

# 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.



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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:

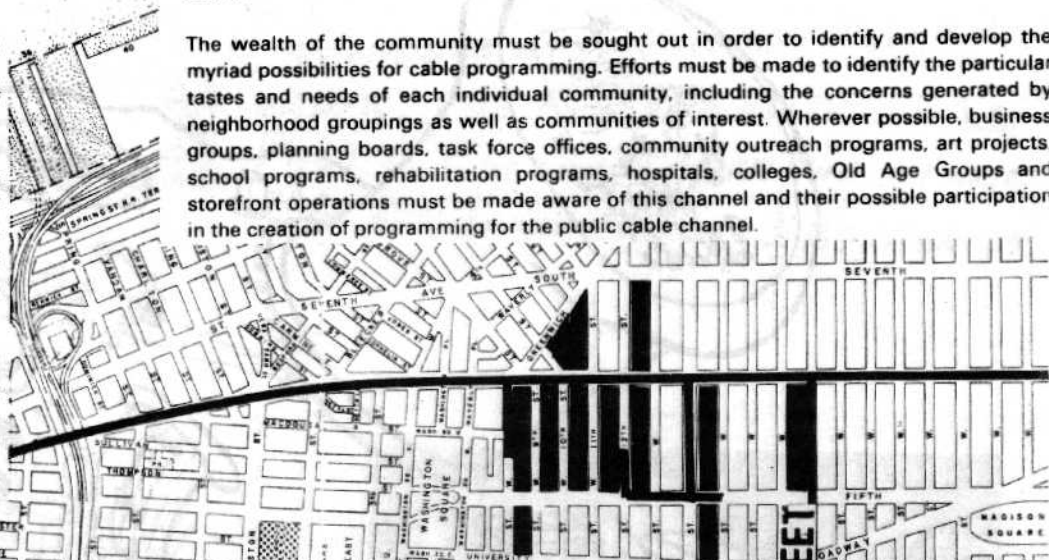
#### Information:

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.

