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RCA and the VideoDisc: the business of research. Margaret B.W. Graham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Peter Brueggeman, book review  
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During the 1970's, RCA and other companies were racing to develop a videoplayer system for the consumer market. Different technical approaches were developed including optical disks (Philips/MCA/Magnavox/IBM Laservision, Pioneer's LaserDisc), magnetic tape players (Sony Betamax, Matsushita VHS, RCA Selectavision MagTape, Avco Cartrivision), capacitance disks (Matsushita/General Electric/JVC, RCA Selectavision VideoDisc), holographic images on vinyl (RCA Selectavision Holotape), and other systems by CBS and Telefunken/Decca. RCA simultaneously experimented with various videoplayer technologies and settled on the capacitance disk. A diamond stylus read audiovisual information by sensing the variation in capacitance on a grooved spinning conductive vinyl disk. RCA Selectavision VideoDisc was introduced to the market in 1981, sold poorly, and was discontinued in 1984.

Graham chronicles the research and development of RCA's VideoDisc from its beginning in 1965 through technical development and endless delays in the 1970's to its quick demise in the early 1980's. Graham offers an inside look at corporate research and development gained by extensive interviews and access to RCA documents. RCA's corporate history and structure shape the ultimate failure of Selectavision VideoDisc. RCA's past innovative glory in radio and television did not readily transfer to videoplayer development within RCA's existing corporate structure. RCA's research capabilities were so in-depth that several videoplayer technologies were simultaneously pursued by different RCA divisions. Rivalries existed between divisions thus delaying the development of any one videoplayer technology; divisions pushed their own solutions. Premature press conferences were the rule as management strove to demonstrate RCA's continued technological superiority especially after RCA's expensive withdrawal from the computer business in 1971.

The Selectavision VideoDisc failed due to poor internal coordination of research and development resulting in delayed market entry, inaccurate market assumptions (consumer interest in videotape rentals surprised RCA), and the

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increasing installed base of magnetic tape videoplayers (VCRs). Graham documents RCA's activities in the race to be first on the videoplayer market and in the context of the activities of other companies developing videoplayers. Laser optical disks were in the running for the videoplayer market but the products introduced suffered from unreliable players, defective disks, and poor program availability. RCA and the VideoDisc offers insight into the corporate research process, the development of mass storage technology for audiovisual information, and the shaping of products for the consumer electronics market.