

# The New York Times Magazine

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Naked man in bath, traffic-light protest, school-board hassle, real-estate advice

## What's all this on TV?



The world of public access: Top, underground stars Tinker Belle, Susan Blonde and Taylor Meade in an Anton Perich satire of a TV talk show; bottom, a public-access cameraman focuses on Paul O'Dwyer during a taping of an Earth Day celebration at the South Street Seaport Museum.

By Stephanie Harrington

Looking like Jonathan Winters impersonating the Statue of Liberty, a portly gentleman of middle age, his stomach preceding him by a few inches, trots through the streets of New York's Little Italy holding aloft a hollowed-out flashlight stuffed with flaming Sterno. It is the torch of the New York City Street Olympics, one of the Parks Department's better ideas. And, as the torchbearer tries vainly to transfer the Olympic flame to its elected receptacles (two beer cans, also stuffed with Sterno) and the sportscaster informs us that "the Sterno doesn't seem to light, folks," the games are launched. Stickball. Boxball. Stoopball. Johnny-on-the-pony.

A Puerto Rican high-school student on New York's Lower East Side holds a microphone out to one of his schoolmates, a black girl.

"Do you think you're getting a good education?" "To tell you the truth, man," she says. "I don't understand these white people."

"Are you prejudiced?"

"Yes, I am. But they don't teach you right. If you ask them a question, they got to get all snotty about it."

That night, in the same school district, racked by its efforts to put the concept of community control into practice, there is a stormy meeting of the local school board, parents and teachers to debate the firing of two principals by the controversial superintendent.

A man eases himself into a bathtub. He is naked (which, after all, is the only way to take a bath). He submerges, surfaces, and rolls himself a joint. (Yes, Virginia, marijuana.) He stands up and very slowly, very i-h-o-r-o-u-g-h-l-y soaps his genitals, then his, uh—as Lenny Bruce used to call it—tushy. A cat frolics near the tub. Handel's "Water Music" plays in the background.

And you are there.

You are, that is, if you happen to be one of the 108,966 New Yorkers who pay \$6 a month (in addition to the \$9.95 residential installation fee) to subscribe to TelePrompTer Cable TV or Sterling Manhattan Cable Television, Inc., the two cable-television companies that service Manhattan. TelePrompTer services the area north of 79th Street on the West Side and 86th Street on the East Side; Sterling services the area to the south of those boundaries. Cable franchises for New York City's other four boroughs haven't been awarded yet.

To put it more precisely, to have seen the videotaped episodes just described you would have to be

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Stephanie Harrington is a freelance who writes frequently about television.

# TV

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one of the (let's be generous) 10 per cent of cable subscribers who tune in with any regularity to the two cable channels that carried them: Channels C and D, the public-access channels used by the two companies.

Public what? Is it bigger than a breadbox? Or smaller than a side order of chopped liver? Most New Yorkers, if asked about public access, would probably offer a sympathetic nod and directions to the nearest rest room. Most of them simply haven't heard that public access, not Martha Mitchell's phone calls, is our last (or at least latest) hope for an electronic embodiment of the First Amendment.

A funny thing happened to the First Amendment on its way to the public airwaves. It got lost somewhere between the broadcasting industry's profit and loss columns, and all the networks' account-

ants and all their programmers couldn't seem to find a way, economically or administratively, to squeeze in the public voice. So the idea, contained in the Federal Communications Act of 1934, that the airwaves belong to the people, was relegated to the sphere of folk wisdom. And instead of direct access to the public airwaves, the American people got the equal opportunity doctrine, guaranteeing political opponents equal air time; the personal attack doctrine, guaranteeing the right to reply to personal attacks made over the airwaves; and the fairness doctrine, requiring that all sides of controversial issues be presented. But, starting with the 1968 Court of Appeals decision in favor of antismoking commercials, the legal trend has been away from general protective doctrines and toward public access. Under the general doctrines, as F.C.C. Commissioner Nicholas Johnson has

pointed out, broadcasters retain "sole discretion on which spokesmen and which time a certain point of view is allowed," but public access "would allow groups to choose their own spokesmen and present their own views in the fashion they deem most favorable."

With the development of the cable-television industry, public access became an idea whose time had come technologically as well as politically and juridically. The multichannel capacity of the coaxial cable meant that there could be plenty of room for public expression. Theoretically, the cable's channel capacity is limitless; New York cable franchises require only 24 channels. Cable television, or community-antenna television (CATV), began in small towns that, because they were geographically isolated, could not receive major network signals until a municipal government or an entrepreneur put up a master antenna and connected it, usually for a fee, to sets in individual households. Now, though, CATV is undergoing a major urban test in New York City.

If the system and public-access use of it survive that, they can probably survive anything.

There are about 18 municipally owned cable systems in smaller cities and towns around the country and various CATV experts have proposed municipally owned urban systems, built with Federal money and operated on a common-carrier basis or administered by representative community boards. But the fact is that cablecasting, like broadcasting, is for the time being a developing province of corporate conglomerates. In fact one cable-television consultant, Francille Rusan, has suggested that CATV might now be understood as the abbreviation for corporate antenna television. More than 51 per cent of all the cable-television subscribers in the country are served by the 25 largest multicable systems operators. Tele-Prompter is the country's largest multisystem operator and Warner Communications, Inc., is the second largest, a fact that could affect the New York cable market if the proposed purchase by Warner of

Sterling Manhattan\* is proved by regulatory agencies. Sterling has suffered financial problems in the development of its Manhattan system, and Warner's financial viability could mean tension and improvement. Sterling's current service, though Warner has not announced any specific plan. The \$20-million deal will probably be consummated October or November.

(The heavy corporate involvement in CATV has already resulted in one perversion of the public-access concept: There are those in the cable industry who are trying to discourage blacks from pressing for ownership of CATV stations by telling them that public channels will provide minorities with the means to express their views without imposing on them the burden of financing and operating cable systems. The

\*Sterling Manhattan is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sterling Communications, Inc., which is 70 per cent owned by Time Inc. In addition to Sterling Manhattan, Warner will acquire six CATV franchises on Long Island as part of the deal. Time Inc. also recently announced an agreement in principle to sell its interests in eight other operating CATV systems and three CATV franchises to American Television and Communications Corporation.

are no black-owned television or CATV stations in the country, mainly because black entrepreneurs can't raise the necessary capital from white financial institutions.)

Public access began its New York run as a twinkle in the eye of the Mayor's Advisory Task Force on CATV and Telecommunications, headed by Fred W. Friendly. In its 1968 report the task force recommended that the cable companies in New York hold "two channels only as a carrier" for "lease by outside users who wish to present original programs." In July, 1970, the F.C.C. noted that "broadcasting affects the sense of community of those within the signal area of the station," that "recently governmental programs have been directed toward increasing citizen involvement in community affairs" and that cable "has the potential to be a vehicle to much needed community expression." The New York City CATV franchises, awarded in August, 1970, were the first in the country to require cable companies to reserve special channels for leasing to members of the public on a

first-come, first-served basis and according to time allocations that would assure access to as many people as possible. Two free municipal channels, for use of the city administration, were also required. (Since then public access programming has been initiated in Charleston, W. Va.; Reading, Pa.; Cape May and Wildwood, N. J.; Berkeley, Calif.; De Kalb, Ill. and Orlando, Fla. Not all these places, however, have separate public channels.) The F.C.C.'s rules governing cable television, which weren't promulgated until February, 1972, require that CATV systems in the top one hundred markets provide only one public channel, one municipal channel and one educational channel. Cable systems like Manhattan's, which were operating prior to March 31, 1972, are exempt from the F.C.C. regulations until 1977. But if either Sterling or Tele-Prompter wanted to drop one of its public channels, in line with the F.C.C. minimum, New York City would almost certainly request that the F.C.C. uphold the local two-channel requirement, a re-

quest that both city and F.C.C. spokesmen expect would be granted.

In the nearly two years since Channels C and D were inaugurated on July 1, 1971, community and special interest organizations, nonprofit video production groups, experimental video artists and film makers, an adult branch of the Boy Scouts and even a man who just wanted to share his enthusiasm for Shakespeare with the viewing public have provided about 1,500 hours of programming that has included school-board meetings, block-association events, traffic-light protests, discussions of tactics by Gay Liberation activists, abstract tapes, experimental films, ecology projects, children's stories, antiwar protests, information about real estate, housing and business administration, feminist news and even flying lessons. Public-access programming has increased from about nine hours a week to about 135 hours a week. (The same taped programs are often repeated on both companies' systems, however.)

So, suppose you want a

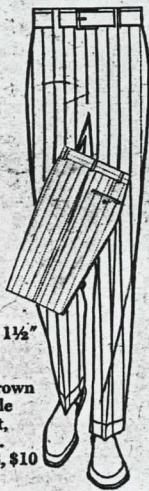
chunk of that time. Your block association wants to share its concerns with the community at large. Or you just happen to wake up one morning in the grip of an irresistible urge to be on television—to rebut David Brinkley or read from the works of Kahlil Gibran or present a tape of your Lhasa apso doing his yoga exercises. If you are at least 18 (or you have a friend who is 18 and willing to assume responsibility for you) you can just pick up the phone and call Tele-Prompter or Sterling or both and ask them to send you an application for public-channel time (don't worry about an angel, the time is free). Fill out the application. Submit it two weeks before the cablecast date requested. And familiarize yourself with the city's rules governing public access—they outline application and scheduling procedures, indicate the type of information the cable companies and public-access users might require of each other, specify the assistance companies must provide users and allow the companies the right to preview and edit

material to protect themselves from "liability under applicable law." (A producer has the option to withdraw a show if he doesn't like the editing.)

Then all you have to do is produce a program. If you own or have access to video equipment and know how to use it, you can tape it yourself. (Just be sure to check with the cable company to see if your tape fits their tape deck. If not, you can bring your own deck to the studio to play the tape for transmission.) The cheapest do-it-yourself rig available is the Porta-Pak, a minimal, portable system that costs about \$1,500 and has become the Model T of public access production. It includes a camera, a battery-powered half-inch tape deck, a handheld microphone and other assorted paraphernalia. The daily rate for renting a Porta-Pak is roughly 5 per cent of the value of the equipment, or about \$75; the weekly rate about 15 per cent, or \$225, and the monthly rate about 30 per cent, or \$450.

If, however, you lack the  
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tions; during the course of the discussion, one of them exposes her genital area as testimony to the skill of the doctor who operated on her.

So, if Anton Perich has been responsible for more column inches than public access had been awarded since its inception, it has been a mixed blessing: He feels misunderstood, the cable-company lawyers are biting their fingernails and many of the other public-channel users are worried about public access's distorted image. For there is a serious, if loosely-connected, countereestablishment media movement; it includes community activists and video enthusiasts who aim not only to challenge censorship but to change the very way we think about television. It includes groups like Community Newsreel/Video Rivington, Survival Arts Media, Alternate Media Center and Open Channel, a resource and consulting organization. They hope to transform television from a one-way to a two-way medium, to use it as a social and political catalyst. Columbia University sociologist Amitai Etzioni is already experimenting with closed-circuit electronic town meetings. The nonprofit producers are aware that public access is a long way from this vision, just as the cable industry is a long way from providing such technological-possible but expensive services as electronic meter reading, home-appliance monitoring and shopping by cable (which could totally disrupt retail marketing.)

Many of the video activists currently work in low-income areas that are not even wired yet. They set up their own screening rooms in schools, churches, settlement houses, pool rooms, etc. And if cable never services the masses in sufficient numbers for the full development of public access's potential, video groups will probably continue taking Porta-Paks to the people to stimulate dialogue in the neighborhoods.

As these groups have taken larger and larger advantage of public access, cable companies have found themselves with a strange hybrid on their hands: part common carrier, which they are required to operate but not regulate; part company-subsidized public service. And they have provided this service in a manner not surprising

for private businesses—investing as little money, manpower and equipment as they could while still satisfying franchise requirements and the need to maintain a community-oriented public image.

The city, having provided the public with its own channels, has not bothered with any effective publicity campaign to let the people in on their good fortune. So, the public's awareness of the access channels is only beginning (thanks, in part, to Perich) to run slightly ahead of its ability to quote the daily pollen count. In an attempt to pressure the city to promote public access more vigorously and to encourage the companies to provide more live programming, taping and viewing facilities, video groups have formed an Interim Committee on Public Access. Some members of the committee adhere to a concept of participatory democracy that borders on psychodrama, afflicts orderly discussion with intermittent paralysis and makes the roller derby look like a Montessori exercise in human relations, but the group has managed to sustain itself. It is currently trying to organize a weekend of workshops, one of which will concentrate on formulating a process for electing a community board to replace the cable companies as the administrators of public access. Community public-access boards are being regarded more and more favorably by the F.C.C. and cities like Newark and Minneapolis-St. Paul are planning to experiment with the idea.

The committee also plans to work on the need for more live programming facilities and the development of a plan for subdistricting. Under the city franchises the cable companies have until the summer of 1974 to develop the capacity to transmit isolated, discrete signals simultaneously to 10 subdistricts. Under this plan, Greenwich Village residents, for instance, could tune in Channel C and watch a local school board meeting while, on the same channel, viewers on the Upper West Side could get a neighborhood discussion about the rebuilding of the West Side Highway and Upper East Siders could catch a panel discussion of the most efficient way to shop at Bloomingdale's.

Financing public access is another crucial problem. Con-

## 'Body Movements'



Dancer on a tape shown on public-access TV.

tinuing foundation support will probably be essential. There has also been talk of getting some revenue-sharing money or other Government funding. Revenue may also be available, eventually, from advertising by local merchants during subdistrict programming hours. But the most popular idea among access users and the cable companies is to earmark for public access 2 per cent of the city's franchise fee (which is 5 per cent of the companies' gross receipts from basic subscriber service). It is an arrangement that the city of Newark has agreed to, subject to F.C.C. approval, but that elicits a less than enthusiastic response from New York City bureaucrats. Herbert Dordick, Coordinator of the city's Office of Telecommunications, has suggested the possibility of charging an extra 25 cents per cable-television subscriber to subsidize public access, but other city officials simply talk vaguely about public-access money trickling down through bureaucratic channels.

The city administration has apparently been laboring under the illusion that its cut from cable revenues will offer life-giving support to the failing municipal budget. It is an illusion encouraged by Mayor Lindsay, who goes so far as to liken cable TV to oil wells under the city's streets. Such thinking is naive, however, since it is considerably more expensive to install cable in densely used urban areas than in the small towns where the cable industry has had most of its experience. Dordick, who, be-

fore coming to New York, worked on a Rand Corporation study of cable in Los Angeles, believes urban cable systems should be thought of primarily as a way to improve the quality of communications in the city, making it a more attractive location for businesses that rely on data transmission and other communications services.

But the last thing financially pressed Sterling Manhattan, which is \$13-million in debt, has had on its corporate mind lately is expanding its services beyond the minimum franchise requirements. Despite the very recent insistence of Sterling's board chairman, Barry Zorthian, that Sterling and Time Inc. are "committed" to their Manhattan cable system, despite his emphatic denial of rumors that Sterling was trying to unload its Manhattan franchise, the pending deal with Warner Communications is clear evidence that Sterling's high brass has been much more concerned with retreating from an enterprise that—because of mismanagement or Time Inc.'s unwillingness to invest sufficient money, or both—has come to be regarded by some as the Edsel of the cable industry. And in the unlikely event that the sale does not go through, Sterling would ask the city for franchise concessions, including postponing the inauguration of one more municipal channel and two more public channels, which are supposed to be operational this summer; postponing large-scale subdistricting in-

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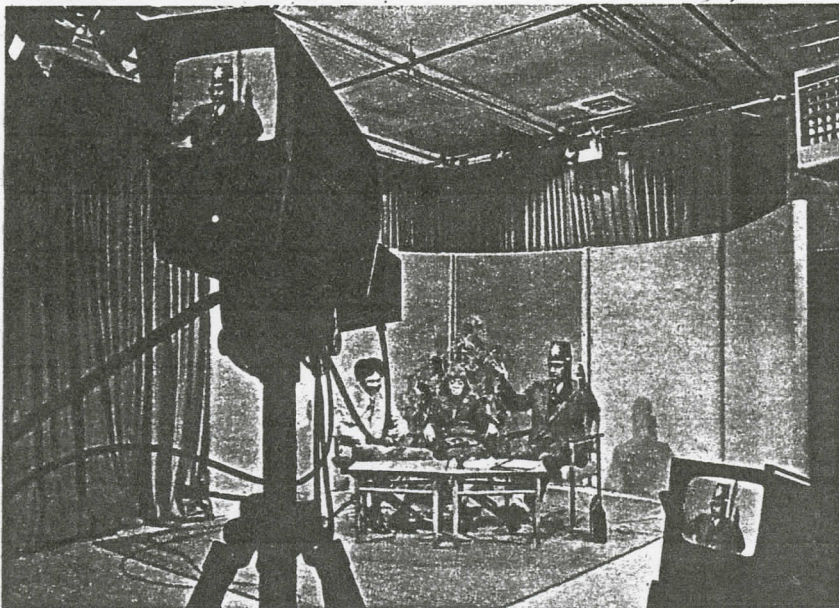
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## View from the storefront



At TelePrompTer's Harlem storefront studio, a discussion of minority groups and religion.

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equipment or the rental fee or the know-how or the enthusiasm (or all of these) to make your own tape, you can avail yourself of the sparse but free videotaping services of TelePrompTer's storefront access center at 60, West 125th Street. Or, if you prefer immediacy, you can arrange for a live 15-minute telecast from the TelePrompTer storefront any night between 7:30 and 11. (Prime time)

There is also the Video Access Center in Greenwich Village at 528-30 LaGuardia Place, which is not only a source of video equipment and training but a community viewing center where anyone who does not subscribe to cable (almost everyone south of 14th Street) can come in and watch cable programs on sets provided by Sterling. The Access Center was financed by the Fund for the City of New York, equipped by Sterling and is run by one salaried director and about 50 volunteers, people from the community who came to learn video production and stayed to teach others. The center has no capability for live programming, but it does have four Porta-Paks. Two of them are available for free public use, one is reserved for once-a-week use by hospitals, schools and other institutions and groups with ongoing video projects, and one is used in the center's 10-

week video training course, which teaches everything from the concept of public access to program planning, to the technicalities of taping and editing. With only one Porta-Pak for training, however, classes are limited to a maximum of eight people. The waiting list numbers about 500. But the center also tries to accommodate the camera-resistant, putting people with program ideas in touch with people interested in taping them. Free videotaping facilities are also available at Automation House at 49 East 68th Street. In all, there are in New York about 25 video groups, community organizations and educational and cultural institutions that will provide assistance in noncommercial video production.

In the early days of public access, most programming was provided by nonprofit video production groups funded by private foundations. In fact, a report on public access by the Center for the Analysis of Public Issues noted that during the first year of public access 10 or 12 groups produced 60 per cent of the programs and foundations provided 60 per cent of the money. Of the \$579,000 spent on public access operations during its first year, \$311,000 came from foundations, \$168,000 from governmental bodies, \$75,000 from TelePrompTer and \$25,000 from Sterling.

Before the proposed sale to

Warner was revealed, Sterling had announced a plan to open its own access center on the East Side, somewhere between 14th and 23rd Streets, which will provide much the same facilities as TelePrompTer's storefront, with the exception of live public-access time.

Sterling is reluctant to cablecast live public-access programs because they can't—obviously—be prescreened. And ever since the arrival of one Anton Perich on the public-access scene, visions of lawsuits have been dancing in the cable companies' corporate heads. A slender, soft-spoken Yugoslav, 28 years old, his finely-boned face framed by a cascade of ringlets that give him an air of pre-Raphaelite romanticism, Perich hardly looks like the Russ Meyer of public access television. But that's how he has been spotlighted by the local press since his public access debut on February 4. Perich's first tape opened with assorted short subjects: a fashion show, a woman dancing with a dog so affectionately that the poor animal began to act like a refugee from three celibate months in the trenches, and a poetry reading accompanied by a striptease. Then came the feature, a take-off on the sex habits of an average swinging couple—\$15,000-a-year Queens Boulevard types. But just as the husband was about to relieve the pain of a visiting TV repairman by administering a unique home remedy

for hemorrhoids—the insertion of a cylindrical light bulb in the afflicted area—sets all over Manhattan went dark. TelePrompTer's engineers were on the job, and censorship, an issue that had been lurking in the background, had come out into the open.

Since February, Perich has been presenting a weekly Sunday night hour of what he calls social satire or soap opera as camp. He explains that he is fascinated by the sexually uninhibited behavior he has encountered among the people he has met in New York, many of them dropouts from Andy Warhol's Factory—models, actors, poets, gays, straights, transvestites and various counters of the chick peas at Max's Kansas City, the Union Square restaurant where New York's kinkier elite meets to eat and do whatever else occurs to them.

Perich has been using their natural exhibitionism as a kind of esthetic vibrator to massage life into ideas suggested to him by daily newspaper reports of minor tidbits and major scandals in the lives of celebrities, opportunists and just plain fringe personalities. Transferring their superstardom from Warhol's Factory to Perich's Wooster Street loft, his actors improvise weekly tapes in various states of dress and undress and with affectionate gestures for themselves and others of any sex. Perich compares his super superstar, Taylor Meade, to W. C. Fields. Whatever role Fields played, Perich explains in thickly accented English that sounds like a bit of camp itself, he filtered it through his obsession with alcohol and through his own perversity. And whatever role Meade plays is filtered through his obsession with sex and his perversity. The roles Meade has played in the last few months include a United States Senator who seduces his daughter's boyfriend, a Dr. Feelgood analyst whose clients include a certain "Jackie O.," an aging rock star and a famous movie star who runs for Mayor of New York and whose bodyguard, in order to "keep Taylor happy," periodically opens his coat and exposes himself (as TelePrompTer's engineers shut out the video).

Well, the calls and letters started coming in, Kay Gardella of The Daily News gave public access an X-rating and a lawyer, who just happens to be running for city councilman, formed an anti-obscenity group called "Concerned

Citizens on Public Access," which consists of a priest, a couple of ministers, the lawyer and some of his personal friends. Then Andrew Heiskell, chairman of Time Inc., which owns 70 per cent of Sterling's stock, happened either to see or hear about (no one at Sterling or Time can say which) Perich's second installment, which ended with a man inserting a paint brush in his behind and, with impressive dexterity, writing "I LOVE YOU." Heiskell made inquiries as to what, exactly, was going on. (Or, as a Sterling executive put it, he suggested that Sterling re-evaluate its policies on such matters.) As a result of that re-evaluation, Sterling has been prescreening all of Perich's tapes. TelePrompTer was already doing so.

As already noted, the city's public access rules permit prescreening and deletion of "objectionable" material. New York State's CATV legislation, however, prohibits any censorship of program content and absolves the companies of liability for programs they do not produce themselves. But then there are the F.C.C. regulations, which not only proscribe the presentation on public channels of commercial and political promotions, lottery information and "obscene or indecent matter," but also explicitly preclude "local regulation of access channels." And even though Manhattan's cable systems are technically exempt from F.C.C. regulations until 1977, both the cable companies and the city are already operating on the premise that F.C.C. rules take precedence over all others. Ultimately, it is expected, the question of censorship will be settled in the courts.

Before Perich, however, only two tapes had been refused; both had been submitted to Sterling. One tape showed a man masturbating while in a hospital bed in traction. The other was entirely and explicitly about copulation. But the "Bath" tape described earlier was run undetected. So was a tape produced by Ted Estabrook (a veteran of the "Texaco Star Theatre" and "Your Show of Shows") in which a naked woman sits cross-legged on the floor and, with very spaced-out movements, examines the parts of her body. Nor was there any problem about running a Global Village tape in which transsexuals discuss their reasons for undergoing sex change opera-

ling subscribers who would talk about their incomes make more than \$20,000 a year, 24 per cent make more than \$30,000, at least 60 per cent have credit cards, only 54 per cent are married, 26 per cent have children of viewing age and 73.5 per cent have households with two or less people living at home. TelePrompTer, which has switched from door-to-door selling to newspaper, radio and direct mail advertising, estimates that among its subscribers the median income is \$8,000, with a high of \$30,000 and a low at the welfare level; that most of its subscribers are blue collar workers in the \$3,000 to \$10,000 bracket; that their median age is 35; that most are married; and that the average number of people per household is 5.2.

The president of TelePrompTer's Manhattan company, Joseph Groth, says that in his opinion "low income people are much better prospects for our service than higher income residents because television is a much more important source of entertainment for them." He also says that his company's sales for the first quarter of 1973 are up 10 per cent over the same period last year and that TelePrompTer, which lost \$350,000 in 1972, expects "to operate with a profit" this year. There are those who say that TelePrompTer's rosy financial complexion is only a paper flush, that its parent company treats the Manhattan system as a flagship enterprise in which it is willing to invest enough money to enhance its image and write off any deficit.

Whatever the reason, TelePrompTer has completed its trunk line and is servicing 33 per cent of the possible subscribers in Inwood, 30 per cent on the Upper East Side, 27 per cent on the Upper

**Public access players: School boards, block associations, feminists, gay activists, the Boy Scouts and a man who wanted to share his enthusiasm for Shakespeare.**

West Side and 18 per cent in Harlem.

Although Sterling has penetrated only 632 of the 1606 blocks (this total includes warehouse areas) in its franchise district, it has temporarily stopped laying trunk cable. In fact, all it has been doing lately is "upgrading existing service" and installing subsidiary wiring for individual buildings at the rate of "a couple of blocks a month." And even though Sterling already has a trunk line running down Second Avenue past low income neighborhoods of the Lower East Side, there is, at this writing, no subsidiary wiring under way in that area. Nor, according to Board Chairman Zorthian, is it Sterling's policy to lay subsidiary cable "on the basis of speculation." It has never, however, given priority to a selling campaign to generate discernible demand among low income people, either.

So, if the sale of Sterling's Manhattan system to Warner Communications is completed, there will be few tears shed at Sterling's departure—except perhaps tears of relief. Things couldn't be much worse, and Warner's financial health could mean that cable service in lower Manhattan will be better for everyone. Al Stern, president of Warner Cable Corp., a subsidiary of Warner Communications, says that Warner is prepared "to spend significantly more than the purchase price to make this system work." He also says that Warner would complete the lower Manhattan cable system as quickly as possible, that Warner considers public access a vital part of CATV and will be meeting with public-access users to explore cooperative experimentation. Warner, he says, "does not subscribe to the theory that only the wealthy can afford cable television." In fact, Stern agrees with TelePrompTer's president Groth that low income people who have less to spend on entertainment "get more dollar value out of cable."

So eventually, it will probably be possible for everyone in Manhattan who wants it

to get cable service. But the fact remains that the first people in Manhattan to get it—and, therefore, to receive the public-access channels—were the people uptown who read New York magazine and express themselves in letters to The New York Times and get health care information from their private doctors. The very last to get it—lagging behind by three years or more—will be people in low income areas. This is a development pattern that has not hastened experimental efforts to use the public-access channels as a medium of expression for and debate among all segments of the community and to increase the involvement of all the people in community affairs. Nor is it consistent with the intentions of the Federal Communications Commission as stated in Section 180 of the F.C.C. rules governing cable television service:

"We emphasize that provision must be made for cable service to develop equitably and reasonably in all parts of the community. A plan that would bring cable only to the more affluent parts of a city, ignoring the poorer areas, simply could not stand. While it is obvious that a franchisee cannot build everywhere at once within a designated franchise area, provision must be made that he develop service equitably and reasonably." Sterling seems to have overlooked this particular paragraph of the F.C.C. rules. So, apparently, have the city and the F.C.C., both of whom are responsible for enforcing section 180.

So up to now, history has repeated itself. Direct public access to over-the-air radio and television was frustrated because it didn't make sense economically for the broadcasting industry. But then along came the cable, which was supposed to correct all that. With all its channels, surely it could afford to accommodate the public. But Manhattan's public access experiment has been temporarily slowed down because . . . well, until now, anyway, it didn't make sense economically for the local cable company. ■

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