

ALTERNATIVES ON MEDIA CONTENT, JOURNALISM, AND REGULATION.

THE GRASSROOTS DISCUSSION PANELS AT THE 2007 ICA CONFERENCE

Edited by
Seeta Peña Gangadharan
Benjamin De Cleen
Nico Carpentier

Participatory Models and Alternative Content Production: Whether concerned with social movements, civic engagement, aesthetic production or personal expression, alternative content production embraces participation as core value as well as a structural possibility. This theme event examines attempts to develop, use, augment and promote structures for participation in production processes. Discussion will compare content creators' strategies for social inclusion, democratic involvement and technological literacy, but looking not only at technological or political imperatives but institutional ones as well. Key practitioners also address what is meant by participation, who participates and how, and what alternative content producers gain and lose from participatory design. | Alternative Journalisms: What are the many faces of alternative journalism today? This theme event explores the role of alternative journalists in speaking to power and creating social change and contemplates journalists' adaptation and/or resistance to new social, economic, political and technological pressures in the field. The discussion will center on the practice of alternative journalism as it has existed in the past and in the present. Panelists will also treat alternative journalism's successes and failures and the challenges of working in a media- and information-saturated environment. The event will end by reflecting on ways to enhance alternative journalism's critical capacities. | Civil Society and Regulation: As media, communications and information systems become more complex, civil society has become increasingly concerned with their just and ethical control and management. In this event, advocates working for change in regulatory regimes review current debates, illuminating the ways in which media, communications and information policy intersects with citizens, communities and constituencies at the grassroots level. Both practical and hypothetical intersections will be explored. Panelists will also discuss citizens' ability to inform decision-making about government and governance of media, communications and information as well as advocates' ability to monitor and contribute to policy debates.

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Introduction

Nico Carpentier

From May 24-28, 2007, the International Communication Association (ICA) held its yearly conference in San Francisco (USA), bringing together more than two thousand media and communication scholars to discuss the state of affairs in our field, and to present new (academic) work to our peers.

As is common with the ICA conferences, each year a specific theme is selected. For the 2007 conference the conference organizer, Sonia Livingstone, selected *Creating Communication: Content, Control and Critique* as theme. Together with the theme, the conference organizer also selects a theme chair brings the theme of the conference to life, in close collaboration with the conference organizer. For the 2007 conference, Sonia invited me to become the theme chair, an honor I gladly accepted.

Together with Sonia, and with the much-appreciated help of Benjamin De Cleen, I worked for a year to organize the four keynote panels and the sixteen theme panels of the conference. But I soon realized that the theme of the conference—focusing on control and critique—required more than organizing traditional academic panels. When Susana Kaiser and John Kim offered to add a one-day film program to the conference, I gladly accepted. I have not regretted this decision for a moment, given the great films they selected and the enthusiastic response from the audience that in some cases did not leave the room for the entire day.

In talking to Seeta Peña Gangadharan, I soon realized that we could do even more. Eventually we came up with the idea to organize three so-called grassroots discussion panels, bringing in activists and alternative media people into the ivory tower that academia often still is. Our aim was to organize a dialogue between the people that actually organize, realize, and live the participatory and bottom-up processes that we so eagerly analyze. By asking a wide variety of people from the evenly diverse alternative (or counter-hegemonic) worlds, we maneuvered us academics in the position of the audience, which was (at first) forced to listen to the presentations of our guests. And we were silent, and listened to the fascinating stories about how civil society intervened (sometimes successfully, sometimes less successfully) in the creation of alternative content, in the organization of alternative journalism and in the attempts to influence the regulation that impacts upon the communicative processes. Only after the presentations, our and their questions came, in successful attempts to discover the areas where our interests met. We found many.

When looking back at these dialogues, we decided that the civil society narrations were too relevant and too fascinating to leave them unpublished. Hence this book, which captures almost all of the narrations we listened to at the grassroots discussion panels

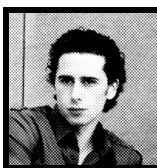
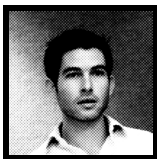
during the ICA's 57th conference. Moreover, Steve Rhodes¹, who took pictures at these panels, kindly agreed to have his work included, so that our dialogues materialized even more. I hope you enjoy reading them with the same enthusiasm that we had in listening to them.

All this would not have been possible without the help of my co-organizers (Seeta Peña Gangadharan and Benjamin De Cleen), all our panel members, our photographer (Steve Rhodes), the conference organizer (Sonia Livingstone), the ICA director (Michael Haley), and the entire ICA staff. I thank them for their appreciated support.

¹ See <http://ari.typepad.com/about.html/>.

GRASSROOTS DISCUSSION PANEL 1

Participatory Models and Alternative Content Production



Whether concerned with social movements, civic engagement, aesthetic production, or personal expression, alternative content production embraces participation as both a core value and a structural possibility. This panel examined attempts to develop, use, augment, and promote structures for participation in production processes. The discussions compared the content creators' strategies for social inclusion, democratic involvement, and technological literacy, by not only looking at technological or political imperatives but also at institutional ones. Key practitioners also addressed what is meant by participation, who participates and how, and what alternative content producers gain and lose from participatory designs.

Participants

Ryan Junell (Webzine)

Jay Dedman (Ourmedia)

Ronda Hauben (OhmyNews International)

David Sasaki (Global Voices)

Ilyse Hogue (MoveOn)²

Chair: Benjamin De Cleen (Free University of Brussels (VUB))

Relevant Links

Webzine @ <http://webzine2005.com/>

Ourmedia @ <http://www.ourmedia.org/>

OhmyNews International @ <http://english.ohmynews.com/>

Global Voices @ <http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/>

MoveOn @ <http://www.moveon.org/>

² Ilyse Hogue's speech is not included in this collection.

Independent Publishing on the Internet: Webzine and Fifteen Megs of Fame

Ryan Junell³

Origins

The room hummed with the low din of twenty-two computers. I sat at my desk (a door over two filing cabinets) at a small web design studio just after 8pm on a Friday night—probably holding a beer, probably working on a website. It was the fall of 1998, and I was in the heart of San Francisco’s Multimedia Gulch. Why? Because this was my dream job... I thought.

I moved to the Bay Area two years earlier with an insatiable desire to join the forefront of the internet revolution. I spent my first year converting internet consultant rhetoric into slick corporate presentations for Fortune 500 companies. I spent my second year designing front-page graphics for recycled press releases disguised as news at an online digital economy trade magazine. The money was good, but I was getting bored. I wanted to build websites with a team of skilled people.

As a freelancer with an eye for design and experience with web production, I was quickly picked up by one of the hundreds of newly-formed web studios eager to put warm bodies in front of a monitor. I got to know a set of people with very similar expectations about the web industry. San Francisco is no stranger to big expectations. The city has a constant sense that something huge is about to happen, perhaps due to the cataclysmic promise of seismic faultiness, which adds an underlying tension and urgency to daily living.

I had no idea I would spend most of my time designing and building websites for doomed e-commerce companies—companies commemorated today only by decaying promotional monitor squeegees and branded miniature frisbees. I never understood how stock in a dot.com could make normal workers millionaires, yet the lure of stock options, venture capital, and IPO’s kept digital workers toiling at their desks. It was a shame to see the internet go from being an open, non-commercial medium of free expression to being a huge, greedy strip mall.

Disillusioned by hype and empowered with experience, I was ready to get involved with a practical, meaningful, and socially accountable internet-related project that actually mattered to people. Back at my “desk,” an engineer buddy named Eddie walked over. He was wearing one of his dazzling psychedelic shirts and drinking a beer. He said, “Hey dude, have you ever met Srini Kumar from Unamerican.com?”

“Nope. I’ve seen his stickers around though.” I said.

³ See also <http://junell.net/>.

“Yeah... ‘Fuck Work’ is the big one. I just got one that says ‘Microsoft Sucks’. He asked me to work on a webzine event with him. We need a designer. Are you interested?” said Eddie.

I returned cautious, yet curious, “Uh... sure. When is it?”

Eddie smiled, “Three weeks!”

My induction to the first WEBZINE event’s inner circle was the beginning of a rich and educational journey through ideas dealing with media, society, and creativity. I developed a deep respect for thousands of media creators who, as if following an intense digital manifest destiny, seized the internet to share their ideas with a global community.

The Bay Area has a habit of incubating critical masses of like minds. The WEBZINE event happened in San Francisco because of the environment’s dynamic blend of technology geeks, experimental artists, radical writers, and advanced partiers. Dozens of other unique cultural movements, such as the Gold Rush, the Beat poets, the Haight Ashbury hippies, the UC⁴ Berkeley protests, Silicon Valley, underground raving, Burning Man, and the over-zealous dot.com industry, have flourished in the Bay Area. The WEBZINE event drew directly from this hub of attitude, perspective, experience, and vibe to identify and unify a community of geeks interested in independent publishing on the web.

From aimless, brainwashed dot.com yuppie to inspired, independent thinker, I was transformed by the WEBZINE event, as were many others. WEBZINE simultaneously legitimized an underappreciated genre of media and galvanized a diverse community of devoted zinesters. The WEBZINE event is dedicated to these media creators and their work.

What is a webzine?

Our media landscape has widened exponentially with the introduction of affordable desktop computers and access to high-speed internet connections. Millions of people appear online every day but are seemingly unaware that the internet is as much an active medium as it is a passive one. People now own the tools to create and present films, radio stations, newspapers, journals, and television shows; yet relatively few recognize the opportunity.

Independent publishing on the web has been around as long as there has been a World Wide Web. By sharing even the most trivial information such as a favorite color, a poem, or a picture of the family dog, a person experiences the core of independent publishing: initiative. A webzine (pr. web-zeen) is a non-commercial creative publication distributed on the World Wide Web. Webzine creators publish on the internet for the basic satisfaction of having their words read, images seen, and/or voice

⁴ University of California

heard. Webzines typically feature articles, interviews, editorials, multimedia, and/or news about a particular slice of life.

Why is a webzine interesting? Most webzines, in fact, are not very interesting at all. Webzines are not mainstream publications and are not targeted towards a mass audience. Webzine authors usually write for an audience with common interests. The special strength of a webzine comes from its ability to describe subject matter with an intimacy mass media systematically eschew.

Webzines are unique because they offer the rest of the world an unedited glance into an individual's worldview. Mainstream publications, such as *Time Magazine* and *USA Today*, have a responsibility to institutional survival and must enforce strict editorial guidelines. Because webzines are unfiltered by corporate objectives, they favor the visions of their authors.

Webzines are about creativity, the exercise of free speech, truth telling, and the communication of ideas with a larger community. Webzine makers are passionate, generous people. Though people have millions of reasons for making webzines, process is the common thread. The exercise of saying something that hasn't been said before or perhaps isn't being said enough is the fundamental joy of making a webzine.

The WEBZINE event

The WEBZINE event series started in 1998 when, on a whim, Srini Kumar of Unamerican.com baited Adobe Systems on the idea of organizing an event about webzines. To his pleasant surprise, they bit. Adobe wrote Srini a check for \$1500, which enabled him to locate a venue, round up a team of organizers, ask some friends to speak, and pay for some posters and programs. WEBZINE 98 took place at the Transmission Theater in San Francisco on November 14, 1998, with twenty speakers and two hundred fifty in attendance. Little did Adobe know that they had helped birth the world's only annual event for independent publishing on the internet. I was one of the original six organizers.

Understanding the gravity of the first event, three of the original organizers including myself moved forward to plan a bigger and more organized event. WEBZINE 99 took place on July 24, 1999, in San Francisco, with more than fifty speakers and seven hundred fifty in attendance. Among many notable occurrences, Mayor Willie Brown proclaimed the day "Internet Independence Day," Survival Research Laboratories blew off a jet engine in the parking lot, and the whole event was webcast on a teeny ISDN line.

With more financial support and a phalanx of volunteers, WEBZINE 2000 happened again in San Francisco on July 22, 2000, with more than fifty speakers and nearly one thousand in attendance. We produced an hour-long documentary, which included interviews and panel discussions. Attendees learned how to make webzines at a webzine-making workshop and rocked out to an evening of electronic noise music played on laptop computers. Our panelists from New York were very inspired by the

event and wrote us an email afterwards asking if we would mind if they put on a WEBZINE event in New York.

WEBZINE 2001 in New York City took place on July 21, 2001, in the basement of CBGB's⁵ with nearly fifty speakers and over three hundred in attendance. To mention only a few speakers, Michael Moore (director of "Roger and Me" and "TV Nation") spoke along with Phil Kaplan of FuckedCompany.com and Mark Berenson, father of political prisoner Lori Berenson. The New York WEBZINE event proved that our celebration of independent publishing on the internet was a meaningful global sentiment.

After the 2001 internet industry bust, the event hibernated for a couple of years to come to life again in 2005. WEBZINE 2005 was held at the Swedish-American Hall in San Francisco on September 24-25, 2005. It was probably the most successful of WEBZINES. And it was also the last WEBZINE—at least for now.

Organizing a WEBZINE event

Depending on your definition of a good time, organizing a WEBZINE event can be very fun. I adore creative collaboration, which is the reason why I am attracted to webzines in the first place. Great beauty exists in being part of a group with a mission to accomplish something for no other reason than to put it out there for others to enjoy.

The WEBZINE event's decentralized organizational structure is modelled after a burgeoning trend in the software industry called "open source." Open source means that the code or operation of a thing has been made available to the public. The Linux operating system is the greatest example to date of the success of open source. Linux is distributed under a free license giving anyone the right to modify its source code and redistribute it as they see fit. Because of this, Linux has with it a talented and friendly community of developers dedicated to the improvement of this software. By applying the open source ethos to WEBZINE, we established an environment where any organizer could contribute to the event as much or as little as they wanted without group expectation or scrutiny. The sum of contributions results in the event.

We created an email list for the regular organizers, which we called the "core" list. Information posted to core was directly related to organizing the event. A second list called "zinesters" was created in 1999 to build an informed community of webzine enthusiasts, bounce ideas around for new WEBZINE events, and keep the WEBZINE spirit alive year round. The zinesters list currently has more than two hundred fifty subscribers and generates twenty to thirty new messages a week. We have had extensive webzine-centric discussions about society, art, advertising, history, and methodology. The zinesters list also receives a constant stream of links to new and interesting webzines.

WEBZINE organizers take on the following tasks:

⁵ CBGB is the name of a legendary music club.

<i>Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rounding up speakers - Creating a website - Finding sponsors - Finding DJs, musicians, and performers - Figuring out food and refreshments - Having meetings
<i>Promoting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making a press release - Making posters and/or flyers - Contacting the media - Sending out emails - Distributing up posters and flyers
<i>Presenting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating program and other materials - Designing the venue
<i>During the event</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stage-managing - Cleaning up - Setting up a network - Managing the door - Handling volunteers - Selling T-shirts
<i>Other</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing a discussion list - Documenting the proceedings - Coordinating with the venue

The WEBZINE organizational meetings began three months prior to the event. We put out an open call for organizers on the zinesters list and other popular geek lists in the Bay Area. We usually met for no more than two hours over coffee or dinner in a regular space on a weekday evening in the Haight or in the Mission. After a few meetings, a core team emerged, made up of the regular faces that really wanted to be involved. Organizers tasked themselves based on their interests. Everyone contributed to programming speakers and selecting a date. By showtime, all organizers had mastered their piece of the event and maintained it throughout the day.

WEBZINE organizers commit enormous amounts of time, energy, and resources to create a place for folks to show off inventive, innovative, and creative online projects. The essential zinester thrill of creating is at the heart of our organizational process.

Financing a WEBZINE event

Over time, the event has had to ask itself many of the same questions webzine creators ask themselves. To what extent does this project require financial assistance in order for it to survive? Could the event become a successful non-profit? Would becoming an institution serve the non-commercial and independent principles we're attempting to communicate? Are we compromising our message by accepting corporate sponsorships? The event has taught me that having a financially sustainable creative project that is our own is better than: a) not having a project at all and b) working for a corporation. One of our main messages was to encourage people to stop consuming corporate media and

begin creating their own. The do-it-yourself (DIY) spirit is one of the strongest motivations for creating a webzine and, in turn, our event.

The ambiguous connection between our radical rhetoric and our commercial patronage would perhaps confuse diehard punks who might believe that we, the volunteer organizers, are merely an extension of “the man.” I completely disagree. The biggest effects of corporate sponsorship on an event are in the programming, the product demos, and the prolific marketing materials (not to mention the heinous complimentary tote bags), none of which have been seen at our event. The WEBZINE organizers have retained full control over the event and have turned down lucrative sponsorships from companies who did not understand or respect that responsibility.

Sponsors of the event were individuals who understood webzines and webzine culture. They knew that webzines are usually made on company time because they were the types of people who had done something cool on company time before. Dropping a few dollars into the WEBZINE hat was their way of supporting an event they felt was serving a community they cared about.

We approached small web studios and other small companies with no direct marketing objective for donations of \$400 or less, in order to stay off the tax radar. The donations were essentially grants to put on an event with no expected returns. We usually thanked the sponsor from the stage, in our program, and on our website.

We raised nearly \$8,500 in 2000 and spent the money on projectors, food, T-shirts for volunteers, renting the venue, creating a documentary, and a number of supplies. Every single penny we accepted from sponsors went back into the event. Organizers and volunteers also make large personal sacrifices of money, time, and resources to pull off the event.

Our event would have happened had we brought in \$50,000 or fifty cents. Our mission was to provide a space for people to come together to discuss independent online media. I believed then (as I do now) that as long as we ultimately had control over our project (in our case, the event), then we were upholding DIY ideals, even in the most punk sense of the term.

Evolution of the event

The WEBZINE event is one of the few success stories of the internet boom because of its lack of institutional overhead. The event started as a whimsical pitch and transformed over four years into an annual not-for-profit bi-coastal gathering. Although the event evolved in subtle ways over the years, it remained an exhibition, forum, and party.

WEBZINE 98, for example, was rife with organizational inexperience. Every element was generated at the last minute by the seat of our collective pants, which gave the event an exciting immediateness. Speakers stood alone or with an interviewer at the microphone in a smallish gallery space starting around 8pm and going until midnight. Once the speakers wrapped, the event quickly turned into a ravenous drinking party.

The fact that we pulled off WEBZINE 98 at all amazed us. We were very proud of ourselves and felt like we had proved the validity of our idea. We knew that future events could be better. We spent the next few months reviewing what we had accomplished and how we could improve it.

WEBZINE 99 was to WEBZINE 98 what a feature film is to a movie trailer. Scott Beale of San Francisco's Laughing Squid crowd applied his event-organizing experience and networking skills to the core team. Thirteen other part-time organizers joined Scott, Eddie, and myself under our open-source policy. We expanded our sponsorship approach to accept cash donations from web design studios and in-kind donations from service providers. We significantly changed the format of the event from an evening crowd of insiders at a party to an all day conference, with keynote speakers, panels, and workshops. We programmed panel discussions in hopes of elevating the level of discussion for zinesters unfamiliar with public speaking. We also encouraged multimedia artists to show off their works. We sent out dozens of press releases and created flyers, which garnered some early press attention.

WEBZINE 2000 was the most polished and well organized of the four, produced by a seasoned set of twelve core members in three months. I volunteered full time on the event for more than two months and was intimately close with nearly every aspect. The panels were carefully planned to create a constructive, open dialogue between the speakers and the audience. We introduced an open microphone, hosted by our friend and emcee, Justin Hall. As we recruited speakers for the event, we noticed that many of the zinester speakers we programmed for 98 were no longer involved with their webzines. We realized that our event is not only about webzines but also about encouraging people to experience the process of free speech. We featured more individual speakers who took a closer look at independent media theory.

The West Coast organizers were thrilled and flattered to hear that interested zinesters on the East Coast wanted to host and organize WEBZINE 2001. The New York core was made up of six dedicated zinesters, several of whom were former top employees of the Bla Bla Network, a webzine portal start-up. After several unsuccessful attempts to acquire webzine.org, webzine.com, and webzine.net (bids opened at \$5000), we finally registered webzine.ws to create a permanent home for all things WEBZINE. I first met with the East Coast core to discuss a New York event using an online instant messaging tool two months before the event. The event was low key and predominantly attended by diehard webzine fans. WEBZINE felt right at home in the low-slung ceilings of CBGB's basement, just beneath the stage of rock and roll bands such as Television, Patti Smith, the Talking Heads, and the Ramones.

The event hibernated for the next four years while the internet industry recuperated from the 2001 bust. In early 2005, the Webzine events-of-old started coming up in conversations by enthusiastic next-generation creators of tools who were looking for a Webzine-like forum to demo their stuff and talk about the future of independent online publishing. Scott Beale, Eddie Codel, and I crashed BarCamp (the indie response to O'Reilly's elite tools conference FooCamp⁶). Before the weekend was over, we had

⁶ FooCamp is an invitation-only, unstructured hacker event hosted by O'Reilly Media.

pulled together a new core group of organizers and even decided on a keynote speaker. This was Jacob Appelbaum, a media producer who had independently found his way to New Orleans while it was in lockdown stage immediately after the flooding from Hurricane Katrina and who worked with a group of people to establish a variety of communications from within the zone.⁷ WEBZINE 2005 was held at the Swedish-American Hall in San Francisco on September 24-25, 2005, and was perhaps the most successful of WEBZINE events. A well-attended two-day event, it featured bloggers, vloggers, phloggers, and many of the latest software and service makers such as Wordpress, Odeo, SixApart, Technorati, and many others. WEBZINE 2005 was arguably the most well funded and well organized of the events. By looking at the amount of audience-created media (blog, audio, video, and photos), one could get a sense of how much the WEBZINE ideals had made its way into the fabric of the modern internet.

In the spring of 2006, Eddie and I discussed spearheading another webzine event later that year. But it never materialized, probably because we were both preoccupied with paying work that we loved. We discussed paying ourselves to spend the months on end of organizing a big event like webzine, but for some reason turning WEBZINE into a business just didn't seem right. I'm proud that through its five incarnations, WEBZINE remained a 100% volunteer organized event. Without a core group tirelessly devoting time, energy, and spirit there really is no way to pull it off. But I think WEBZINE is quietly and patiently waiting for the right cataclysm to bring the punked-out media makers together again.

Fifteen megs of fame

Andy Warhol once said everyone would experience fifteen minutes of world fame. I wonder if his statement holds true in the age of the internet. Fame is a product of the media, yet when we are the media, we control the means of determining fame. The typical webzine takes up about fifteen megs of space on a hard drive. It is possible that in the future everyone will experience world (wide web) fame for fifteen megs of self-published material on the internet.

Fame is the easy part, but celebrity is not the only reason zinesters publish. The act of placing words, sounds and images on a website is a form of historical documentation. Self-publishing is a way of proving that our ideas, dreams, and fantasies exist. Webzines reflect and confirm our identity. It follows that by not publishing our ideas, we lose our identity and must return to our seats in the audience. When we lose "us," we get "them"—and "they" are really boring and very controlling. "They" are the powerful mass media companies like AOL Time Warner, Bertelsmann, General Electric, Viacom, News Corp, and Disney who tell the consumer public what to buy and how to think.

In the past decade, the internet has transformed from an open, non-commercial medium of free expression to a passive medium saturated with e-commerce, banner advertising, and walled gardens of corporate protection. We need to understand that the

⁷ See <http://jacob.wordpress.com/>.

freedom to independently publish on the internet is a valuable exercise of free speech and an extension of our constitutional rights as citizens in a democracy.

The WEBZINE event believes society is strengthened by the wide circulation of diverse ideas. We have worked hard to bring deserved recognition to the contributions of independent media creators. Dozens of webzine makers shared their experiences and perspectives at our event. WEBZINE was designed to support a meaningful dialogue between creators, their audiences and the general public. As an organizer and participant of the WEBZINE events, I am proud of our message and our work. I hope we have inspired everyday people to get started on their fifteen megs.

Videoblogging and Ourmedia.org

*Jay Dedman*⁸

This is the history of videoblogging and Ourmedia's role in its development.

Videoblogging began as a consistent act in 2004, when a small group of video geeks realized that the blog was the distribution tool we had always been looking for. It was also a time when broadband internet in the United States had become fairly common in people's homes, which made watching videos through the browser easy. The motivation of this first group of videobloggers was to have people around the world record their lives, distribute these videos through blogs, and archive them online for all to search. It was an extremely exciting time, since videoblogging was completely unrealized by companies. For a short while, videobloggers could experiment and innovate without any commercial distraction.

Videoblogging was amazing for several reasons. First, it was a way to let anyone with an internet connection see a video. Second, it allowed others to comment on the video and create a conversation. Third, the blog automatically archived videos. Fourth, by adding a text description, the blog made all the videos searchable. Fifth, by using RSS⁹, creators could create their own "channel," and deliver videos to thousands of people at no cost.

I must emphasize how supportive the videoblogging community has been throughout its history. When videoblogging was still unknown to the mainstream, this tight-knit group of people attracted new members each day through word of mouth. Video geeks around the world were thrilled to find a way to get their videos distributed to a wider public. For so long, many of us made videos that sat in our closets. We would embrace new members and help them in any way we could through email and chat. We quickly documented our processes and expanded our knowledge when anyone learned a new trick. Since we were an international group, we stressed personal documentation so we could get to know each other. Everyday you would see artists, soccer moms, college students, et cetera make videos for each other. We reached out to people in different countries and included all languages, since many members were multi-lingual.

In January of 2005, just six months after our community began, we held the first Vloggercon¹⁰ at NYU¹¹ in Manhattan. During a blizzard, about eighty people from across the US and Europe met to discuss what videoblogging meant. The event was spontaneous and organized in an ad hoc manner. The developers discussed practical subjects: what tools the community needed, what videoblogging was allowing artists to do, and what, according to the academics, it all meant. The biggest talk focused on the future of videoblogging and how to spread it to a wider audience. The importance of

⁸ See also <http://www.momentshowing.net/>.

⁹ Really Simple Syndication—a web feed format

¹⁰ See <http://vloggercon.blogspot.com/>.

¹¹ New York University

getting as many regular people as possible creating and posting video cannot be stressed enough. The participants were artists, educators, and developers all sharing a common goal of building a new way to communicate online. We all wanted to bring a human touch back to the web through video.

At this time, we were still dealing with very fundamental problems such as “where will the videos be stored?” Since our goal was to be as inclusive as possible, we did not want to require people to own their own server and deal with FTP. We wanted people to be able to upload their video through the browser and get it on their blog as quickly as possible. And we wanted it to be free. There was no service that did this in January of 2005. At the time, we were all videoblogging in our own unique way by hacking into existing services and technologies to do what we needed to do. This is when we conceived of Ourmedia.org.

At Vloggercon 2005, JD Lasica and Mark Canter announced that they were creating a site that hooked into Archive.org run by Brewster Kahle. Anyone could create an account, upload their video of any size/format, and then link to it from their blog. It was incredible. Ourmedia was to be non-profit and focused on community video that practiced no censorship. Now that there was a simple and consistent way to upload video, Michael Verdi and RYanne Hodson quickly built Freevlog.org to teach anyone how to videoblog in six easy steps using Ourmedia.org. Combined with our evangelizing this made our community grow from a few hundred people to a few thousand people within the year.

Ourmedia was a huge success from the start. It was an amazing resource that tore down any barrier to entry. You could now make a blog and post a video for free in about five minutes. This was unheard of. Ourmedia also focused on helping creators of similar interests find each other.

Yet, Ourmedia also faced deep challenges from the beginning. Marc Canter put his own money into creating the site, but it was mostly volunteer run. Consistency was difficult. The site worked well for several thousand people, but when it starting hitting 100,000 people, this created enormous problems of scale. It was also extremely difficult to have the same sense of intimacy when this many people came together.

By January of 2006, the commercial world had caught up with us. Entrepreneurs had joined our email list and saw what it is we were doing, and what it was that we needed. Every week a businessman launched a new site that helped videobloggers post video. YouTube was one of those sites. It was sad that we were losing the intimacy and initial excitement, but ultimately it was great news that personal web video was becoming so popular. The network had now spread. People had options. The technology was becoming invisible. The mainstream press now had plenty of examples and hooks to write about this new style of video publishing. Videoblogging was now mainstream.

Ourmedia continues to exist to this day. JD Lasica and Markus Sandy are leading the site into new places. You can still upload a video for free to Ourmedia, but this is nothing new these days. Ourmedia now focuses on media literacy and offers resources for new people to understand the context in which they create their work. Ourmedia is

building tools that let people create “channels” by tagging similar media, thus letting you become a video DJ. Ourmedia is also championing Creative Commons licensing to help create a participatory culture rather than a permissions culture.

Videoblogging has helped create many opportunities for video creators, but the challenges of community media are still the same. As simple and cheap as technology has become, many people still do not know how to tell effective stories. People are still disconnected and isolated from one another. The web is still unknown territory for the majority, instead of it being a place to seek out new connections. Not everyone has regular access to broadband internet or to his or her own computer. The social boundaries in society are still mirrored online.

However, we need to remember that effective change always comes slowly and usually through small, motivated groups. In three short years, there are now videoblogs on every continent (including Antarctica!). YouTube, with its enormous resources, is making web video popular around the world. Once a new videoblogger comes online, enlightened video creators cross over the usual boundaries, find each other, and make entirely new connections. The real challenge now is simply asking what it is we want to do now that we can show each other anything. And it all begins with picking up a camera and showing who you are.

The Participatory Nature of OhmyNews: Citizen Reporters Passionately Committed to Social Change¹²

Ronda Hauben

Today I want to describe the creation and significance of OhmyNews as a model for a new form of journalism, for a journalism that is appropriate for the 21st century, a journalism that has been made possible by the internet and the netizens.¹³

I plan to present three different examples of OhmyNews (OMN) related experiences and then draw together their implications, toward understanding the participatory experience provided by OhmyNews.

As a featured writer for OhmyNews International (OMNI) I recently covered the 50th anniversary dinner in New York City of the Korea Society. One of the speakers at the dinner was Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill. He explained the problem of \$25 million in funds of North Korean money being frozen as part of a US Treasury Department proceeding against a bank in Macau, China, the Banco Delta Asia (BDA). This is a problem holding up the implementation of the six-party agreement to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. Hill committed himself to work on this problem until it was solved.

There were several Korean journalists covering the event for their publications. They were particularly interested in what Hill said, but Hill's talk in itself didn't seem to represent a newsworthy event.

In the next few days, however, it appeared that an important story was developing.

In the process of trying to unravel the unfolding developments I found one news organization that did a story about the legitimate activity the bank had engaged in for North Korea. The news organization was the McClatchy Newspapers. I also found links to some documents refuting the Treasury Department's charges.

I now had the documents in the case. The US government's findings gave no specific evidence of wrong doing on the part of the bank. The bank's statements and refutation gave significant documentation refuting charges of illegal activity. The refutation also made the case that the allegations were informed by political motives rather than by actual illegal activity by the bank. The US government had targeted a small Macau bank to scare the many banks in China. "To kill the chicken to scare the monkeys," as the government document explained, quoting an old Chinese proverb.

¹² This article appears in OMNI. The url is:

http://english.ohmynews.com/ArticleView/article_view.asp?menu=&no=363832&rel_no=1&back_url=/.

¹³ The url for the Korean language OhmyNews is <http://www.ohmynews.com/>. The url for the English language OhmyNews International is <http://english.ohmynews.com/>.

At last I had the news peg for the story. I wrote an article, submitting it around 5AM my time to OMNI, using the software OMNI provides for articles. By noon the next day, my story appeared on OMNI.¹⁴ That was May 18.

Also on May 18, the *Wall Street Journal* carried an opinion editorial by the former US Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton. The article scolded the US government for agreeing to return the \$25 million to North Korea.

Both of these articles with their opposing points of view could be found on the internet by May 19, by those doing a Google news search on the subject.

I wanted to share this experience here today in order to put the focus of the rest of my remarks about the Korean OMN, the English language OMNI and the theme of citizen participation into an appropriate context.

OMN grew out of the experience of its founder Mr. Oh Yeon-ho and the vision he had for transforming the South Korean news landscape. For more than ten years, from 1988 until 1999, Oh was a journalist for an alternative South Korean magazine, the *Monthly Mal*. One experience Oh uses to help explain the impetus for OhmyNews is when he did a significant story that uncovered the facts about a massacre of South Korean civilians by US soldiers that had taken place during the Korean War. Oh published his expose in 1994. The story had little impact. In 1999, however, some *Associated Press* (AP) reporters did a similar story. The AP story was picked up by much of the South Korean mainstream news media and treated like a breaking news event. The AP reporters won a Pulitzer Prize for the story.

Mr. Oh realized it is not enough to break a news story. What is judged as news in South Korea (and similarly in the US, I may add) is more dependent on the nature of the news organization reporting the news than on the newsworthiness of the story itself. Mr. Oh set out to change this situation by starting OhmyNews.

His goal was to transform the news environment in South Korea, which at the time was eighty percent conservative and twenty percent progressive, into an environment that was fifty percent conservative and fifty percent progressive. His objective was for the quality of the news to determine its coverage, rather than the finances of the organization publishing the story.

Mr. Oh describes how he recognized that the desire of netizens in South Korea for political change in Korea was reflected in the campaign for the presidency of a candidate who was not part of the political mainstream. Oh was determined to give this story the political coverage it merited. OhmyNews was the means to achieve this goal. The conservative mainstream press was hostile to Roh Moo-hyun. Never in the past had someone won the presidency without the support of the conservative mainstream press. Nevertheless Roh Moo-hyun won a surprising victory in December 2002 due to the

¹⁴ Ronda Hauben, "Behind the Blacklisting of Banco Delta Asia. Is the policy aimed at targeting China as well as North Korea?" OhmyNews International, May 18, 2007, [http://english.ohmynews.com/ArticleView/article_view.asp?menu=A11100&no=362192&rel_no=18&back_url=.](http://english.ohmynews.com/ArticleView/article_view.asp?menu=A11100&no=362192&rel_no=18&back_url=/)

active election campaigning for him by netizens and OhmyNews. Mr. Oh describes how when the election was over, reporters from the conservative mainstream press called him and other OhmyNews reporters and congratulated them for having made the victory possible.

In his book *The Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine explains the problem of creating a government that will be democratic. The essence of democracy, Paine explains, is that the sovereignty of a nation lies in its people, not in the government officials. Democracy requires the participation of the people and also observation and control over a government by its citizens. The objective of creating a constitution is to create the compact of the people that will be the basis for determining and overseeing the actions of government officials. Paine describes this lesson as the gift of the American revolution of 1776 and the French revolution of 1789.

We are looking at the same problem more than two hundred years later. It has become clear that the existence of a constitution is not adequate as a means for citizens to exercise their control over government officials. A peoples' or citizens' press is also needed as a means of exercising some of the desired control of citizens over their government.

A problem that has developed is that mainstream media organizations—as Mr. Oh found in South Korea—often don't fulfill this important function of the press. Fortunately, there are many citizens today who feel the need for control over the abuse of power by government officials. These citizens are eager to participate in carrying out the role of the press as a watchdog.

In 2000, Mr. Oh was able to start the Korean language OhmyNews with a small staff of four reporters. By welcoming citizen reporters to write for OhmyNews, he was able to augment the content of the newspaper so it could be much broader than the limited finances and meager resources would have otherwise made possible. The staff has since grown as have the number of citizen reporters participating in OhmyNews.

While OhmyNews (OMN) is published in Korean, an English edition called OhmyNews International (OMNI) is available so those who do not read and write in Korean but want to know more about OhmyNews can participate and in this manner, learn more about the concepts and practice of citizen journalism as developed by OhmyNews.

Citizen journalism as pioneered by OMN is the continuation of what Michael Hauben described as one of the gifts of the internet. He wrote that the internet “gives the power of the reporter to the netizen.”¹⁵

Mr. Oh's vision and practice in creating and developing the Korean OMN is an attempt to give the power of the news media to the citizen, making it possible for news stories

¹⁵ Michael and Ronda Hauben, “Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet,” IEEE Computer Society, 1997, distributed by John Wiley and Sons, <http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netbook/>.

citizens uncover to get the needed support and distribution so as to be able to impact the policy agenda and decision making processes of the government.

In this context, OMNI gives citizens and journalists from countries around the world a taste of what it could mean if they had an OMN in their countries. Its intent is to be a catalyst for the creation and spread of other OhmyNews-like sites in other countries besides South Korea and then to support the collaboration among these diverse OMN-like sites. (There is already a version of OhmyNews in Japan.)

There is not yet an OMN in the US. So my story about the connection of the US government's policy toward China and the US government actions against the Macau bank is not yet likely to be able to impact how the mainstream news in the US frames the story with North Korea and the six-party talks. But the need for a US model of OMN becomes all the more urgent when one participates in OMNI and thus has the experience of exploring the potential of what it will make possible.

To sum up, Mr. Oh, describing citizen journalism at the OMNI forum in South Korea last July said¹⁶:

“Though we are an open platform accessible to everyone, not everyone can write a news story. Only those reporters who are passionately committed to social change and reporting make our project possible. The main reason that citizen journalism has not grown and spread more rapidly is the difficult task of finding and organizing these passionate citizen reporters in waiting.”

¹⁶ Oh Yeon-ho, “Welcome to Korea and OhmyNews,” reprinted in the *Amateur Computerist*, 15(1), <http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/ACn15-1.pdf>.

Global Voices: From Blogger Meetup to Editorial Hierarchy

*David Sasaki*¹⁷

Gathering in person to agree on founding principles

Global Voices, an online network and aggregator of bloggers from around the world, took shape in the same manner as most other online communities: a group of like-minded individuals were seeking out their peers. In this case, they were the early adopters of weblogs, and they were especially interested in using their digital printing presses to share the culture, traditions, and political developments of their countries with an audience based around the world.

Over thirty of these leading bloggers from places like Malaysia, China, Iraq, Iran, and Kenya gathered at Harvard Law School in December 2004, for the Berkman Center's Conference on Internet and Society. Iranian blogger Hossein Derakshan came up with a term for the movement, bridge blogging, to describe the use of weblogs as a medium of direct and instant one-to-many communication across borders. The notion that a weblog was more than a medium of self-expression but also a bridge between groups of people that had previously been informed of each other by the editorial judgment of just a few major news organizations seemed revolutionary. It seemed worthy of a manifesto.

And so they drafted one, and it came to be called the Global Voices Manifesto. Part of the manifesto reads as follows:

We believe in free speech: in protecting the right to speak—and the right to listen. We believe in universal access to the tools of speech.

To that end, we seek to enable everyone who wants to speak to have the means to speak — and everyone who wants to hear that speech, the means to listen to it.

Thanks to new tools, speech need no longer be controlled by those who own the means of publishing and distribution, or by governments that would restrict thought and communication. Now, anyone can wield the power of the press. Everyone can tell his or her stories to the world...

From volunteer experiment to virtual newsroom

It was clear from the manifesto that these pioneering bridge-bloggers were interested in both spreading and protecting their newfound ability to communicate globally without restriction. But six months after the first gathering, there was little to show for their initial enthusiasm.

¹⁷ See also <http://www.el-oso.net/blog/>.

Each continued to write daily on his or her own blog, but the posts and the conversations each inspired weren't being collected or tied together. Frequently, the bloggers became so comfortable with their readership that they stopped providing context to situations and events that might be unfamiliar to a typical international audience. There was an outpouring of compelling content from regions often ignored by mainstream media, but those individual expressions weren't collected into a global conversation of varied perspectives.

In the beginning of 2005 (when the blogosphere still felt like a tangible community mostly focused on issues of technology), conference organizers Ethan Zuckerman and Rebecca MacKinnon started writing daily summaries of what English-speaking bridge-bloggers around the world were discussing. Soon, blogging services began offering their tools in a variety of languages and what was once the blogosphere turned into a myriad of overlapping blogospheres—communities of bloggers typically defined by language and nationality—held together by blogrolls and hyperlinks.

Was it possible, Zuckerman and MacKinnon wondered, to bring all of those various blogospheres together on a single site by recruiting representatives from each? They secured a small amount of funding from the MacArthur Foundation and hired regional editors from Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Western Europe and North America were excluded because bloggers from both regions were already well represented online and in the mainstream media.

At the time I was living in Mexico, where I became the first Regional Editor for the site in May 2005. Everything was an experiment; there were no editorial restrictions or even guidelines. As editors we followed, translated, and summarized what our respective regional blogospheres were discussing. But more importantly, we began recruiting volunteer contributing authors who were willing to write weekly summaries of their national blogospheres. Today, we have over one hundred volunteer authors covering the blogging communities of nearly as many countries. Some countries, like Colombia, India, and China, have more than one author.

Editorial policy has been shaped as doubts came up. Authors should not insert their own opinions, we agreed, but rather convey the opinions of the bloggers they are citing. Acronyms should be written out. Background information should be given to events and individuals that are not internationally renowned. When translating from another language, both the original text and the translated text should be included so that readers can correct mistakes or suggest alternative translations. To improve readability, regional editors began copyediting the posts of contributing authors. And, soon, we found ourselves running a virtual newsroom with correspondents based around the world.

Some lessons stand out. First, leadership is important, but good ideas are more important. Zuckerman and MacKinnon have the ability to attract funders and media attention, which has been instrumental to the growth and influence of Global Voices. They also have the experience in technology and journalism to advise on what is effective and what is not. But when it comes to editorial and administrative decisions, those policies are always reached via consensus on our mailing list. Second, technology

is important, but content is more important. Compared to sites like Digg, the tools we use are fairly primitive and old school by Web 2.0 standards. We essentially rely on a group blog, a mailing list, and an IRC chat room for our editorial meetings. But while feature-rich sites like Digg and YouTube tend to focus on Apple's latest and greatest product or a thirty second video clip of a skateboarding dog, Global Voices highlights powerful narratives and thought-provoking content from around the world on a daily basis. Our readers come not for thirty seconds of infotainment but to connect directly with their fellow world citizens.

A global blogosphere with more local content

The exponential growth of blogs and bloggers over the past two years has been staggering. Whereas most Latin American nations only had a handful of bloggers in 2005, your average South American metropolitan city now has hundreds if not thousands. But as the space becomes more crowded, conversation tends to point inward. The communities become more insular and content becomes more local and specialized. In 2005, it seemed as though every blogger was writing to the rest of the world. To be a Tanzanian blogger at the beginning of 2005 meant that you were one of a handful of early adopters, and so it seemed natural to write for an international audience. These days there are hundreds of Tanzanian bloggers, and their discussions focus on local issues: education reform, local corruption, traffic, and the Taifa Stars football team. Making traffic in Dar es Salaam compelling for a Global Voices reader in Moldova becomes a difficult task.

At the beginning of 2005, many bloggers in the developing world also wrote in English simply because it guaranteed a readership. There were millions of English-speaking internet users seeking out weblogs, but only a few Swahili speakers had ever heard the term. That has all changed, and these days bilingual bloggers are more likely to write in their native language and interact with local bloggers.

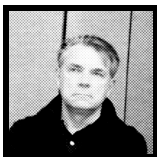
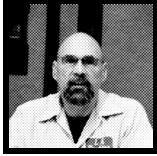
New tools, same mission

The dawn of online cross-border communication didn't begin with the birth of the weblog. Throughout the Eighties and Nineties, internet users around the world used bulletin board services, newsgroups, chatrooms, mailing lists, and rudimentary HTML pages to communicate with one another. But the weblog made it easier than ever to create content, link to what others were saying, and allow readers to comment. In other words: to have a conversation. While the popularity of blogging continues to grow, it is no longer the ubiquitous medium of content distribution and online interaction that it once was. Frequently, internet users now document their lives via images and captions on photo-sharing sites like Flickr. As digital video cameras become more affordable, we see a rise in vlogging and personal YouTube channels. Many veteran bloggers who feel that they no longer have anything left unsaid are taking to sites like Twitter and Jaiku, where post length tends to be a single sentence, not an entire page. Younger people especially seem to feel more comfortable expressing themselves on social networking sites like MySpace and Flickr than starting up their own weblog.

What does this all mean for the future of Global Voices? It means that we must continue to adapt in order to act as a bridge not just between the ever-expanding and increasingly numerous blogospheres of the world, but also the various formats in which individuals choose to express themselves online. The mission laid out in Global Voices' founding manifesto remains the same, but the methods employed to facilitate dialogue between regions, languages, and generations will forever be in flux.

GRASSROOTS DISCUSSION PANEL 2

Alternative Journalisms



What are the many faces of alternative journalism today? This discussion explored the role of alternative journalists in speaking to power and creating social change and contemplates journalists' adaptation and/or resistance to new social, economic, political, and technological pressures in the field. The discussion centered on the practice of alternative journalism in the past and in the present. Panelists also treated alternative journalism's successes and failures and the challenges of working in a media- and information-saturated environment. The panel ended by reflecting on ways to enhance alternative journalism's critical capacities.

Participants

*Bob Ostertag (artist, author of *People's Movements*, *People's Press*)*

Shinjoung Yeo (Radical Reference)

Josh Wolf (Free the Media Coalition, Rise Up Network, prisonblogs.net)

Don Hazen (Alternet)

Chair: Nico Carpentier (Free University of Brussels (VUB))

Relevant links

Bob Ostertag @ <http://www.bobostertag.com/>

Radical Reference @ <http://www.radicalreference.info/>

Free the Media Coalition @ <http://mediafreedoms.net/>

Rise Up Network @ <http://www.riseup.net/>

Prisonblogs.net @ <http://prisonblogs.net/>

Alternet @ <http://www.alternet.org/>

Social Movements and the Printed and Electronic Word

Bob Ostertag

My recent book, *People's Movements, People's Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements*, examined the history of social movement journalism in the US. In it, I argue that the specific dynamics of the printed word were a fundamental factor in shaping what we have come to think of as modern social movements. In this presentation, I will outline the results of my historical research and then address some of the vexing issues posed by the transition of social movement journalism from the printed to the electronic word.

For two centuries, Americans whose concerns and interests lay outside the accepted political boundaries of the day have organized social movements as the principle vehicle for advancing their cause. Their journals have been these movements' most important tool, and have been applied to almost every task these movements undertook. The history of social movements and the history of their press are often nearly inseparable, and historians frequently peg the birth of a social movement to the founding of the movement's first journal.

It is therefore surprising that the history of the social movement press has been studied so little. I suspect this is largely due to the fact that, when judged by the standards typically used to assess the importance of mainstream publications—circulation, advertising revenue, size of book, longevity, and “objectivity”—social movement publications appear to have been of negligible importance. Yet, even the most cursory review of the social movement press reveals the mistake of judging it by these standards.

It is my contention that the history of social movement journalism can only be understood in the context of the particular movements of which each journal was a part: its internal dynamics and strategies, its relation with its immediate adversary, its relation with the state, and its location in the broader culture (for example, the constitution of “abolitionists” as the predominant voice against slavery, the direct conflict between abolitionists and southern slaveholders, the complex relation between abolitionists and the federal government, and the place of abolitionism in the broader culture, particularly in the North). Each of these four components is highly dynamic; together, they create a context of continual change.

As a result of this fluidity, there is no schematic framework which can simplify the analysis of social movement dynamics, and no substitute for nuanced and detailed historical analysis of the social movement press in the context of the movement of which it is a part. Conventional measures of a journal's importance, such as circulation, financial stability, and longevity, may—or may not—be meaningful measures of the significance of a movement publication. Movement publishers who cling single-mindedly to these objectives may miss crucial opportunities to contribute to overall

movement goals; historians committing the same error may similarly underestimate (or overestimate) the importance of movement journals.

“Objectivity,” circulation, longevity, geographic distribution, and advertising revenue are commonly considered universal standards by which the importance of newspapers and magazines is measured. For the corporate media, however, these measures are not ends in themselves but are simply tools for maximizing profits. As such they are quite useful. Any business plan for running a publication as a profit-making endeavor must incorporate all these tools in a thoughtful and ongoing way. Advertising revenue generates profit. Circulation supports advertising. Longevity keeps the money coming. Large geographic distribution diversifies the profit base against local downturns.

“Objectivity” is not a profit-maximizing device but rather the ideological rationale for the whole enterprise. “Objective” and “unbiased” only became media buzzwords as a direct offshoot of the concentration of media ownership. Prior to the giant media oligopolies, these notions were conspicuously absent from American journalism. Newspapers and magazines were published because the people who made them had a point of view they wanted to get across, and made no bones about it. The notion that journalists should—or even could—write without a viewpoint or opinion emerged as a necessary ideological underpinning of media oligopoly, the selling point for the idea that media control by the few is not inherently detrimental to democratic institutions or culture.

Social movement journalism seeks to promote ideas, not profits. Movement journals seek to challenge corporate control of media, not justify it. They address readers as members of communities, not individual consumers. They cover social movements as participants, not “observers.” They exist to make change, not business. If the political context of a given movement at a particular time offers conditions in which a long-lived, large-circulation, profit-making, journal can be strategically employed to further movement goals, then these are meaningful accomplishments. If such conditions are not present, these measures may be irrelevant or worse.

This is not to imply that social movement publications always come up short by the standards of corporate journalism. The *Sierra Club Bulletin* (now *Sierra*) has been in continuous publication for over one hundred years. The *Earth First! Journal* made a small profit beginning with its very first issue (mainstream publications typically expect a year or even much longer of red ink on the corporate ledger). Some gay and lesbian publications now produce profits that make the corporate giants envious (and the journals possible take-over targets). The AIDS epidemic, one of the biggest stories of the twentieth century, was first reported by a volunteer writer in the *New York Native*, a gay community paper less than one year old at the time. Gay papers consistently scooped the mainstream press in coverage of the epidemic for years afterward.

William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator*, on the other hand, had nothing along these lines to recommend it. It was a one-man operation that never had a “scoop.” In fact, it rarely had news at all in the conventional meaning of the term. It consistently lost money, and had only three thousand subscribers at its peak, yet it remains one of the most influential newspapers in US history. Its demand for immediate, as opposed to

gradual, emancipation moved from the outer fringe to the core of the abolitionist movement, and then to national policy with the Emancipation Proclamation. Its uncompromising voice spread well beyond abolitionists to inspire and inform early women's rights activists and many others. It even bequeathed us the term "Garrisonian," an adjective first used to describe the most militant brand of abolitionism, and later generalized to indicate an uncompromising willingness to speak one's mind on social justice issues, regardless of the consequences. Frederick Douglass, a former slave, had to lecture constantly and mortgage his home simply to keep his papers in print, yet he is considered one of the giants of American political writing. One hundred years later, *Not Man Apart*, published by Friends of the Earth with almost no budget, volunteer writers, and a circulation of 35,000, was more influential in its day than any other environmental journal, including the *Sierra Club Bulletin* (then with a circulation of 300,000), and *Greenpeace* (with a circulation of more than a million).

If profitability and circulation are not reliable measures of the contribution of movement publications to the overall goals of the movement of which they are a part, what about other conventional standards, such as longevity? Duration of publication is certainly a measure by which the wheat of American journalism is typically separated from the chaff.

Here again we find influential journals at both ends of the spectrum, with no reliable correlation between longevity and contribution to movement goals. The *Sierra Club Bulletin/Sierra!* has been publishing continuously for more than a century. Walker's *Appeal* and the early woman suffrage pamphlets were one-issue affairs. *The Furies* became "legendary" among lesbians in the second half of the twentieth century, despite publishing for less than a year.

The Liberator set an early standard with thirty-five years of uninterrupted publication, spanning the earliest articulation of "abolitionism" to the legal abolition of slavery. But what if abolition had been achieved in ten years instead of thirty-five? *The Liberator* would not have entered the historical record book with its lofty thirty-five years, but would the reduced lifespan have indicated a less successful journal, or a more successful one?

In both the abolitionist and woman suffrage movements, even the softer-focused, larger-circulation publications went into a tailspin in the period just prior to victory, with many publications closing their doors. In both cases, however, the demise was a consequence of coverage of the movements' cause moving to the front page of the mainstream press. Here again, was the termination of so many publications a sign of the journals' failure or success?

Longevity is a particularly interesting conundrum in that it is equally prized by both the profit-driven media and by most movement publishers themselves. These latter may acknowledge that making profit is not what movement publishing is about, yet still believe that the longevity of their publication is a certain indicator of their contribution to the cause. This notion is a particular manifestation of the conventional activist wisdom which prioritizes building lasting institutions that can outlive the transitory character of activist upsurges and "build for the long haul." The idea is that by outliving

the upsurge which created them, institutions (such as journals) can continue to further the cause, and remain at the ready so that when the next upsurge comes, the movement will have seasoned organizations ready to roll and not have to “reinvent the wheel.” This notion too does not hold up well under historical scrutiny.

The tiny gay and lesbian papers that emerged in the 1950s and early 1960s assembled a remarkable track record. They fought for and won the right to publish and distribute materials that discussed homosexuality. They developed a dedicated core of increasingly confident and experienced activists, and a loyal readership. By conventional reckoning, they should have been perfectly positioned to lead the charge if a real mass movement emerged. But when “gay liberation” exploded in the aftermath of Stonewall, these publications appeared confused and outdated, and quickly folded. After years eking out a bare existence in the desert, they starved in the midst of abundance. The movement itself, however, was none the worse for it, as new publications more in tune with the times sprung up.

What of the environmental movement? After decades of “long haul” journalism as the most prominent voice of “conservationism” and “outdoor enthusiasts,” the *Sierra Club Bulletin* should have been perfectly positioned for the 1960s and the birth of “environmentalism.” It even had an editor well suited to the job in the form of David Brower, who tried everything within his considerable personal powers to cajole the journal into the new era. The result: Brower was run out of the organization, and started a new journal, the aforementioned *Not Man Apart*, with substantially less money, less staff—and more clout.

If the record of journals attempting to make the transition from an era of relative quiescence into a time of widespread activism is one of failure, what of those journals which emerged during a movement’s heyday and survived the subsequent decline? Here the record is even worse.

The pioneer gay glossy *The Advocate* is a particularly dramatic example. Launched as a community-based journal to track police violence against homosexuals, *The Advocate* reinvented itself as a slick “lifestyle” mag, not only managing to survive the decline of gay radicalism, but attaining commercial success unparalleled in the history of social movement journalism, with major advertising accounts, Wall Street investors, and substantial profits. Yet in terms of social justice advocacy, the latter-day *Advocate* has been simply awful. The quality of its content traces a trajectory almost precisely inverse to its profitability.

The underground press of the 1960s fared no better. The few underground papers that survived the waning of the counter-culture did so through increasing reliance on sex ads in the personals, a tradition that began as an expression of “free love” ethics and degenerated into run-of-the-mill pornography. And then there was *Rolling Stone*, which secured an advertising base by explicitly purging the counter-culture of radical politics.

Those journals that closed when they sensed their time was up appear in a comparatively appealing light. These range from Garrison’s *The Liberator* to the 1970s lesbian journal *Amazon Quarterly*. Once abolition was achieved, Garrison abruptly and

unceremoniously shut his paper down, despite widespread criticism from his allies. Gina Covina of the *Amazon Quarterly* went straight to the point when she noted, “When we quit to pursue other interests, we didn’t feel guilty because we weren’t, by any means, leaving a vacuum... There were lots of other papers. We weren’t needed in the same way we had been.”

This conundrum is rooted in the very nature of institutions in general, and the particularities of movement journals in specific. Social power is always exercised through institutions, be they banks or mafias, armies or churches, states or families, anti-slavery committees, or environmental journals. By creating a stable set of relations among their members and rules for their behavior, institutions make it possible to aggregate social resources and personal energies. These very things, these fixed rules and relations, make institutions inherently resistant to change to at least some degree. Yet, institutions function in social milieu of constant change. This confrontation of institutional rigidity and social fluidity results in perennial endeavors of institutional “reform,” and movement publications are no exception.

In general, building an institution is a difficult project, and reforming an existing institution is often a more efficient strategy than launching a new one. As institutions go, however, the start-up costs associated with launching a movement journal are remarkably low: a handful of people (or even one single person) and a few dollars have often been sufficient. The “cost” of reforming an existing journal may be much higher. Movement journals are typically staffed by people who work long hours for little or no pay, and who often perceive challenges to their existing way of doing things as invalidating the many sacrifices they have made. This accounts for the conspicuous failure of most movement journals to outlast the particular social and political context in which they emerged, and the ease with which they are often replaced by new journals more in tune with the times. *Mother Earth News* would be one of the very rare exceptions to this pattern: emerging from the widespread “back to the land” movement of the 1970s, the journal managed to transition from an activist-run journal to a professional enterprise without losing focus on its core social and political objectives.

I stated at the outset that there is no schematic framework which can simplify the analysis of social movement dynamics, no “stages” theory of social movements, and therefore there is no substitute for nuanced and detailed historical analysis of movement publications in the context of the movement of which they are a part. The movements included in this study demonstrate the point. The trajectory of the abolitionist movement is the most neatly linear. The goal of immediate abolition of slavery with full political rights for slaves emerged as a consensus goal out of years of debate between various alternatives. Once abolitionism took off, over the next thirty years it enjoyed a relatively steady increase in its number of adherents, who were increasingly militant and vocal. The goal of woman suffrage likewise emerged out of a variety of ideas for the advancement of women’s rights, accompanied by an upsurge of militant activity. But then the movement fell into decades of “doldrums” during which the movement adopted an increasingly mainstream, genteel tenor, and final victory came with a whimper, not a bang.

The gay and lesbian movement takes an altogether different trajectory. Accumulating momentum very gradually in the 1950s and early 1960s, it suddenly exploded into a mass movement when its trickle of activists flowed into the mighty river of 1960's radicalism. This momentum lasted well into the 1970s, creating a golden age of "gay liberation" when breathtaking victories were won in a stunningly short period of time. The movement then began to disintegrate, until the AIDS epidemic forced the community back into political mobilization.

The GI movement is even more narrowly bounded by the period of US military intervention in Vietnam. The movement grew from nothing at the outset of the 1960s to a power that brought the world's most formidable military to a grinding halt, then quickly dissipated when US combat operations in Southeast Asia ceased.

The environmental movement offers yet a different trajectory. The movement's key victories (the creation of the EPA, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and more) all date from the widespread activism of the 1960s and 1970s. Since that time, as the global environmental catastrophe has become increasingly apparent, the issue has gained a more or less permanent place in the corporate media. This has helped create a continuous widespread interest in the issue and broad support in opinion polls, yet most "members" of environmental organizations today limit their activities to mailing checks to national organizations. The crisis this movement seeks to address, meanwhile, offers no clear solutions, such as abolishing slavery, enfranchising women, or withdrawing from Vietnam.

The trajectories of the press these movements created are just as varied as the movements themselves. The abolitionist and woman suffrage press show the most similarity. Extremely radical, fringe journals came first (*The Liberator*, *Revolution*), followed by journals with a progressively softer tone and broader circulation (*National Era*, *The Women's Journal*, *The Women's Column*). Finally, there was an across-the-board decline, and even collapse, of the movements' journals in the period just victory was won.

Both movements achieved consensus on one very specific policy objective around which everything in the movement then revolved (immediate emancipation without emigration for the abolitionists, and suffrage for women). But consensus was not something the movements were born with; it developed over time. Should emancipation happen gradually or all at once? Should the freed slaves be sent abroad or remain in the US? Should they have the full political rights of citizenship? Should the US Constitution be replaced or amended? All these questions were unresolved in the early years of abolitionism. Winning the vote for women likewise emerged only gradually as the consensus objective among Nineteenth Century American feminists, whose concerns entailed a much broader vision of advancing women's rights.

In both movements, it was in the early period, when ideological and policy consensus was up for grabs, that radical journals could hold sway with tiny circulations and no resources other than the passion of their publishers' convictions and the fire in their words. Once the movement's direction was settled and the task of the day became winning converts to a generally accepted program, uncompromising adherence to principle became a much less valuable asset, and more conventional assets like financial

backing, a stable staff, and a more flexible appeal, all increased in importance. *The National Era*, which dominated the later stages of the abolitionist movement, quickly reached a circulation nearly ten times the peak achieved by either Garrison or Frederick Douglass. In the woman suffrage movement, the later and tamer *Women's Journal* quickly outran *The Revolution* by the same proportion.

The gay and lesbian movement, on the other hand, never had one objective which, if won, would constitute “victory.” Even the present-day battles over marriage rights and military service do not represent anything close to a consensus in the gay and lesbian movement about priorities, while even those activists that do prioritize these issues do not imagine that achieving these objectives would constitute anything more than another step on a long journey. The environmental movement is even further a field, addressing challenges that will never be “won” but only better managed, and which promise only to become more complex and thorny. The path cut by these movements is thus less linear, and the story of what resources are most valuable to movement journals, and when, is correspondingly more complex.

The Sierra Club Bulletin (now *Sierra*), the flagship of the environmental movement press with a huge circulation and the financial muscle of the Sierra Club behind it, has been enormously effective—when it has been used as one element of a broader activist strategy. The publication reached its apogee of influence in the successful fight to prevent the damming of the Grand Canyon, when David Brower used the *Bulletin* in close-knit coordination with grassroots mobilization, aggressive lobbying, and paid advertising in the *New York Times*. In other periods, when the journal has not been as tightly linked to an audacious political strategy, its clout faded dramatically, despite having larger circulation, more stable staff, and healthier finances.

The *Earth First! Journal* offers another successful example of the strategic use of a journal. The paper was launched with essentially no money and peaked at 10,000 subscribers. Yet this was sufficient to achieve the goal its publishers had in mind, which was not so much to win policy battles per se, as to redefine the left fringe of the movement into a magnet that would pull the entire environmental debate to the left.

From printed to electronic word

There was a specific window of time that we can rightly call the era of the social movement press, and it is bounded by technological developments. It began in the early 19th century when the invention of the iron press and machine made paper—the first major innovations to the printing press since Gutenberg—which dropped the cost of regularly producing a small newspaper low enough to place it within reach of a small group of people or even a sufficiently dedicated individual with few resources other than passion.

During this era, the linkages between social movements and their journals were extremely tight. Movement journals were often a movement's first institution; in some cases they remained the only one. In fact, not only do historians frequently peg the birth of a social movement to the founding of the movement's first journal, but the scholarly literature on social movements generally place the emergence of what we think of as

modern social movements at the start of the 19th century, precisely when the changes in print technology became available. This is not coincidental. The specific dynamics of the printed word are fundamental to what we have come to think of as social movements:

1. The process of assembling the resources to print a journal on paper with a printing press, a process which necessitates at least some level of social organization right from the start;
2. The process of building distribution networks to distribute a journal, networks which in turn became the backbone of organizations. My research showed that the commonplace notion that social movement organizations create journals to get their message out is upside down: it has been much more common that social movement organizations emerged from the distribution efforts of radical journals; and,
3. The fact that print journals are assembled in discrete issues of fixed and limited content. Not everything can be said. Someone must decide which words go in and which don't, so there is by necessity a gate-keeping function, and those who execute this function become at a minimum de facto movement power brokers, and more often high-profile movement leadership.
4. Since the printed word exists in a limited number of journals, each with a limited number of issues of limited size, highly motivated readers could read virtually all of the published words, resulting in a sustained and focused discourse that was central to the formation not only of the movement's strategies and tactics, but also of its identity and the identity of its adherents—of what it meant to be an abolitionist, a woman suffragist, and so on.

These dynamics all stem from the fact that the printed word was, to borrow a notion from economics, scarce. The electronic word, in contrast, is abundant, and this difference upends all the social dynamics that accompanied the printed word. This shift is now playing itself out in every part of our culture. The implications for social movements are profound:

1. Publishing on the internet is free, no resources have to be assembled to launch a log or website, and thus no a priori social organization is implied.
2. Distribution is immediate, worldwide, and free. The social networks required to distribute print journals, networks which generally then formed the backbone of social movement organizations, are not necessary.
3. There is no limit to what can be said. The gatekeeper function inherent in the printed word, which empowered so many movement leaders, has vanished.
4. The electronic word is limitless. The problem of who gets to speak and for how long has been solved. But the solution poses its own problem: with everyone speaking, who has time to listen? How will all the "chatter" of the internet cohere into the sort

of sustained discourse that lead people to identify as militants of a social movement, to throw the obligations of daily life to the side and make history?

The answers to these questions are only beginning to be invented. What we can say for certain is that the era of the social movement press is coming to a close. Something new is being born, something substantially different from what came before. The dynamics of the printed word were so central to how movements constituted themselves, to what social movements were, that we can expect the transition to the electronic word to transform not only how social movements communicate, but also indeed what social movements are.

Radical Reference: Taking Information to the Street

ShinJoung Yeo

The practice of journalism is firmly rooted in community. The late James Carey, professor of journalism at Columbia University, in his article, “A Short History of Journalism for Journalists”¹⁸ stated, “The principle task and consequence of journalism is to form and sustain particular communities.” In this symbiotic relationship, journalism forms and informs the community, *and* the community forms and informs journalism. In order for alternative journalism and alternative journalists to flourish, community support is crucial and necessary.

Unlike many mainstream journalists who work for large media organizations, journalists in alternative journalism outlets usually do not enjoy the luxury of many editors, personal researchers, fact checkers, lawyers, funding, and so forth. To paraphrase Blanche Dubois¹⁹, independent journalists have to rely on the kindness of strangers and personal networks. I like to think of Radical Reference as one stranger among many ready and willing to assist in this process.

For that reason, I'd like to talk about Radical Reference: who we are and what we do to support alternative journalism.

The role of Radical Reference

Radical Reference (RR) was launched in early 2004 to assist and support the activists and activist organizations in protest at the 2004 Republican National Convention (RNC) in New York city. As you remember, a half million people came out on the street to protest the Bush administration, its many destructive policies, and the Iraq war. This weekend of mass mobilization was due to the energies, commitment, and collaboration of many grassroots organizations across the political spectrum, including RR.

Before the RNC, RR volunteers attended many meetings of various local activist organizations and participated in local events to find out ways that we could help. One thing that we noticed was that many activist organizations and individuals needed quality information for much of their work. However, few had access to reliable and diverse information resources or the time and skill sets to obtain that information. So, by identifying this information need, RR was officially formed, and the recruitment of volunteers began. By the beginning of the RNC, RR counted twenty-five to thirty volunteers.

¹⁸ James Carey, “A Short History of Journalism for Journalists: A Proposal and Essay,” *Press/Politics*, 12(1), 3-16.

¹⁹ The main protagonist in Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

RR consists of librarians, library support staff, and library science students who are professionally trained and bring with them a large variety of backgrounds, interests, and professional skill sets. There are children's librarians, government document librarians, law librarians, zine librarians etc. We were able to use our expertise to assist groups in the buildup to the RNC.

For instance, at the request of media activists in NYC, RR began providing research and fact-checking workshops to teach activists how to locate, analyze, and verify information sources. RR helped fact-check the "The people's guide to the Republican National Convention," a tourist map of sorts with more than six hundred points of interest, RNC events, protest sites, and information on war profiteers. During the RNC, RR went out to the streets and provided "street reference" to out-of-towners, journalists, and anyone with a question. "Street Reffies" prepared and were armed with in-depth reference kits of maps, emergency health and legal information, restaurant guides, lists of places to access free wi-fi, and more. In addition, teams of home support volunteers were on call for questions that could not be readily answered with the information on hand. Home support volunteers also acted as a virtual affinity group by monitoring local mainstream and alternative media to keep Street Reffies informed about various events and police activities.

Originally, we thought that RR would only be active during the RNC. However, we soon realized that the need filled by RR continued beyond the convention. RR has become known and recognized in activist communities for the critical role that information professionals play in the movement for social justice. In light of this, RR has expanded its services to include online question submissions, fact-checking, and FOIA workshops and skill-sharing sessions on infoshops, alternative library resources etc. Today, we have a vibrant website, and more than three hundred volunteers across the United States with a variety of professional backgrounds and the ability to provide information services in ten languages.

Models for success

I think there are three factors that have led to the group's success: recognition of community needs, collaboration, and implementation of open-source technologies to facilitate the group's work.

First, the actual Radical Reference idea—well, other than the alliteration—was formed by communities not by us. We knew that we wanted to apply our skills in some way to further the cause of social justice, but we didn't know exactly how or what we could offer. However, as a result of direct interaction with grassroots communities we were able to identify their needs. This led to the provision of services that are responsive and reactive to these communities.

Second, one of RR's strengths was and is its commitment to collaboration. From the beginning, RR has worked closely with other organizations involved in the planning for the RNC convergence and has continued to seek out opportunities to work with other groups. For instance, RR has formed a close relationship with the NYC Independent Media Center, giving workshops and fact-checking special issues of the *Independent*.

There is also much collaboration among the three hundred volunteers. RR's reference system is designed specifically to tap into this collective knowledge base by allowing for various avenues of input by multiple volunteers in order to provide a wide range of resources to questioners.

Finally, RR services and collaboration could not happen without the creative use of internet technologies. RR has consciously decided to utilize open source and/or non-commercial software and web hosting. We believe open source is crucial—philosophically, technologically, and economically—to any organization that deals with information. The philosophy behind open-source is the free and open sharing of information, and this is the same pillar on which librarians build their profession. There is a common belief that technology is value-free, but many social and political activists are challenging this notion by creating and employing technologies that are imbued with their value system of justice, equality, and community.

RR's website content is managed by Drupal, software developed and maintained by a large and diverse community and distributed under the GNU General Public License (GPL). In addition, during political events, Txtmob, a free web-based cell phone text messaging service, is used to provide synchronous communication between street librarians, home support and the greater communications network connecting many other affinity groups together. RR relies on their community as well. For example, web hosting and technology support is provided gratis by Interactivist, a non-profit organization that supports groups working for social justice.

In the name of convenience, we often overlook the underlying philosophy and principles of the technologies we employ. RR provides a good example of how an organization can infuse its technologies with its organizational philosophy.

Conclusion

As I said in the beginning, RR is just one example of how communities can support alternative journalism. Let's think about journalism in ecological terms. In any healthy ecological system, every organism feeds into and is connected with each other and supports the system as a whole. A healthy ecology is necessarily diverse; monoculture on the other hand, brings on the destruction of the entire ecological system. Like mountain pine beetles currently destroying much of Colorado's high country pine forests, a journalistic monoculture will mean the death of our democracy.

The system is the community of which RR and alterative journalists are interconnected parts. RR and journalists feed the community by supporting each other and eventually this leads to creating a community where diverse voices are promoted and journalism of all stripes flourishes. Creating and sustaining a healthy media ecology is not an easy task, but it's not an option; rather it's our obligation. I hope that RR will continue to challenge the media monoculture and help cultivate a healthy media landscape.

Knew Media

*Josh Wolf*²⁰

After spending two hundred twenty-six days at the Federal Detention Center in Dublin, California, for refusing to comply with a subpoena for the grand jury that demanded me to testify and turn over unpublished materials, I was thrust into the position of having to explain not only why I was a journalist, but also prodded into exploring what I, as a journalist, would or would not do in any number of hypothetical situations. Few of those questions had easy answers, and while many journalists agreed with my responses to the hypotheticals, others found them reprehensible and accused me of damaging the public's perception of the news media. As a result of my experiences, over the past year I have a unique perspective on the media landscape and have grown to see a vital role for both the establishment and alternative media within the marketplace of ideas.

In July of 2005, I was visited by the San Francisco Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigations as part of the Joint Terrorism Task Force. I was asked about an anti-G8 protest that I had filmed in the Mission District of San Francisco a few days earlier. While I didn't have any information pertaining to the crimes they were investigating, their involvement left me feeling less than comfortable, and I didn't feel that I should have to blindly turn over my complete footage in order to prove to them I didn't have anything incriminating. They eventually left without the video in hand, and I thought that'd be the end of the story. Six months later, the same two agents returned with a subpoena for the federal grand jury demanding not only my unpublished footage but my testimony as well. The next six months were spent trying to fight it, and it was during this time that we offered to screen the footage before the judge to illustrate that I did not have any material directly relevant to the federal investigation. Under the US Attorney's objections, the judge refused. On August 1, 2006, I found myself imprisoned for refusing to turn over my materials and testify before the jury. I was granted bail by the Ninth Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals on September 1, but returned to prison on the September 22, after my appeal was denied. I was not released until April 3, 2007.

While the government did not dispute my role as a news-gatherer during the early phase of my court battle, the question of who is and is not a journalist quickly ignited through various media reports, and the US Attorney followed suit after I had been incarcerated. Prior to my jailing, the government's position was that whether or not I am a journalist is irrelevant as there is no federal shield law and no privilege exists to avoid testifying before a federal grand jury. Later on, as my time in jail began to be measured in months, the US Attorney's statements took on a more vociferous tone, arguing that I suffer from delusions of journalism and that continued incarceration would lead to this realization. Needless to say, what I learned is that the Justice Department is anything but.

²⁰ See also <http://joshwolf.net/>.

We are a long way from reaching a consensus on who should be defined as a journalist, but I think we are beginning to come to terms with the fact that it isn't dependent on who signs your pay check. Not long ago Senator Lugar²¹ introduced the Free Flow of Information Act of 2006 which would only provide protections for those who earned their livelihood as journalists. Last month a new Federal Shield Law was introduced that protects anyone engaged in journalism, not just those who earn their living from the craft. Had this year's Free Flow of Information Act been on the books it's highly unlikely I would've spent a single day in jail.

It's true that my ordeal did garner a lot of criticism from the traditional media, but it generated a great deal of support as well. The *San Francisco Chronicle* came out against my jailing almost immediately, and I have been recognized by several journalist organizations for the stance that I took. So why the disjunct? Why is it that some feel that I have done a great service standing up for a free press and others feel that I've left a great stain on the profession?

I'm not entirely certain what the answer is, but I think it comes down to objectivity. Well, not really objectivity so much as the perception of objectivity. While true objectivity is likely an unattainable ideal, it is possible to convince your audience that your coverage is "Fair and Balanced." Just ask anyone who regularly tunes into *Fox News*. I have never presented myself as unbiased; I feel that we all have inherent biases and that the most honest approach is to disclose our own personal ideologies as opposed to hiding behind a subterfuge of false objectivity. Not surprisingly, this philosophy is not without its detractors and the very notion that journalists across the spectrum should receive equal treatment is tantamount to heresy for some of the people I've encountered.

Recently, another filmmaker has been placed in the federal government's cross hairs. As I'm sure you all have heard by now, Michael Moore is under investigation by the Treasury Department for a trip he took to Cuba while filming his latest film *Sicko*. It's still uncertain what will happen to Michael Moore and the 9/11 rescue workers who travelled to Cuba, but it is already evident what effect this investigation will have on the people in this country. These attacks on information have a chilling effect on both the subjects involved and those that are covering them. The purpose of these sorts of governmental investigations is not to achieve justice; and not even to punish those whose actions have been deemed suspect. The purpose is to instill fear into anyone who dares to cover sensitive topics or chooses to express controversial political views.

It wasn't threats of jail time that led the mainstream media to seek out safer, friendlier material. The driving force behind a corporate entity is the bottom line, and unearthing corporate scandals about your advertisers or their affiliates just isn't good for the bottom line. Obviously some stories do still get through, but it is easy to see why it is not in the corporate media's self interest to spend money on stories that will hurt their profitability.

One of the ironic strengths of independent media is that they rarely can sustain their creators' economic needs. While this means that independent journalists have far less time to dedicate to journalistic pursuits as a sole means of employment, it also means

²¹ Richard G. Lugar, United States Senator for Indiana

that they have more liberty and freedom to explore with far less financial risk than those working within the corporate structure. At the same time, they have far less resources than most commercial ventures and are limited in the ways they can research their subject matter.

Without well-funded mainstream media there are many important stories that would never get the attention they deserve (just as there are many stories that are given the attention they do not deserve), and without independent media and alternative sources for information, a whole realm of vital situations would get no coverage at all. And though many in independent media would disagree with me, I feel that both the commercial and independent media play an important role in our society. The core problem is the lack of media literacy in the United States. The problem is that there are actually people who think that because Bill O'Reilly says his show is the *No Spin Zone* that his program is actually free from bias.

If media literacy were taught as part of the curriculum than the potential abuses of any form of media whether corporate or alternative would be mitigated. Once people begin to take into account the various motivations driving one's coverage, then they will be better adept at choosing what to focus on and what to dismiss and hopefully become a more informed populous. Of course, if the government continues its assault on those who focus on covering matters unpopular to the administration, then that dissenting voice may be lost from the marketplace of ideas. This is a great concern of mine having personally dealt with being incarcerated. The Free Flow of Information Act of 2007 will be a step in the right direction if it passes, but it is necessary for all journalists from both the alternative and commercial media to work together to ensure press freedoms in this country and throughout the world.

Notes on Alternative Journalism

Don Hazen

The challenge at hand is to understand the range, scope, and impact of the many faces of alternative journalism today; to grasp how alternative journalism has changed with the advent of the internet; and to assess what effect media changes have on the power and potential of alternative journalism, and its influence on social change.

It is rare that anyone agrees with a definition of “alternative journalism.” For the sake of this discussion, let’s define it as: the presentation of facts, opinions, and narrative imbued with a strong point of view and distributed via non-corporate means. Perhaps a better name would be advocacy journalism—but of course that can mean the right or the left. Moreover, there are global, national, regional, and local journalisms, and these various geographies are relevant to the discussion.

My personal trajectory tracks quite well with the large scale changes in alternative journalism. We start in 1985 when I was publisher of *Mother Jones* (*Mojo*), an award-winning magazine with a focus on investigative reporting. *Mojo* was and still is part of a large collection of “magazines of opinion”—many of you likely read them, including *The Nation*, *In These Times*, *The Progressive*, *American Prospect*, *Z*, and many dozens more. None of these magazines make money, and they are supported by various forms of philanthropy, mostly by wealthy individuals and sometimes foundations, often supplemented by their readers. These magazines are the cores of the old “national” alternative journalism.

In 1991, I moved to AlterNet, then a project of the Institute for Alternative Journalism (IAJ). At that time, AlterNet was a syndication service for the one hundred twenty-five or so newsweeklies, in every medium and large city and college town across the country and in Canada. The most famous of the “alties” are the *Village Voice*, the *LA Weekly*, and perhaps the *Bay Guardian* here in San Francisco, all of which had a very strong political voice and were the home of “point of view” or advocacy journalism. Some well-known investigative reporters, like the *Voice*’s Wayne Barrett, still toil there. At AlterNet, we brokered content from these papers, and many magazines of opinion to the member papers of AAN²², the trade association.

Recently, one company, the *New Times* company from Phoenix, Arizona, has taken over ownership control of virtually all the biggest papers in the key markets: the *Voice*, the *LA Weekly*, and papers in Miami, Houston, Dallas, Phoenix, Seattle, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Berkeley, and half a dozen more. For the most part, the *New Times* model is to be the only weekly in a marketplace. When they had to compete in a market, in SF and LA for example, they weren’t successful. Where they ended up being most successful was in leveraging large amounts of venture capital to be able to buy everything they couldn’t compete with.

²² Association of Alternative Newsweeklies

And the *Voice* ownership, wanting to cash out, and not caring for the future of the *Voice* style of journalism, sold *New Times* their eight or so papers. (Independent papers still exist in Boston, Portland, Atlanta, Sacramento, San Jose, and a handful of other cities.) For many, this corporate take over of the alties is the death knell of the weekly alternative advocacy journalism form, since the owners of *New Times* produce a quite different form of journalism—long form, professionally written and edited, and often effective but not advocacy journalism in the classic sense. The *New Times* style is to tell stories of heroes and victims and personal quests, and it prefers to keep the complexities and oppression of the system and social ills like class and race out of the narrative.

In the mid-Nineties, IAJ changed its name to Independent Media Institute, recognizing the limits of the word “alternative” and also understanding that public interest information and strong opinion writing come in many forms. The brand “AlterNet” remains however.

Under the auspices of the newly renamed Independent Media Institute, I launched two popular Media & Democracy Congresses, in SF and NYC, attended by a couple of thousand people. These events launched the media and democracy movement, which is now under the leadership of Free Press, a group that is once again holding media reform conferences. Media reform in its latest incarnation is frequently about net neutrality, wireless internet, and still the never-ending, ever-failing, effort to reduce media ownership concentration.

After a period of organizing on media reform, including publication of a book called *We the Media* about who owned and controlled what, I came to understand the limits of media reform. It is a constant uphill battle that has resulted in pretty much losing every significant battle against media corporations over the past sixty years. Media conglomerates have taken over radio, TV, and cable and are of course fighting to get their hands on the internet. Based on this, I concluded that it was necessary to make use of the powerful and growing development of new technologies to help fight the corporate control of information. The most important media reform was to build an independent media structure in order to reach larger audiences with compelling content and keep up with the corporations that invest billions in social networking web 2.0 sites, knowing that these web communities are going to become dominant. But more about that in a second.

When the World Wide Web came along, AlterNet recognized that it no longer needed to sell content to reluctant newsweeklies but rather could go directly to audiences all around the country and the globe with content from hundreds of sources. Alternet.org was launched about nine years ago and has grown to be one of the highest trafficked, influential news sites on the web, winning two Webby Awards, for best magazine and for political coverage. In April 2007, we had 2.6 million visitors. That is a far cry from the days at *Mother Jones*, when it was hard to get our circulation over 200,000 for a monthly magazine. Now of course *Mojo* and *The Nation*, like all magazines, have websites to accompany their magazines, but that hasn’t really worked. Time has shown that you have to be one or the other—a print magazine or a powerful, robust website.

Digital media have spawned a whole new breed of magazines of opinion. In some cases, changes have been highly successful. One example is the *Huffington Post*, a blog that became a portal with large traffic, overpowering some of the progressive content on the web and in print.

Common Dreams, *Truth Out*, *Raw Story*, *Chirping Chimp*, *Buzz Flash*, and *Tom Paine*, are all new developments over the past seven years, and all have thriving audiences. Like AlterNet, these sites, are still new versions of old media, but in many ways represent innovative new takes on the old model of alternative journalism. Old media are characterized by top-down content decided by a small group of people. Now, there is nothing wrong with that model, and it is never going to die out, but it certainly isn't the future of media.

Here is a useful list of ten elements that will characterize media as we go forward. These ten elements tell us a lot about how the media are evolving and how the media that we are creating differ from the media we are used to.

Ten capabilities of twenty-first century media:

1. Targeted
2. Efficient
3. Consumer controlled
4. Time-shifted
5. Internet-enabled
6. Prodigious (more pros in all categories; more product)
7. Bottom-up (insane amount of content)
8. Collaborative
9. Global
10. Emergent, which essentially means out of control. There was no way to predict the blogosphere, for example. We used to know what was coming down the pike. That doesn't work any longer.

I haven't mentioned the blogosphere yet which, perhaps, best represents the transition from old media to new. The universe of progressive blogs has anywhere from two to four million visitors. They are a powerful force in the echo chamber. Some do top-notch journalism. For example, *Talking Points Memo* has a large influence and uses its readership to greatly enhance its research and accountability capacity. The *Daily Kos* is perhaps the most famous of the blogs with hundreds of diarists, and the largest blog traffic. *FireDog Lake* got front-page *NY Times* credit for its live blogging of the Libby trial²³ and for covering the story in depth and with nuance. *Crooks and Liars* has huge traffic and is the pre-eminent site for progressive video, and on and on.

In the remainder I will schematically summarize how the media landscape has been transformed by technology—and what the advent of Web 2.0 means for alternative media.

²³ The trial of Lewis "Scooter" Libby, former Chief of Staff to Vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney

Web 2.0!

Definition: The enrichment of the web that incorporates user-generated features, feedback, collaborations, and content into existing structures, and offers enhanced organization of information for easy retrieval and reusability.

This means ...

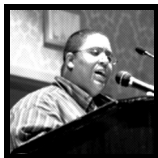
1. Expectations of users are shifting
2. “Grazers” of information
3. Creators/collaborators of content
4. We create loyalty and community by providing the tools
5. We can make traffic grow and reach new audiences
6. It’s consistent with our values of empowerment and community
7. It’s open, participatory, democratic, and accountable

Common features of Web 2.0 include: tagging, RSS, user generated content, multimedia, social networking, recommendations, and ratings. The focus is on the entire experience: “I can participate.”

Web 2.0 suggests that we have to move to providing services, not simply destinations.

GRASSROOTS DISCUSSION PANEL 3

Civil Society and Regulation



As media, communications and information systems become more complex, civil society has become increasingly concerned with their just and ethical control and management. In this debate, advocates working for change in regulatory regimes reviewed current debates and illuminated the ways in which policy intersects with citizens, communities, and constituencies at the grassroots level. Both practical and hypothetical intersections were explored. Panelists also discussed citizens' ability to inform decision-making about government and governance of media, communications, and information as well as advocates' ability to monitor and contribute to policy debates.



Participants

Malkia Cyril (Youth Media Council)

Pete TriDish (Prometheus Radio)

Todd Davies (Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, LaborTech)

Danny O'Brien (Electronic Frontier Foundation)

Chair: Seeta Peña Gangadharan (Stanford University)

Relevant links

Youth Media Council @ <http://www.youthmediacouncil.org/>

Prometheus Radio @ <http://www.prometheusradio.org/>

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility @ <http://www.cpsr.org/>

Labortech @ <http://www.labortech.net/>

Electronic Frontier Foundation @ <http://www.eff.org/>

A Framework for Media Justice

Malkia Cyril

Communication rights are human rights

George Clinton, a famous funk musician, once said, “Whoever controls the flow of information dictates our perceptions and perspectives; whoever controls the news shapes our destiny.”

Despite the constitutional guarantee of free speech and free press, racial stereotypes and anti-youth bias remain rampant in news and entertainment media, while control over news, information, and culture has moved increasingly into the hands of private corporations and right-wing politicians. In a society fractured by structural racism and dominated by corporate power, neither the press nor speech can be truly free for youth, communities of color, and other disenfranchised groups. For these communities communication rights must be considered human—and not simply civil—rights, secured by both constitutional and international law, and distributed by a truly representative government. Two-thirds of the public makes critical policy decisions based on what they read, watch, and listen to in the media. Without the human right to communicate equally, the media present a “double bind” for youth and communities of color—acting as both an opportunity for civic engagement and a significant threat.

Media content and the struggle for racial justice

Media content is where disenfranchised communities first engage with media as a social justice issue. From the over-representation of Blacks and Latinos in coverage of crime, to the misrepresentation of Arabs and South Asians in coverage of terrorism and war, racial stereotypes in the news criminalize youth and people of color, and result in an uninformed public and punitive social policies. This trend extends to entertainment media where hip-hop music and even primetime TV are saturated with stories about crime. And, from the newsroom to the music studio, progressive voices remain largely unheard. The Youth Media Council (YMC) understands criminalization and racial bias in the media to be the result of three primary forces:

- increased corporate ownership and consolidation of media outlets,
- resurgent influence of the right over media infrastructure and public debate, and
- lack of a comprehensive progressive media strategy to protect the public interest and defend communication rights.

These conditions, and the social change sectors most impacted by them, require an affirmative new communications framework that centers media content as a primary landscape for change and has a vision to transform corporate media—its infrastructure, policies and outlets—into an inclusive public resource.

From privilege to power: a call for media justice

Traditional frameworks for transforming media often rely upon privileged expertise, demand deep pockets, and fail to expose or challenge structural racism. YMC is developing an emerging “Media Justice” framework to transform media through participatory, relevant, and strategic processes that are deeply rooted in grassroots organizing to build the power of youth and communities of color. This framework contains a vision for media and culture that draws upon centuries of international struggle for communication rights and the historical resistance of communities of color to cultural colonialism.

Media justice principles: educate, liberate, coordinate

Educating grassroots leaders as media activists. YMC develops the media activism of emerging organizers of color through a process of participatory organizing and leadership development. To bridge the divide between professionalized media change-makers (most often in the D.C. beltway or PR firms) and grassroots organizing, we are developing a media leadership pipeline that highlights the voices and visions of disenfranchised communities in the movement for media and racial justice.

Liberating our media outlets from corporate and right-wing control through local, grassroots action. At the YMC, we develop and mobilize a local membership to make concrete changes in the media policy and content we believe will improve the social conditions most pressing to youth and communities of color. Our media activism is built on the premise that helping people fight for media change where they live will improve the lives of their communities on the issues they most care about.

Coordinating key regions to strengthen the capacity and strategy of the media justice sector. Building a movement for media justice requires a coordinated strategy. The YMC works in key regions to strengthen media activist organizations, increase campaign and strategic coordination across the sector, and build the field of media justice, while building the will for media activism in key sectors of the movement for racial justice and youth rights.

Through innovative programs, leadership development, strategic action and field building, the Youth Media Council is building a powerful new Media Justice Model for structural media change in the service of racial justice and human rights.

Radio Controlled: A Media Activist's Guide to the Federal Communications Commission

Pete Tridish

Who decides how the United States media are owned, operated, and controlled? The policy that our government uses to regulate media is often portrayed as an obscure topic that just a few lawyers and engineers in Washington DC care about. In the past few years though, millions of Americans have made their views known on media issues by commenting at Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) proceedings and lobbying Congress against media monopolies. This short primer is intended to help interested citizen's understand the way that the backroom deals that govern our media are made, and to give you a can opener with which you can let loose the worms of public outrage that the big business lobbyists have been trying to keep in the can.

What the FCC is going on?

The Federal Communications Commission is an independent United States government agency, with a direct responsibility to Congress. The FCC was established by the Communications Act of 1934. They are charged with regulating interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable. Herbert Hoover, the Secretary of Commerce in the 1920s, said that radio was the first industry he ever saw that practically "begged to be regulated." The industry begged for regulation because the key players of the industry wanted the government to keep out any challengers to their oligopoly position in their markets. Their attitude was, "We got here first, now protect us from anyone else that wants to set up shop." This was all done, of course, under the rubric of "protecting the radio dial from interference."

Telecommunications Act of 1934: A public interest bargain with one side kept

The Telecommunications Act of 1934 essentially cut a deal with the existing broadcasters. The government would keep order on the airwaves and create a stable business environment. In exchange, since broadcasters get a special privilege to broadcast that other citizens do not, they must operate "in the public's interest, convenience, and necessity." At times, this has meant that they must do certain forms of public service broadcasting, present different views on issues of public importance, meet certain equal opportunity hiring rules, maintain publicly accessible files, and so on.

Unfortunately, most of the "public service rules" have been whittled away by the broadcasters' legal challenges in the courts. Broadcasters won many of these legal battles based on the claim that the "public service rules" infringed upon their First Amendment rights. These broadcasters argued that being forced to broadcast things that they did not desire was a violation of their first amendment right to freedom of speech. There are

still a few things that are required of broadcasters, but they are relatively minimal. For example, broadcasters are still required to participate in the emergency alert system, which allows the government to take over the stations in times of emergency and extreme weather conditions.

What the FCC does and does not do

- The FCC is in charge of spectrum management.
- They do not pass laws (or statutes), they write regulations that are administrative and technical in nature.
- They do not set broad policy goals. Their policy is directed by laws passed by Congress. The FCC administers these laws.
- They distribute licenses to broadcast TV and radio. They regulate the cable industry, telephones, wireless communications, satellite broadcasting, and any devices which may create interference to radio communications.
- They auction spectrum, collecting usage fees for the US treasury. They study policy questions and emerging technologies.
- The FCC is an enforcer of its regulations.

Quick! Turn off the transmitter. Here comes the FCC! Some words about FCC enforcement.

The FCC enforcement agents do not have guns and cannot arrest people. Generally, they enforce first by gentle persuasion and gradually escalate through their various authorities. When someone or some company violates an FCC regulation, first the FCC gives a warning and asks the violator to comply with the law. Next they can impose fines (up to \$11,000). If that does not cause the violator to comply with the law, the FCC asks the federal courts for an injunction, which is administered by federal marshals. If you violate a court injunction, you can go to jail, usually for about a year.

The FCC has a very mixed history of the effectiveness of its enforcement efforts. This is due to an enormous history of case law from the courts, where broadcasters and others have challenged the constitutionality of many FCC regulations. It is also due to limited enforcement budgets, which force the FCC to overlook many minor infractions while they pursue the most egregious violations.

For example, hypothetically, the Congress could pass a law mandating that the president can have an hour per week on all TV and radio stations to address the nation. The FCC would open a rulemaking and figure out how to technically implement the presidential broadcast and then write rules and regulations about the procedures that broadcasters would use to make the broadcasts work. The FCC would also be in charge of fining or suspending the licenses of broadcasters who failed to comply with these rules. A broadcaster who did not like either the statute passed by Congress or the rules and regulations passed by the FCC could go to the courts, and the courts could hear arguments and decide whether the statutes, rules or regulations were constitutional.

Who are these people, and what do they do with themselves all day?

The FCC has five Commissioners. The Commissioners are appointed by the president and must be approved by the Senate. The Senate rarely seriously challenges an appointment, unless there are unusually strong partisan considerations. Their terms are five years, though they rarely stay that long. Serving as a FCC Commissioner is usually a stepping-stone to some higher political office.

The Commissioners are always split three to two, in favor of the party of the current president of the United States. The Chairman of the Commission is always from the party of the President. If a new President is elected, the Chairman will offer his or her resignation to the President. If he or she is of the same party, the president usually keeps the chairman. If he or she is from a different party, then the Chairman is replaced, altering the balance of power.

Commissioners are picked from a field of candidates who are executives in the communications industry, influential staffers for Congress, or party operatives from the Democrats or Republicans, and sometimes up through the ranks of the FCC. They are almost always lawyers, and almost never engineers.

There is a large permanent civil service staff, numbering in the thousands. They revolve in and out of the FCC from the industry. The staff rises and falls in power in the agency, depending on which party holds the presidency. Usually, everyone keeps his or her job gets reshuffled with each new administration. The staff advises the Commissioners and writes proposals, which the Commissioners decide upon. Often the Commissioners do not particularly know very much about the technologies and economics involved in intricate policy decisions, so they are very dependent on staff recommendations.

Popular myths about the FCC (which are mostly true)

They control what you hear in the media. The FCC controls who gets a broadcast license or a cable franchise. They also make certain limitations on broadcasters, like the “no obscenity” rules or the rules against advertising on non-commercial TV and radio channels. The FCC does not, however, decide who gets a radio station based on whether they are anarchists, anabaptists, or aardvark anatomists. They base ownership on who submits a license application that meets certain technical standards and minimal character qualifications (no felony convictions, applicant must be a US citizen, etcetera). The FCC is in fact very scared of any form of content regulation. Over the years they have been sued into blithering submission by the broadcast industry. Also, every time that anyone in the history of the FCC has attempted to go beyond even the most meager of rules about what can and cannot be said on the air, they have been slapped down by Congress.

They have a lot of power. Well they do, but the system is designed for precedent, stability, and inertia. The FCC has a lot of power to do exactly what it is supposed to do, like give out radio licenses. But Congress can always pass a law that trumps the FCC, though it is almost unheard of for either Congress or the courts to overrule the FCC on

technical matters. The courts and Congress generally defer to the expertise of the FCC on any matters that involve engineering. The only exception in recent years is the low power FM issue, and that just barely slipped through as a rider to a “must-pass” appropriations bill. On the other hand, it is common for Congress to pass a law telling the FCC that it has to change its procedures on legal matters. For example, the FCC used to have regulations capping the number of radio stations that one company could own nationally. One company could own no more than seven FM stations and seven AM stations in the entire country. Under Reagan, those limits were raised to twenty FM and twenty AM stations. Finally, Congress passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and the caps were eliminated. From that point, the FCC had to allow corporations to buy up as many radio licenses as they wanted, which has allowed Clear Channel to accumulate over twelve hundred stations across the country.

The FCC does not care about you. Commissioners need to be concerned with public opinion. They usually have interests in climbing the political ladder to higher public offices. Therefore, they like to use their position to grandstand and get their names in the press or to position themselves to be executives at communications corporations. Most of the public does not know much about what the FCC does, but if there is a hot issue, Commissioners often want to talk about it. For example, when a Commissioner is about to leave the job and run for public office, he or she will often ask the staff to crack down on obscenity on the airwaves, since that issue can win votes from the “family values” crowd.

The FCC is on top of things. Really, the agency is in constant chaos. Every new Chairman proves that he or she is “against big government and bureaucracy” with some silly new “streamlining initiative” making new offices, consolidating two old bureaus under one manager who only knows about one of the fields, shifting desks around, etcetera, and nothing gets done for months. The FCC probably has more “efficiency effectiveness experts” than real communications engineers. Everyone in the FCC freely admits that their small agency has no real way of keeping up with the massive technological changes going on in the private sector, where billions are spent compared to the FCC’s hundreds of thousands for research.

Information is hard to get from the FCC. Actually they have an amazing website. Most of what you need to know is right there. It is, however, in a language that is nearly impossible to understand until you get used to it. The staffers are just like anyone else you might meet. Some are really crabby and act as if any contact with the non-engineer or lawyer public is a big imposition. Others are generous with their time and very, very nice. Some get really excited that anyone actually cares what they are doing!

You thought the voting in Florida was weird...? How a bill becomes a law, FCC style

Someone—maybe the public or the corporations, or one of the FCC Commissioners—puts in a request for a rulemaking. If the Commissioners don’t care about the request, it is ignored. Some requests have been sitting at the FCC since before the Commissioners were born. If the Commissioners are interested, then a notice of Inquiry (NOI) is adopted, and the issue is opened to public comment. In most matters, some big

corporations, a few small businesses, and one or two citizen advocates or policy nuts write comments. All the comments that go to the FCC go up on the FCC website to the amazing Electronic Comment Filing system (e-government at its best). Anyone can therefore see the comments of any other party. Then, there is a shorter period for reply comments, during which commenters can reply to the comments of others. The staff looks over all the comments and makes a recommendation to the Commissioners, who approve the rule, send it back for changes, or ignore it. Strangely, they never vote anything down. They just forget about it. Decisions are always negotiated before the actual vote. If there are not enough “yes” votes for the proposal to pass, it is not voted upon.

It is important to remember: rules are made by a tiny elite in-crowd, and you are not it. Most of them have a financial interest in the proceedings, and money usually talks. It means the FCC will pay attention to you. Of course, there are exceptions. Many of the staffers who stick it out working for the government (even though they could make two or three times as much working in the corporate sector) can be affected if they see that ordinary citizens really care about an issue. It is not uncommon for these staffers to go to bat for the “public interest,” and it can make a real difference. There are a number of elements of comments that Prometheus Radio Project and our ally organizations have made that have ended up being incorporated into federal regulations. However, in the end, no one at the FCC is truly empowered to make the sorts of fundamental changes to the system that are needed—even if the FCC staff or Commissioners wanted to.

In recent years, activists have jumped into the normally collegial rulemaking process. This process was intended for highbrow legal and technical discussion between industry stakeholders and the FCC. But now these rulemakings are being filled with zillions of comments on proposed FCC rules coming from ordinary people. Unlike ordinary citizen letters to the FCC, the staff has to read these comments. And while the FCC is not compelled to take your advice, they are compelled to address all unique arguments raised in comments and say why they did or did not adopt the suggestions. If they do not address the substance of the concern, the commenter has standing to sue the FCC. While not a panacea, this tactic of mass filing of formal comments has pushed the agency towards more responsiveness to the concerns of regular people.

Last word

The communications policy process is complicated but actually squares pretty well with what you learned in high school government class. The part you probably didn’t learn in school was the inordinate influence of the corporations on the process. Citizen groups have had greater success in recent year than they have had in many years since the late seventies. Bureaucrats in all parts of government and industry will try to tell you that they don’t have the power to address your concern, and it is the responsibility of some other party. Hopefully this guide has helped you identify the correct part of the bureaucracy to target for the change you want to make, and will aid you in holding these people accountable when they try to pass the buck off to some other agency. Happy lobbying!

Remarks for Grassroots Discussion Panel on Civil Society and Regulation

Todd Davies

I serve on the boards of two organizations: Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR) and the Institute for Public Interest Media (IPIM), both based in San Francisco.

CPSR is a member organization for progressive technologists, with a focus on technology-related and media policy. I have been a member of CPSR since 2002. I am presently the president of CPSR, but I will be stepping down in a few weeks to become acting treasurer, while our regular treasurer is on maternity leave, and handing over the presidency to Annalee Newitz, who joined the board last year.

IPIM brings labor activists together for cultural activities (LaborFest) and conferences (under the banner of LaborTech) devoted to practical uses of technology for labor and to issues in technology law and policy as they affect working class interests. I hosted and helped organize the 2004 LaborTech conference at Stanford University, where I am a lecturer and associate program director for the Symbolic Systems Program.

Of the two organizations on whose boards I sit, my day-to-day involvement has been much greater in the case of CPSR than it has been with IPIM, so I will devote most of my remarks to CPSR. Both organizations have relatively small budgets, and yet both have had high impact in their respective spheres of influence: high technology policy and labor communications. I will also speak a bit about my involvement with online deliberation tools, which grew out of work with the East Palo Alto Community Network.

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR)

CPSR is a membership advocacy organization with a strong member-driven agenda. It was founded in the early 1980s by computer scientists who wanted to get together to stop proposed uses of computers in “missile defense” applications (i.e. Launch on Warning, and later, the Strategic Defense Initiative). The desire among informed computer professionals to debunk Reagan Administration claims about the feasibility of automated missile defense systems was a powerful, galvanizing force that led CPSR to achieve prominence quickly in this policy space. Early members were generally united by their position on CPSR’s founding issue, and energy was therefore focused on making the organization’s advocacy and education effective on a consensus agenda.

As the Cold War faded with the end of the 1980s, CPSR became a locus for new issues. Electronic privacy and pro-social uses of technology were two foci that emerged and that have remained important for CPSR over the past two decades. The Computers, Freedom, and Privacy (CFP), Directions and Implications of Advanced Computing

(DIAC), and Participatory Design Conferences (PDC) were all started by CPSR. The organizational structure of CPSR, and its growth and persistence across the political and technology transformations of the late Eighties and early Nineties, together led to two types of diffusion in the organization:

First, CPSR is member driven, with both an elected board generally drawn from the membership (all board members must be members) and a working group structure for action that allows members to take the initiative and to participate in the formation of CPSR's agenda. As CPSR grew from its founding base, this organizational structure resulted in a shift from decisions that were made by a small group of computer scientists who knew each other in a handful of places to a more complex organizational agenda fed by a larger and more geographically and professionally dispersed membership. Knowing about and joining CPSR shifted from being an inner circle phenomenon among an elite group to being a nationwide and then international movement, with enough paying members to support a small staff. The founders saw their influence diluted in this larger organization, and the result was a more diffuse, less cohesive agenda.

Second, changes in the political and technological environment (a shift of public consciousness away from nuclear conflict, for example, and the spread of the internet beyond research institutions) meant that consensus on CPSR's agenda broke down. In its early days, CPSR's members generally agreed on the organization's focus and issue positions opposing military technology, or they would not have joined. Once a large membership was established, however, agreement on the founding issue was no guarantee of agreement on subsequent agendas. CPSR members have had long-running disagreements over issues such as whether electronic voting can be done in a responsible way, or not. Other recurring disputes have involved CPSR's structure and mission themselves: centralized versus decentralized, staff versus member driven, single versus multiple focus, and so on.

Thus opinions, as well as the agenda itself, became more diverse as the organization aged. CPSR managed to remain vital and effective for many years despite these diffusive tendencies, in large part because members were attracted to the opportunities for engagement with other progressive technology activists that CPSR offered, through its journal (now defunct), chapters, email lists, conferences, and other activities. For a while, CPSR filled a void that left few alternatives for technologists looking to plug into the technology policy and progressive technology spaces. As other organizations have moved into these spaces, however, CPSR's role has become less clear, and the challenges posed by its structure and legacy, which are rooted in an earlier era, have yet to be addressed adequately.

In the coming year, CPSR will be reviving its foci on technology and war (in a conference planned for next February) and on progressive technology (in a 20th Anniversary DIAC conference planned for November). Other board members and I hope that this will be an effective use of the CPSR name and of its remaining resources. But a more sweeping organizational overhaul may be needed if CPSR is to thrive in the coming years.

LaborTech

My substantive involvement with the Institute for Public Interest Media, apart from the annual board meeting, has mostly taken place around the LaborTech conferences. I have participated in four of these conferences (2001, 2002, 2004, and 2006) and was the host and a co-organizer of the 2004 conference. I also helped organize the 2006 conference. LaborTech began in the early 1990s, and conferences have been held in various locations in the US and abroad, with one held every one to two years.

LaborTech conferences are opportunities for labor and media-technology activists to get together and share both practical knowledge (e.g. how to set up a grassroots labor website) and political perspectives (e.g. legal developments in workers' rights to use email for organizing). Some important initiatives have been incubated at LaborTech conferences, such as the Workers Independent News Service (WINS).

A limitation of the conferences has been the difficulty of sustaining engagement among attendees beyond the two or three days of each conference. For the last four years, I have been working on a tool with students at Stanford that is inspired by these types of difficulties and is aimed at facilitating resolute deliberation and democratic project development among like-minded activists. The tool, called "Deme," has proved difficult to turn into an everyday platform, due mainly to limitations in web programming technology that have only recently been addressed. Deme has been rewritten completely in the last year, in a new framework called "Ruby on Rails," making possible a much more maintainable and sophisticated interface. We plan to launch the new version this summer, and I hope very much that it will be able to be used by the next LaborTech organizing committee.

Online deliberation for groups

The difficulty of bringing grassroots groups together online inspired my work on Deme, and is the subject of much of my academic research at Stanford. Deme was conceived as part of my involvement with the East Palo Alto Community Network²⁴ a grassroots hub network and web portal in the low-income community of East Palo Alto, near Stanford.

Online deliberation is a broad field of practice and inquiry, which is the subject of a conference I hosted at Stanford in 2005, and of a forthcoming edited volume that grew out of that conference.²⁵ The CPSR DIAC conference planned for this coming November may be the next online deliberation conference. Online deliberation includes approaches such as citizen dialogue, public consultation, community organizing, learning communities, and managerial decision making in addition to Deme's approach, which is on democratic group decision making. The impetus behind Deme is the observation that existing tools do not foster the full range of decision-making activities seen in grassroots groups, in an online environment. Email lists and message boards, for example, are inadequate for producing democratic decisions and text-centered

²⁴ See <http://www.epa.net/>.

²⁵ See <http://www.online-deliberation.net/>. The title of the forthcoming book is: *Online Deliberation: Design, Research, and Practice* (Center for the Study of Language and Information).

discussion in groups of more than a few people with ordinary internet skills (of the sort possessed by users of, say, Yahoo Groups). Students and I have written some papers and given presentations describing the motivations behind Deme in greater detail.²⁶ I believe that the coming availability of tools like Deme has the potential to revolutionize grassroots civil society, by democratizing participation and by eliminating effective excuses for inner circle decision making.

²⁶ See <http://www.stanford.edu/~davies/>.

Electronic Frontier Foundation and Activism: Defining the Net as Grassroots

Danny O'Brien

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) was one of the first groups to take advantage of the online dissemination of political information and agitation. We were the first organisation to have a full-time online activist back in 1990, and improvised many techniques that are now accepted as the standards of digital activism today.

We're very fortunate, in a way, that our issues are the hot topics which benefit the most from being propagated and magnified on the Net. If you're at all somebody who uses technology and communication systems, you'll already have a natural bent to the beliefs EFF fights for (even if you don't necessarily agree with us). The importance of protecting the digital realm for free expression, freedom from surveillance, the right to innovate, and the limiting of the most damaging side-effects of our current intellectual property law.

While these aren't the most important issues for everyone who uses the Net, they're issues whose importance is often brought into focus and concentrated *on* the Net. Other groups work to organise their grassroots on the Net. For us, our grassroots is the Net.

Given that, what I'd like to discuss very briefly is what insights that gives us as to the nature of online activism and what problems we have moving that involvement onto the wider stage. This is kind of a meta-conversation: a discussion of what's involved in online activism, not what issues we should be most active about. I'm taking my ten minutes to talk about this meta-activism because I think that questions regarding the nature of the regulation of cyberspace are already our meat and potatoes at EFF. I'm happy to talk all day, absolutely unprompted, about the challenges that free speech and organising faces online, but it usually takes me a little more self-prompting to talk about the practical nitty-gritty of day-to-day activism and information propagation online.

I have two issues that I work with on a daily basis: one is the tenuous position of bloggers and online writers in China, and places like Fiji and Thailand. The other is the threat to free speech and innovation involved in Digital Rights Management (DRM). I can tell you which of those appears to get more coverage, more analysis, more outrage and more civil disobedience online. It's DRM.²⁷

Why is that? Is it because the Net is solely the preserve of geeks? Clearly not. My experience is that not only is it not just geeks who get hit up about this topic, but also anyone who understands it sufficiently *and* has a day-to-day involvement with technology. But more importantly, it's geeks, and the geek communities who have access to the most powerful tools in propagating and organizing protest online, and

²⁷ See <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/archives/005229.php/> for a more detailed discussion of what follows.

possess the ability to innovate with those tools on an incredibly rapid basis. The geek community is, by the standards of many real world communities, incredibly politically apathetic. And yet, its voice is heard much louder than others through their adoption of such tools.

This is a question not of permanent advantage or bias of the Net but of temporary power of the cutting-edge. When, back in 1990, EFF first started to lobby Washington and spread information about what was then an incredibly obscure congressional process, it was the only group to do so. So even our obscurest issues were everywhere online. Now those tools: email mail outs, form letter engines, searchable archives of legislation belong to everyone. That means, in some ways, that everyone has more power to take on their pet topics and spread the word. But it also means that *everyone* is doing so, which means any group quickly finds itself competing for the attention of individuals who are not as single-minded as they are, who care about a lot of topics. In that case, the technology race has to keep advancing, not just to penetrate the world of regulation and caucusing and lobbying, but also to help individual citizens prioritise and cultivate power and knowledge about every issue that concerns them, whether it's DRM or free speech in china, consumer rights or civil rights.

There is collateral damage here though. Who does it benefit to win the war for attention on the Net, if it doesn't translate into action in the real world? That's a struggle that we, in particular, have, given the natural reticence of us geeks to engage with Washington, and proselytise. But it's a problem we've seen elsewhere too: in Howard Dean's campaign most famously, but perhaps I can also point to Ron Paul's²⁸ tremendous success online in the face of two to three percent poll gains in real life. Sometimes the very competition between single-issue groups online blinds them to the fact that they're fighting the wrong fight. And while reach online is easy to calculate and metrics and data-mining easy to produce, having an effect in the halls of power is something that we have yet to consistently connect to the effect we have in the halls of the Net.

About EFF

From the internet to the iPod, technologies are transforming our society and empowering us as speakers, citizens, creators, and consumers. When our freedoms in the networked world come under attack, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) is the first line of defense. EFF broke new ground when it was founded in 1990—well before the internet was on most people's radar—and continues to confront cutting-edge issues defending free speech, privacy, innovation, and consumer rights today. From the beginning, EFF has championed the public interest in every critical battle affecting digital rights.

Blending the expertise of lawyers, policy analysts, activists, and technologists, EFF achieves significant victories on behalf of consumers and the general public. EFF fights for freedom primarily in the courts, bringing and defending lawsuits even when that

²⁸ Ronald Ernest Paul is a Member of the United States House of Representatives for the fourteenth district in Texas. He is a Republican candidate for the 2008 presidential election.

means taking on the US government or large corporations. By mobilizing more than 50,000 concerned citizens through our Action Center, EFF beats back bad legislation. In addition to advising policymakers, EFF educates the press and public. Sometimes just defending technologies isn't enough, so EFF also supports the development of freedom-enhancing inventions.

monitor and contribute to policy debates. and information as well as advocates' ability to about government and governance of media, communications will also discuss citizens' ability to inform decision-making practical and hypothetical intersections will be explored. Panelists communities and constituencies at the grassroots level. Both communications and information policy intersects with citizens, review current debates, illuminating the ways in which media, this event, advocates working for change in regulatory regimes concerned with their just and ethical control and management. In become more complex, civil society has become increasingly Regulation: As media, communications and information systems alternative journalism's critical capacities. | Civil Society and environment. The event will end by reflecting on ways to enhance challenges of working in a media- and information-saturated will also treat alternative journalism's successes and failures and the journalism as it has existed in the past and in the present. Panelists field. The discussion will center on the practice of alternative new social, economic, political and technological pressures in the change and contemplates journalists' adaptation and/or resistance to alternative journalists in speaking to power and creating social alternative journalism today? This theme event explores the role of design. | Alternative Journalism: What are the many faces of alternative content producers gain and lose from participatory meant by participation, who participates and how, and what institutional ones as well. Key practitioners also address what is by looking not only at technological or political imperatives but social inclusion, democratic involvement and technological literacy, processes. Discussion will compare content creators' strategies for argument and promote structures for participation in production possibility. This theme event examines attempts to develop, use, embraces participation as core value as well as a structural production or personal expression, alternative content production concerned with social movements, civic engagement, aesthetic Participatory Models and Alternative Content Production: Whether