★ THE AUSTIN ★
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ACCESS

So you want to be on television?

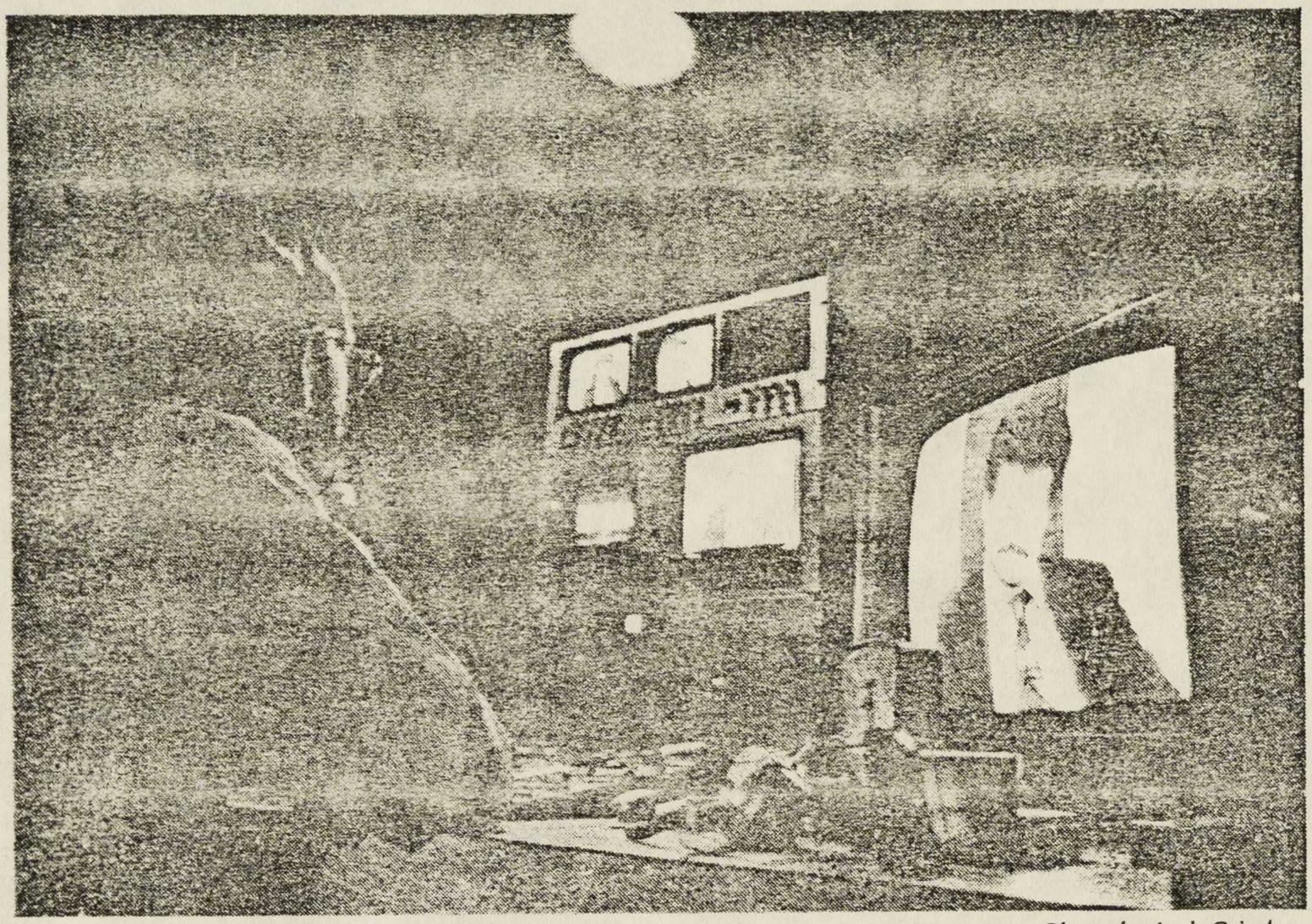

Photo by Jack Grieder

Austin Community Television editing room

By Jeff Whittington

No, you don't have to be Fred Silverman to communicate with a mass audience on television. (What's that? Okay, you don't have to be Grant Tinker.) You can have the opportunity to reach over 80,000 TV sets in Austin, if you're only willing to put in a little effort — and a mere 15 dollars.

The source of this opportunity is Austin Community Television, an organization which adminsters the public access channel on the local cable system. ACTV cablecasts during prime time every day on cable channel 10.

A year's membership in ACTV costs $15 for individuals, $50 for non-profit organizations, and $75 for commercial companies. You don't even have to be a member of ACTV in order to get your programs on their channel — they will accept and run privately-produced tapes by nonmembers. However, membership entitles one to free use of ACTV's equipment and video editing facilities.

The only restriction is that the equipment must be used to create programs which can be broadcast on ACTV, and that one must be able to demonstrate that he or she can run the equipment without breaking it. ACTV's equipment isn't formidable high-tech, but fairly simple Sony and Beta machines.

Equipment can also be *rented* by members for projects which aren't designed for use on cable channel 10. However, it is stressed that the equipment is available primarily for use on public-access programming.

Those who have never held a video camera in their lives need not feel intimidated; ACTV also offers classes in basic video technique, offered in the first two weeks of every month. There is a basic course in handling portable video equipment, and a more advanced course in video editing. The courses cost $30 and $40 respectively, and the fee includes six months' membership in ACTV.

The outlet is there; if you have something to say in the language of video, don't go complaining that you have no place to say it. ACTV is offering that place, for those who are willing to accept the challenge.

Perhaps the most successful example of the use public access TV is Alternative Views News Magazine, a program which airs on ACTV every Wednesday at 6:30 and every Sunday at 7 p.m.

Alternative Views grew out of a media study group four years ago, which examined what was and was not covered in the mainstream media. "There's a tremendous amount of distortion and censorship," said Alternative Views co-founder Frank Morrow. "I didn't realize the extent of it until we started this program."

Alternative Views began in 1978. Morrow, Dr Douglas Kellner and several others arranged with ACTV to cablecast their one-hour program at a regular time each week.

In the next three years, Morrow and Kellner produced well over a hundred programs examining topics that have frequently been glossed over or ignored by the major media. "Sonoma State University organized a panel of experts on the press who compiled a list of ten major stories that were ignored by the media," Morrow said. "By the time the list came out, we had already covered all of them — and a lot more that they hadn't talked about."

Alternative Views gathers its information from a wide variety of sources, not bound to any one ideological point-of-view. According to Kellner, "We use print sources — left wing, right wing, even the business press — that put into question either official media accounts like you get on CBS news, or official government reports."

Over five dozen local groups have been represented on Alternative Views newscasts in the past three years. "About half of our programs were *initiated* by local groups, so we see ourselves as performing a community service," says Kellner. "The other half we initiate on events of current interest."

Alternative Views has recently been raising funds for the purchase of videotape, in order to make more copies of their programs available to organizations for educational purposes. Ultimately, their goal is to export the show to public-access systems all over the country. Contributions — tax-deductible, of course — can be sent to P.O. Box 7279, Austin 78712. Also, any local organization with something to say can contact Morrow and Kellner at the same address.