Community Media

Sharon Karsten
Definition of Comprehensive
Final Draft
September 8, 2012

Community Media is a social movement and practice that has gained momentum over the last fifty years. The inclusion of the word 'community' in the movement's name speaks to its roots in a tradition of connectedness that might be considered integral to human experience. 'Community' has many meanings, referring on one level to a shared set of interests, and on another, to a common geographic connection. It is through the merging of a plurality of interests (defined geographically or otherwise) that the movement operates.

The term 'media' as well speaks to a type of connectedness – one that stems from collective drive towards communication. This term has roots in the notion of intervention (ie: mediation)… it also assumes a technical dimension when referencing (and distinguishing between) various mass media technologies. When linked together, the words 'community' and 'media' convey the notion of a platform through which a plurality of voices are enabled to speak. It must be acknowledged that a plethora of understandings exist surrounding this movement and its definition; however, in its etymology one gains the sense of the primacy of both collectivity and intervention.

Community media activities operate in a fragmented landscape of practice. Varying motivations and aims exist amongst practitioners within the field – differing from broadcast-based activity, such as community radio and community television initiatives, to direct media educational activities such as workshops, to art-focused initiatives such as those developed within artist-run centre contexts. While there do exist a number of common concerns amongst these forms, the differences are important for study, as they reveal a plurality of interests, agendas and power dynamics. This is especially true in the current climate, where new technologies have enabled widespread growth of community media practices that are increasingly varied in approach and motivation.

The relationship of social and political movements to advances in technology is an area of key concern for community media scholars. Influencing technological forces within the movement can be traced back as far as the printing press, circa 1439, which was seen as an enabler of resistance movements such as the 15th century Protestant Reformation, the Bolshevik Rebellion of the 1900's and the Civil Rights movement. In the 1700's, pamphleteers such as Thomas Payne (a founding father of the U.S. and pre-curser to the modern-day 'blogger') was to pair printing press technology with social-justice causes, resulting in radical shifts in political landscapes.

The industrial revolution of the 1700's made cause for the emergence of a debate on the value of hand-made goods and work-processes to those mass-produced. Marxian notions - springing from the realities imposed by the Revolution - of the reification of 'the commodity,' and of the power dynamics at play between the haves and have-nots (proletariat and bourgeois) would constitute key theoretical considerations within the community media movement (though as we shall later discuss, the movement can be seen to have moved beyond a traditional Marxian conception of class conflict).

One of the world's first community radio stations – Columbia's *Radio Sutatenza* – was initiated in 1947 – set up and managed by Father Jose Joaquin Salceda and the Catholic Church. The station was developed as a missionary tool to disseminate Christian doctrine to Columbian peasants, and to teach skills that would contribute to the community's development. Many such missionary projects were developed in Latin America during the 1950's and 60's, leading to the development of what is now considered to be a dynamic community media sector.

The 60's, 70's and 80's saw a proliferation of community media practices as more affordable and portable media equipment, such as film and audio recording technologies, became available. These new technologies were prime activist communication tools that grew to prominent use in the 60's, at a time ripe with anti-war protests, the identity politics of the civil rights and feminist movements, and global political uprisings. The founding of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964 at the University of Birmingham initiated a key site for the emergence of research surrounding such constructs as media studies, hegemony, subculture and popular culture, and for theorization on the cultural dynamics of the political unrest that characterized this era.

The 70's also saw the rapid development of community-based television initiatives, as well as rapid growth of public broadcasting sector. Such initiatives were developed in-line with national policy agendas centred around such concepts as 'nationalism', 'protectionism' and the manufacturing of home-grown culture as a means for state-based identity-cultivation. During this era, the ideas of Paulo Freire - whose seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in 1970 - grew to have a major impact on the way in which community media was conceived in relation to political and communal change-agendas. The idea of 'dialogic pedagogy' became a seminal notion within community media practice, and community media initiatives perceived as vehicles for the enablement of self-representation and group empowerment.

In response to the rapid changes in media activity occurring throughout the 60's and 70's leading to the proliferation of issues surrounding media ownership, journalistic freedom, transnationalization, equal rights, etc., UNESCO commissioned a research project led by Nobel Prize winner Sean MacBride that aimed to investigate and provide recommendations surrounding global media policy. The resulting report (commonly called the MacBride report) makes a series of 87 conclusions and recommendations that are of direct relevance to the Community Media movement – notably, in their emphasis upon the need to democratize 'one-way' media communications processes.

The birth of the internet in the early 1980s would spark innovations in social change projects that would evolve throughout the 90's and up to the present day. Such web projects as the *Media Awareness Network* and *The Global Village Cat* were sprouted in an effort to increase awareness of the role of community media in contesting mainstream corporate media, and in enacting social-change agendas. Community Media during this time grew to symbolize (and encapsulate in practice) various philosophies of resistance against forces of globalization. Amidst shifting trends in policy that favored the logic of the global marketplace over the nationalism of previous eras, community media, in its systemic cultivation of plurality, locality and democratic participation, was seen as a force of counter-hegemony, and a mechanism for the development of alternative social realities.

The disruptive force associated with the community media movement has continued to flourish into the present day, and has assumed new forms with the emergence of broadly-accessible web platforms such as *Youtube* and *Facebook*. Such technologies have, on one hand, lent new possibility to the movement, and on the other, have complexified its operations and agendas. In an era when common citizens can, from their homes, network with others around the world to develop and broadcast types of messaging previously possible only for those in positions of power, the idea of 'community' (as rooted in locality), as well as the identity of 'community media' as a movement, is being challenged. Practitioners and scholars in the field are now thinking through the implications of these technologies, and are grappling with new sets of tensions that have emerged.

One of the theoretical frameworks through which these emerging tensions are being considered is that of the 'public sphere' – a discourse first made popular by Habermas in the early 80's. Habermas draws attention to a sector of society removed from the direct influences of state and marketplace, in which a type of rational democratic discourse is made possible. Community media is seen to play into this public sphere discourse in its engineering of 'independent' platforms upon which can be activated new publics, and new visions for social-democratic change.

On another level, the community media movement has been seen to enact elements of 'carnivalesque' revelry/resistance that have been analyzed within a Bakhtinian theoretical tradition. Bakhtin speaks of a particular mindset engineered by carnival (as practice and as metaphor) involving playfulness, disruption, the toppling of established hierarchies and the celebration of the base and primordial aspects of human existence. In its celebration of human connection and in its resistance to the traditional power-structures imposed by and within the corporate media sphere, community media is seen to present radical alternative to notions of alienation commonly attached to the 'spectacle' (see Guy Dubord's *Society of the Spectacle*). Indeed, community media can be seen to re-claim the spectacle as a tool for activation (rather than passification) of human subjects, and to offer a powerful antidote to an ailing social/economic/political system.

The fact that the movement has been taken up across a number of traditions, including gender politics, class politics, race politics, etc… positions it outside of a traditionalist

Marxian perspective. The movement might well be analyzed in its various 'nodal points' (to borrow terminology from Laclau and Mouffe) – instances that can be seen to exist independent of a coherent paradigmatic 'whole', but that are nonetheless moments of significance and transformation. The move towards a network mentality in the current web-empowered manifestations of the community media movement can be seen to position it on the borderline between poststructuralist and postmodernist traditions. While these two concepts can be said to carry a plethora of diverse and often-contradictory meanings, in spite of their weightiness, they help the scholar to think through notions of difference as played out within the movement.

At its root, then, this comprehensive aims to consider how notions of social, cultural and political change operate in and through community media. It looks historically at this phenomenon's development, and probes the various interests and dialogues at play. Of particular interest are the framing devices activated by practitioners and scholars within the field, and the discourses through which the need for change is articulated. While many of these discourses are founded upon idealist (dare I say utopian) narratives, my aim is not to discredit them on this account. Rather… I wish to consider their various meanings and manifestations as played out through history - finding truth in the particularities of circumstance.

READING LIST

INTRO TO THE FIELD

Setting the scene, defining terminology, describing conceptual frameworks, situating the field within an academic context

Barney, D. (2004). 'The vanishing table, or community in a world that is no world'. In A. Feenberg and D.D. Barney (Eds), *Community in the digital age: Philosophy and practice.* Rowman & Littlefield.

Bailey, O., Cammearts, B. & Carpentier, N. Eds. (2008). *Understanding Alternative Media,* New York: Open University Press

Burnett, R. (1996). Video: The politics of culture and community. In M. Renov & E. Suderburg (Eds.), *Resolutions: Contemporary video practices* (pp. 283-301). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press

Howley, K. Ed. (2005) *Community Media: People, Places and Communication Technologies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Howley, K. Ed. (2010). *Understanding Community Media*. Los Angeles and London: Sage.

Liebes, T. & Curran, J (1998), *Media, Ritual and Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Global trends towards media centralization (neoliberalism)
Contestatory media practice, alternate paradigms

Baker, C. (2007) *Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters*, Cambridge University Press. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Benjamin, Walter (1936/2005). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm. Retrived on August 1st, 2012.

Couldry, N. (2003) 'Beyond the Hall of Mirrors? Some Theoretical Reflections on the Global Contestation of Media Power', in N. Couldry and J. Curran (Eds). *Contesting Media Power. Alternative Media in a Networked World.* Lanham: Rowman&Littlefield

Fuchs, C. (2010). 'Alternative media as critical media'. European Journal of Social Theory, 13(2), p.173-192.

Public Sphere
Bachtinian 'dialogism'/ 'subversion' discourse

Gardiner, M. (2004). 'Wild publics and grotesque symposiums: Habermas and bahktin on dialogue, everyday life and the public sphere'. In N. Crossley & J. M. Roberts (Eds.), *After habermas: New perspectives on the public sphere* (pp. 28-48). Oxford UP.

Habermas, J. (1992). "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere". *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Craig Calhoun (Ed).

Media Literacy

Aufderheide, P. (1997) 'Media literacy: from a report on the national leadership conference on media literacy', in R. Kubey (Ed*.). Media Literacy in the Information Age*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Hoechsmann, M. and Poyntz, S. (2011). *Media Literacy*: *A critical introduction.*Wiley-Blackwell.

Tyner, K. Ed. (2010). *Media literacy: New agendas in communication*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Goldfarb, B. (2002). *Visual pedagogy : Media cultures in and beyond the classroom*. Durham: Duke University Press.

HISTORY
Practices

Brecht, B. (1927) 'The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication', in: A.G. Dagron and T. Tufte, eds. *Communication for Social Change Anthology* (2006). South Orange, New Jersey: CFSC

Downing, J. (2001) *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements,* Sage.

Halleck, D. (2002) *Hand-Held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities of Community Media.* New York: Fordham University Press

Jankowski, N.W. (2002). 'Creating community with media: History, theories and scientific investigations'. In L.A. Lievrouw & S.M. Livingstone (Eds.), *Handbook of new media: Social shaping and consequences of icts* (pp. 34-49). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

UNESCO. *MacBride, S. (Ed.) (1980). Many Voices, One World: Communication and*

Society Today and Tomorrow.

Ouelette, L. (1995) 'Will the revolution be televised? Camcorders, activism, and alternative television in the 1990s', in P. d'Agostino & D. Tafler (Eds)*, Transmission: Toward a Post- Television Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

The internet

Atton, C. (2007). 'A brief history: The Web and Interactive Media', in K. Coyer, T. Dowmunt and A. Fountain (Eds), *The Alternative Media Handbook* (2007). Routledge.

Meikle, G. (2002) *Future Active: Media Activism and the Internet,* NewYork: Routledge

Vegh, Sandor (2002) 'Classifying Forms of Online Activism: The case of Cyberprotests against the World Bank', in M. Mc Caughey, and M. Dayers (Eds)*, Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice.* New York: Routledge

MOTIVATIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT
Arguments for the value of community media

Gidley, B. (2007). Beyond the Numbers Game: Understanding the Value of Participatory Media, in *Inclusion Through Media*. T. Dowmunt, M. Dunford and N. van Hemert (Eds.) (2007). Goldsmiths, London, UK. P.p. 39 – 61

Media and Activism

Bennett, L. (2003) 'New Media Power: the Internet and Global Activism', in N. Couldry and J. Curran (Eds), *Contesting Media Power*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield

Rodriguez, C. and Kidd, D. (2009). *Making our Media: Global initiatives toward a democratic public sphere*. Hampton Press.

Media and Development

Berrigan, F. J. (1979) Community Communications: The Role of Community Media in Development, Paris: Unesco

Goldbard, A. (2006). *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*. Oakland, CA: New Village Press

Huesca, R. (2003) 'From Modernization to Participation: The Past and Future of Development Communication in Media Studies'. In A.N. Valdivia (Ed.), *A companion to media studies* (pp. 50-71). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Media and awareness/empowerment

Boal, Augusto (1974) *Theater of the Oppressed*. Boston: Theatre Communications Group

Freire, P. (2006). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.

Gilchrist, A. (2001) Working with networks and organisation in the community in L. Deer Richardson, L. and M. Wolfe (Eds) *Principles and Practices of Informal Education*, RoutledgeFalmer, Oxon, UK. p.p. 106-119

Lewis, P. (2006). *Community Media: Giving a Voice to the Voiceless*, in P. Lewis and S. Jones (Eds.) *From the Margins to the Cutting Edge: Community Media and Empowerment.* IAMCR, Hampton Press, USA. P.p. 13 – 3

35 works