

Cable's 'Paper Tiger' turns tables on media

By Jim Davidson

The Pittsburgh Press

Hopes were running high when city councils and cable TV operators waved their magic wands and created community access TV channels in the late 1970s and early '80s.

The local cable system would reserve air time for the efforts of ordinary people. They could walk into a state-of-the-art TV studio and twirl a few knobs. Their programs would be innovative, informative and extremely cheap to produce.

Few rabbits crawled out of the hat, however. In Pittsburgh, community access TV has produced

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tepid public affairs programming, occasional comedy and an armload of aerobic exercise shows.

An exception to the rule is the politically incisive "Paper Tiger Television," produced since 1981 by a New York City collective of media artists, and now telecast on community access channels in Texas, Minnesota, Massachusetts and California.

In each of about 75 segments taped to date, one person reads and comments on a newspaper, magazine or family of books, usually asking and answering questions like "Who reads it?" "Who owns it?" and "What does it really mean?" in the context of provocative and amusing 30-minute segments.

Pittsburgh Filmmakers will show three "Paper Tiger" episodes at 8 and 10 p.m. tomorrow at 205 Oakland Ave. The three are "Joan Braderman reads the National Enquirer," part five of "Herb Schiller reads The New York Times" and "Elayne Rapping Reads Romance Novels."

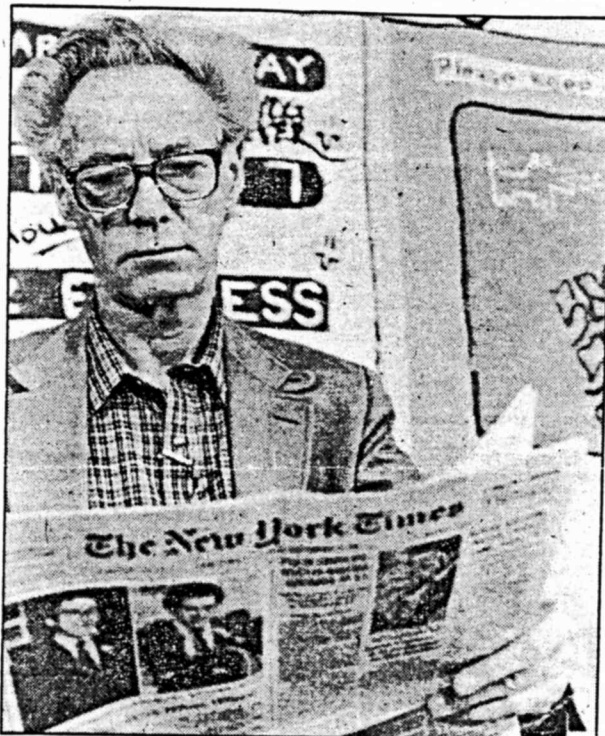
DeeDee Halleck, founder and mainspring of "Paper Tiger," will appear at 8 p.m. Saturday with "Judy Butler Reads La Prensa" and "Waiting for the Invasion: U.S. Citizens in Nicaragua," produced by Paper Tiger members.

Also expecting to attend is Ms. Rapping, a Pittsburgher and tenured English professor at Robert Morris College. Her segment, which was unavailable for review, shows her against the backdrop of a laundromat, discussing the appeal of Silhouette novels sold in supermarkets and through high school book clubs.

What intrigues her is their mix of the old-fashioned and the new, the prim and the sexy. "They put in a lot of rhetorical stuff about women's liberation and doing your own thing," but show their heroines finally deferring to their men.

The range of commentary in "Paper Tiger" is apparent in the other two Friday segments, both available for review.

"Herb Schiller Reads The New York Times" is one of the six original segments taped in 1981 when "Paper Tiger" was part of another cable series. Schiller dryly analyzes the newspaper's Washington Talk column, ridiculing its lightweight story about breakfast sales in Congressional dining halls and scolding it for not revealing ties between



From "Herb Schiller Reads New York Times"

corporations and elected officials.

At Schiller's side, unacknowledged, sits a silent youth of indeterminate sex, dressed as a cowboy and twirling a toy pistol. His or her job is to display beginning and end credits written in magic marker on a dinner plate, but his or her function is to jazz up the segment's

graphic appeal.

"Joan Braderman Reads the National Enquirer" is full of rock-and-roll graphics that, for instance, superimpose Ms. Braderman's face over Sophia Loren's on an Enquirer cover.

Using a hard-boiled New York

style, free-wheeling logic and a profusion of gag lines, she explains her love-hate reactions to a newspaper "everyone knows is a rag... but on the other hand engages people's desires."

She says people are embarrassed to carry it on the subway, and her own mother "would not be caught dead" with the Enquirer in her house. But for reasons she explores, 5 million people per week are drawn to the Enquirer and its happy news about tribulations of the stars. Readers rest secure in "knowledge that there's someone as crazy as you are who's on TV."

Her analysis is delightful — for instance, when she distinguishes between "gee whiz" stories and "hey Martha" stories in the Enquirer. In the latter category are reactions like, "Hey, Martha! It says here Natalie Wood really didn't drown."

Part of her "dehoaxing" is to discuss methods of putting the Enquirer together, like the Friday meeting where \$80,000-per editors must each submit 30 ideas for stories, or the methods used by C.R. McQuiston, who somehow holds his lie detector to the TV screen and determines which public officials are lying.

She says it, but is her information true? Not necessarily.

She explains her statements about the paper are "accurate" insofar as they're based on what "inside sources say" — a method of news-gathering that perfectly parodies the method of the National Enquirer. And for good measure, she indulges in near-slander of Enquirer publisher Generoso "Gene" Pope, patterned on the newspaper's ways of saying enough but not too much. Anyone who recognizes humor in the pages of the National Enquirer will probably howl at the way she does it.