

origination service wherein Quantum would train community people in the operation of video equipment, supply hardware and programming concepts. Initially, community people would have to leave their communities and come to Berkeley for training. Quantum says it will guarantee a cable system two to four hours of locally produced material each day, as well as another four hours of imported programming, the scheme being to swap programming among the systems that Quantum is working for. Quantum estimates the cost to a cable system of say 6,000 subscribers as 2¢ per subscriber per day, or \$43,800 a year, which is a lot of money; money which should not be diverted from direct investment into a community.

Basically, a centralized service for local programming is self-defeating. Communities needs differ. If there is local money available from a cable system to do programming to give it over to outsiders is a blatant rip-off. Moreover, Quantum seems to be interested in providing only heavy production equipment, no portable stuff, and thus declaring itself an expert—the same old game.

The California company announced their plan at a news conference in February. Prior to the conference, we called them and asked about their scheme. Every specific question of ours was diverted with the explanation "we can't answer that now." At the actual press conference Quantum was even more vague (we have a videotape of it) which caused the covering press to get hostile at Quantum's obvious lack of any real information.

Our feeling is that Quantum is trying to grab publicity through premature announcements because it wants to be first on line for potential federal funding in this area. The company claims to have lined-up some prestige names on its advisory board, and those people should know better. Specialized national networking through cable is to be encouraged, but the last thing that local experimentation needs is a packaged plan—the same for everywhere. If Quantum is hustling your community, keep a close watch on them.

## PROJECTS

*Alternate Media Center* (144 Bleeker Street, New York, New York 10012) is a projected funded by the Markle Foundation (for \$260,000) to explore community-oriented uses of cable. The Center's projects encompass New York City; Cape May, New Jersey; Reading, Pennsylvania; Charleston, West Virginia; Baxter, Tennessee; Montpelier, Vermont; Gulf Coast Pulpwood Cutters, Mississippi; Rice University Media Center, Houston, Texas; and Wooster, Massachusetts.

Alternate Media is into training people in the techniques and technology of half-inch video and working with cable owners and managers. In essence, it is a training project for people in public access cable-TV.

The Center runs a no-fat operation without fancy furnishings and phony secretaries. Just video and community organization. The directors, Red Burns and George Stoney, are both practical-minded people who know what to avoid in trying to create genuinely responsive alternatives in cable.

The only drawback of the Center, which is in no way the fault of those who run it, is that it serves as a "safe" project for foundation-type funding. That is, Alternate Media does many of the same things that individuals are who have no support are also doing. But because Alternate Media is affiliated with N.Y.U. it has a legitimacy that the rest of us do not.

We once tried to get a small grant from the same Markle Foundation and were informed that they had given "all their half-inch money" to Alternate Media. Other people report similar experiences. Our project was to do a technical mini-manual on half-inch video interfaced with cable-TV. We wanted only about \$5,000. But because of projects like Alternate Media Center there is no small-sca-

le money left for diverse groups who don't need or want brokers in their work. Afterwards, we also learned that it doesn't pay for big-time foundations to give small grants because of their overhead. In other words, it costs them the same in administrative expenses to give away \$50,000 as it does to give away \$5,000, so that thinking small doesn't interest them while at the same time they are encouraging decentralization of social systems.

*Open Channel*, 49 East 68th Street, New York, New York 10021. Thea Sklover, who is head of Open Channel, has been working towards genuine alternatives in television since well-before the half-inch video scene developed. Her integrity and motivation are above question and she has been tireless in her efforts to guarantee public access on the legislative level. But she has some strange ideas.

Open Channel functions as a middle-man between the Public Access channels in New York and community groups who want to produce programming but who don't have skills or equipment. This puts Open Channel in a brokerage position and what's particularly frustrating is that there are people in New York who think that Open Channel and Public Access are the same thing, a notion developed through extensive publicity that Open Channel has gotten in both local newspapers and national magazines. At a time when the head of the F.C.C. himself has said publically that Public Access (in New York) isn't working, it's a dangerous game for only one group to be its spokesman.

Moreover, Open Channel is committed to notions of production which merely mimic broadcast tveevee, although using portable equipment. Thea maintains that the groups she is working with are used to certain production standards and merely want to see them applied on local news and events. Well, no one argues against well-produced tape and there is no reason to tolerate bad camera work, bad sound, or bad edits. But the techniques of broadcast television are also formatting devices which have proved unable to communicate honest, straightforward information. The alternatives of well-produced portable video guarantee access to behavior more genuine than street interviews and performance functions.

One of *Open Channel's* prize tapes is of a church service in a black church. Two-and-a-half hours of engaging energy that, however, took Open Channel 20, repeat 20, people to produce. What's ironic, is that an essentially white, middle class group is using the vitality of black culture to demonstrate what Public Access can do, while being unable to record similar enthusiasm among themselves.

Indeed, Open Channel's headquarters are an office scene, five or six women at typewriters and one man in the corner, with no more space than a desk, to look after the actual equipment.

As another experiment, Open Channel is to be encouraged, but not as the broker for Public Access television. It is important for the outside world to realize that Open Channel's approach is but one of many.

## CONFERENCES

*CHALLENGE FOR CHANGE AT N.Y.U.* took place November 21-23, 1971. It brought together fifty participants from New York State and a resource team from the "Challenge for Change" unit of the National Film Board of Canada, which has pioneered in community and minority participation in film and half-inch video.

The formal discussion consisted of film and video showings and a series of discussion groups and workshops. Video and audio tapes of portions of these discussions are accessible through the library of Alternate Media Center, 144 Bleeker Street, New York, N.Y., as is a written summary of what was said.