

HAVE YOU PLACED YOUR BID?



MANHATTAN CABLE'S THEA SKLOVER—OPEN CHANNEL

PROPOSAL FOR A PLANNING GRANT TO DEVELOP COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING AND CONTROL FOR PUBLIC CABLE CHANNELS

Two or three years from now when the smoke clears and we stand and look over the growing wired landscape of our nation, there is little doubt that we shall find that the majority of the cable systems throughout this country will be owned by the large systems operator. Why? Current ownership patterns show that local municipalities tend to grant franchises to known entities. Generally that is true because it takes a tremendous amount of capital outlay to wire this nation properly for broad band communications. No matter what ruling the FCC may promulgate regarding preferential treatment for local public or non-commercial entities at franchise time, it is doubtful that there will be sufficient capital available for many non-profit cable ventures.

Consequently, it will be large corporate entities that will tend to own most of the cable in America—OWN but not control. Historically, these two words have become synonymous, ownership meaning control, but what is proposed is the concept of separation of ownership and control of this new communication medium.

What this suggests is that a diversity of ownership of cable systems is important and that it should be encouraged, but more important than who owns the system is the question of what programming, what software ultimately will come through that hardware system and what access is guaranteed to all members of the community. And that the crucial issue is the allocation of adequate channels for public use and control with built-in mechanisms for programming and production expertise.

New Yorkers who presently receive 10 channels of television reception by July 1971, will be receiving 17 channels and by the following year, 24 channels. According to the most recent state of the art, 42 channel systems are presently being installed in other cities in this country. The potential for increased capacity is dependent upon demand and legislation. However, the question of gravest concern is what information will be carried over those channels and who will control this.



HALL

Also in July, 1971, the two franchised cable operations in the borough of Manhattan must make available two public channels. This plan would seek to demonstrate on one channel what true neighborhood participation in the planning, programming and running of a local television outlet. By so doing, it would set a precedent for separation of control of local CATV channels and ownership of systems.

The fact that there are presently 80,000 homes wired for cable in the borough testifies to the rapidly growing acceptance of this form of television reception in New York City; therefore, it seems an excellent location for a demonstration of this nature. Additionally, it is imperative that some demonstration of positive use of this system be made at this point in time before we find that the fate of the radio industry is replicated in the development of this new phenomenon.

PROBLEMS CONCERNING PUBLIC UTILIZATION OF CATV:

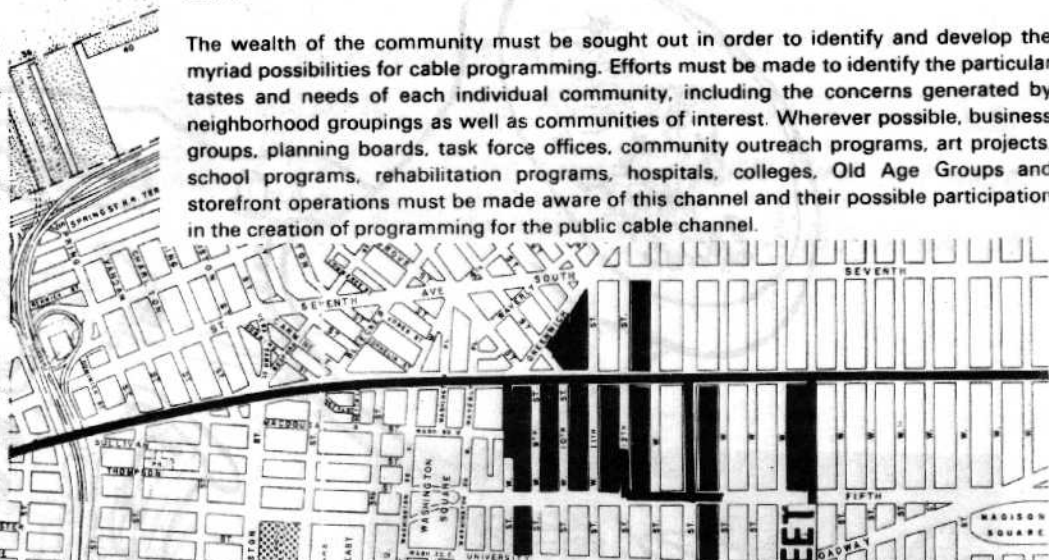
Information:

One of the principle problems is informing the public of the availability and the potentiality of CATV. They must be told what it could be, how it might be used and given a mechanism which will enable them to make competent use of that potential. It is thought by some that if a common carrier status was achieved by cable that would alleviate all of the problems related to public use. However, it is not enough to merely say that channels are available to all without providing a structure designed to encourage their use and to offer adequate money and expertise for the creation of programming. Availability without these back-up services will not accomplish the goal of access for all nor create the type of programming that will attract the interest and support of the community.

Resources within the community must be identified and their participation invited. Specialists in the fields of journalism, broadcasting, filmmaking, and video production must be sought out so that their support and expertise can be utilized to the fullest by the local community. In some instances training of individuals within the community as to programming skills, and production techniques will be necessary and should be offered to those who seek such knowledge. However, in those instances where groups prefer to work with a trained production staff, such a staff must be available.

Equipment maintenance and availability must also be planned. Decisions regarding location of equipment, equipment requirements of the community, funding for additional equipment needs, are all necessary steps in the ongoing development of community CATV.

The wealth of the community must be sought out in order to identify and develop the myriad possibilities for cable programming. Efforts must be made to identify the particular tastes and needs of each individual community, including the concerns generated by neighborhood groupings as well as communities of interest. Wherever possible, business groups, planning boards, task force offices, community outreach programs, art projects, school programs, rehabilitation programs, hospitals, colleges, Old Age Groups and storefront operations must be made aware of this channel and their possible participation in the creation of programming for the public cable channel.



At this point in time, there exists many unresolved legal problems associated with full community utilization of cable. In order for the separation of control and ownership of cable systems to be fully established libel laws must read that responsibility for programming rests with the programmer, individual or group who has created the programming, and is not the responsibility of the cable operator himself. Until such laws are enacted, the cable operator is placed in the role of censor, one who cannot guarantee access even on public channels, since his corporate entity would be held responsible for any defamation or other legal claims. Unless this situation is remedied, the cable operator will be in the position of controlling the flow of information that originates from all the channels on his system, putting him in an unprecedented position of censor for all the channels within any given locality. Some ongoing structure must be formed that will orchestrate and coordinate all these energies and efforts.

Production Consultants:

Individuals in the area of television production, at the local public television station, independent producers as well as experimental half inch video groups, established university programs and students in communications have all been approaching Open Channel in order to participate in this project. During the early weeks of operation a formal agreement with the Educational Broadcasting Corporation, which operates Channel 13 and NET, will be consummated along with agreements with independent producers. In Progress:

One project has already begun via an arrangement with Alternate Media Center at N.Y.U., George Stoney, Executive Director . . .

Creation of local cable committees will be another function of Open Channel. In order for this local cable committee to be a workable entity it must comprise representatives of the geographic neighborhoods as well as representatives from communities of interest: artists, members of citizens groups, ethnic groups, religious groups, political parties, labor, schools, business, sporting associations, etc. It must be a cross section of the segments of that particular community and must be responsive to the needs and tastes of that community.

The primary responsibility of the local committee will be to guarantee access to all citizens and to insure that the television time is not dominated by the loudest voices or the most organized political groups. Open Channel, the service module, will work with this committee as a programming arm that will produce some of the programming carried on the Public Cable Channels. However, it will also stimulate and seek out other sources of programming within the community, alerting them to rights of access to these channels.

If we are to guarantee the right of access to all, then we must consider the technology, or the means of production, whereby the less wealthy may be able to afford to produce their own programming. Therefore, experimentation with the carriage of the signal and image of the simplest and least expensive equipment, both the half inch video-tape, one inch video-tape and Super 8 film will also be done. If we can prove that cable-casting of the half inch tape is viable, that will open the doors to access to the many, not just the few. Since it is talent and approach, rather than hardware, that makes for quality programs, we believe that the marriage of talent and cheaper technology will produce an excellent product.



ANCHISED AREA 380,000 HOMES

June 23, 1971

Beryl,

Here is the speech and the proposal for Open Channel that has been funded. I think it is all there. The main points are 1) the availability of public channels; 2) the liability question that still is not answered but will be soon, (that means that the cable operator still has the right to screen tapes before playing them and so can still censor). I tried to get a bill through the State Legislature to change this but was unsuccessful this year, therefore I will have to wait till next year, or until the FCC acts in. Please forgive me for not having details and a well thought out article but I'm right in the throes of organizing Open Channel * and as you well know that is hell. We are in the process of developing rules of access; in other words how it shall be determined who gets on and when. If you could wait a while for those I think this whole thing would have more relevance to your readers. For that is the actual mechanism that will guarantee access to all those interested in utilizing the channels . . .

this area. However since the channels are available as of July 1, I am going ahead and will help to create programming for those channels. The importance of the success of this public use of cable here in Manhattan cannot be stressed enough. I truly believe that if we can make it work here we will be setting a precedent for the nation in opening up this utilization of television. However, if it fails, if these channels are not used, or if they carry programming that no one cares about or relates to, or if they are utilized for the entertainment of the esoteric few, then we probably will have provided the necessary fuel for those who are fighting against this opening up of the medium. See you soon. Thea

COLN SQUARE DEVELOPMENT

Contact George Stoney, NYU—School of the Arts, 111 2nd Ave., NYC, for extensive information on their use of 1/2" portable video and plans for Alternate Media Center.



Dean Burch
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
1919 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Enclosed you will find a copy of the latest issue of our publication, *Radical Software*, which deals with alternate uses of television, videotape, and other communications technologies.

Our readership is composed largely of people who are involved in making their own television. Most of them are using portable half-inch videotape cameras manufactured by Sony and others. We ourselves also make our own TV with the portable equipment.

We are writing for some information of direct concern to ourselves and those we service. *Specifically, we keep hearing rumors from people we know in Washington that the F.C.C. is going to issue a ruling against the use of half-inch videotape equipment, that broadcast interests and unions are pushing for such a restriction.*

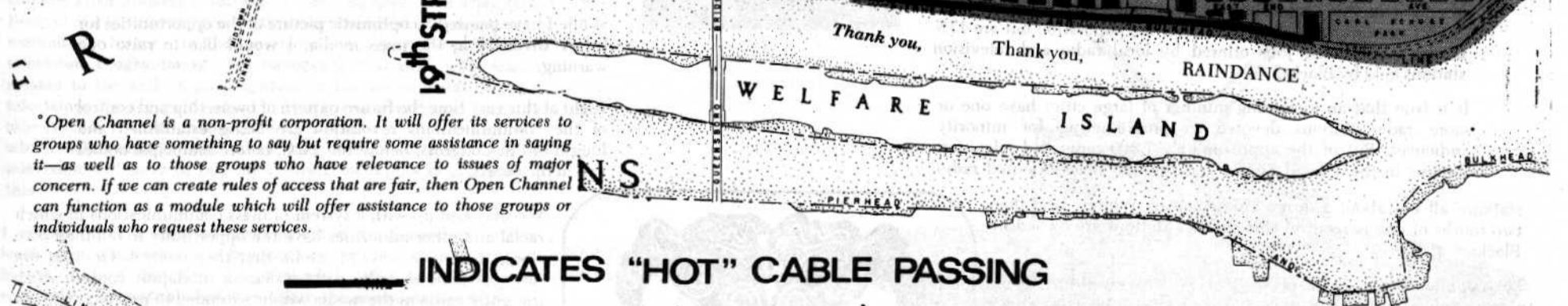
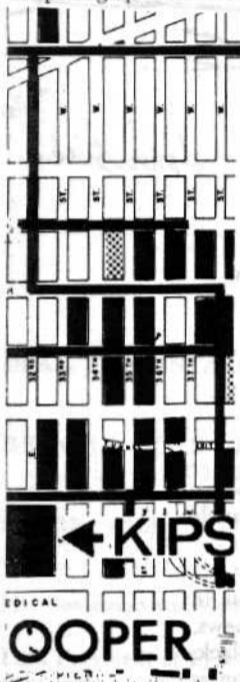
Given the current limbo on local origination we find these rumors hard to believe. But one never knows.

As you probably know, to ban half-inch portable equipment from CATV local origination uses would be equivalent to denying community groups access to cable as it would mean that they would be limited to either a heavy hardware investment or bound to just a studio situation (controlled by the CATV owner).

As you probably also know, half-inch portables are relatively cheap (\$1,500), fabulously easy to use, and can operate anywhere there's normal lighting conditions.

What we'd like to know is what is the F.C.C.'s position vis-a-vis portable half inch video used with CATV. Has it been discussed? Do you anticipate a ruling either way?

We'd like your permission to include your reply in the next issue of *Radical Software*. If this is okay with you, may we hear from you by the second week in June which is the deadline for our next issue.

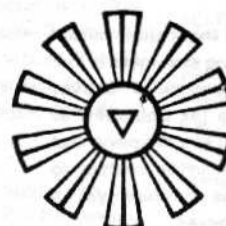


INDICATES "HOT" CABLE PASSING
 CATEGORY I (HOT BLOCKS)
 CATEGORY II

*Open Channel is a non-profit corporation. It will offer its services to groups who have something to say but require some assistance in saying it—as well as to those groups who have relevance to issues of major concern. If we can create rules of access that are fair, then Open Channel can function as a module which will offer assistance to those groups or individuals who request these services.

I believe that *Radical Software*, Raindance, and Quantum are all trying to do something similar. I recently wrote to Ira Schneider and Raindance about a catalogue we are trying to do at Quantum. We are involved in attempting a twelve part manpower study of the cable industry in the seventies. My contribution (hopefully!) will be a catalogue/index of available programming for cable use. . . . I would appreciate it, if you would publish my request for information on programming available for cable television—having people include costs and lengths of tapes/films—in the next edition of *Radical Software*.

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quantum
communications
incorporated

