or pessimism.

For the optimist, the cable will be instrumental in increasing social relations, encouraging participation and developing community spirit.

The pessimist will regard the cable as a tie, a shackle, a constraining bond which, in some bureaucratic-totalitarian "brave new world", will connect every home with "Big Brother" or "Little Father".

In other words, developments in the use of cables will have to be watched with constant vigilance.

#### The world growth of television programme distribution

There are no exact statistics by which the present situation can be accurately assessed. In only a few countries does programme distribution already play an important part; in most cases it has not yet seen the light of day or exists only on an experimental basis.

It is mainly outside Europe that the system is beginning to show its full potential, in places where, having already reached a certain stage of development, it is entering its period of ascendancy.

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(1) THOVERON, Gabriel, op. cit. pp 778-781

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This is the case in North America: in Canada there are about one million subscribers and in the United States approximately five million.

In the USA programme distribution began in a very modest way about twenty years ago, in a Pennsylvanian valley, whose inhabitants were unable to receive television programmes.

In 1969, 6% of homes were connected to "Community Antenna Television" (CATV). An article of March 1971 states that approximately 4.5 million subscribers pay 5 or 6 dollars a month to some 2,750 different television cable systems (certain suppliers have only a few hundred houses connected while the biggest company, Tele Prompter Corporation, has approximately 540,000 clients using 100 different systems). Opinions as to development possibilities differ. For the most optimistic, in ten years 50% of the population will be using programme distribution; for Mr. Blank of CBS, the figure will be only 25% and it will be reached only after a much longer period (1). At all events, the rate of expansion is extremely high.

About one third of the programme distribution organisations have made programmes of their own; the FCC (Federal Commission of Communications) has taken certain steps to encourage this. We shall return to this point later, and merely note in passing now that the United States is the first country in which programme distribution has increased the range of programmes available to the public.

Japan will be the second. There Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK) began in 1954 to make cabled television available to regions where transmitters could not be installed for topographical reasons or for lack of wave-lengths. Since that date some 10,000 cable television circuits have been laid. In Tokyo the various television organisations, the postal authorities and the newspaper publishers' association have collaborated in setting up the Tokyo Cablevision Foundation, which will coordinate existing services and will attempt to build up and operate a network which will supply not only existing programmes but others produced on its own initiative (2).

Elsewhere, television programme distribution merely aims at improving reception.

In Europe programme distribution is still only beginning, even in places where it has existed for some time as in Great Britain: there it was introduced in 1954 and there were as many as 800,000 subscribers by 1967 (3), but there are still no plans

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- (1) "The TV networks shrug off new competition" op. cit. p. 92
  - (2) See "The EBU Review", European Broadcasting Union, No. 120A, April 1970.
  - (3) According to a survey published on 10 June 1970 in the Brussels magazine Spécial, p. 41 "Télédistribution: pas encore bénéficiaire".

for using it in any other way than to improve the quality and variety of available programmes. In Switzerland, where programme distribution is sometimes organised privately and sometimes by local authorities, approximately 7.5% of television sets are connected to a cable (1). We have already mentioned the first experiments in Holland. In France, attempts have been very localised; the first was at Nancy in 1967, where 2,555 council flats in the Haut du Lièvre district were among those connected up with two aeriels, one for TV and one for VHF radio (2).

### The example of Belgium

We shall dwell in greater detail on Belgium, partly because it is the country where we have been able to observe the phenomenon most closely but mainly because its location has destined it to be what in fact it is today: a country in the forefront of developments in this field.

This is illustrated by the fact that the network in Liège was for a long time the most extensive in the world supplied by a single group of aeriels (it has now been overtaken by Vancouver, Canada). Further, the Belgian Coditel Company collaborated in setting up networks in Switzerland, France and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

The Belgian example also shows how, in a particular country, a phase of extremely rapid expansion may follow a slow initial settling-in period. It may be supposed that a similar pattern will occur in other European countries.

Belgium, a country small in area, is at the meeting-point of a large number of foreign stations: it has frontiers with the Netherlands, Germany, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and France, and the sea which separates it from England is not very wide. As soon as television transmitters were set up in the country certain particularly privileged viewers were able to receive - and this was exceptional in Europe at the time - programmes from three different transmitting stations (3).

The important fact however was the inequality of reception opportunities. Depending on where one lived it was possible to view one, two or three programmes. The less fortunate felt frustrated. In Liège, for example, sets could only receive RTB programmes, whereas the weeklies published the programmes broadcast by the ORTF (available in Hainaut and at Brussels) and by RTL (available in the south of Luxembourg province). This frustration provided extremely favourable ground for the first experiments in programme distribution.

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(1) 39th Rapport Annuel de la Société Suisse de Radiodiffusion et Télévision, 1970 p. 1

(2) News item published in the Figaro of 9 May 1967.

(3) GANTELME, J. "La réception de trois programmes de télévision en Belgique occidentale" in Bulletin de l'UER, Geneva, Vol. VII, No. 38, 1956, pp. 521-528.

## (a) The preparatory phase: 1960-69

After studying the technical problems in collaboration with an English firm, Teleng Ltd, S.A. Coditel set up its first network in Namur - or more exactly at Saint-Servais - in 1961, supplying five programmes to areas where formerly only two at best could be received. At the end of 1961, Coditel was offering four programmes to the inhabitants of Verviers and in October 1962, four programmes in Liège. In the spring of 1965, it set up business in the province of Brabant and provided six programmes for the inhabitants of Saint Josse-Ten-Noode, in the Brussels area. This was done at the request of the burgomaster of Saint Josse-Ten-Noode, the construction of multi-storey blocks of flats having spoiled reception in various parts of the commune. The primary intention was to restore quality to its previous level, but at the same time original quality was surpassed.

At the end of October 1968, Coditel had 14,000 subscribers in Liège, 8,500 in Namur, 8,200 in Verviers, 2,500 in Saint Josse, the networks having a length of 410, 182, 192 and 57 km. respectively. In the same year other networks were beginning to develop,

In the Brussels area Brutélé (supplying four communes) and a subsidiary of Philips, Radio-Public (supplying seven communes), were formed. At Liège, Télédís was launched in twenty-seven communes by the ALE (Association Liégeoise d'Electricité), an intercommunal organisation.

## (b) Rapid growth

The new networks led to extremely rapid growth in the number of subscribers, which within a year almost doubled in the French speaking part of the country. The National Statistical Institute produced the following findings:

District	Number of subscribers	
	End of 1969	End of 1970
Brussels	10,846	32,089
Liège	19,094	23,448
Verviers	9,160	11,050
Namur	9,919	11,343
Total	49,019	87,930

Almost 10% of viewers in the French speaking area - 9.8% to be exact (87,930 out of 892,704) - had their sets connected to a circuit by the end of 1970, even though programme distribution was only offered in certain parts of the area. Among the members of the RTB enquiry panel, 18.1% were subscribers to programme distribution in the Liège province, 12.2% in the Brussels district and 3.6% in Namur province (7.3% of the overall total) (1).

(1) Enquête Permanente sur les Programmes, Rapport Télévision STV 41. Les stations de TV que peuvent capter les membres du panel TV, Brussels, RTB, roneoed, June 1971.

One of the results of this development has been a distinct improvement in reception possibilities. The Permanent Enquiry Department measured these in 1966 and 1971. The number of viewers able to receive ORTF's second programme rose from about one tenth to about one quarter of the total; the number able to receive RTL rose from 7.5% to 11%; and roughly one tenth were able to receive on programme of the NTS (Holland) or one programme of WDR (Germany). Reception of RTB, BRT and ORTF's first programme do not seem to have altered (1).

Programme distribution is continuing to develop. Existing networks are expanding and others are being created: a Charleroi network is being prepared as we write.

(c) Remarks on the experiment

1. The first thing to note is the extent of public action in the setting up of networks.

Coditel is a joint stock company with a capital of 400 million Belgian francs, two-thirds of which is held by the firm Electobel, and one-third by the Société Nationale d'Investissement (SNI). The size of the SNI shareholding imports a mixed character to the firm.

Télédis and Brutélé are intercommunal organisations, and it was at the burgomaster's invitation that Coditel went to St. Josse. It is felt that the authorities in many communes consider programme distribution to be a public service similar to the water, gas and electricity supplies.

2. The large part played by the authorities is undoubtedly due largely to the fact that the capital expenditure required is enormous. Coditel's experience shows that the first years of operation normally show a loss. "The first phase consists in covering running expenses, then in covering them and depreciation. The following phase, which comes at least five years after the network went into service, enables the losses of the first years to be made good, and finally, after seven or eight years, the system begins to show a profit" (2).

3. The extent of capital investment explains why programme distribution is established first of all in large and medium-sized built-up areas, where the potential number of customers per kilometre of cable is highest and operations therefore show profits most quickly. Programme distribution is still almost exclusively an urban phenomenon.

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(1) For 1971, see note 20. For 1966: Enquête Permanente sur les programmes, Rapport 57 - La Télévision en 1966, Brussels, RTB, p. 10. See also G. Thoveron, op. cit., pp 230-232, which shows that little change took place between 1962 and 1966.

(2) "Télédistribution: pas encore bénéficiaire", op. cit. p.92

4. It will also be noted that programme distribution was introduced first of all in the French speaking area. In the Flemish area the first attempts have remained localised and isolated. This is no doubt due to the fact that there are more French language programmes available, which makes it possible in the Walloon area and Brussels to offer subscribers a much more attractive selection. The growth of programme distribution seems to depend on the number of extra possibilities it offers.

5. Finally, it should be added that, while programme distribution has achieved good results in extending the number of reception possibilities, it has not always come up to the public's expectations regarding improved picture definition. Following complaints, Ufidec (1), a consumers' association, has conducted a survey among its members. Unfortunately the results will not be available before the early months of 1972.

It would appear, however, that in some places distributors have sacrificed the quality of programmes for the sake of quantity. There would also appear to be room for further technical progress.

To conclude, we **should** like to raise certain problems which will affect the future of programme distribution.

#### Monopoly or competition

As we have seen programme distribution enables more programmes to be received.

This situation calls for a decision by States. They may encourage, restrict or forbid the setting up of new transmitters, just as they may encourage, restrict or forbid the broadcasting of certain existing programmes. What they do will be a determining factor.

In the United States, radio and television are private and competitive. There is therefore no major objection to a large number of transmitting stations.

36% of television programme distribution organisations have therefore created their own programmes for their own subscribers subscribers (2). This proportion may be thought rather small, especially if one considers that the programmes in question are rather meagre and unoriginal, consisting mainly of weather reports, local news and market rates, with sometimes a look-in on local council meetings.

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(1) This association publishes the bulletin referred to in note 10.

(2) See the chapter "CATV: Promise and Peril" in N. JOHNSON'S How to talk back to your television set, Bantam Books, 1970, p. 145.



However, the number of such new programmes will undoubtedly increase. The FCC (Federal Communications Commission) has decided that programme distribution companies with more than 3,500 subscribers must broadcast programmes of their own (the average number of subscribers on a network is somewhere around 2,000) (1).

It should be realised that this measure is not necessarily dictated by an idealistic vision of the future of communications: it is to a large measure designed to slow down the expansion of programme distribution by burdening it with extra costs. What matter, if out of this evil comes forth good?

More recently the City of New York, while granting two companies the right to lay cable networks in Manhattan, stipulated that each of them should put two channels at the disposal of the public as "common carriers" (2). One does so free of charge, the other demands a sum of \$25. Users naturally have to comply with certain rules: in particular, programmes must be pre-recorded.

There is thus a tendency on the part of controlling bodies to encourage the multiplication of broadcasting stations.

What is the situation in Europe, where radio and television generally have a tradition of public service? Governments are unenthusiastic about cabled television's irruption into the zones of influence that the various stations had carved out for themselves; certain stations are worried at the threat to their effective monopolies.

States are therefore obliged to introduce measures making it compulsory to broadcast certain programmes and prohibiting certain others.

(a) Compulsory broadcasts concern certain national programmes, the aim being to ensure that the public is not deprived of them.

In Belgium, "except in cases recognised as impossible by the Régie des Télégraphes et Téléphones, all distribution networks" must "broadcast simultaneously and without cuts all programmes produced by Radio-diffusion-Télévision Belge" (Royal Decree of 24 December 1966).

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(1) See the chapter "CATV: Promise and Peril" in N. JOHNSON'S How to talk back to your television set, Bantam Books, 1970, p. 145

(2) D'ARCY, Jean, "Bientôt en Europe, la télévision par câbles?", in the Figaro, No. 8.394 of 10 September 1971, supplément littéraire, p. V-17.

(b) The range of prohibited broadcasts is more varied.

In some cases, the broadcast on programme distribution is merely forbidden of those programmes which would not be permitted on national transmitters. In Belgium, for example, the Royal Decree of 24 December 1966 forbids the broadcasting of programmes that are prejudicial to the security of the State, "ordre public" or Belgian legislation, are immoral or are likely to outrage other people's convictions or be offensive to a foreign State.

Similarly, as television advertising is forbidden in Belgium, the Decree prohibits the broadcasting of programmes with a commercial advertising content and programmes of commercial television stations designated by the Minister. (In practice, television programme distributors broadcast Radio Luxembourg programmes, but transmit no picture when the commercials come on.)

In the same way, "a distributor may broadcast the programmes of any television broadcasting station which is authorised to operate in the country in which it is established"; this has the effect of giving effect in Belgium to any bans imposed abroad.

Again "the distributor shall not equip his television programme distribution network with apparatus by means of which pictures of sounds other than those of authorised programmes may be broadcast".

This of course forbids cable broadcasting of "pirate stations".

Finally, the Decree guards against the possibility of new programmes being produced by programme distributors: the distributors are forbidden "to possess apparatus by means of which television programmes may be produced, recorded or reproduced".

In extreme cases the State may, in order to maintain its monopoly intact, forbid the retransmission by cable of any programme not of its own public service.

In Spain the Ministerial Decree of 13 March 1970 bans the broadcasting of any signals "other than those produced by the Spanish Public Television Service" (section 2(2)).

Moreover, the signals must be transmitted in exactly the same way as they are produced.

In this case programme distribution opens up no new prospects: indeed, it precludes them.

Nothing is therefore settled one way or the other, all the more so as local monopolies may take the place of States in applying censorship, or at least a very biased choice of programmes.

### Local monopolies

Each programme distribution firm normally exercises a local monopoly. Just as only one company has the right to supply a town's water, gas or electricity, so also programme distribution, especially if it is regarded as a public service, will frequently be in the hands of one concessionaire in each municipality. Initially the supplier will, for obvious commercial reasons, endeavour to offer the maximum number of programmes to subscribers. But once he has become firmly established, and once the range of available programmes has considerably expanded, he will be free to make a selection.

The law can normally play a part by stipulating the duties of programme distributors; these duties could include that of ensuring the widest possible dissemination of all ideas, opinions and forms of expression, even if unorthodox or even outright heretical. It would be by no means unusual for the law to take such a step. Enjoying as he does a monopoly, the programme distributor should normally have to accept certain constraints, in exchange.

Failing this, programme distribution would result in an uncontrolled increase in the number and variety of forms of censorship.

### Rural areas

As we have seen, programme distribution in Belgium developed first and foremost in urban areas; many people fear that country districts may be systematically and irrevocably discriminated against because the low population density and the dispersed dwellings make the establishment of a cable network extremely expensive.

Harold J. Barnett, discussing this matter, shows that this argument is not conclusive (1); he adds that firms can work out an average installation cost and that the government can subsidise networks in rural areas.

Insofar as programme distribution is regarded as a public service and the authorities help in its development, it is quite conceivable for local councils in Europe to ensure that country areas are in fact supplied, just as they have seen to it that such areas have electricity or telephones.

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(1) BARNETT, Harold J., Resistance to the wired city, Research monograph No. 12.70, 27 December 1970, Department of Economics, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, pp 14-17.

Cable facilities will moreover become all the more necessary if, as we have seen, the cables can perform other tasks than transmitting television.

This would require, however, a certain measure of long-term planning. We must not wait until all built-up areas are supplied before deciding to calculate the average cost of installation. Action must be taken without further delay.

### Television programmes

If programmes become more numerous, it is reasonable to suppose that their average quality is likely to deteriorate. The risk in producing more and more lies in producing more and more superficially. This raises the problem of saturation: is the variety and standard of talent sufficient to keep the huge public appetite permanently satisfied. There is no problem in the short-term; many creative artists and performers, journalists and programme organisers, sports and sportsmen are awaiting the opportunity to prove their worth. According to Harold J. Barnett there are in London some forty acknowledged first-rank theatres, several of lesser importance, five symphony orchestras, several opera companies and other forms of entertainment which did not appear on television in the 1970 season (1). There is therefore a reserve supply. But is it not limited? And if there is no intellectual limit, are there not material limits?

There will be a tendency, for reasons of economy, to import programmes which have already paid their way on their home markets. In Europe there is a risk that American productions will invade broadcasting time, which will have to be filled one way or another.

It may also be thought, on the contrary, that competition will stimulate the quality of production. But it is to be feared that only the wealthiest broadcasting stations will manage to maintain their position, especially if the possibility of receiving a wide range of stations leads to a reduction in the number of programme exchanges and relays between stations. Here again, the less well-off stations - those in small countries - will have to bear extra production costs for the sake of original programmes.

All these costs could be met by greater use of advertising, but this too may well suffer from competition (we shall return to this question in the following section).

The activities of advertising agencies may also lead to a form of demagogy in programme planning, whose ultimate aim may come to be the winning of public favour: superficial

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(1) BARNET, Harold J., op. cit. pp 14-17

entertainment may well supersede information, expression and education. European television would gradually come to resemble the American model - unless governments continue to apply strict principles to the use of television publicity (for example by requiring that commercials should be kept quite separate from entertainment, information and cultural programmes, by limiting advertising time, by concentrating commercials within certain times of day, etc).

### Advertising

An increase in the number of broadcasting stations, accompanied by competition for publicity markets, may well lead to a lowering of prices.

But the main result might be that television, once its public was fragmented in this way, would no longer offer the same advantages as today. At present it provides advertisers with a wide, fairly homogeneous public and is particularly well suited to the advertising of mass consumer goods. Throughout Europe, television commercials are mainly used by manufacturers of food-stuffs, beverages, cleaning products, health and toilet preparations, textiles, clothing, electrical household appliances and vehicles (1).

As far as newspapers, and especially magazines, are concerned, advertisers therefore tend today to favour publications intended for a specific, clearly defined public. "A public which actually reads articles composed for highly motivated people and closely related to either their hobbies, their social lives or their jobs - that, 'writes a journalist' is what the advertisers order us to produce" (2).

But this allocation of advertising between television and the printed press is likely to be challenged by a proliferation of channels each having its own audience. An advertiser will no longer be able to reach the masses through one or two stations only; he will have to deploy his efforts more widely.

True, there is still room for expansion here, as in the matter of programmes. Many advertisers are just waiting for the chance to use the small screen, and once again programme distribution will bring abundance where there was formerly a shortage.

### Pay television

Pay television may no doubt appear to be an alternative to advertising or to the licence fee payable in countries with a public television service. In fact, programme distribution can solve all the practical problems raised by pay television. Indeed, according to whether the cable allows each subscriber's viewing time to be calculated payment can be based on consumption ./.

(1) Bureau d'Etudes de la RTB, La Publicité Télévisée en Europe, Brussels, RTL, November 1968, p. 318

(2) J.C., "Tué par les annonceurs", in the special issue Le Journal et ses lecteurs, Revue Esprit, Paris, Seuil, No. 2, February 1971, p. 321

measured either in time or by programme (with a slot machine fitted to the television set). This would constitute a veritable revolution in broadcasting techniques, which up to the present day, to quote Jacques Durand, "have been unobtrusively breaking down traditional capitalism" (1).

It is doubtful, however, whether a really significant section of the public will agree to pay directly for something which hitherto has been financed by advertising or licence fees. Television would end up as a very expensive form of leisure. Pay television will moreover be unable to produce programmes greatly superior to those of traditional broadcasting stations unless it first deprived those stations of their best talent, which would amount to a blood-letting. It is for this reason that in Great Britain the Pilkington report comes out against pay television (2).

### Conclusions

One would like to conclude by assembling on one side of the scales the hopes raised by programme distribution and on the other side the anxieties. But here, as elsewhere, we pause on the brink, wondering what new invention is going to invalidate all our forecasts for the future. Who is to know whether, once the web of cables has been woven, satellites or some other discovery will not make it all useless?

One is tempted to write that programme distribution could be the best or the worst of invention; but one is obliged to add that it might quite simply lead to nothing at all. However, this in no way affects the necessity to consider its potentialities immediately and to influence its establishment and the use made of it, while reminding ourselves that our work may be very short-lived.

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- (1) DURAND, Jacques, Le cinéma et son public, Paris, Sirey, 1958, p.9
  - (2) U.H. House of Commons, Committee on Broadcasting report, Command 1753, London, HM Stationery Office, 1962, p. 295

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