

Much is a matter of commitment. Recently, Sanfratello came up with a modification which he says makes even the most technically impossible tapes viewable over cable. The part for the modification cost fifty cents. \*

A uniform characteristic of all of the groups and individuals doing half-inch programming for the public channels has been commitment. With few exceptions, people doing Public Access programming receive little or no pay. Most of the groups have had philanthropic support. Open Channel, organized by Thea Sklover to provide taping facilities and personnel to groups wishing to put programming onto the public channels, got started with a \$19,000 grant from the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation and a \$15,000 grant from the Stern Fund. Open Channel has taped with more than eighty requesting groups and organizations, and has more than that waiting. They have also done some of the most ambitious public channel programming, including a two-and-one-half hour "special", a music service from a black church in Harlem. Alternate Media Center, at New York University's School of the Arts, also received support from the Markle Foundation, with a grant of \$275,000 to be spread over three years for the purpose of promoting community and non-professional use of the cable via half-inch video. The Center is run by a woman named Red Burns, who, with students and paid professionals, has been helping groups around the country as well as in New York to create their own capability to produce half-inch video programming. In general the Center contributes the technical know-how and cable experience, and the groups find their own funding for equipment, tape and other expenses. The Center is in the process of organizing a Public Access video center for Reading, Pennsylvania, the first one to be funded by a cable company (Berks TV Company, a subsidiary of American Television and Communications, the nation's third largest CATV company in number of subscribers). The Center will train resource people for one year, then leave it to the people of the community to run.

Two of the best series of programs on the public channels received funding from the Fund for the City of New York, through its Center for the Analysis of Public Issues. One is a series for and about old people, called "The Elders; programming includes an exercise class taped at an old people's center, a nutrition discussion group, and a discussion of an old people's rights movement with Bella Abzug. The series was produced by David Othmer and taped by students from the Alternate Media Center. As with the programming of other special interest groups, these tapes have had an audience, and the response has been strongly enthusiastic. The other series was done for the signing deaf, those who use sign language, produced by the Deafness Research and Training Institute, a federally funded rehabilitation center affiliated with New York University. The series includes a cooking class, some panel discussions on problems of the deaf, and an excellent tape on how to use half-inch videotape equipment, made with Frank Cavestani at Space Videoarts, which has received support from the Samuel Rubin Foundation.

Considerable programming, some of the most varied and creative, has been done by people in the so-called "underground" video groups in New York: Global Village, Peoples Video Theater, Raindance, Space Videoarts, Videofreex. Their commitment to and development of half-inch videotape as an alternative to our communications system pre-dates Public Access by several years and has been of the greatest significance to its development. All of these groups have received funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, but, since the non-commercial use of half-inch video is for the most part also non-remunerative, most of the people involved live and work on a shoestring. Although they have sought foundation support, few of the groups have received it, despite the fact that their accumulated body of work is impressive. One reason why they have not received foundation support may be that their commitment to alternatives includes their own life-styles, and this may be misleading to foundation people.

One very encouraging aspect to the Public Access financial picture is that much has been accomplished on relatively little. But it is clear that, if Public Access is to have a chance to be experienced by our communities, in order to be valid even as an experiment, it will have to have a substantial commitment of money and people, probably from philanthropic, commercial and government sources.

\* The part was a capacitor, inserted into the Automatic Gain Control to subdue its tendency to overreact to signals from half-inch tape (including a 60-cycle hum which is often present).

*Red Burns, Alternate Media: "One of our principal concerns is the whole problem of deconditioning people from the assumption that they have no access to media, and that they cannot deal with it... What we've come around to believing and understanding is that it's terribly necessary for this video equipment to be available on a community basis. (But) we don't have enough money, and I don't think any foundation would have enough money, to give everybody video equipment. So we don't go around turning everybody on to video, saying, 'Hey, isn't that nice!', and then leaving... We have evolved a way of working in which we attempt to set up projects which can be self-generating. We will go in with resources to begin with and any kind of expertise and advice that we have learned and then it has to be taken over by the community... Our concept is based on the fact that there are resources available in the communities, but that the resources will not be made available until the communities get into the idea of the use of the equipment... So initially we're trying to find ways to provide money, whether it's the cable companies who are into the possibility of making a contribution, or community planning boards, community colleges, or neighborhood groups....."*

