



Over the last six months there's been an explosion in cable-TV activity ranging from useful books to a national office devoted exclusively to providing non-partisan information about CATV. Here is a list:

CABLE TELEVISION INFORMATION CENTER

This is a three-year project funded by the Ford and Markle Foundations (at \$950,000 per year) to provide information to municipalities and community groups about the options available to them in granting and getting a cable franchise. According to Bowman Cutter, the Center's director, the information will range from simply answering questions to drafting feasibility studies and beyond to the point of assigning field workers to become actively involved in cable negotiations. Although the Center has just been in existence a short time it's already received over 200 requests for assistance from various city governments.

Cutter is a 29-year-old businessman with no previous experience in either cable or any facet of public (or private) television. Prior to his appointment he was an executive with the Chicago-based Northwestern Industries Conglomerate (and also taught in the business school at the University of Chicago). More important, he was campaign manager for Senator Adlai Stevenson and thus brings with him high-use knowledge about city- and state-level politics. Forty percent of his staff (of ten) will spend their time in the field and Cutter says that he is choosing them for their political savvy as well as their knowledge of cable.

While the Center is not conceived as a policy-making group, Cutter says it will offer both opinions and straight information. Moreover, he plans to stay in touch with successful cable projects to draw off their resources in advising other communities. This might lead to a library of successful videotapes so that nascent cable systems can see the potential of the medium through the medium itself rather than print and talk.

Cutter offers assurances that the Center will not function as an arm of the Ford-Public Broadcasting axis in an attempt to establish domination over cable-TV planning. In fact, he says, his liaison with them is informal and infrequent. From talking with him it becomes clear that his background in business and politics may be just what's needed in the position he fills. Where he may be weak is in understanding the programming potential of cable and thus it would be a good idea for people with practical experience to make contact with the Center and pass on print and video information. The address is:

Bowman Cutter, Director
 CABLE TELEVISION INFORMATION CENTER
 2100 M Street N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20037
 Phone: (202) 872-8888

BOOKS

CABLE TELEVISION IN THE CITIES: Community Control, Public Access, and Minority Ownership. Edited by Charles Tate. \$3.95 from the Urban Institute 2100 M Street N.W. West, Washington, D.C. 20037.

This book didn't cost \$500,000 to produce as did the Sloan Commission Report, but it's about 500,000 times more useful. In fact, it may be the best single resource book about cable-TV including as it does a bibliography of relevant publications, a list of research and demonstration projects, useful facts about the cable industry and the F.C.C.; and a rundown on the people in congress who sit on committees effecting cable.

More important, *CABLE TELEVISION IN THE CITIES* has a point of view—that minorities and community groups should control cable—and thus configures its information towards that end (there is even a list of community owned systems) right down to work-sheets which would enable you to make a practical estimate of your communities needs both in wiring and video production.

While the book is weak on programming ideas and the need for high flexibility video equipment, it is so comprehensive and fortunately non-theoretical that its use value can't be stressed enough. If your community is considering cable then get this book.

ON THE CABLE: The Television of Abundance. Report of the Sloan Commission on Cable Communications. McGraw-Hill (paperback). \$2.95. This book should be studied as a document in political science or sociology, because as an overview of cable it is of trivial important (see first article, this section).

What is important are the insights to be gained into the mentality of the foundation establishment which would pay \$500,000 to produce this document. Cable will change the nation, the Sloan Commission claims, but their claim is so devoid of exuberance or imagination that you wonder "why bother?"

It is of critical importance to understand that the drafting and appearance of this report was a major event deserving of full national coverage only because it reconfirms a traditional power pattern (foundation-report-publicity-maybe action), not because it had much to say. Thus, the foundation establishment used cable television to reassert its influence at a price of half a million collars while people actually working towards "the television of abundance" are for the most part without funds or organizational support.

Indeed, the most critical failure of the Sloan Report is that it offers no notions of how to integrate public access and other alternative types of programming into the economic life of cable systems. Yet, there will be no fundamental structural change in communications unless there are alternative ways of funding. Foundations are notorious for their lack of economic innovation, probably because they themselves never have to worry where their funding is coming from. Thus, the Sloan Report is preoccupied with guaranteeing cable operators unlimited access to imported broadcast signals (i.e. more of the

same old stuff) because that will make them financially healthy and then maybe they'll get around to those other innovations "which is what we really want to see."

In this context, public access becomes like "public service:" those bullshit shows that the networks do on Sunday mornings that people don't like, but which are "good for them." Or it becomes another stab at NET, i.e. a second chance at educational television, only this time they think, maybe they'll get it right.

At least the folks at Children's Television Workshop, which brought you *Sesame Street*, must think so. CTW is now an integral part of the "what's going to happen with cable" scene and their spokesman is Mike Dann, formerly of CBS, who stars in Les Brown's book *Television* as the ultimate cynic, a type of man who programs crap for money, but who wouldn't watch him it himself.

Sure, we all know that "Dann never really wanted to do that stuff, that is talents are needed now in non-commercial teevee", blah-blah-blah, but like it or not *Sesame Street* is just another power structure controlling kid's lives with enormous resources and influence and no outside inputs. You probably didn't know it, but the CTW moguls like to spend occasional weekends at executive type retreats in the mountains having what can only be described as "secret" meetings to determine how they'll influence cable-TV.

COMMUNITY ACCESS VIDEO, by Herbert Allan Frederiksen. \$3.00. Available through bookstores or from the author at: 695 30th Avenue, Apartment#E, Santa Cruz, California 95060.

Portions of this book are excerpted in this *Radical Software* along with an order form if you can't get it from your bookstore right away. We say "right away" because this is *the* most useful book available on making your own television. It has that detailed description of how to acquire and work with video equipment (editing, cabling, shooting, etc.) that everyone else always talks about writing and/or needing. It has a fine chapter on "Forming Your Own Non-Profit Corporation for \$20;" and a glossary of video terms unique to Porta-Pak production; suggestions as how to make money to support your own video, and finally, much information on gaining access to cable-TV.

The author is working in Santa Cruz, California trying to set-up a public access facility. Because the city did not specify public access in the original franchise agreement (with Teleprompter) Frederiksen has had to organize a community referendum on the issue. But even though he has gotten the required signatures the city government may refuse to hold the ballot arguing that it would be a breach of contract with the cable system. Thus, Frederiksen is prepared to take the matter to the California Supreme Court which could then establish a precedent by ruling that even though a cable franchise is in effect without broad-ranging public access, the community can go back and rewrite it. This would strike down what's called "grandfathering" where existing cable systems attempt to avoid liberalized access rules by claiming that their contract was in effect before the rules were issued. (Just as blacks in the south couldn't vote if their grandfathers hadn't. Hence the term). Needless to say, Frederiksen details all his experience in organizing Santa Cruz in the book.

It should be noted that Frederiksen is doing his whole trip without any outside support, at a time when foundations are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars and study projects and meetings. Moreover, the author had to pay to publish his own book (\$900 for 3,000 copies, first-run), a book which is infinitely more useful than the \$500,000 Sloan Report.

CABLE TELEVISION, by Monroe Price and John Wicklein. Pilgrim Press, 1505 Race Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102. \$2.95 paperback. \$5.95. hardcover.

Monroe Price is co-author of the Sloan Report, but don't hold that against him. While this book doesn't have the grass-roots feeling of Frederiksen's, or the pragmatism of *Cable Television in the Cities*, it is still a high-use addition for a good knowledge of cable.

THE F.C.C. RULINGS ON CABLE are available for only 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ a copy by writing: Superintendent of Documents, General Post Office, Washington, D.C. 20402; and specifying: Federal Register of February 12th, 1972, #30, part two only.

In brief, the F.C.C. has adopted a laissez-faire attitude which obviously reflects Chairman Dean Burch's brand of Republicanism. However, instead of keeping hands-off the public input as well, the rulings restrict it and thus amount to a form of protectionism.

Specifically, the rulings state: "There remains the issue of whether also to permit State or local regulation of these channels (public access) where not inconsistent with Federal purposes. We think that in this area a dual form of regulation would be confusing and impracticable. Our objective of allowing a period for experimentation might be jeopardized if, for example, a local entity were to specify more restrictive regulations than we have prescribed. Thus, except for the government channel, local regulation of access channels is predicted . . . We will entertain petitions and consider the appropriateness of authoring such experiments (as expanded public access)."

Quite simply, this means that the F.C.C. has screwed Public Access. While it does guarantee one channel, it actually forbids a local system to make more available without federal permission. This means, for example, that the New York City agreement would not have been possible if it were arrived at after these rulings. While the F.C.C. might retort that it is open to modification of the rules, it becomes an added burden on the part of community groups to have to petition the government for expanded access.

That the government has declared hands off on the business end, but then turns around and stifles legitimate public interest, is representative of the type of action that gives conservatism a bad name. Clearly, it seems, the government is still afraid of open access to the channels of communication in America.

(On the positive side, however, the rulings do specifically mention and encourage the use of half-inch video equipment and very clearly state that there will be no technical standards imposed on non-broadcast signals carried over the cable. In other words, technical standards will not be used as a form of censorship as they are with broadcast television.)

BUSINESS

Cypress Communications based in Los Angeles has indicated it would be interested in buying alternate types of video programming. Address inquiries to: Leon Papernow, Vice-President, Cypress Communications, 10880 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, California 90024

For an interesting overview of why cable-TV is a good financial investment and which of the companies to invest in request the report from: Source Equities, 160 Broadway, New York, New York 10038.

The *PUBLIC ACCESS NETWORK* is apparently a complete hype being pur across by a company called Quantum Communications, 3051 Adeline Street, Berkeley, California. Their scheme is to offer cable systems a local

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.

THE NATIONAL CABLE TELEVISION ASSOCIATION held a conference ostensibly for college students in Washington on February 11th of this year. The program included speakers from the F.C.C., including Dean Burch, some people from the cable industry, and individuals deeply concerned about cable like Ted Ledbetter of the Urban Communications Group.

As conferences go, the format proved highly successful. Instead of dull panels it was mostly question and answer and at times quite provocative. When Burch claimed that public access in New York was not a success, George Stony of Alternate Media Center spent several minutes rebutting him with a wealth of details about the problems that we've had in New York (e.g. landlords won't give the systems access to their buildings, the buildings don't have cable, people who can use public access have no way to watch).

Apparently, there was some dissension within the N.C.T.A. about having the conference, some of the board members arguing that college students had nothing to say to them. Unfortunately, the N.C.T.A. had nothing to say to college students, so that the trade organization learned a lot about what people are thinking, but in return we learned nothing about where cable owners are at, as the kids say. That was frustrating because we obviously

have to work with those people, not alienate them, and we have to understand what their concerns are. There may be another chance this May, when the N.C.T.A. holds its own convention in Chicago. Some folks in New York are talking about going. If you're interested you might contact them through Alternate Media Center.

POLICY MAKERS CONFERENCE ON URBAN CABLE COMMUNICATIONS "Your Invitation to Study Cable Communications for America's Urban Environment" was held January 25 and 26 in Dayton, Ohio, and we'll bet you probably didn't know about it. Well, about 500 people including city officials from all over the country came to hear discussion about the plan that Rand Corporation drew up for wiring Dayton and also hear endless panels on other facets of cable with subjects like: "Emerging Minorities" and "Response to Social Needs."

Basically, the Dayton plan suggested that the city itself be part of a single system including surrounding municipalities. Funny thing was that Dayton's high-density areas (most profitable for cable) are mostly black, so that by including white suburbs in one system the black community was in essence subsidizing cable TV for the whites. Well, they decided uh-uh, and now the Omniscient Rand Corp. is going to cable conferences and lecturing on "Lessons from the Rand Study of Cable in Dayton, Ohio." Needless to say, there was minimal input into this conference from any of the people actually working at the programming level.

An odd trend seems to have developed among the social planners in America: black and other minorities operating out of self-interest are now not just acceptable, but desirable, but a white minority group, i.e. middle class whites who want an alternative to the dominant life style, is given no legitimacy. The reason probably lies in the fact that the planners themselves are white m.c. and thus become uneasy when people with similar backgrounds act on them in a much different way.

