

editorial opinion

Cable TV won't give you an excuse to leave home

That fellow George Orwell was wrong. In his novel "1984" Orwell surmised we would have Big Brother in our living rooms watching our every move via a television screen.

With the advent of television back in the '40s, the doomsayers were in their glory. They predicted that the old boob tube would be the death of a free society.

Television, indeed, will have a gigantic impact in the '80s. But Big Brother watching won't be the problem. The real challenge will be for Americans to adjust their lifestyles.

Education, entertainment, social relationships and working all will be affected by the television revolution.

Cable television will be responsible for a big chunk of that change.

For the last six months, cable television outfits have been invading suburban Detroit communities seeking franchises to set up their profitable outlets.

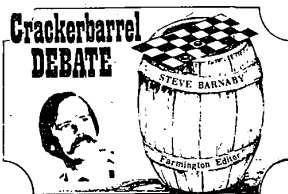
Major communication outfits are getting in on the act throughout the country — Time, General Electric and even American Express. Other corporations are being formed just for cable television. So it's only fair you get a peek at what's in store. Most of the cable outfits will be firmly established in this area in two to three years.

FOR STARTERS, imagine having 36 to 120 stations from which to choose. The old TV Guide will look like the phone book.

A guy named Ted Turner has launched a station which will provide a 24-hour all-news station. Bureaus have been set up in 20 cities around the country.

The entertainment and sports network will provide coverage of just about any sport the mind can imagine — even high school sports. It has been referred to as a video Sports Illustrated.

Cinemeraica will provide programming especially



attuned to persons over the age of 50. Nickelodeon will counter with a network just for the kids.

Another network will run all those boring British Broadcasting Corporation programs we're used to seeing on public television.

But that's just the beginning.

In Florida, the Knight-Ridder outfit (they own the Free Press) is experimenting with a system where viewers call into the television to find out about such things as weather, news and airline schedules.

Down Ohio way, a system allows viewers to vote for their favorite programs, pick talent contest winners and, believe it or not, do their shopping.

IN OTHER WORDS, by the end of the decade it will be possible for the average family to simply stay at home. Forget the gas crunch. You can save those gas rationing coupons for that big vacation.

Forget the traffic jams at the Silverdome. You'll be able to sit home and watch the Lions lose. No more long lines at the supermarket.

But then, psychologists will probably make a fortune off people going nuts because they can't find an excuse to get out of the house.



How was pride in work lost?

Traveling along life's highway, The Stroller likes nothing better than to stop occasionally and chat with folks who have weathered many an economic storm and made a success of their lives.

The famed golfer Walter Hagen used to say, "Take time to stop and smell the roses."

On one of these stops the other day The Stroller happened to be in the office of Leo Schultz, head of the Vico Products Co. in Plymouth, who developed his company from a small corner of his basement to a multi-million dollar business.

During the course of our visit the conversation turned to the growing popularity of foreign cars in the American automobile market.

"It is no surprise to me," Leo said. "They make better cars and they stole the play away from us. The Japanese now have about 22 percent of the world market, and they are still growing."

He leaned back in his chair for a moment, then continued. "You may wonder how this came about, but it is no puzzle to anyone in the mechanical end of the auto industry. The Japanese take more pride in their work than we do. Somewhere along the line the American worker has lost the pride of accomplishment. And it is too bad."

This was a very strong statement. And ever since he heard it The Stroller has been trying to pinpoint the time when American pride was set aside.

He listened again to this man who has been close to the auto industry for quite a while.

"We have only ourselves to blame," he said. "The average man in the shops today is concerned with only two things — watching the clock for quitting time and how much money he is being paid. He has little thought about the quality of his work."

This remark rang a bell with The Stroller. It took him back to the days when he was a toiler in the machine shops of the major plants back home.

In those days the machinist — The Stroller was a qualified journeyman — was given a rough casting and a blue print. It was his duty to produce the finished product regardless of the number of machines that had to be used. If the plan called for holes, the machinist drilled them.

If it meant using a lathe, a lathe was used. And with every move there was a feeling of pride and a great desire to have the final inspection approve the work.

How proud it made a fellow feel when he realized that his work had been approved and was now on the shipping dock ready to be delivered.

Then came a great change in the shops.

It was brought about by what was termed mass production. Under this plan the mechanic no longer took a casting and worked on it to the finish. He did only one part of the job, then turned it over to a fellow worker on a different machine. In fact the job was passed along so often that the finished product couldn't be claimed by anyone.

As a result, there passed the pride of accomplishment. No longer could the mechanic say "that was my job" when the final approval was given by the inspectors.

Working just became a form of hustling the job from one person to the other. And this haste along the assembly lines has helped to bring about the loss of pride in workmanship.

This is what Leo Schultz meant when he said that Americans have lost their pride while Japanese pride is on the upswing.

This is what is causing the growing switch to foreign cars and helping to throw American economy out of whack.

You can take the word of a man who has been through the mill for that.

'Why wait? Pass him on the right!'



There's money to be made when Superbowl arrives

Superbowl Sunday is coming up. The greatest media event of the year — the championship game of pro football — will be beamed to more homes in the nation than any other program during the rest of the year.

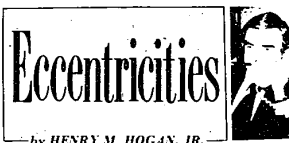
Superbowl is probably the greatest single tourist attraction of the year, bringing in more dollars to the host community in a short period of time than any other known event, including national political conventions.

As most of you know, Superbowl is coming to the Pontiac Silverdome in January 1982, the first time it will leave the sunbelt and be played in a northern city.

When Superbowl was being promoted for metropolitan Detroit, the committee said it would bring in between \$60-80 million in a five-day period during a slow time for Detroit. The skeptics couldn't believe it.

BUT AS I prepare to go out to Pasadena this week to attend the super-event, let me tell you how much it will cost me, and then you can multiply it by the number of seats in the Silverdome to get some idea of the magnitude of the undertaking.

First, it will cost more than \$500 to fly round-trip to Los Angeles. I won't count this in my figuring because this goes to the airlines and not to the local city. But a portion of it will be used by the airlines, to beef up their local staffs to accommodate incoming spectators.



To get a room at a good hotel, I am paying \$134 a night and had to commit for a minimum of four nights, which is \$536.

To get around Los Angeles, I will have to rent a car for at least \$25 a day or \$100 for four days. If I don't rent a car, I'll pay more than half of that in cab fares to and from the airport, to and from the game, and around the city.

If I eat three meals a day, it will cost at least \$25 a day, and if I eat in a fine restaurant, it will probably cost that much just for dinner. Because I don't intend to spend the four days sitting in my hotel room, I'll probably spend another \$100 on tips, libations, entrance fees to local events, and so forth.

So if you take the hotel bill, food, transportation in the city and miscellaneous, I'll spend a minimum of \$800 without airfare.

THERE ARE MORE than 80,000 seats in the Silverdome which would bring in \$64 million to metropolitan Detroit if all spectators were out-of-town owners who spent \$800 each.

I didn't include what the networks would spend in setting up for the game (rumored to be around \$10 million) or what organizations will spend for promotional activities associated with the event. I didn't even include the \$30 for my ticket.

Convention people say this money will be recycled seven times because low-income workers will be hired for additional jobs, such as restaurant and hotel help. And they will immediately re-spend it in the metropolitan area.

The state of Michigan will probably pick up the 4 percent sales and use taxes on most of the money spent without having to educate anyone or increase state services.

Superbowl is a big business. And it will be our business in two years.



No compacts in housing

What the housing industry needs is another George Romney — someone who will denounce the natural gas-guzzling residential dinosaurs of the 1960s and '70s as the American Motors president denounced the gasoline-guzzling autos of the 1950s.

But it won't happen, at least not in the foreseeable future. One gets that strong impression from a friendly get-together with the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan.

The summary of our depressing conversation: New houses will stay large, and young couples will have to stick to apartments or live with parents.

Housing costs will continue to increase faster than the consumer price index as a whole, with no relief in sight.

The chief culprit is consumerism and local governments, which respond to voters in existing housing rather than to the needs of persons who would like to buy.

THE CONSUMER price index has risen from a 1967 level of 100 to 223.7 as of September 1979. In that same period, the cost of home ownership had risen to 267, about 43 points ahead of food and 115 points ahead of apparel.

(Interestingly, residential rent was only 178.7 on the scale, 88 points lower than home ownership.)

The reason, builder Herman Frankel of Orchard Lake said, was that so many elements in construction were related to the soaring price of energy — asphalt, pipe, kiln drying.

"I don't believe there's going to be any good news," he said.

"Our consensus," said Otto Binggesser of Bloomfield Hills, president of the association, "is that houses will probably not change very much in size. There will probably be more condominiums and cluster housing in the future."

WHY CAN'T SOMEONE make compact houses the way Romney sold compact cars?

The reason is that the housing industry has a robot-silent partner that the auto industry doesn't have — local government. Binggesser said communities zone for larger and larger lot sizes. This raises land improvement costs. It's uneconomical to put a compact house on a giant lot, so houses keep getting bigger and bigger.

There's a vicious circle: Once people buy houses in a suburban community, they don't want anything smaller than their house around; so they zone for larger houses in the future.

The result is devastating to younger families. The fruit of this "grass roots government" is that not only do we have racial barriers in this metropolitan area, but we also have age barriers and economic barriers. A "balanced" community is virtually impossible to find.

JAY JANIS, chairman of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, told a congressional committee last fall what the rising cost of housing is doing to Americans:

Only about 15 percent of potential house buyers can meet monthly payments today. Buyers of new housing today must spend 36 percent of their disposable income — twice the proportion they had to spend only 10 years ago.

Irvi Yackness, general counsel of the local builders group, told us much the same story. In the 1980s, buyers will have to spend up to 40 percent of their incomes on housing, he said.

Although the building industry is a giant nationally, it isn't dominated by four or five big firms, the way auto production is. There are thousands of small firms, and collectively they lack the clout to fight local and state "over-regulation."

As long as that state of affairs continues, they say, housing prices will continue to soar.

discover Michigan

Did you know that at one time all of Michigan was ice-covered and Alaska was not? Pleistocene glaciation blanketed most of the Great Lakes area but left much of what is now Alaska free from glacier ice. A mile-thick glacier covered, for example, Kelley's Island in Lake Erie.

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