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Reforming the American Public Sphere:

The Media Reform Models of Progressive Television Journalists

in the Era of Internet Convergence and Neoliberalism

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Anthropology

by

Adam Richard Fish

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Reforming the American Public Sphere:

The Media Reform Models of Progressive Television Journalists

in the Era of Internet Convergence and Neoliberalism

by

Adam Richard Fish

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Sherry B. Ortner, Chair

Based on ethnographic data, this dissertation analyzes the broadcasting and media reformative models of workers in American television and internet video news networks. Media reform broadcasters seek to diversify the American public sphere as a counterhegemonic movement through recursively using technology and policy to create access for increased diversity of voice. Their challenges illustrate the problems for democracy in a neoliberal state.

This dissertation of Adam Richard Fish is approved.

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2012

Dedicated to my grandparents Mary and Dick Cook

and my wife and daughter, Robin and Isis Viola Lune Fish.

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Introduction: The Cultural Interventions of Media Reform Broadcasters

This dissertation consists of an empirical study of the broadcasting and media reformative models of television and internet video producers. The television and internet video broadcasters and media reformers I focus on include Free Speech TV (FSTV) and Current, two television networks based in the United States. My methods for empirically documenting the models of these media reform broadcasters include co-production of television documentaries (2006-2011), participant observation of office and production practices (2010-2012), interviews with employees (2009-2011), textual analysis of visual programs (2009-2012), and textual analysis of journalistic and historical documents (2006-2012). These two fieldsites were selected for their centrality within the field of media reform, their innovative approach to television and internet convergence, their mix of motives, which include both profit generation and more-than-profit cultural interventions, and because access was allowed.

Current is a for-profit television network founded in 2005 by Vice President Al Gore and Joel Hyatt to democratize media production on television. It later became a progressive news network. Gore remains the chairman of the board, and Hyatt is the CEO. Current claims to be independently owned despite Comcast, the cable and internet service company, owning 10 percent of the network. From primary offices in San Francisco and Los Angeles, the network broadcasts potentially to 71 million homes, 60 million of which are in the United States, via distribution contracts with cable and satellite companies such as Comcast, Time Warner, DISH, AT&T U-Verse, and Verizon FiOS. Its present roster of programs includes *The War Room with Jennifer Granholm* and *The Young Turks*, both progressive television news programs. Throughout its history, Current has had networks in England, Ireland, and Italy but now operates

only in the United States and South Africa. It claims to be the "fastest growing cable network in history" (Current.com), but its 2009 IPO listing to the Securities and Exchange Commission clearly states that it is not a profitable company.

I worked for Current as a contract-by-contract, freelance citizen video journalist, or what Current called a viewer-created content (VC2) producer, beginning in 2006, and eventually produced 16 documentaries for the network before Current ceased the VC2 program in 2009. These professional experiences provided valuable observations about the workings of the company and the contacts necessary to conduct interviews with more than 30 Current employees throughout a range of corporate departments. I categorize Current as a media reform broadcaster because in addition to broadcasting television programs, the network has endeavored to change the structure of how diverse voices access the hegemonic public sphere and employees articulate critiques of pro-corporate federal media policy.

Free Speech TV (FSTV) was founded by Jon Stout and John Schwartz in 1995 with the goal of providing progressive and independent news, art video, and documentaries on emergent distribution systems such as satellite, cable, and the internet. Its history begins at the end of the 1990s as the 90s Channel, another Schwartz project. Receiving no money from advertising or the federal government, FSTV is a not-for-profit organization and finances its operations through viewer support and foundation grants. From a small office in Denver, Colorado, FSTV broadcasts to potentially 30 million viewers on the DISH and DirecTV satellite platforms. It is also on approximately 200 local public access cable networks. The network's present television news roster includes simultaneous transmissions of *Democracy Now!*, *Big Picture with Thom Hartmann*, and Al Jazeera English's *The Stream*. In addition to broadcasting this television content licensed from other networks, FSTV produces live television coverage from progressive

political events such as the national NAACP convention, Netroots Nation, the National Conference on Media Reform (NCMR), and Take Back the Dream—all conferences I attended with FSTV in 2011. Attendance at these conferences allowed me to observe FSTV's television production and social networking practices as well as other participants in the field of media reform broadcasting such as the citizen video journalism outfits the UpTake and the Tiziano Project. Using my production skills learned at Current, at these live television programs I helped to produce television content for FSTV.

Preparing for these experiences, I participated in FSTV's office practices in Denver for one week where I interviewed seven individuals, the majority of the non-profit television network. FSTV is categorized as a media reform broadcaster because a dominant strand of its history can be told through the social reformist practices and models it mobilizes in seeking access to cable and satellite television systems for its progressive content. Throughout this dissertation, I emphasize the ideological synergy between FSTV and one conference in particular, the NCMR, founded by national media reform organization Free Press. The FSTV-NCMR similarities illustrate the shared concerns of those reforming media policy and those hoping to broadcast on a reformed media system.

In order to ascertain the breadth of the media reform broadcasting movement and its concerns, I expanded my research beyond Current and FSTV and investigated firms involved in digital social entrepreneurship such as Causecast, television hardware and software development such as Orange Labs, documentary television production like companies Northsouth Productions, and internet video production and promotion such as YouTube's Next New Networks. Including the interviews with these populations, Current, and FSTV, I interviewed more than 80 individuals and spent over a month total in offices of television and internet video

production companies. In addition to the social movement conferences I attended with FSTV, I observed film and video festivals, "meet and greets," business conferences, and other examples of "interface ethnography" (Ortner 2010). Much of this fieldwork did not contribute directly to this dissertation's written form but helped to contextualize the entrepreneurial and technological efforts that impact the work of media reform broadcasters like Current and FSTV.

This dissertation is an example of militant ethnography (Juris 2008) and critical media studies (Jansen 2011, Hackett and Carroll 2006), both of which are applied approaches to media studies and cultural anthropology. The subjects of this dissertation are media reform broadcasters who are politically progressive and corporately independent and who recursively transform the grounds of their own socio-technical productivity (Clark and Van Slyke 2010, Kelty 2008). These media reform broadcasters exhibit a "reactive discourse" (Ortner n.d.:44) by defining themselves in opposition to neoliberal media policies and the conglomerated media corporations these policies support. This dissertation consists of a series of ethnographic illustrations and anthropological interrogations of the cultural interventions used by marginally empowered media reform broadcasters to diversify the voice (Couldry 2010) within the American public sphere situated as it is between the internet and television, private media and public media.

Media reform broadcasters' cultural interventions include a suite of broadcast and reform models that I catalogue in this dissertation (Avery and Stavitsky 2000, Ang 1991). Media reform broadcasting models are diverse precisely because they are linked to new technologies that are historically situated and under the persuasion of mobile political and economic power. Looking closer at history and technology, I import the theory of the Cycle from open to closed public media systems (Wu 2010), as well as the transformation of the public sphere (Habermas 1991, 1992), so as to be in a position to look at media reform broadcasters and their models and

technologies in light of historical trends in the ownership of networked communication technologies. My claim is that the object of media reform broadcasters, an open public media system more responsive to the needs of a democratic state, is impacted by socio-technical power that is historically contingent. Second, media reform broadcasters are interested in impacting a single American or hegemonic public sphere as opposed to generating the conditions for alternative "subaltern counterpublics" (Fraser 1992).

The argument throughout this dissertation is that broadcast media reformation is an incomplete and recursive set of cultural interventions mobilized to create openings in networked communication systems prone to closure because of the pro-corporate ideology of neoliberalism.

Reactive Discourses and the Models of Media Reform Broadcasters

Practices, models, and discourses surrounding television and internet video production and dissemination unify the subjects of this dissertation. They also share values such as independence, progressivism, and media reformation. By independence, the media reform broadcasters refer to their status as not working for companies that are vertically integrated into larger, multinational media companies. In fact, their work is often opposed to the results of conglomeration that tend to mute diversity of voice in the American public sphere. The second dominant characteristic of media reform broadcasters is progressivism. Progressives believe in federal regulation of large corporations, investment in education, supporting unions, protecting the environment, and, most importantly, state support of public media, community-created media, and journalism. Third, the subjects of this investigation are media reformers who attempt to transform the networked communication systems in which they are situated. Thus,

independence, progressivism, and media reformation form the core values of media reform broadcasters.

I had an opportunity to meet and talk with progressive leader Van Jones at both Netroots Nation and Rebuild the Dream, two conferences I attended with FSTV in 2011. When I returned from Netroots Nation on July 6, 2011, I wrote the following fieldwork experience on my blog mediacultures.org after hearing Jones's keynote speech. It describes the progressive political platform while transparently revealing my growing empathy with progressivism:

> Honestly, I did not know what a "progressive" really was until working the video camera for Free Speech TV at the 2011 Netroots Nation conference in Minneapolis lat month. I thought a progressive was just another name for a Democrat or a liberal. I was wrong.
>
> It is corny to admit it but what I discovered was a worldview and mode of political action that aligned with my own belief system as a person and an anthropologist. The core concept of progressivism is progress–that culture changes through time because of the actions of vision-driven groups and individuals. Now, how much agency individuals actually have to enact cultural change is a hotly debated topic in both political and academic circles but few disagree that "a small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."…
>
> Progressive philosophy is aligned with the base theory of cultural anthropology, that is: culture is not a static or conservative thing that we need to stabilize at some nostalgic and unrealistic moment but rather a dynamic process. Progressives want to direct that process towards a more inclusive future. Progressives are not hung-up on retaining or reverting to an antique sense of ethnic, gendered, or national purity. They don't romanticize some false sense of the securities of 1950s Americana. However, as I will describe below, The American Dream as a concept was a focal point for progressives at Netroots Nation this year.
>
> Although in the preceding years, Netroots Nation events have attracted Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Al Gore, and other stalwarts of the Democratic Party, the perspective one gets from Free Speech TV's makeshift studio in the lobby of the conference is one in which the Democratic Party is centrist, more aligned with the corporate and Republican agenda, more beholden to Washington lobbyists, more entrenched in political melodrama than progressives who though technologically savvy, informed, and vocal are true outsiders. True there is the Congressional Progressive Caucus, with but one Senator, Bernie Sanders (VT), and 70 or so representatives, the impression of progressives from Netroots is something closer to the ground and grass then the overpasses of the Beltway. Here, real issues are addressed: economic justice, the expiration of the Bush tax cuts and the Patriot Act, resistance to corporate consolidation of the media, the elimination of all types of discrimination, the end of troop deployments to the Middle East, and healing the relationship between energy independence and

ecology security. Progressives believe in labor unions and environmental justice over corporate profits; equality in free speech and education; and valuing the dignity of all human beings over corporations as human beings.

As progressives are rarely represented in Congress they are a grassroots movement, hence the "roots" of Netroots Nation. But what about the "Net"? The progressive brand "Netroots," a conflation of internet and grassroots, describes a politically coordinated and technology-enabled public. It can be considered synonymous with the progressive blogosphere, the internet-activated public sphere. Netroots express the value of technoprogressivism—an idealization of the positive role of technology in achieving progressive political objectives that has its historic roots in 1960s computer and countercultural notions of techno-cultural change. Netroots activists believe in the power of networked technologies to bring together people in a space of reasoned, passionate public discourse that can lead to coordinated social change. Because of the element of disenfranchisement experienced by progressives, the internet and cable television outlets like Free Speech TV constitute the technological grounds for community and cultural change.…

While progressivism should be clear after reading the passage above, I need to further elaborate on another key component of media reform broadcasting: independence. An example of independence comes from the unpublished "A History of Free Speech TV" written by FSTV co-founder Jon Stout (2010), who criticizes "the commercialization of television, the reversal of the Fairness Doctrine, and relaxed standards for station license renewal and maintenance, [and] the gradual consolidation of media ownership by five multinational corporations more concerned with profit than with public service" (Stout 2010). It is within this climate that FSTV defines itself as an insurgent and non-conglomerated operation.

In her ethnographic research on independent film producers, Ortner explains the discourse of independence as a "reactive discourse" that opposes the hegemony of Hollywood (Ortnern.d.:44). Both Current and FSTV pride themselves on independence that they define reactively as not being a subsidiary of a vertically integrated, multinational, media conglomeration. Promotional videos provide an aperture into both the "active" as well as the "reactive discourse" of independence. In videos promoting their respective television networks,

Current host Cenk Uygur and FSTV General Manager Don Rojas both display a reactive discourse by foregrounding their independence.

In two videos most likely shot the same day in the basement of Current's headquarters in San Francisco in late 2011, Uygur affirms that he is taking the job at Current and why. The synergy between independence and progressive politics is key. In the first video, Gore welcomes Uygur to Current, saying "We want you to keep speaking truth to power, without fear or favor; you are on a truly independent network now." Uygur responds, "I love it. I want to be independent, progressive, *and* progressive. And I know you are not going to mind that." Gore chuckles, "Not a bit. We encourage it" (Current 2011a). This short and unscripted exchange between two media reform broadcasters with similar values makes it apparent that one important goal, other than to promote the Uygur program with the celebrity of Gore, was to establish the values of progressivism and independence as central to Current. The oppositional nature of this discourse, "speaking truth to power," is an example of a reactive discourse that constructs an independent identity against a non-independent entity. This interpretation is supported by the reactive discourse in the second Current video.

The second video, "Cenk Uygur: Five Reasons To Bring the Young Turks to Current," leads off with Uygur saying, "Nobody tells us what to say, and what not to say." The second reason is: "There is no corporate control here, no conglomeration where you have to worry 'Oh, what is the parent company going to think, do they have any interest [inaudible] for the government? Should we say that or not say that?' No, its independent programming by an independent company." The third issue deals with access: "We don't have to worry about access, access to guests where you say, 'I don't want to say that about Democrats,' or 'I don't want to say that about Republicans; what if they don't come on?' I don't care, and they are going to let

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us do the kind of programming we want here where we can actually tell you what is going on in Washington without worrying about offending anyone" (Current 2011b). One also hears this reactive discourse of independence from the promotional videos for Keith Olbermann's and Jennifer Granholm's shows on Current. Current is a for-profit corporation, and Gore, Uygur, Olbermann, and Granholm are all "on-brand," and that brand is independence and progressivism.

Current's core values of progressivism, independence, and media reformation had several distinct iterations during my fieldwork. In the beginning, Current was in the business of reforming the media landscape by democratizing nonfiction media dissemination. Progressivism and independence were not brand discourses during this earlier iteration. Spokespeople and management including Gore attempted to downplay progressive politics and maximize its non-partisanship in the company's early days. By 2012, however, progressivism had become central to Current's mission. The present progressivism, according to Olbermann, Granholm, Gore, and Uygur, is a result of Current's non-conglomerated independence, insuring access and the ability to "speak truth to power, without fear or favor." These reactive discourses of independence and progressivism are simultaneously political mantras as well as commercial discourses required of public-facing officials of the network to be "on message." What is meant by independence can be further explored in an investigation into the ways FSTV's reactive discourse is seen in a promotional video from its archive coordinated with data I gathered in several interviews.

In an in-house promotional video, FSTV General Manager Don Rojas uses the same phrase used by Gore. He introduces the television network by saying: "Free Speech TV is noncommercial, and we don't take money from the government. We are independent, so we can report the news *without fear and favor*." In both the case of FSTV and Current, there is no better example of what they are reacting to than Fox News, the quintessential non-progressive and non-

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independent television news network. Giselle Diaz Campagna, FSTV's development and marketing director, monologues with impunity her hatred of Fox News, a subsidiary of one of the world's largest media conglomerations, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, and the most conservative of American television news networks. Fox News "created this gigantic void for us to fill. … I think people need the real stories, to hear unfiltered news, to hear the Wikileaks of the world, the Amy Goodmans of the world. And the fact that Fox News has decided to drive that media bus into the brick wall creates a need for us" (interviewed February 3, 2011). FSTV's Rojas agrees that the rise of conservative news programming provides to FSTV an opportunity: "Our grand strategic vision is in the next three to four years, build into an anti-Fox network." As an example of the reactive discourse, Campagna states that Fox News, as a conservative and conglomerated network, provides an opportunity, a "gigantic void" in the American public sphere to be filled by a progressive and independent television news network. Rojas and Campagna see the presence of a right-wing Fox News as creating a need for left-wing FSTV. This "gigantic void" needs to be filled by a network that can balance this conservative powerhouse. This mission to fill this "gigantic void" is a reactive discourse based on a desire to reform access and therefore increase the presence of diverse voices in a single American public sphere.

Independence, progressivism, and media reformation form the core values behind Current and FSTV's cultural processes. These cultural processes are expressed in self-aware discourses and instigated through practices designed to diffuse these core values. These values form reactive discourses when mobilized to balance the American public sphere in the present neoliberal context. Neoliberalism, for media reform broadcasters, is defined by market fundamentalism, media privatization, and media deregulation. Neoliberalism is made tangible to media reform

broadcasters, who observe public media resources being auctioned off by the state to private corporations and the absence of media industry trust-busting regulation. As I will explore in this dissertation, the interlinking core values of independence, progressivism, and media reformation are reactive discourses that are mobilized to intervene in contexts of neoliberal, corporate–governmental domination.

This dissertation details instances in which media reform broadcasters were successful in producing structural slippages in systems of domination; other times they produce important temporary autonomous zones for action beyond the pale of neoliberalism, but this is rare and not their ultimate goal. They aim to create the structural conditions for the inclusion of diverse voices in a hegemonic American public sphere.

The Hegemonic Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere as Jürgen Habermas originally conceived of it in 1962 is indispensable for this dissertation, focused as it is on interrogating the ways media reform broadcasters intervene into public debates with the goal of diversifying the information from which citizens can make rational judgments about civil society. Habermas says, "The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public" (Habermas 1991:27). Based on historical research into the 18th century in Western Europe, Habermas (1992) conceptualized the public sphere not as a function of the state or of the private domain. The public sphere consists of classically liberal, bourgeois, and literate private persons gathering in public places to openly discuss public issues. Habermas saw the bourgeois public sphere work against the specter of feudalism and monarchism. His subjects had dialogues that fomented resistances that held states accountable. Eventually the practices of the public

sphere—freedom of the press, free speech, and freedom of assembly—were institutionalized by the state. If Habermas is to be believed, social movements can trace their lineage back to these public moments of debate, dialogue, and modeling.

Even Habermas agreed that this was an unrealized moment, the ideal manifestations of which only lasted a short time. Soon, non-bourgeois private persons, followed by the cultural industries, began to dilute and pollute the monolithic public sphere with fragmentation and engineered top-down messaging. In summarizing the downfall of the public sphere, Habermas relies upon his dissertation professor Theodor Adorno's critical conception of the culture industries to explain how for-profit public opinion manufacturing brought about the conclusion of a rational and civilly guided public sphere (Adorno and Horkheimer 1977).

Both the idealized conception of the public sphere and its denouement are concepts useful in understanding the motivations and historical patterns in the work of media reform broadcasters. Ostensibly, media reform broadcasters are focused on diversifying the information available for rational debate within a single American public sphere. Their access to that national public sphere is truncated by numerous factors and oscillates through time and in relationship to political and economic power and the availability of technology. Throughout this dissertation, I return to the concept of the public sphere in relationship to the goals of media reform broadcasters. It is necessary to address the criticisms of the public sphere and thereby specify the public sphere that media reform broadcasters seek to address and "improve" through access and diversification.

Habermas's conception of the public sphere has been criticized for a number of accurate reasons. The "public sphere" is monolithic and universalizing; ignores counter-publics of gender, ethnic, and class minorities; and has little to say about the specific affordances of contemporary

networked communication technologies (Schudson 1992, Ryan 1992, Fraser 1992). The "public sphere" could more accurately be conceived of as a plurality of spheres and publics. The concept of a single public sphere as suggested by Habermas (1991) was criticized by Ryan (1992), Garnham (1992), Schudson (1992), and Fraser (1992) as not conceptualizing a non-bourgeois, non-liberal, non-masculine public sphere. Taking a note from Gramsci, critics such as Eley (1992) argue that this transition from the bourgeois public sphere to what followed was actually the transition from domination by a classed hegemony to one less obvious, rule by repression, in which the media industries play a decisive role in producing consent and apathetic consumerism. As I describe below, media reform broadcasters adopt this critical approach to the cultural industries, but the primary way in which Habermas and his critics are useful for this investigation into media reform broadcasters is in theorizing the single versus multiple public sphere(s) and the hegemonic versus the counterhegemonic public sphere.

Habermas designates such fragmentation and diversification into public spheres as signs of the decay of the unified public sphere. On the contrary, scholars affirm that counter-publics persevered throughout the period of the unified public sphere in the 18th and 19th centuries (Ryan 1992, Garnham 1992, Schudson 1992, Fraser 1992). Each criticism returns to the primary question of whether it is a public sphere in the singular or public spheres in the plural that is the more accurate or desired description of the relationship between diversely stratified private persons, the state, civil society—and I would add media corporations—whose networked communication technologies augment public sphere(s). It is this tension between public sphere and public spheres that illustrates a major point in the practices and goals of media reform broadcasters.

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An important characteristic against which to define media reform broadcasters' notion of the public sphere is the "subaltern counterpublic," which Fraser defines as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate opposition interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1992:123). Fraser provides the feminist movement in the United States in the late 20th century as an example of a subaltern counterpublic. While the politically progressive community might be considered a subaltern counterpublic with its own events, journals, websites, and television networks, as Fraser (1992) defined the conditions for the feminist subaltern counterpublic, progressive media reform broadcasters do not envision their work as against the dominant public. They see themselves, their work, and their information as central to dominant national issues within a single American public sphere. Media reform broadcasters focus on impacting the diversity of programming within this monolithic public sphere. They are not interested in producing the conditions for a subaltern counterpublic. Their interest is in competing on a national level with the likes of Fox News, MSNBC, and other media giants. Current and FSTV seek to contribute diverse voices into a single, national, or what I am calling an American or *hegemonic public sphere* (Habermas 1992:427-7; Fraser 1992:122-127). FSTV and Current are both television networks as opposed to internet video networks precisely because they intend on engaging in a normative national dialogue, which tends to exist on television, not the audience-fragmenting internet.

It is unlikely that a single American public sphere, inclusive of all rational actors and the media systems, exists. This hegemonic public sphere is an analytic conception based on interpretations of observed emic practices and ideal statements. A more empirical statement might be that marginally empowered actors constitute a counterhegemonic public sphere nested

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within a national public sphere. Media reform broadcasters likely engage this national public sphere through what Fraser calls "interpublic relations" or the "character of interactions among different publics" (1992:122). These "interpublic relations" describe the mechanisms and processes by which marginally empowered actors grouped in political and competency affinities seek to impact the national public sphere. In the cases that constitute the ethnographic writing in this dissertation, "interpublic relations" are mediated by new technologies, public policies, and communication justice organizing. The interpublic relations are also structured by the relationships between dominant economic and political power encoded under the rubric of neoliberalism. The following section further interrogates the relationship between a systemic hegemony and counterhegemony in the field of media reform broadcasting.

Habermas's delineation between system and lifeworld in his theory of communicative action (1987) is central to recent studies of media reform organizations (Hackett and Carroll 2006). Like this study, Canadian sociologists Robert A. Hackett and William K. Carroll (2006) used detailed interviews and participant observations with activists in the media reform movement to investigate how the system, in the Habermasian sense, is challenged. Systems in their calculation are constituted by the "macrostructures organized by markets and bureaucracies" (Hackett and Carroll 2006:52-53). Habermas's notion of the system conflates markets and federal bureaucracies into a single hegemonic force. It is into this hegemonic public that media reform broadcasters' counterhegemonic cultural interventions attempt to intervene. However, before defining counterhegemony it is important to explain the field in which the hegemonic and counterhegemonic public spheres interact.

Media reform constitutes a field, in the Bourdieusian sense, capable of competing with other ideologically based fields in the pursuit of influencing the hegemonic public sphere and

there diversifying voice. Drawing from Bourdieu, Hackett and Carroll (2006) state that "media...comprise a field, subject to its own self-transformation as social interests as diverse as corporate owners, journalists, advertisers and media reform activists jostle over possible futures" (2006:40, Postill 2010). Bourdieusian field theory (1993) facilitates a description of the media field as constituted by various fields internally and externally competitive with other fields. These fields constitute a larger field—the media reform broadcasting field, if you will. In this calculation, the media reform movement, corporate television networks, and internet service providers, to name a few actors, compete within their specific fields and with one another in the hopes of influencing the hegemonic public sphere. Bourdieu's (1993) thinking about fields in the cultural industries affords me an opportunity to discuss hegemony.

It is necessary to interrogate three forms of hegemony at play in the field of media reform broadcasting: hegemony, counterhegemony, and antihegemony. As the section above explained, a related concept, subaltern counterpublics (Fraser 1992), is not particularly useful in defining the work of media reform broadcasters. Media reform broadcasters, for the most part, are not subaltern counterpublics or antihegemonic forces content with forming the context for the development of alternative or radical activist media. Media reform broadcasters form a counterhegemonic public driven to diversify voice (Couldry 2010) in the media-based hegemonic public sphere/market-bureaucracy system (Habermas 1991, 1987).

The larger field inclusive of media reform organizations, media corporations, and federal media policy makers is contested by these actors and others, leaving engineered gaps, fissures, and openings for cultural interventions. Hegemony as Gramsci (1971) understood it and the bourgeois public sphere as Habermas (1991) described it share similarities as both are terms used to describe a dominant and singular context for mediated discourse. Media reform broadcasters

are actors within multiple public spheres and counterhegemonic movements, and yet they also frame their political actions as attempting to secure access into the monolithic hegemonic public sphere.

Access for media reform broadcasters to the hegemonic public sphere is dependent upon a suite of resources ranging from economic to cultural capital, including technological competencies. These forms of capital and competencies constitute counterhegemonic resources capable of being mobilized to gain access to the hegemonic public sphere. Media reform broadcasters are counterhegemonic, but they are not antihegemonic: "ultimately rejecting the project of building a new and sustainable society, in the name of endless oppression, micro-politics, and differentiation" (Sanbonmatsu 2004:29-31). Hackett and Carroll (2006:204) cite Carroll and Ratner (1994:13): "Anti-hegemony is skeptical of all attempts to construct a general interest, to build unity; it instead trumpets a politics of difference, of dispersed singularities, disavowing the need for consensus and coordinated political action." Media reform broadcasters aspire to fix the "democracy deficit"[3] produced by how neoliberal governmental ideology regarding the market and bureaucratic system limits voice in the hegemonic public sphere. To do this they mobilize counterhegemonic cultural interventions to challenge the closed-system logic of the hegemonic public sphere.

In the counterhegemonic calculation, a "diverse and inclusive public sphere can place the system under control... [and] the system itself can be democratized" (Hackett and Carroll 2006:204). With the right contributions, the hegemonic public sphere can be constructed to "not privilege the prerogatives of private capital and bureaucratic hierarchy" (Hackett and Carroll

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[3] Democracy's deficiency is a direct result of "political economic factors—including 'the neo-liberal model of largely unregulated capitalism, open markets, and private ownership'" (O Siochru 2005a:210 quoted in Hackett and Carroll 2006:50).

2006:204). The system the authors refer to is that described by Habermas in the theory of communicative action, namely, the market and bureaucratic system as opposed to the lifeworld of embodied action and civil society. The market/bureaucracy system, dominated by neoliberal governmental ideology, is the dominant influence on the accessibility of the hegemonic public sphere.

Media reform broadcasters constitute a field within which they compete with other fields such as commercial broadcasting, federal media policy, print journalism, and other types of social movements for the attention of participant publics and to impact the hegemonic public sphere. Media reform broadcasters are intent on impacting how the system of market and bureaucratic logic influences the hegemonic public sphere. In performing their attempted cultural intervention into the hegemonic public sphere, media reform broadcasters mobilize their cultural assets not in terms of an anarchistic and antihegemonic skepticism of democracy but rather in terms of a counterhegemony hopeful about improving the democracy deficiency within the American public sphere. Despite its conflict with anthropological theories of cultural diversity, the notion of a single hegemonic public sphere is an emic conceptualization by media reform broadcasters.

Models, Frames, Imaginaries, and Discourse

The cultural intervention of media reform broadcasters includes several broadcast and media reform models or frames. Models and frames are etic categories used by theorists to make general statements about emic discourses and practices. The claim, however, is that the model or frame bears a resemblance to a symbolic system within the emic interiority. I discuss frames as well as models because both concepts are nearly identical but are formed from distinct

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theoretical traditions: frames emerge out of sociology and models out of anthropology. I will

outline the symbolic anthropological concept of model before detailing the concept of frame.

Geertz discussed humans and their relationship to symbolic information. He said

"cultural patterns…give meaning, that is, objective conceptual form, to social and psychological

reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves" (1973:93). This

intertransposability is usually glossed as symbols are "a model of and for reality." The models of

media reform broadcasters influence how they broadcast and how they reform. Likewise, these

models are transformed in the course of negotiation and in relation to structuring elements such

as economic, political, and technological power. An investigation into models reveals the codes

that are worked on and work on the actions and ideas of media reform broadcasters. The concept

of the frame is similar to the model.

Throughout my research I observed and participated in groups of media reform

broadcasters using their culturally specific discourses to attempt to frame and react to problems

accessing the hegemonic public sphere. Drawing from symbolic models for and of their reality,

they would bring these problems and opportunities to voice through the reductive practice of

framing. In doing so, they would externalize collective categories. Frames form a "reservoir of

symbols" that "enable other actors to comprehend the issue raised from within their own

context" (O Siochru 2005:297). Frames are translatable across fields and partnership modalities

and can galvanize political practice. Frames describe the "shared values and goals, name a

problem and potential solution, identify opponents whose power needs to be challenged, and

propose a strategy or collective action repertoire" (Hackett and Carroll 2006:78). Frames readily

position actionable information.

Discourses constitute the data for model building. By discourse, I refer to the more general formation of the term and its meaning as the "terms, tropes, and styles distinctive to a particular social universe" (Ortner n.d.:44). Ortner claims her method as "cultural ethnography through discourse," which focuses on "listening to the ways in which people spontaneously seem to say or write the same things in many different contexts" (Ortner n.d.:46). Ortner sees discourses and practices linked. She says, "discourses are maintained in many ways—through reiteration at the level of talk, through at least some level of behavioral conformity in practice, but also, and importantly, through ... reflexive representations" (Ortner n.d.:60). This dissertation begins as a "cultural ethnography through discourse" (Ortner n.d.:46) as I collect discourses across video texts, television documents, interview revelations, and observed practices. In the process of encountering and collecting discourses I produce models. It is my theory that media reform broadcasters draw from these models in their cultural interventions.

In her recent fieldwork, Ortner (n.d.) investigates the cultural interventions (discourses and practice) of independent filmmakers. As I said before, she sees "independence" as a reactive discourse with which independent filmmakers distinguish themselves from the Hollywood studio system. Their practical distinctions include being more DIY and making less expensive, less commercial, and less hegemonic movies. This practice allows for a discursive component about freedom and about making movies that are more honest and less formulaic. Drawing from Marcus and Fischer (1986) and Fischer (1995), Ortner (n.d.) sees these discourses and practices as forms of cultural critique. She is interested in "contestations over the discourse itself," which "open questions of the ideological nature of discourse" (Ortnern.d.:47). Thus "cultural ethnography through discourse" enables a cultural critique of power. The practice of lower-budget filmmaking and the discourse of independence come together to formulate the

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communities of independence, itself an intervention in the hegemony of Hollywood. A similar discourse/practice of independence and intervention into corporate media is at work in the labor of media reform broadcasters.

Following the works of Charles Taylor (2003), Kelty richly describes how the physical practices of computer geeks—coding, hacking, and file sharing—are discourses that are difficult to distinguish from practices (Kelty 2005:200, 201). The discourse-practice synergy is best articulated in the hyphenate "argument-by-technology" (Kelty 2005:187). In this investigation into the models and discourses of media reform broadcasters, I am inspired by the theories Kelty devises to discuss internet and computer "geeks" (2005, 2008). Like computer geeks, media reform broadcasters are situated within a "nexus of technology and politics"; they share a "profound concern for the technical and legal conditions of possibilities for their own association" (Kelty 2005:185). These computer geeks are a "recursive public," which is a "particular form of social imaginary which this group imagines in common the means of their own association, the material forms this imagination takes, and what place it has in the contemporary development of the internet" (Kelty 2005:186). Attempting to materialize social relations while describing the relative agency of geeks within spheres of power, Kelty describes recursive publics as "more tangible than ideology and less absolute than a technocracy" (Kelty 2005:187).

Media reform broadcasters are a "recursive public" who collectively challenge the socio-technical means of their professional livelihood through guerrilla technological practices and policy oppositional models. They are not just broadcasters, pundits, television hosts, or behind-the-scenes waged producers. They are not just activists, seeking social justice for others. They

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are both broadcasters and media reformers who reform the technological and political conditions for their broadcasts.

Kelty prefers the term "imaginary" to "discourse" because he sees the imaginary as inclusive of both "technical practices" and "discursive argument." He says, "The conceptual tool of a 'social imaginary' is important for my analysis because it permits a description of how geeks imagine their social existence through these technical practices as much through discursive argument" (Kelty 2005:186). I take imaginary (Kelty 2005) and discourse (Ortner n.d.) as synonymous with the mental and oral exercises necessary to socially contextualize the workworld's purpose and active practice. To imaginary and discourse, I add the theory of modeling in cultural anthropology, which is the analysis of the aggregate of discourses and imaginaries. In this dissertation, I conceptualize imaginaries as an embodied variety of modeling.

The subjects of this dissertation dialogue on their future in meetings, panels, and in semi-private conversations. In particular, their mission is how to achieve public goals such as improved democratic dialogue on private media systems. Throughout their history, media reform broadcasters modify their broadcasting approaches, how they address the public, and what reformist model they draw from. Their broadcasting models oscillate through time from public sphere and guardianship to commercial broadcasting models as they address the public as participants, informed citizens, or consumers. Their reformist models include free speech, anti-monopoly, access, public resource, democratic, emergent technology, and democracy models. These broadcast models are most prevalent with FSTV. At Current the dominant discourses are centered on how television and the internet can best be mobilized to increase democratic participation. As part of this techno-democratic modeling, the agents at Current also dialogue in utopian fashion on the positive role of technology in contemporary life more generally. The

major point is that media reform broadcasters' models/frames and discourses are mobilized to articulate approaches to accessing and contributing to the hegemonic public sphere.

Dissertation Chapter Overview

In the following chapters, this dissertation exhibits and analyzes how media reform broadcasters draw from models and express discourses in attempts to access the hegemonic public sphere. Chapter 1 begins in the tradition of reflexive anthropology (Marcus 1999). I begin by revealing how this project began and how access was acquired. In my case, this project has a surprisingly long prehistory beginning in 2002 when I began my work as a film distribution coordinator for the Sacred Land Film Project, distributing a film about threats to Native American religious landscapes on a Ford Foundation grant. This personal history leads to working as a freelance documentary television producer for Current in 2006 and the access necessary to conduct long-term participant observation. Throughout this period of my life, the themes of applied visual anthropology and my felt experience of the crisis of textual representation drove much of my professional, political, and personal work. The investigation into the subject of this research, media reform broadcasters, is a result of my decade-long (2002-2012) investment into applied visual anthropology and post-textual forms of representation.

The models that are a core element of this research manifest in a number of iterations. Chapter 2 presents the variety of broadcasting and media reform models that exist within media reform broadcasting. For instance, the various ways television networks address their audiences (guardianship, commercial, and public sphere models) are the dominant ways both for-profit and nonprofit television news networks envision their work of engaging the American public sphere (Avery and Stavitsky 2000). Media reform models include opposition to the cultural industries,

anti-monopoly, public interest, free speech, and pro-democracy models, amongst others. Media reform broadcasters draw from these models in making discursive arguments that the media are (and should remain) public resources, emergent technologies won't alone salvage democracy, and journalism is necessary to democracy. I explain how Current and FSTV variously mobilize models in their pursuit of sustainable income and political purpose.

In chapter 3, I initiate an historical analysis of the practices of media reform broadcasters by specifically investigating the practices FSTV used to gain access for its content on cable and satellite systems. This history illustrates how FSTV is a "recursive public" capable of reflecting on and changing the conditions for its production (Kelty 2008). This history necessarily analyzes how FSTV engaged with U.S. public media policy. I introduce the specific ways FSTV used the policies of the Fairness Doctrine; leased access; satellite set-asides; public, education, and government (PEG) channels; and program service broadcasting options. FSTV's early citizen journalism during the 1999 WTO protests and the 2000 Presidential election illustrate FSTV as a guerrilla television production community. This chapter approaches the contemporary era with FSTV's 2009 rebranding, new management, and use of social media. Throughout this chapter, FSTV's practices illustrate the counterhegemonic position of progressive media and how cultural interventions can be mobilized in attempts to create openness for marginally empowered groups.

Chapter 4 introduces Current's discourses, as described as moral technical imaginaries (Kelty 2008), through a look at how modulating discourses draw from models regarding the optimum use and convergence of television and the internet. Through narrating several historical eras at Current, from explicit, user-generated video content production to implicit social media content acquisition to the present professional television phase, this chapter illustrates the numerous and sometimes competitive discourses at work throughout a network's history. This

chapter makes clear Current's unsuccessful attempts at mobilizing technologies to achieve political and economic objectives of engaging the hegemonic public sphere through the corporate-driven inclusion of citizen voices on television.

Current's technological discourses to achieve media reform are distinct but related to those of FSTV. Throughout Current's history, it experimented with various ways of discursively conceptualizing and practically implementing a convergence of television and the internet in such a way as to be profitable and achieve its stated pro-democracy mission. Current did not require the same technological interventions into the emergent broadcast technologies of satellite and cable as FSTV. Though Gore was involved in the "information superhighway" as a Senator and Vice President, Current was not directly involved with policy as was FSTV with the satellite set-asides. As a for-profit television network, it had the capital to finance its broadcasting system by buying a broadcasting license. Current's history is much more contemporary. It came to market at a time when the networked communication technology that was disrupting the established system wasn't cable or satellite but the internet. The technologies and policies have changed, but what unifies these two case studies, beyond progressive values and the technology of television, are the ways they mobilize their cultural assets—models and discourses—to attempt to achieve mastery over disruptive technologies in the hopes of succeeding in the production of the conditions of a diversified American public sphere.

This broad historical sketch of the failed and successful attempts to mobilize cultural assets to create openness in the closed system of television is followed by an analysis of one day in the offices of FSTV followed by one panel at the NCMR in which a FSTV representative engaged with his partners in media reform. Chapter 5 includes two detailed ethnographic vignettes about FSTV and its work preparing for the NCMR. Two employees and I begin the

vignette brainstorming about what elements we want to include in the "umbrella statement"—our private and public explanation for why we are going to a conference on media reform. The methodical process of proposing, negating, and selecting justifications illustrates how FSTV discursively and practically applies itself to the problems of media reform. A number of central problems emerge: access, diversity, independence, media regulation, and corporate media. This vignette explores how a public identity is editorialized and constructed in reaction to policy and technology. As we worked and revised different concepts, we refined how FSTV sees itself and how it overlaps with partner organizations. This process also embodies the type of design oriented, collaborative anthropological projects advocated by Rabinow and Marcus (2008) and Kelty (2009).

In the conclusion, I provide ethnographic details and analysis of Current and FSTV employees' stated future. The relationship between the traditional broadcasting systems and the internet is a central issue around which I observed their fluctuating practices and discourses. In the case of Current, the 2008 global financial crisis, the pressures of the profit drive, investors, and debt fueled a movement away from the utopian rhetoric of the internet and toward its cable property. I analyze the diaspora from Current. Many previous employees found work in the internet video commercial economy. In the case of FSTV, the new technologies continue to afford the network new opportunities for inexpensive broadcasting. Both television networks are constantly under pressure from the satellite and cable companies that distribute their content. FSTV's existence as a public interest network in an era in which neoliberal policy seeks to eliminate state support for media is tenuous. Thus the internet, which exists with little regulation, remains a place where FSTV can practice progressive media without needing to secure public interest set-asides. Should there be regulation to defend public interest broadcasting on the

internet, it is unlikely to surpass the satellite and cable set-asides in total impact. As McChesney

and Nichols (2011) argue, the problem isn't technology but funding and support. Without

sophisticated ways to finance, support, and promote progressive internet video content, its

impact will be as minimal as it is on cable and satellite.

CHAPTER 1: ACCESS, REFLEXIVITY, AND METHODOLOGY

The first goal of this chapter is to reflexively contextualize the origins and methods of this research within the traditions of militant ethnography, critical media studies, multi-sited anthropology, applied visual anthropology, and post-textual forms of representation. This reflection on applied visual anthropology reveals the political commitments that brought me to the production of citizen video journalism and the subjects of this dissertation. The second goal of this chapter is to reveal how following the loose network of media workers (Granovetter 1973) resulted in the data regarding media reform broadcasters.

Militant Ethnography and Critical Media Studies

From the end of 2006 to the beginning of 2012 I lived, worked, and researched individuals working in the industries of television and internet video, primarily in Los Angeles but also in San Francisco, New York City, and Denver. Access to cultures of media production is often difficult and requires long-term, multi-sited methodologies that blend professional, personal, and scholarly life. I have substituted the benefits of "critical distance" for the benefits of increased empathy with my informants' passions for politics, citizenship, and technology.

This intimacy qualifies this research as "militant ethnography" (Juris 2007, 2008:23) and "lateral" or "interface" ethnography (Ortner 2010, Mauer 2005) as well as an exploration into "critical media studies" (Jansen 2011:1). Anthropologist Jeffrey Juris describes his multi-year and multi-sited ethnographic research alongside anti-corporate globalization activists as militant ethnography. The approach has three modes:

> 1) Collective reflection and vision about movement practices, logics, and emerging cultural and political discourses; 2) collective analysis of broader social processes and

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power relations that affect strategic and tactical decision making; and 3) collective ethnographic reflection about diverse movement networks, how they interact, and how they might better relate to broader constituencies. (Juris 2008:23)

Much of the time with my subjects through the years was spent dialoguing on the

changes to the television industry and the future of the movement of citizen video journalism in

the case of Current, or progressive politics in the case of FSTV. In these moments, I responded

creatively to my informants' queries for insights into the direction of the business and

movement. This lateral sharing of information from one cultural producer to another is an

example of lateral or horizontal scholarship that is characteristic of investigations into Western

elites (Maurer 2005, Ortner 2010). This dissertation is the first attempt to provide an accurate

and pragmatic document to my academic community of peers as well as my community of

television producers.

With this applied approach of militant ethnography, I address issues in critical media

studies (Jansen 2011). Critical media scholars

challenge government and market censorship for media culture; oppose concentrated ownership of media; challenge representational practices that stereotype, marginalize, or "symbolically annihilate" minority view, cultures, groups, or individuals; encourage development and wide distribution of alternative media; document, publicize, and urge action to counter domestic and global divides; use media technologies to expose abuses of power; and develop and promote policy positions to advance social justice. (Jansen 2011:1)

Drawing from the works of Amartya Sen (2009) on capabilities and John Rawls (1971)

on fairness, critical media studies is a facet of political and social justice. Many of the issues I

discuss in this dissertation—access, policy, and representational power—have long been the sites

of social justice movements. This research project fuses the militant ethnographic method with

anthropological theory, methods, analysis, and writing to achieve the goals of critical media

studies.

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A militant ethnography and critical media study of American television news producers reveals that their shared models revolve around the notion of "media reform" and "broadcasting." The subjects of this research worked to enact structural transformations of television during a time of intense internet convergence, corporate consolidation, journalistic degeneration, and political polemicism. Thus the methods of militant ethnography and critical media studies are fitting approaches for the investigation of these politically engaged television producers seeking to transform the systems they use. For this reason, "media reform broadcasters" is the term I use to describe investigated subjects.

Applied Anthropology and the Crisis of Representation

Pockmarked pillbox fortifications provide multiple angles for snipers. Once shooting galleries for urban warfare, now sand erodes from these man-high horseshoes of sandbags. Razor wire wraps around bullet-riddled homes left silent since the hot war ended in 1974. Nevertheless, this cold war in Nicosia, Cyprus, between the Turkish north and Greek south continues on the ground, here, in the UN's buffer zone. Incorporating Nicosia's 16th-century Venetian bastions and broad defensive ditches, this mile-wide dead zone that splits the city is a testament to ancient and modern ethnic and religious strife. Blue-helmeted UN patrolmen look down on me from lookout towers wrapped in concertina wire as I clandestinely collect images for a documentary on divided cities for Current. When they aren't analyzing me, I whip out my medium-sized Sony HDR-HC1 video camera from my hip bag, quickly rack focus, push record, and zoom onto the staccato pictographs of a machine gun's spray across the facade of a government building. The frantic zooming creates dizzying television artifacts that reveal my anxiety of working alone, for

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little to possibly no pay, in this live war zone. The pay didn't matter; this was the type of work many others and I imagined rugged television journalists lived to do.

The next morning I met with Miranda Christou, researcher at the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies. "You see the demolished houses, the abandoned houses, houses that have become military spaces, and you feel something violent has taken place...it is still a violent border," she warned me on camera in my Current documentary, *Divided Cyprus* (Fish 2008). She was going to be giving a lecture at the University of Cyprus the following day and invited me to attend and meet others researching the social impacts of a divided Nicosia.

On my way out of the conference I peered out the taxi window and saw a scrappy tent encampment under olive trees and, oddly enough, a large and tattered Iraqi flag. I immediately asked the driver to stop, and I got out with my camera, ran across the street, and I was again in the green zone with UN security towers hovering over me, the deflated tents, broken chairs, and four Middle Eastern men. I introduced myself, and they diligently and proudly told me their story on mini-DV tape. They were camping out protesting for asylum or a work visa. I spent hours that evening and the next day collecting the stories of scientists, teachers, artists, and military personnel who were secular and harassed by the religious fundamentalist overlords of Baghdad recently liberated out of the chaos of occupation.

I was nervous carrying all of this footage from the green zone to the United States, but I made it through customs and back to Los Angeles. I had collected about 15 interviews and five hours of b-roll footage for the short documentary *Divided Cyprus* (Fish 2008) and four interviews and an hour of b-roll for *Secular Iraqi Refugees* (Fish 2007c). I edited this footage into two 5- to 7-minute documentaries and uploaded them onto Current.tv. Current used its online video site to solicit, display, and decide to purchase short documentaries from viewer-

created content (VC2) producers. The response within the VC2 community was positive, and soon Andrew Fitzgerald, the manager of the Collective Journalism department, requested a phone call. He wanted the short documentaries or what Current called "pods" and would pay me $750 for each. The vision I had of myself as a rogue cosmopolitan journalist was going to be complete; not only had I been to one war zone and recorded the stories from another, I would be bringing these stories to television. These stories would provoke dialogue amongst viewers about the negative human effects of war, I hoped.

Two of the Iraqi refugees, Jawad and Ammar, upon seeing the pod they are in online, left comments on the online video post updating the audience about their situation. Amongst other things, Ammar wrote that they "came here seeking refuge into this country to escape death in our country." Fitzgerald, upon seeing these Iraqi refugees comment on my pod, made a video himself. Fitzgerald discussed the refugees' comments and how this was Current's fifth pod on Iraqi refugees from all over the world, including Kurdistan, Jordan, Syria, Sweden, and now Cyprus. Fitzgerald's video was shown after my pod was shown on television. This recursive loop between a VC2 producer, a diverse and engaged audience, a Current employee, and Iraqi refugees shows the power of a multiplatform and interactive approach to journalism. We had produced a small public sphere on the issue of war diaspora, and it felt good.

This vignette reveals the aspirations and joys of citizen video journalism, a shorter form of applied visual anthropology (Pink 2008). Getting to that place in Cyprus required a mental, physical, political, and technological development that is intertwined with my academic and professional personal history. That history begins with my work as a film distribution coordinator for the Sacred Land Film Project of the Earth Island Institute on a grant from the Ford Foundation in 2002. The history that brought me to the divided city of Nicosia and the Iraqi

refugees developed as a video camera–wielding tribal archaeologist for the Confederated Colville Tribes from 2003-2005. These professional experiences solidified the two components that constitute an applied visual anthropology that later led me to Current and FSTV: the political dimensions of anthropological research and the crisis of textual representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and its potential salvation in videographical work.

Amongst other office chores, I was hired to devise and implement internet-based outreach and media distribution for our PBS film *In the Light of Reverence* (McLeod 2001) about the destruction of four sacred Native American sites. Like everyone else in 2002, I had little understanding about how to distribute video online three years before internet video broke with YouTube. From this position, I hoped to matriculate into documentary film production and learn sustainable forms of documentary film fundraising. I got a taste of both working under the Earth Island Institute, a part of the Media Consortium, a group of partnered organizations that includes subjects in this dissertation: FSTV, Free Press, and the UpTake.

Every morning I would ride my bicycle 15 miles from a doublewide trailer along the central coast just south of Half Moon Bay, California, to the home of the executive director, Toby McLeod, in the village of La Honda, made infamous as the psychedelic redwood forest home of Ken Kesey. McLeod hired me because of my anthropological experience with Native American historic preservation. At an early stage in the history of the social internet, the Ford Foundation was eager to finance experiments in online networks and video distribution for a PBS film. It was at the Sacred Land Film Project in 2002 that I first implemented and observed the practices and overheard the discourses regarding the upcoming convergence of internet, video, and political activism.

In my 11 months as the film distribution coordinator for the Sacred Land Film Project, I was able to professionally engage with video and internet-based anthropological activism. I finished writing my MA thesis on the iconic symbolism of clay Fremont figurines from Utah (700-1400 AD) that winter (Fish 2002), went to India for the first of three trips to engage with the subcontinent's historical archaeological heritage, taught an archaeological field school for the University of California, Riverside, in the Yucatan, and worked as an archaeologist for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in California and Washington state before taking a position as tribal archaeologist for the Confederated Colville Tribes (CCT). It was here in northeast Washington that I continued to professionally investigate video and internet-based applied anthropology.

Beginning in 2003, I was able to explore my applied anthropological sensibility and desire to experiment with post-textual forms of representation in my tenure as a Colville tribal archaeologist tasked with writing two long empirical reports of all archaeological and ethnographic sites in two large geographies traditional for one or more of the nine tribes that constitute the CCT of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. In my position with the CCT, I used a Canon GL1 video camera to record the stories relating to ethnographic sites on mini-DV tapes. I got my first experience editing video when CCT filmmaker Chris Horsethief and I edited together a 1930s film about the building of the Grand Coulee Dam and the forced relocation of Colville tribal burial grounds and a 1930s newsreel about digging up Hopi burials in the Southwest produced by the Ford Motor Company (Fish 2003). In a later article, I discuss the similarities between film production and archaeological knowledge production through an analysis of the Colville film (Fish 2011a). It was in this video exercise that I began to see an antidote to the frustration I had felt for years as a writer of anthropological analysis.

Like the field itself, I underwent a crisis of representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Tyler 1987) relating to the inaccuracy of textual representations of the historical and material phenomena I was tasked to holistically record for the future generations of the Colville tribe. My GIS maps, literature reviews, and transcribed interviews were insufficient. Cultures of internet production continued to develop social and browser-based, peer-to-peer applications from 2003 to 2005, and I began to see how the new consumer-grade video and networked social technologies might facilitate Colville tribal dialogue on the present and future of the tribe (Fish 2011b). Naively I hoped that video would supplant or replace textuality as the central mode of documentation and the internet would provide an avenue for indigenous activist "voice" (Couldry 2010). It would be in landscapes starkly contrasting the rolling sagebrush hills and densely forested mountains of the Colville reservation—first India, then Los Angeles—where I would continue the experiments with video, the internet, and activism.

By 2004, it became clear to me that the price drop of prosumer video cameras, along with their quality increase, and the rapid expansion and amateurization of peer-to-peer internet networking were going to result in a transformation of the culture of documentary video production and distribution, and I wanted to be a part of it. While finishing my second large report for the CCT, I applied for and was accepted into UCLA's School of Theater, Film, and Television (TFT) for an MA in Cinema and Media Studies (which was then called Critical Studies). I selected this wing of UCLA's TFT focused on theory and history because I thought I could explore my concerns regarding post-textual representation while developing my video production skills and learning about internet activism (Castells 1997). I discovered that the MA in Cinema and Media Studies did not require much production, but it didn't matter. When I began the MA program in September 2005, I had 80 hours of documentary footage, an Apple

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laptop to edit the film, and soon the necessary contacts in Hollywood and Silicon Valley to begin

a short career in citizen video journalism that developed into the access and data for this

dissertation.

I would soon learn about this solution to the crisis of representation in UCLA Professor

John Caldwell's course on documentary film in which he paired a look at the reflexive films of

Ross McAlwee with a reading of the postmodern anthropological classic *Writing Culture*

(Clifford and Marcus 1986) and the documentary theory classic *Representing Reality* (Nichols

1991). Following the theoretical direction in these texts and films, I made my first film from

videotaped adventures with religious tourists in Sikkim in 2005: *Tantric Tourists* (Fish 2007b).

This was my first critical practical engagement with the crisis of videographical representation as

I struggled with the promises and perils of reflexive documentary video. *Tantric Tourists* also

became legendary in the Hollywood and Silicon Valley office of Current. When I eventually

uploaded *Tantric Tourists* to Current's website in late 2006, I and my future productions—and

research and interview requests—were received with open arms. I soon was befriended by

Current employees at parties, dinners, film festivals, on the phone, and in social media. *Tantric

Tourists* was not the first short documentary Current purchased from me, nor is the story of

Tantric Tourists complete without a look at the backstory of the first short documentaries I sold

to Current, *Whose Sacred Land?* (Fish and Evershed 2007) and *Me and My Weed* (Evershed and

Fish 2007).

My friend and co-producer, ornithologist Nathaniel Taylor, had arrived from Los

Angeles, as had Alexander Jones, another friend and experimental novelist teaching English in

South Korea who had come for a visit. I met them at a meditation hut along Lake Khecheopalri,

sacred to both the recently numerous Hindus as well as the indigenous Buddhists. It was beyond

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remarkable that I should find my friends at an obscure hut in the Himalaya, but after telling them the story that was to become *Tantric Tourists* they were interested in producing the next adventure, *Whose Sacred Land?* (Fish and Evershed 2007). I was subjectively exhausted by the reflexive videographical methodology that I exploited in *Tantric Tourists* and was committed to making a more expositional and observational short documentary. I wanted to make a short film that would satiate my desire to make an applied visual anthropological film the way that *Tantric Tourists* satisfied my need to explore the crisis of representation through reflexive filmmaking.

Nathaniel, Alex, and I got up the next morning committed to document through video a story of the erosion of the native Buddhist landscapes. Locals told us that the monk who lives a thousand feet up at the monastery or gompa that hovers in the clouds above small Khecheopalri Lake might answer our questions regarding the sanctity of Buddhist sites in Sikkim. We hiked there, and an hour later we were out of the terrestrial leech-infested forest and on a grass knoll in front of a monastery. The chief monk wasn't difficult to identify, the only man in saffron and orange amongst a small group of Israelis on an extended vacation after their required military service. Amongst these individuals was one young lady named Sarah Evershed, a BA student in World Literature at Pitzer College in Los Angeles who was on a foreign exchange in Sikkim. Surprisingly, she could speak Hindi and had a passive interest in video, if not in two American men who were on a mission that coordinated with her BA thesis, the sacred landscape of Buddhist Sikkim. It was atop that green hill that I learned the principle of collaboration that would become a theme of cultures of media reform broadcasters throughout my research with guerrilla television producers and citizen video journalists.

Evershed introduced us to her friend who was helping her with her Hindi, Chumday. She could speak decent English, and my co-producers and I couldn't speak any Hindi or Bhutia, a

Burmese-Tibetan language spoken by the Buddhist indigenous people of Sikkim. In addition, her father was the monk, who gave us permission to film the rituals in the gompa. He told us that in his opinion Khecheopalri Lake was being threatened by the rapid influx of Westerners and Hindus who elect to bathe in the lake, while Buddhists do not (Evershed and Fish 2006). He told us to meet with Captain Yapo Yongda, the head monk of Pemayangtse Monastery. We asked him if his daughter Chumday and Evershed could come along and introduce us. He said yes, so did they, and we set off down the mountain to the Jeep and on to Pemayangtse.

Yapo Yongda, a previous captain of the Royal Sikkimese Guard, a bodyguard of Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal, remains a strident loyalist to Sikkim's monarchy despite India's appropriation of Sikkim in 1975. After we spent three days meditating and praying with him and the students from the school for orphans that he runs, Dema Pema Choeling Academy (Taylor, Evershed, Fish 2006), Yapo sat for a videotaped interview. He unleashed on us, informing us of how Hindus were bathing in Khecheopalri Lake in violation of Indian Constitutional law protecting indigenous lands from Indian settlers, how a sacred wall was being destroyed by the exhaust from the Jeeps bringing tourists, and how the archaeological remains of a gompa were flattened for a helipad for tourists that never materialized. These revelations along with visits to each of the desecrated sites constitute the short documentary *Whose Sacred Land?*, which we sold to Current (Fish and Evershed 2007).

During the course of the filming of this documentary, Evershed and I became close. We were the two most committed to the documentary; her Hindi skills and my dedication to filmmaking made a good production pair. We were both scheduled to return to Southern California, she to Pitzer College and I to UCLA. Our friendship evolved into dating in Los Angeles. One of the first classes I took at UCLA was Documentary Film with John Caldwell. He

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gave the students an option to write a paper or a documentary film proposal. I chose the film

proposal and Evershed, Taylor, and I worked to textually craft into narrative sequences the

footage we had shot. Starting with text was a strange flip of the corrective to the crisis of textual

representation that I envisioned would start with video, not text. Nevertheless, I took another

class concurrent with Caldwell's Documentary Film course that would forever change the

professional development of my career and this dissertation. In the final day of the required class

American Television History, the adjunct instructor showed us as a treat for our cynicism of the

history of television a promo DVD from Current.

I hadn't seen much contemporary television, but I was sure I'd never seen anything like

Current before: the iconic and ironic pixelated graphics, the shuffled programs of short citizen-

generated video, the unscripted hosts. The adjunct challenged our "critical distance" with the fact

that Current was a television start-up and needed content from citizen video journalists. I took

serious note and went home and told Nat and Sarah that we had a new objective.

It wasn't a long form theatrical documentary for the Sundance Film Festival, where

Taylor had been volunteering for several years, that we needed to produce. We needed to make

our videos from our adventures in India into short, internet-readable "pods" for this new

television network called Current. I studied the early Current community of producers online and

recognized that in the state they were in, with low participation and desperate for content, we had

time to develop a deeper strategy for maximum impact. My idea was to offer to Current via their

online studio something I knew they hadn't covered and would be irresistible to them—a

reflexive documentary on a sick young woman acquiring a prescription for medical marijuana

and following her to get her medicine. The subject would be Evershed, and Current didn't resist.

Through legal contracts Current bought *Me and My Weed* (Evershed and Fish 2007)*,* followed by

Whose Sacred Land? (Fish and Evershed 2007), and *Tantric Tourists* (Fish 2007b) for $750

each. Moreover, I was on my way toward the access I needed to understand the political and

representational potential of short-form television documentaries in the age of convergence. I

was beginning to understand television-internet nonfiction production, but I also needed to

understand the ethnographic method to investigate communities of media production.

Thankfully, I also had to make a living.

By winter 2005-2006, I had taken a position as a research assistant for Dr. Sherry Ortner.

She had just arrived to UCLA from Columbia University and was beginning an ethnographic

project on cultures of media production. Ortner had befriended Caldwell and told him she was

looking for a research assistant. Caldwell, knowing my background in anthropology, told me. I

interviewed with Ortner, and after contacting my supervisor at CCT she decided to hire me. Over

the next five years I transcribed more than 45 interviews and did countless other chores for

Ortner, all the while learning how to conduct interviews and gain difficult access into

communities of media production. During the five years I worked for Ortner, I produced 16 short

documentaries for Current, several of which I've described above. The work with media

ethnographers Ortner and Caldwell while being a media producer at Current made the subject of

my PhD dissertation obvious. I would ethnographically investigate the culture, history, and

politics of Current through an observatory and participatory investigation into the issues of

citizen participation in the era of convergence and neoliberal democracy. I was intrigued by how

the drive to make a profit and improve democracy were simultaneous and contradictory at

Current. Nevertheless, I wanted more data than what Current exclusively could give me, so I

expanded the research, the sites, and the methodologies.

Multi-sited and Digital Methodologies

Media reform broadcasters are not bound inside specific firms, nor are they defined by explicit practices. My research population is not essentially journalists (Pedalty 1995), television producers (Dornfeld 1998, Caldwell 2008), independent producers (Ortner n.d.), hackers (Coleman and Golub 2008), or geeks (Kelty 2008), but the larger scene (Ortner n.d.), field (Bourdieu 1993), and ecology (Postman in Eurich 1970) that includes these populations. Three elements define the cultural boundary of the investigated population: the field of production, social networks, and shared models. First, the boundary of the population and practice I am investigating is drawn around a contested and emergent field of media production situated between the internet and television. Second, this field is populated by individuals and firms that are loosely networked together (Granovetter 1973) based on social ties and thus constitute a "scene" (Ortner n.d.). Each individual in the research population knows or knows of one another, works together, competes, or socializes with similar populations. Last, as I described above, they share social liberal models of media reformation.

While this dissertation focuses on two television news networks, it is not an analysis of these specific firms. Rather, this dissertation is an exploration of a discursive field that includes amateur and professional internet and television workers, social justice video activists, and open internet advocates loosely networked together because of social affinities and co-laboring in an emergent visual and networked industry. This project is located less around a field site and more a "field" in the Bourdieusian sense: a structured social space (Postill 2010). With numerous firms competing and collaborating for resources, trading personnel and tactics, this field could be conceived of as an ecology (e.g., Postman, McLuhan, Bateson). Postman (in Eurich 1970) explained why the word ecology works: "The word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people." In studying media ecologies as opposed to

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specific firms, I resist the temptation of isolating a single firm. Instead, I attempt to see each investigated firm as thematically interrelated.

In this multi-sited ethnographic project (Ferguson and Gupta: 1997:37, Marcus 1998:79), I follow the informants in a space transversing pattern (Appadurai 1991). The primary three fieldsites were the Western American cities of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Denver. Secondary fieldsites were Boston, Minneapolis, and Washington, DC. Tertiary fieldsites where I worked for Current as a television documentary producer include Las Vegas, northern Kentucky, and the Hulapai Indian Reservation. International sites where I participated in the work of citizen video journalism include Nicosia, Cyprus; Belfast; East Jerusalem; and Sikkim, India. I also conducted interviews and participant observation in New York City and via telephone with people in the San Francisco Bay Area, Denver, and New York City. Email, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+, video sites like YouTube, mobile phones, video telephony, and other forms of networked communication greatly enhanced my access to information. I lived in Los Angeles during the fieldwork, specifically Venice Beach, which enabled me to access Hollywood and its numerous studios. The cosmopolitan and digitally mediated life I lived during the fieldwork mirrors the cosmopolitan lives of my informants. Yet, while moments of our lives are marked by movement and mediation, site-specific localities also impact our actions. This is certainly the case with Current and FSTV, two progressive television news networks the employees of which lived highly mobile lives, and yet their emplaced sociality was tethered and impacted their forms of community activism (Pink 2008).

Field of Media Production

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Media reform broadcasters work within a technical and moral economy (Scott 1976) bound by broadcast and broadband technology and political and economic power. Between 2009 and 2012, I interviewed and observed in their native offices and urban landscapes more than 80 digital social entrepreneurs, independent nonfiction television companies, internet video platform developers, commercial internet-television convergence engineers, progressive television journalists, social media community managers, and others. With each encounter I collected as much audio, video, and field notes as access allowed. For some, like Current, I worked for several years; for others like Causecast I participated in brainstorm sessions; some video activists, like those at Witness, I know only through our communications over the phone; and still others like FSTV and Orange Labs I observed for weeks in offices. Throughout, I conducted more than 80 interviews, producing over 100 hours of audio recordings. I also signed more than 16 contracts with Current and two non-disclosure agreements; these legally binding documents are material testament to numerous office visits to Blip, Next New Networks/YouTube Next, FSTV, Orange, Causecast, United Agency, Disney, and others.

I was confident from the moment I sold my first documentary to Current that the network would contribute a substantial amount of ethnographic data to my eventual dissertation on media reform production in the era of neoliberalism and convergence. What was required was to collect additional information that would substantiate or challenge the issues inductively arising from the Current data. Opportunities to observe candid action and dialogue in private offices were an important reason to pursue additional fieldsites. I had a special opportunity simultaneously working for and ethnographically on Current. I rarely showed my frustration over low pay, request upon request for re-edits and re-uploads, petty politics internal to Current's offices, impossible demands for signed appearance releases, ruthless intellectual property rights

agreements, employee churn, seasonal swaying of corporate directions, or being "expendable," as one creative executive was apt to remind me. Many VC2 producers came to Current idealistically prepared to work for Gore's media democratization project, only to quickly leave for reasons such as these. The low pay and the strict intellectual property rights agreement were the main reasons for the growing population of ex-VC2 producers. My dissertation project was one reason why I remained loyal to the network through its identity crises, problematic approaches and employees, and decreasing opportunities for independent documentary producers like myself.

A pleasure of cultural anthropology is the license given to identifying cultural processes that transcend and connect small instances. The approach taken towards identifying models and discourses as opposed to "cultures" is an attempt to go beyond the notions of geographically, linguistically, or ethnically bound "cultures" to document unique ways of being in the world. A dissertation entirely focused on Current without recourse to other institutions, media industries, economic processes, geographical determinants, and emergent technologies and their business models would not be in the tradition of cross-cultural anthropology.

For these reasons and with the guidance of advisor Dr. Christopher Kelty, I began to conceptualize the project as not focused entirely on Current. Kelty had secured a grant from the NSF to pragmatically document the speciation of participation provoked by the affordances of the internet. This research instigated a focus on relationships between institutions and various publics (Fish et al. 2011). This relational thinking caused me to investigate institutions with more tenuous relationships to Current.

Another reason for expanding the research is to ensure that research can continue. Access is precarious for ethnographic work with powerful, sometimes wealthy people, whose

power and wealth is dependent upon the generation of cultural industrial concepts that are easily

stolen and difficult to defend. Ethnographers of media industries can never be confident that the

access they enjoy today will exist tomorrow.

For both practical and theoretical reasons I broadened my approach to include others

working in the techno-social space between social justice and digital entrepreneurship. This

research into digital social entrepreneurs and the contradictions in doing good and turning a

profit resulted in a publication (Fish and Srinivasan 2011) featuring, for example, Samasource, a

for-profit organization using the internet to provide work experiences in the developing world

through interviews and participant observation. In Samasource, I observed a situation similar to

what I saw at Current. Here was a for-profit organization using the peer-to-peer affordances of

the internet to make a profit and perform acts of social justice. I observed and interviewed 11

such digital social entrepreneurs—people like Jesse Dylan, who named his organization, Lybba,

after his father Bob Dylan's favorite concert hall. Lybba is an online social networking site for

health patients. Others like Ryan Scott and Levi Felix started Causecast, a for-profit, for-good

organization that now attempts to mobilize philanthropy by employees within corporations.

Some, like Patri Friedman, grandson of neoliberal theorist Milton Friedman, engaged in more

speculative and libertarian applications of technology for social engineering. Friedman's project,

seasteading, is an attempt to create floating post-nations in the ocean beyond the jurisdiction of

national laws, taxes, and moralities. With the data provided by these practical and fanciful social

entrepreneurs, I began to recognize how emergent technologies provide to their master users

classical liberal ideals about how social and commercial functions can be improved. This digital

utopianism is documented (Turner 2006) and critiqued (Keen 2007, Morozov 2011, Carr 2008)

as a result of mythological thinking (Mosco 2005). As proponents of myths about the digital

world, however, these digital social entrepreneurs consistently both inspire and obscure pragmatic action (Mosco 2005). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the social as well as business histories of new networked communication technologies.

While the discursive connections between seasteaders and health networkers and Current's video and television social entrepreneurs were surprisingly strong, the practical differences were distinct enough to make a project inclusive of both digital social and Current's video and television entrepreneurs implausible. I needed to further limit the project to practices with specific technologies, namely internet video and television. With this new structuring principle I focused on subjects working in cable, satellite, and internet television. While I limited myself to those engaged in moving visual programming, I did not limit the project to nonprofit or social justice workers. Instead, I included all forms of televisual, filmic, and videographical worker into the project. This expansion was facilitated by the friends I had made at Current.

A curious development coincided with this refocusing. My nonfiction production work, freely available to view online on YouTube and Current.com, began to attract the attention of numerous independent nonfiction television production companies, their producers, and talent scouts. I was contacted via email and phone by nonfiction television companies like Edelman Productions, Northsouth Productions, Oil Factory, Go Go Lucky Entertainment, and Ping Pong Productions and was afforded experiences that expanded this project's field of cultural production. I collected interview data from six individuals with independent nonfiction producers. The experiences of meeting them in their offices, talking endlessly on the phone, auditioning, editing my reel, writing out pitches, and going on location with and for them provided insight into how the field of cultural production extends out from Current and links to others with shared models. With these participant observations of television production, I

decided I needed to learn more about the other half of convergence, the business and culture of internet video production.

YouTube had long been a potential fieldsite, indeed a premiere location to do this research. Nevertheless, Google and its subsidiaries are notoriously difficult to penetrate. As the company expanded and engaged in partnerships and collaborations with other video companies, so did the opportunity to encounter people whose work lives reflect the models of Google/YouTube. When my research began, YouTube was losing hundreds of millions of dollars a year owing to the extraordinary costs associated with storing large quantities of information. Google was looking for a way to stop the bleeding. It invested heavily in figuring out how best to leverage its content to produce profit. It decided to monetize the content through advertising on videos. Taking a page from the business of television, YouTube didn't heavily invest in monetizing random amateur user-generated content with which advertisers weren't confident they wanted their products associated. Rather, it cultivated relationships with consistent, advertising-safe, hugely popular internet video content creators. In the process, YouTube helped these producers maximize their views through promotion of their content on the prime real estate of YouTube's home page. Google helped these producers with search engine optimization. YouTube developed a revenue-sharing deal with the most subscribed YouTube content "Partners" in which the content producer and YouTube would split a certain percentage of the revenues generated through advertising. In the process, YouTube began to grow out of the red and into the black, and a class of professional internet-only content creator was born. In 2010, 7 percent of online advertising was focused on video. By 2013, it is expected to grow to 11 percent. Thus, internet video is one of the fastest-growing categories in online advertising (Pham 2011).

Much interplay evolved between those who left Current and this blossoming community of professional internet video producers. Being a part of this scene since 2006, I had many opportunities to observe how this community of professional internet video creators was formed in partnership with YouTube and other popular revenue-sharing platforms such as Revver and Blip. Journalistic websites like Gigaom, discussed below, also played an important role in celebrating this emergent market for content and advertising. Before it went the route of YouTube and was purchased by Google in March 2011, I visited the New York offices of Next New Networks (NNN), an internet video start-up that produces in-house popular videos and also locates and develops video production talent. I interviewed Tim Shey, president and co-founder of NNN, and gathered that the economic bottom line and the mechanics of generating memes seemed to be NNN's main focus. I asked about political content, and Shey said "we don't do that." Back in Los Angeles, I visited the offices of Blip, a YouTube-like video platform geared more towards promoting and monetizing the emergent market of professional internet video content. I interviewed Steve Woolf, vice president of content at Blip. I challenged him about the public service of his company and whether he was satisfied with promoting relatively frivolous material. He was proud of the success of Blip and stated that once the internet video industry achieved sustainable profit it would begin to address more projects that were charitable. He also stated that democratizing access to capital is itself a social service. This resonated with something Oliver Luckett, founder of the first revenue-sharing video site, Revver, said to me, that one of his proudest days was when he was able to write a check for $30,000 to a group of producers who made funny videos featuring the dropping of Mentos candies into soda and watching the messy volcano of pop gush into the sky. While Current was a for-profit operation like YouTube and Blip, it had a public-facing responsibility to American democracy, something

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greater than profit. Blip, Revver, and NNN/YouTube provided insights into the for-profit video industries, yet I needed access to ethnographic data that would provide a richer picture of human values in this socio-technical field. However, I would not access the not-for-profit television news networks and witness their more-than-profit moral accounting without having yet another experience of the commercialization of convergence.

As I expanded my fieldwork into nonfiction internet and television I began to notice how uncritically I used the term "convergence" to denote the coming together of the internet and television and broadband and broadcasting. Internet and television communities of production and consumption were merging, as the technologies for viewing were converging onto digital flat screen television. Drawing from my experiences as an archaeologist, I sought to put myself into ethnographic contexts where I could witness the materiality of convergence. I thought about following around a Time Warner cable and internet repair team in Los Angeles before reaching out to engineers at Orange Labs, a Silicon Valley outpost of research and development for Orange, France's largest telecommunications company. Orange Labs was in Silicon Valley to purchase or partner with those companies and individuals on the cutting edge of consumer-facing internet/television convergence. It would provide an opportunity to observe the discourses and practices of convergence from the insider's perspective.

My work with Orange Labs begins with receiving free tickets to attend an expensive, elitist, high-tech business conference in San Francisco. Stepping off of my days as a television journalist and knowing something about how conferences work as a promotional device. I wrote to Gigaom founder Om Malik and asked if I could be given press passes for Net:work, a conference about the ways networked communication systems were changing labor and management, and NewTeeVee Live, about television-internet convergence. Surprisingly, I was

given these two tickets, each valued at over $1000, and was able to hobnob with Silicon Valley

angel investors and convergence engineers.

The conference brought together the CEOs or representatives of most of the business

players in internet-television convergence for a three-day conference. It was here that I met Dan

Linder, back-end developer for Current, and learned more about Current's failed foray into

crowdsourced fictional programming, *Bar Karma*. The morning before the conference, Malik

invited a few dozen people to the "bunker," his office, for a more intimate breakfast. It was there

that Orange engineer Guillaume Payan approached me and asked what I did. I had written in

large black letters "Adam Anthropologist" on a nametag to attract such attention. I explained I

was interested in observing the business of convergence. Eagerly, Payan told me that his CEO

Georges Nahon would be very curious to work with me and I should write to him. In the next

few days at NewTeeVee Live and the following Net:work event, I was steeped in the business of

convergence. The dominant model in this community is that business and sometimes even social

problems require a technological fix. Methodologically I began to develop a sense of how to

"read" conferences as performances of competency and exhibitions of models. This

methodological approach would become helpful in my work with FSTV, with which I would

attend numerous conferences.

When I got back to Los Angeles from NewTeeVee Live, I emailed Payan and Nahon

with my proposition to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in their Silicon Valley offices. The usual

back and forth of proposals and promises ensued, and I was eventually granted permission to

come for a week and shadow Payan, an engineer with responsibilities to meet with any

interesting Silicon Valley entrepreneur with a software or hardware product that might be

usefully incorporated into Orange's consumer television packages. I met with a lawyer in the

morning, signed a non-disclosure agreement, and I was free to observe work, sit in on meetings, and interview whoever I could in one week. Here I collected the necessary data to see the commercial applications of convergence technologies. I observed software that coordinated tablets, mobiles, and televisions, and electronic programming guides (EPGs) linked to social networks so viewers could virtually watch and comment on shows with friends. I asked about the political utility of such devices, and I challenged what seemed like an encouragement of passive consumption and not explicit production. Before seeing Orange and its explicit focus on consumer products and profit generation, I was still under the impression that the field of convergence was populated by digital social entrepreneurs, that the application of these technologies would lead to greater diversity, access, and media democratization. In a week at Orange Labs, in meetings with numerous entrepreneurs attempting to sell Payan this or that digital widget to make passive consumption of television content easier and more seductive, I was able to overcome my social liberal innocence through a close-up look at the business of convergence stripped of its public interest responsibility. Through nine interviews with engineers at all levels of the company, I was able to confirm that the company was not interested in supra-market applications of its technologies but rather how to increase the time spent viewing programs and advertisements across a range of convergent media platforms. This was a valuable insight, but it provided only the commercial and not the social liberal storyline that begins with Current. To get a more rounded picture of the field of convergent cultural production in the age of neoliberalism, I needed to address the nonprofit world of public interest television.

For-profit television journalism can be considered an industry that accounts for its values in for-profit and more-than-profit terms. For-profit television news networks must make a profit, but they also see their job as improving the "nation's" functions by informing citizens about

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issues necessary for their active participation in democracy. During the course of my research, I witness the utter collapse of the American print news industry. A number of large and important print newspapers shuttered their doors, and numerous foreign agencies were closed (McChesney and Nichols 2010). While Current and FSTV suffered losses during this period, they persisted, as did all cable television news networks. However, investigative reporting in print and on television are often costly and the first projects to be cut when economic pressure mounts. Because of the mixed values and pressures shared by cable and satellite television news networks, I focused on gaining access to the first and arguably the most global: CNN. This story of accessing CNN illustrates a point that this particular field of media production includes a number of loose networks (Granovetter 1973). My research required a tracing of these networks in a "hermeneutic spiral" (Hodder 1995:15). This story begins at a TEDx conference.

I attended the 2010 TEDxUSC with Revver founder Oliver Luckett and Current hosts Jason Silva and Max Lugavere. They were on "retainer" from Current. This meant they weren't working but were salaried. They spent this free time developing their brand, Lugavere in music and Silva as a motivational speaker for "techno-optimism." With a mix of transhumanism, visionary poetics, and psychedelia, Silva is a pop theory performer for such a techno-optimistic event as TED. There we met Oliver Luckett, founder of the first revenue-sharing internet video company, Revver. Luckett once worked for Current resident of Programming David Neuman at the Digital Entertainment Network (DEN), one of the first internet video companies. The talks at the TED event were forgettable, but the networking possibilities there were important for my research. That night I spoke at length with Luckett about DEN and Revver. At an event after TEDxUSC I met Heather Knight, a robotics specialist who introduced me to Shey. When I interviewed Shey in New York City, Knight came along and had her robot Marilyn Monrobot do

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a performance for the internet video entrepreneurs. TEDxUSC had an event the following morning at USC about the future of journalism. There I met Adam Naide, CNN's director of audience experience, who was confident that I could gain access to CNN. I called Naide when he got back to Atlanta, and on his recommendation I wrote a proposal for CNN's lawyers. For the next few months following TEDxUSC I waited impatiently for CNN's lawyers and human resource personnel to confirm that I could spend a week observing how Naide uses social media in the context of television news. On the advice of Current's Andrew Fitzgerald I pursued CNN's iReport social network administrator Lila King and CNN's social media manager Eric Kuhn, as introduced by Current's Jason Silva, after he had left Atlanta and moved to Los Angeles to found the social media division at United Talent Agency. While I was not given access to CNN, the connections of the social networks at the periphery of such institutions illustrate the ways these communities of media production are interwoven.

The phone interview is a necessity for expedient and inexpensive qualitative data acquisition. More importantly, it is a necessary component of an approach towards acquiring person-to-person meetings followed by field observations. Emails always precede phone interviews. Email is a powerful tool for ethnographers hoping to secure access to fieldsites. It is easy to send out a number of emails to various possible fieldsites, and if written the right way success will invariably occur. On November, 2, 2010, I wrote to two nonprofit, public service, satellite news networks in the United States: Link TV, a network focusing on international nonfiction television, and FSTV, a network focusing on domestic nonfiction television. Both networks repurpose the video feed from *Democracy Now!* and Al Jazeera English, but only one responded to my request. FSTV General Manager Don Rojas was available despite managing the 2010 midterm election coverage, a rejection of progressivism and a sweeping in of the Tea Party.

He responded kindly, said he'd submit to a phone interview, and asked me to watch that night's

FSTV election coverage on freespeech.org.

I got through to Rojas on the phone a week later, and after speaking to him for an hour I

proposed a site visit to FSTV's studios in Denver. Rojas liked the idea and also said that FSTV

representatives were going to be attending several conferences throughout the year and asked if I

might like to go. A week passed, and I continued to investigate FSTV online. It became apparent

that there were few full-time employees of the television network, so interviewing most of them

was not going to be difficult and probably best done in person. Nevertheless, I did reach out to

another employee at FSTV, Development and Marketing Director Giselle Diaz Campagna via a

short message on Twitter. She responded, and we set up a phone call that week. She also

encouraged me to come for a visit, which I scheduled for March 7 through 14, 2011.

To attend to internet/television convergence I focused on the satellite television

network's use of internet-based social media. This meant shadowing Campagna because she was

responsible for FSTV's new rebranding in which social media was a central component. I

attended numerous meetings with outside contractors as well as other FSTV personnel,

interviewed FSTV President Jon Stout, and helped prepare for the upcoming conference we were

all attending, the NCMR in Boston. I traveled with FSTV to Boston for NCMR, Minneapolis for

the annual Netroots Nation conference, Los Angeles for the NAACP Annual Meeting, and

Washington DC for the Take Back the American Dream conference. The data from these

experiences constitute a set of interpretable observations that support this dissertation's research

agendas regarding the interface of capitalism and democracy in the era of convergence and

neoliberalism.

With FSTV at NCMR I observed the April 9, 2011 panel, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Beyond: Independent Journalism and International Crisis, featuring *Democracy Now!*'s Sharif Abdul Kouddous and Al Jazeera English's Ahmed Shihab-Eldin, who worked as a host for *The Stream*, an Al Jazeera English program collaboratively made with citizen journalists and social media. After the panel I spoke with Shihab-Eldin, pitched him my project, and discussed Current, and he told me that Al Jazeera English had just hired Andrew Fitzgerald, a key informant for my Current case study. Fitzgerald worked in Current's Collective Journalism department, and through his work at Al Jazeera English continued investigative journalism matched with the use of social media. Like Current, *The Stream* exhibited more-than-profit values. "The democratization of the Arab world is directly related to the democratization of the media," said Ahmed Shihab-Eldin. "It's not just about organizing protests," he continued, "there are so many different ways in which social media is used to connect people across borders, but also to connect old media with new media" (Tweney 2011). The connections between FSTV and Al Jazeera English were more than discursive; there is an agreement about content sharing. Between Al Jazeera English and Current there is a liquidity in personnel. In the course of my research I followed these liquid networks (Johnson 2010). I parlayed meeting Shihab-Eldin at NCMR into a number of interviews with Al Jazeera English. This short narrative from NCMR illustrates the connections in this media ecology and reveals how I collected data from companies with a range of moral economies regarding their responsibility to citizens and the state.

Methodologically I followed archaeologist Ian Hodder's advice. He says the "task of the archaeologist is to go round and round the data in a hermeneutic spiral, looking for relationships, fitting pieces of the jigsaw together" (Hodder 1995:15). Following the loose network of friends

of friends, an investigation into one sphere of media production led to another as the evidence from one sphere of media production corroborates with evidence from another sphere. Throughout this process, the research questions were developed by accounting for the shared models and discourses as well as the primary contradictions that permeated all investigated industries of media production. The contradictions observed by me or stated by my informants were the result of the dislocation of public service by neoliberalism. More specifically, each community of media production I investigated attempted to address or outright ignore the negation of democracy within a neoliberal state. Once I recognized this, I pursued these contradictions of "neoliberal democracy" and its cultural interventions with the remaining time I had for fieldwork.

Chapter 1 Summary

This dissertation began out of the crisis of textual representation I personally experienced as a professional archaeologist. This led to an attempted correction in merging applied anthropology and visual anthropology. My emphasis on applied research and video production came together in studies of media production communities.

This research led to discoveries about social networks. The subjects share loose social networks situated around institutional membership, technological competencies, and professional affinities. My fieldwork was dependent upon tracing these networks, both online and off. This circuitous route to fieldwork highlights how I acquired the access necessary to collect data. This process emphasizes the importance of a collaborative and interface approach to qualitative research. In order to develop interpretable data regarding a difficult to access subject, it was

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necessary to triangulate the subjects and their models through exploring horizons around technological competencies, memberships, and affinities.

I could have decided to focus exclusively on Current, but this singular focus would have resulted in a dissertation that emphasizes Current as an "isolate" as opposed to something embedded within a larger field or media ecology. The television network's for-profit status within an industry disturbed by a novel network communications system (the internet) meant looking at independent internet video companies like NNN/YouTube and nonfiction television conglomerates like Discovery Communications. Current's more-than-profit values and emphasis on the social possibilities of emergent technology aligns the network with the ideals of digital social entrepreneurs like Causecast and public service television like Al Jazeera English and FSTV.

This chapter reveals how I came to study the cultural interventions of a community of media reform broadcasters. The social networks of these media reform broadcasters extend into a number of different technical, professional, and collaborative groups. In the following chapters I will present other instances of cultural interventions and how they are designed to install voice in the hegemonic public sphere, circumscribed as it is by neoliberal media policy.

Chapter 2: THE MODELS OF MEDIA REFORM BROADCASTERS

Broadcasting Models

To introduce the broad cultural category explored in this dissertation, media reform broadcasters, I herein discuss the various models exhibited by television broadcasters and media reformers in America. Ostensibly, media reform broadcasters seek to make the conditions for the hegemonic public sphere more inclusive. Through time, broadcasters modify their approaches, how they discourse about the public they address, and what reformist model from which they draw. Their broadcasting practices oscillate among the public sphere model, which makes listeners into producers and co-owners, the guardianship model, which is designed to produce enlightened citizens, and the commercial model, which sees audiences as passive markets. Their reformist models include free speech, anti-monopoly, access, public resource, democratic, emergent technology, and discourse models. Current and FSTV variously exhibit these models through the course of their historical development. Introduced below, these broadcast and reform models will assist us in categorizing the historically situated practices exhibited by Current and FSTV.

Guardianship Model

The guardianship model (McCauley et al. 2003:xix-xvi) is recognizable by its impetus to produce enlightened and informed citizen-viewers. It is an application of the ideals of social liberals John Dewey and Walter Lippmann, who believed that the "public needed education, leadership, socialization" (Artz 2000:5). The guardianship model sees the "audience-as-public" (Ang 1991:28) and sees itself as a trustee of the public media resource (Avery and Stavitsky

2000). The best examples of this model are state-supported television such as the British

Broadcasting Company and a less potent but noteworthy example, the American Corporation for

Public Broadcasting. The intelligent and informed television news talking head is the icon of the

guardianship model. These guardians of media see the public as an aggregation of diverse social,

ethnic, and classed communities that need to have access to informational programming. The

guardianship model recognizes that the consumer model fails to provide comprehensive

information about issues important to the lives of the diverse communities that constitute a

nation.

The guardianship model does not emphasize citizen participation. The primary quality

that distinguishes the guardianship from the public sphere model, as you will read below, is this

absence. As such, the guardianship model is "aid-without-development... [that]...creates

dependencies" on these enlightened public intellectuals capable of guiding the public (Artz

2000:6). The guardianship model is not unlike "libertarian paternalism" as proposed by Richard

Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2008), administer of the White House Office of Information and

Regulatory Affairs. "Libertarian paternalism" suggests governments should "nudge" their

citizens through better designing of the "choice environments in which they act" (in Couldry

2010:65). The idea of guardianship is that wizened elected officials are equipped to direct public

information for public good. This statist paternalism should be worrisome to scholars of

governmentality (Ang 1991, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Foucault 1991) who are suspicious of the

sophisticated and subtle ways governments construct ideal citizens in the images of markets.

This is in line with the suspicions of the cultural industry critics as well (Horkheimer and Adorno

1977). The guardianship model recognizes the media resource as something necessary for the

functioning of a non-market "public." Considering how entrenched market logic is in American

society, this existence of a guardianship model concerned with nudging citizens toward information can be considered as an example of corporations doing the work of the state, à la corporate liberalism, or, more ominously, as acts of discreet corporate propaganda.

The guardianship model is identical to the "informed citizen model" (Avery and Stavitsky 2000:57) that frames the public as in need of carefully selected information not just to become better consumers but also to become better citizens in a representative democracy. The perspective of "audience-as-public consists not of consumers, but of citizens who must be reformed, educated, informed as well as entertained—in short, 'served'—presumably to enable them to better perform their democratic rights and duties" (Ang 1991:28-29).

The guardianship model is evident within the present case studies in a different way. As I will describe below, throughout its history Current has been the result of the guardianship model as well as the two other distinct forms of broadcasting practice: the commercial model, which conceptualizes the public as a market of consumers, and the public sphere model, which recognizes and includes the public's multiplicity of voices. FSTV also exhibits a variety of broadcasting models. In FSTV's case, its technological and policy competencies are paired with its guardianship model in facilitating FSTV's expansion on public television.

Television news, with its signature talking head and cascade of elite pundits, is a prime example of the guardianship model. Examples of progressive guardianship programming include FSTV's *Democracy Now!* and Current's *Young Turks*. In both instances, the audience is positioned as passive recipients of information from well-intending and more informed newscasters, Amy Goodman and Cenk Uygur. Occasionally, regular citizens will gain access to the televised tables of these newscasters, more affirming than challenging the singular authority of the host, but these instances are rare, and the citizen participants gained that access through a

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precise and opaque vetting process on which the public had no input. It is the public sphere model that challenges this approach.

Commercial Model

Ang contrasts the guardianship model with "audiences-as-markets," which envisions audiences not as self-governing publics but as consumers (Ang 1991:29). This model equates the interests of the public with the financial security of the industry under regulation (Avery and Stavitsky 2000:53). In this model, the profitability of the media companies serving the "audience-as-market" (Ang 1991) is a marker of the correct use of the media license.

An example of the commercial model comes from textual scholarship into the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Avery and Stavitsky (2000) investigated the written language of the FCC. The assumption that drove their research was that the "shared value system of corporate liberalism can be found in the decisions and practices of our policy-makers" (Avery and Stavitsky 2000:53). They discovered that the model of the FCC is to see the public neither as citizens needing information nor as participants in a vibrant public sphere but as consumers that the FCC needed to bring to corporations. They called this consumer model the "instrumental view," which privileges the concept of "consumer" over "citizen" (Avery and Stavitsky 2000:53, 57). Avery and Stavitsky's analysis revealed that the FCC is "overwhelmingly tied to such market-orientated concepts as maximizing competition, enhancing market power, promoting investment incentives, insuring competitive rate structures, removing barriers to entry, and encouraging new service providers" (Avery and Stavitsky 2000:57). Thus the FCC does not frame the public in terms of participation or becoming an informed citizenry. As a federal commission tasked with managing the media resources in the public, not only the corporate

interest, this tendency toward a commercial model reveals the FCC's alignment with neoliberal regulation for corporate gain. This claim remains powerfully true today. My reading of FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski's letter to Senator Upton in 2011 negating the FCC's commitment to the Fairness Doctrine and dedication to competition is a key example of the continuing legacy of the FCC, which sees its duty as providing consumers to corporations, not citizens to polls and public spheres (Genachowski 2011).

The first example of scholarly writing defending the commercial model comes from Fowler and Brenner (1982). Their thesis is that "broadcasters as community trustees should be replaced by a view of broadcasters as marketplace participants. … The first step in a marketplace approach to broadcast regulation, then, is to focus on broadcasters not as fiduciaries of the public...but as marketplace competitors (Fowler and Brenner 1982:3-4). In this thesis, all resources must be instrumentalized by the market. The media should not be held in trust for a purpose other than capitalism but should be subject to the logic of capitalism and the rigor of the marketplace. Couldry identifies the commercial model as a result of "market populism... which claims markets as the privileged site of popular voice" (2010:12).

Current is embedded within the commercial model. Though its content and mission could have been appropriate for public broadcasting and the public sphere model, as you will see below it decided to approach broadcasting from a commercial perspective. Current bought the cable network NewsWorld International on the open market, licensed its content to cable and satellite companies like Comcast in the U.S. and Sky in the UK, and solicited advertising with the hopes of producing surplus capital. Yet, its mission from 2005-2009 was to invigorate the mediated conditions of an American public sphere, and from 2009 to today Current has become aligned with the guardianship model. Thus, Current throughout its history has used each of the three

approaches. While Current has been engaged in issues of democracy through both its commercialized guardianship and public sphere model, these have been economical routes to democracy.

FSTV, on the other hand, has always had a tenuous but necessary relationship with the commercial model. Like Current, FSTV fluctuates between the guardianship and the public sphere model, with guardianship-like news programming as well as participatory media initiatives. It explores these two approaches from its distribution strategy that draws from the satellite set-asides of the public service approach, but its economics is not in state-supported initiatives but rather the generosity of viewers and foundations that situate FSTV within the public sphere model. While FSTV is restricted in exploring commercial options on television, it can explore commercial options online. Finally, as a reactive discourse (Ortner n.d.) the commercial model influences how FSTV defines itself. FSTV brands itself as against the commercial model, which it sees as responsible for the lack of independence and the prevalence of consolidation in broadcasting and the erosion of democratic media. While the public service and public sphere model exist variously in the cultural logics of the networks, the commercial model pervades many aspects of the various approaches advanced by both television networks.

Public Sphere Model

The public sphere model frames the public as co-participants in the production of media and co-owners of the media resource. The public sphere model does not see the public as mere consumers of media products, or as citizens needing to passively receive information from informed experts; rather, the public sphere model frames the public as users and producers of media whose citizenry is performed in acts of creation. The public sphere model is the most

demanding and potentially rewarding for the public and for individuals. The public sphere model is also the most constrained by the dominant market logic of neoliberalism.

The public sphere approach to broadcasting is characterized by participatory culture, citizen journalism, dialogue amongst communities or social movements, democratic decision-making, and social ownership of the means of media production and distribution. These efforts are designed to transform consumers into citizens and return public discourse from the public relations managers to those citizens. The public sphere model values dialogue and negotiation in the self-governance of society (McCauley et al. 2003:xxiv).

An example of the public sphere approach is the not-for-profit and progressive Pacifica Radio network, which includes KPFK in Los Angeles, KPFA in Berkeley, and 137 affiliate networks around the country. McCauley et al. (2003:xxiv) cite Barlow (1988), who states that Pacifica uses "the airways to promote community dialogue and to present audio evidence in support of movements for progressive social change. They seek to democratize non-commercial radio in the U.S." Pacifica, unlike NPR or PBS, is not just listener-supported but listener-directed. It has local community boards, community programming, and a national board consisting of producers and listeners (Artz 2000:9). Current and FSTV have engaged viewers to become producers, thereby enacting the public sphere model, but they never engage the viewers as managers, nor do they socialize the ownership of the network in the tradition of the Pacifica network.

While being economically situated in the commercial approach, Current was founded on the belief that what American democracy sorely lacked was a television network that served as a public sphere. Current's citizen journalism project, VC2, was the keystone operation to achieve a democratized and participatory mediated destination embodying the public sphere model. It

sought to provide vocal support for numerous ethnic, class, gender, and political mini-publics around the world. Current's public sphere approach did not, however, include social ownership of the means of production or democratic decision-making internal to the corporation. Current did not allow public participants to retain the broadcast rights to their video contributions. Instead it retained traditional corporate ownership practices over media content. Additionally, public participants and communities working within the Current-supported public sphere had no capacity to democratically contribute to the management of the media corporation. These compromises are inherent in an organization that retains important elements of the commercial model while experimenting with the public sphere model. As we discovered across a range of instances in which organizations attempt to "seed" a public, such compromises are more prevalent than anomalous (Fish et al. 2011). These compromises become even more evident through ethnographic and historical analysis of commercial organizations experimenting with the public sphere model.

The technological sophistication of broadcast television requires there to be personnel who mediate the presentation of the participatory public to the public sphere. Direct democratic governance by a public over the media organization is not possible. Representatives of that media company need to perform the technical tasks of mediating even the most participatory project. This mediation by middlemen includes fundraising, engineering, and even on-camera hosting. FSTV has long considered itself as expressing the public sphere model. It was doing citizen journalism before the internet popularized the practice. It gave voice to social movements beginning with the WTO protests in 1999 and today with media reform activist groups to whom FSTV "opened up" its airwaves throughout 2011. FSTV even experimented with internal direct democratic self-governance but found it too difficult to make decisions. Yet, throughout the

application of its public sphere model it has not been socially owned or democratically driven, and the access it has given to citizen journalists and social movements has been vetted by professionals and mediated by technicians. The task of creating the multiplatform media conditions for the American public sphere is compromised by technological pressure, competency requirements, commercial imperatives, and pragmatic self-governance necessities. FSTV's primary approach to broadcasting mixes approaches from both commercial and guardianship models. When there are economic difficulties, experiments with the commercial model online become increasingly attractive. Likewise, the guardianship model is becoming a dominant approach for FSTV. Thus, throughout the history of a television network, all three models emerge and mix with the other models.

What distinguish these two networks are the criteria for entry into the network's public sphere and the degree of participation required. Both networks required vetting by professionals in regards to content, aesthetics, technicality, length, copyright issues, et cetera. Current's VC2 program, focused on short and personal documentaries, was a more accessible format for citizen participation than FSTV's format of long-form documentary. What further distinguishes these two networks is how live programming interacted with the public sphere. Current very rarely did live programming, and when it did it was for professional, not amateur, coverage of the 2008 election or *Countdown with Keith Olbermann*. Live programming for FSTV, on the other hand, is an opportunity for citizens and social movements to directly address an audience with little moderation other than an interviewer and several broadcast technicians, as I observed at four activist conferences. This use of live video is a distinct quality of FSTV's public sphere model.

So far I have introduced three models of broadcasting. The models inform practical ways that these television networks envision and implement their responsibilities to publics and

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consumers. It is likely that most television news producers and programmers recognize that their work has impacts beyond profit. The television news networks I investigate are explicitly attempting to balance their commercial with their guardianship and public sphere models. Because of this, these television news networks can be identified as also being involved in the movement to reform media regulation to make it more responsive to the needs of the public and less beholden to corporations. Media reform broadcasters tend to align with the public sphere and guardianship practices and eschew the commercial models.

Corporations and agencies that control the use of public media resources utilize models to help them guide their practices. Any one media firm or regulatory body uses one or a mix of several of these models throughout their history. For example, in its six years of existence Current used all three. First, it used the public sphere model when framing its approach to broadcasting around democratizing media production. Second, it used the guardianship model to frame its practice of using professional news hosts to broadcast progressive media to the public. Throughout, while Current has used the public sphere and guardianship models, it has simultaneously framed the public, internally at least, as consumers of the advertising that forms the lucrative interstitial materials between broadcasts. During live broadcasts, FSTV "opens up" its airwaves to activist organizations, thereby deploying the public sphere model. On the same day it may also broadcast *Democracy Now!,* which addresses the public in guardianship style as an informed citizenry. Internally, FSTV's identity is formed in opposition to the commercial model of conglomerated media companies like Fox News. Thus, these categories of broadcasting model can be multiple, simultaneous, and transitional through time. These shared traits may simply designate the nimble agencies of media corporations in the information economy or prove to signify an interpellation of public interest broadcasting by the commercial model.

The subjects of this research are television producers, firmly grounded in the conditions of the cultural industries. They are also media reformers, attempting to improve the conditions for the American public sphere by providing access and diversity on American television. In both their production and reformer manifestations they are politically progressive, focusing on providing progressive commentary or access to progressive content. However, more analysis is required to explain the media reform models of media reform broadcasters. To do this, I will explore the numerous models of media reform, many of which articulate precisely with media reform broadcasters like FSTV and Current.

Media Reform Broadcasters and Their Models

The subjects of this dissertation are media producers and also reformers. Their professional lives consist of a struggle for the recognition of the human right to self-representation and communication justice. To them, media is a right and a resource firmly connected to humanity and citizenship. Their arguments for media justice include access, democracy, and free speech, amongst other issues. As progressive reformers they oppose oligarchy. As media makers they resist the negative human impacts of *corporatism*—the merger of states and companies with corporations having the upper hand, as opposed to fascism, in which the state controls the corporation. As activist media makers, media reform broadcasters oppose the federal sanctioning of media consolidation. These media justice activists and producers are advocates for access to the means of production and diversely progressive content on radio, television, and the internet. Throughout their histories, FSTV and Current have deployed a number of different methods to increase access, diversity, and free speech on television. These methods range from deeply participatory, citizen-engaged journalism in

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Current's VC2 program, to the progressively unique television broadcast in FSTV's live coverage of activist conferences, to complicit commercial broadcasting that retains a critique of corporate media in Current's *Countdown with Keith Olbermann*.

The practice of media reform dates back to 1894, when trade unionists and civil reformers focused on ensuring that domestic telephony was a universal service owned by the cities (Schiller 1999). McChesney (1993) follows media reform into the 1930s, when reformers fought against the corporatization and capitalization of media. In 1966 the United Church of Christ (UCC) complained that southern television stations were not reporting on the civil rights movement or African-American issues. It petitioned the FCC to take away the broadcasting license of WBLT in Jackson, Mississippi. The case eventually made it to the U.S. Court of Appeals, which found that the UCC had standing and that WBLT was not serving the public interest (Jansen 2011:9). This was the beginning of the contemporary media reform movement.

Media justice activists focus on a number of issues that I will explore in depth below. The issues that motivate media justice activists to engage in media reform actions include the fight for anti-monopoly, public interest, free speech, access, democratic representation, rights to spectrum, and right-of-way give-backs. They resist the idea that new communication technologies, namely the internet, have democratized access and made media reform unnecessary. Communication rights are human rights that include but trump other arguments for access. In this analysis, I rely upon the works of two professors, mediamakers, and media justice activists, Robert McChesney (1993, 2000, 2008) and DeeDee Halleck (2002; McCauley et al. 2003; personal communication 2011). Two sociological investigations of "air," Eric Klinenberg's *Fighting for Air* (2007) and Thomas Streeter's *Selling the Air* (1996), provide close details of the media reform movements and their challenges past and present.

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Anti-Monopoly Model

The U.S. media reform movement begins at the start of debates regarding who should be empowered by the emergent technology of radio. The spectrum of radio waves was considered a public resource and fell under the authority of the federal government to regulate. Because of this, the public interest had a right to impact federal proceedings. One of the media reform movement's first arguments was against corporate consolidation of radio spectrum. In the 1920s, a group of media reform activists worked to insert an anti-monopoly clause into the Radio Act of 1927, and they succeeded in including sections 13 and 15, which prohibit monopolies. This is a continuation of the Sherman Act and reappears in the Communications Act of 1934. Anti-monopoly advocates argue that monopoly is both against democracy and competition (Bagdikian 1983, Halleck 2002). The model of anti-monopoly mobilized the language of capitalism ("competition") to intervene in the realms of increasing corporate power.

The anti-monopoly model was a convincing and effective media reform model because it resonated with fundamental beliefs of American capitalism. American ideology favors competition—in elections, sports, and business. Anti-monopoly communication justice activists use this to their advantage by identifying the un-American trust activities of major media corporations. Nevertheless, in the process they perpetuate the concept that public media resources are within the sphere of capitalist "competition."

Thus a limitation of the anti-monopoly model is its failure to critique and challenge a profit-driven media system and its deleterious impact on democracy. The anti-monopoly model uses the language of capitalism to reform capitalist enterprises. This might not be possible. Reforming capitalism while using capitalism's model is difficult if not impossible and may signify the presence of Althusserian interpellation (Fish 2005).

In my field research, I encountered the anti-monopoly model obliquely as part of a discourse antagonistic to vertical integration and conglomeration. Current and FSTV both designated conglomeration of television news networks as a problem for American democracy. The anti-conglomeration model is a version of the anti-monopoly model updated for the late 20th-century's media mega-corporation when companies attempted to dominate the global media production and distribution chain.

FSTV's core media reform model is best expressed in its resistance to corporate conglomeration and conservative partisan news channel Fox News, a subsidiary of News Corp. Below, Rojas speaks against the 2011 merger of Comcast and NBCUniversal. Vertical integration and a partisan and conservative media system are the objects against which these media reform broadcasters react. Both are monologues on media reform, and both exhibit the flexibility of a model that defines an opposition.

As one of the key components of progressive political theory, media reform was an issue that FSTV knew its audience cared about. Media reform also impacted FSTV's growth and survival. During my fieldwork, FSTV attempted to expand its carriage onto the Comcast system. Comcast, during this time, was in the process of acquiring FCC approval to purchase NBCUniversal. This merger of a telecommunications company, Comcast, which distributes content, and a studio, NBCUniversal, which produces content, is considered by many in the media justice movement to be a violation of anti-trust laws. Comcast, a major content distributor, could favor the distribution of that content, giving its subsidiary, NBCUniversal, and itself undue advantage over its competitors. The FCC was adjudicating this issue throughout 2010-2011, and it was a major issue at the 2011 NC MR.

On November 8, 2010, I interviewed Rojas via phone, and we discussed what the

Comcast-NBCUniversal merger might mean for FSTV. It is

> still being considered by the FCC, a lot of lobbying is going on as we speak. There is
> some public pressure built up over the last few months. There has been public pressure on
> Comcast to open up the airwaves to more programming, for more independent television,
> for what we do. So we are hoping we can get a serious meeting going partly because of
> the public pressure. There are a lot of groups, media justice groups, Media Matters [for
> example], that have been putting a lot of pressure on them to democratize more. The fear
> of course is that Comcast, with the acquisition of NBC, will become this juggernaut, this
> monopolistic giant, kind of what Fox has become. Hopefully we can get a meeting with
> them and see what happens. (interviewed November 8, 2010)

This interview segment introduces how FSTV frames its opposition and how that

opposition provides opportunities for the network. This transformation of an opposition into an

opportunity is part of the flexible reactive discourse (Ortnern.d.:44) of media reform. This

discourse extends from Rojas's antagonism with the Comcast-NBCUniversal merger to Rojas's

and Campagna's hatred for Fox News illustrated in the introduction.

Public Interest Model

> "It is inconceivable that we should allow so great a possibility for service to be drowned
> in advertising chatter." President Herbert Hoover, 1924, discussing radio (Streeter
> 1996:44, fn. 32)

In the public interest model a public exists and has interests not addressed by capitalism

and consumerism. The government needs to protect this public interest from corporate

colonization. Unlike the anti-monopoly model, the public interest model is not grounded in the

language of capitalism. Rather, the foundation for the public interest model is located in a notion

of public resources not unlike how in the United States we conceive of public lands as managed

by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management or the U.S. Forest Service.

However, while it avoids the language of capitalism in print, the public interest model is not free from the constraints of capitalism. Supporting the public interest means enacting regulation that favors corporate media. Streeter (1996) illustrates this argument by examining President Herbert Hoover, who in the early 1930s derided the "advertising chatter" polluting the public interests on radio while also handing over broadcast contract to corporations. This duplicity illustrates how the model of public interest is the other side of the broadcasting commercial model. It is also a primary example of the strategy of corporate liberalism: a corporate agenda masked as a state project.

Streeter says of public interest: "The dominant legal uses of the term suggest a functionalist, systemic vision of social relations, and are easily subsumed into a technocratic interpretation, as a general term for the extra-market social engineering imagined to be necessary to the smooth integration of the corporate system, which stands in a paternalistic relation to a consuming public" (Streeter 1996:186). In other words, public interest is the sacrifice made in the act of privatizing the public resources of media. The public and their interests, if not conflated with corporate interests, are linked in a language of compromise in which private corporations receive the benefits.

Despite or perhaps because of how the public interest argument cohered to corporate interests, the model held some early successes for media reform and continues to be a model with utility for media justice. In 1941 with radio and in 1952 with television, the FCC used the public interest model to reserve one or two channels on each networked communication technology.

Both the model and the practice of public interest broadcasting assume the existence of experts, legislators, and broadcasters to produce the technological and policy conditions for a

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population. This is distinct from the public sphere model and the model of free speech, as I will explore below, both of which attempt to empower the creative voice of citizens, not just their listening ears.

The model of the public interest is linked to the guardianship model, which posits that non-market information necessary for citizenship will not be delivered collectively by peers but be meted out by expert news broadcasters, politicians, and sanctioned technologists.

Current approached its problem of access not as a public interest but as a commercial property. As you will read in Chapter 3, FSTV uses the public interest model in a public media policy context to successfully create opportunities on emergent networked communication systems such as satellite and cable television.

Free Speech Model

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. U.S. Constitution, First Amendment

Originally the free speech model relied upon the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to advocate for the right to give voice to opinion without fear of censorship or retaliation. A further extension of this argument is that the freedom of speech requires the freedom to access modes of speech amplification and distribution on public media resources. Towards this end, the federal agencies tasked with managing the media resource and upholding the First Amendment need not create an unnecessary economic burden in the articulating and

distribution of speech. Legislators advocated for both public interest and free speech while drafting the 1927 Radio Act.

Free speech is "an essential right to information exchange," said DeeDee Halleck (2002:101), television producer and FSTV board member. "If the First Amendment protects free speech in an age of face-to-face argument and print media, these rights are extended into more complex forms of technology as they are developed," Halleck continued (2002:101). As the quote above makes clear, the UN stated that communication, including broadcast communication, is a human right. Every citizen has the right to free speech, not just certain eloquent people. This fact illustrates the distinctions between the public sphere and the guardianship models. The model of free speech is linked to the practice of public sphere broadcasting, which seeks to empower everyone's free speech through the application of technology and policy.

In an improbable twist of fate, during the history of telecommunication law and policy the free speech clause of the First Amendment has not been signaled in the course of protecting individual human rights to free speech but rather corporate rights to free speech and personhood. The free speech clause now protects media corporations' capacities to deny citizens access to media broadcasting and protects media corporations from being forced by government to broadcast opinions with which they do not agree. Corporate free speech is now the freedom to not be regulated, in opposition to public interest or pro-citizen free speech regulation. Corporate free speech means the constitutionally defended right to produce profit without concern for citizen's free speech. Free speech "functions to structure industry relations and insulate them from political accountability" (Streeter 1996:193). This is an example of corporate liberalism, the

subversion of social justice in action claimed to be pro-democratic in the overwhelmingly powerful context of corporate–government collaboration.

Morris Ernst of the ACLU railed against the equation that money equals speech as early as the 1920s. Speaking against the corporate liberalism in the 1927 Radio Act, he said, "We are deeply concerned in the bill in so far as it relates to the question of censorship and freedom of speech. Even the term 'free speech' is more or less of a misnomer when you have to pay $400 an hour in one of the good New York stations and are lucky if you can get on at all....the whole bill is predicated on money" (quoted in Streeter 1996:191). Ernst and the ACLU went on to provide solutions that included preferencing non-profit media organizations in the licensing process, a cap on station ownership, and transparency in the licensing system. This is a clear difference from the corporate liberal approach, which sees the public interest as in violation to corporate free speech. The public sphere free speech model to broadcasting articulated by the ACLU in the days preceding the 1927 Radio Act failed to persuade a strong defense of free speech for individuals and non-profit media organizations. The ACLU changed its approach from defending individual free speech to defending private institutions, usually businesses, from political interference (Streeter 1996:192). Since these times, the media justice movement's model of free speech has not been a powerful force of persuasion.

The model of free speech as I have articulated it here, strangely enough, does not describe FSTV's broadcasting model, which is more like the guardianship model of free speech for certain professional journalists and experts. Current also experimented with free speech broadcasting in the VC2 phase, which focused on democratizing media production only to enact the practices of guardianship broadcasting in the present Hollywood phase through the monologues by Eliot Spitzer and Cenk Uygur.

Access Model

The model of access manifests in at least five policy practices that influence guardianship and public sphere broadcasting: the "equal time" doctrine; the Fairness Doctrine; cable PEG channel access; leased access; and DBS satellite set-asides. I will briefly discuss each below.

In order to prevent monopoly control over television content, the Cable Communications Act of 1984 (Public Law 98-549) required cable operators to make available several channels for "leased access." In 1961, President Kennedy made a statement regarding access on communication satellites saying, "public interest objectives would be given the highest priority" (quoted in Pierce 2000:110). The 1994 Cable Communications Act requires that direct-broadcast satellite (DBS) systems such as DirecTV and DISH, being the most prominent after the acquisition of Echostar, are required by law to set aside 4 to 7 percent of their spectrum to PEG channels. In 1996, a federal circuit court reviewed this requirement, and the FCC enforced the provisions. A DBS like DirecTV with 175 channels was forced to offer 7 to 12 channels of PEG programming, opening the way for nonprofit content creators like FSTV. Another act that encouraged access is Section 315 of the 1934 Communications Act, which requires political candidates to be given "equal time" in the purchasing of advertisements. Like other social justice elements in U.S. communication policy, the "equal access" ruling was quickly diluted.

While these two acts have provided routes to expanded audiences for FSTV, the models themselves affirm corporate liberalism, as Streeter says, "Antimonopoly, the public interest, free speech, and access are, in practice, corporate liberal terms" (Streeter 1996:196). However, the model of access appears to be more effective than the free speech model for achieving the impacts wanted by media reformers.

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PEG cable access and satellite set-asides are both examples of relatively successful public access granted by the FCC to force the hand of the cable and satellite companies. FSTV would likely not exist without these opportunities. The Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcasters to provide contrasting information on controversial issues, is another example of the access model. The history of the Fairness Doctrine began in 1949 when the FCC interpreted broadcast licensees as public trustees of a limited public resource, the radio spectrum. A closer look at the history of the Fairness Doctrine illustrates how cultural formations attempt to intervene in policy debates. Eventually, the FCC sided with corporate liberalism.

FSTV Communications Director Linda Mamoun wrote, "Wielding Weapons of Mass Persuasion: The anti-war TV movement" in 2003. In it she interweaves a structuring history of access to television distribution with a history of the agents of independent media. The article begins with the Communications Act of 1934 that "stipulates that the airways are public property" (Mamoun 2003). Mamoun highlights that "the main condition for use of the broadcast spectrum requires broadcasters to serve the public interest, convenience, and necessity" (Mamoun 2003). In 1949 the FCC established the criteria for the Fairness Doctrine. Broadcasters were regulated to insure that they spent time covering public issues and opposing perspectives. They were also required to allow citizens time to reply to the issues that concerned them. In 1967, specific provisions of the Fairness Doctrine were incorporated into the FCC's regulations. For the next few decades, from 1949 through 1987, independent media had a legal grounding as public interest advocates succeeded in enforcing the Fairness Doctrine that required broadcast licensees to provide balanced coverage of issues.

The application of the Fairness Doctrine by the FCC was a relaxed operation. In 1974, the FCC recognized that Congress gave it the authority to demand "access" for groups or people

interested in voicing opinions on challenging issues of public importance. The FCC claimed it didn't need to enforce the Fairness Doctrine because the broadcasters were voluntarily following the spirit of the doctrine. Through the years, the media and technological landscape changed. Courts ruled that new technology, such as teletex, an early television interactivity system, was not applicable to the enforcement of the Fairness Doctrine. Instead of just three networks, there were many more, and along with this multiplication came a greater diversity of voices. Through the 1970s the Fairness Doctrine remained valid.

In 1981, the FCC revisited the Fairness Doctrine and eventually ruled against it in 1987, stating that "it reduced the quality and quantity of public affairs programming, did not serve the public interest, and defied the First Amendment" (Mamoun 2003). The FCC had repealed the Fairness Doctrine on "both public interest and constitutional grounds" (Mamoun 2003).

On June 24, 2011, FCC Chairman Genachowski confirmed to Senator Fred Upton, chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, that, "The Fairness Doctrine is not enforced by the Commission and has not been applied for more than 20 years" (Genachowski 2011). On August 22, 2011, the FCC repealed reference to the Fairness Doctrine. Free Press, the media reform organization I investigate along with my work with FSTV, states that the problems with the lack of broadcast diversity is not a result of the revoking of the Fairness Doctrine but rather "the result of multiple structural problems in the U.S. regulatory system, particularly the complete breakdown of the public trustee concepts of broadcast, the elimination of clear public interest requirements for broadcasting, and the relaxation of ownership rules including the requirement of local participation in management" (Halpin et al. 2007:2). Obama apparently agrees with Free Press that improvements need to be made to the policy resources of the public

sphere, but these improvements do not have to start with revamping the Fairness Doctrine.

Obama's Press Secretary, Michael Ortiz, wrote that the President

> does not support reimposing the Fairness Doctrine on broadcasters ... [and] considers this debate to be a distraction from the conversation we should be having about opening up the airwaves and modern communications to as many diverse viewpoints as possible. That is why Senator Obama supports media-ownership caps, network neutrality, public broadcasting as well as increasing minority ownership of broadcasting and print outlets. (Eggerton 2008)

The access model is within the logic of corporate liberalism. The model positions the public as the recipient of corporate aid; it must ask for access to broadcasting capacities from corporations (Streeter 1996:195). "The granting of access is thus easily interpreted as one of the technocratic corporate liberal adjustments useful for maintaining smooth relations between corporations and the consuming public" (Streeter 1996:195). Like the free speech model before it, the access model can be reversed to seem like a regulation that chills the free speech not of people but of business. In this regard, it affirms broadcasting as centrally located within corporate liberalism.

Diversity Model

Diversity of opinions is a necessary component of a vibrant public sphere. The internet, in contrast to television, is a networked communication device with a low barrier to entry. Unlike television, production on the internet is "democratized." Nevertheless, scholars of the internet often fail to recognize that the capacity for content to enter into the public debate is dependent upon promotion, which usually requires capital. In this regard, internet producers and television producers both face the same challenges: inclusion within a public sphere that requires forms of power beyond having quality content. Producers can manufacture content, but if it is not going to be seen, it is not debatable and is therefore not engaging within a public sphere. In

this context, those with less political or economic power have less potential to be included in the public sphere.

One way of thinking about diversity is to address the multiplicity of the political spectrum. Arguments abound about whether producers of political content on the internet are predominantly liberal or conservative. I tend to agree with Hindman that "Liberals seem to dominate the audience for politics online. Across a wide range of politically relevant activities, from gathering news online to visiting government Web sites, liberals outpace conservatives by a wide margin" (Hindman 2008:23). Alterman (2003) disagrees, stating that the internet is a hotbed for conservative conspiracies.

Regardless, Fox News, inarguably a bastion of conservative political ideology, dominates the top ten news programs every night in the United States. The social results of this popularity are devastating. In a recent study (Public Mind Poll 2011), it was discovered that Fox News viewers are less informed about politics than those who watch no news. This conservatism in the American public sphere is not balanced within the media ecology by independent or progressive voices emerging either in cable television or online because these communities lack the resources to scale to the level of impact had by the conservative television broadcasters financed by Rupert Murdoch.

Ideally, diverse and competitive opinions would have equal footing within the American public sphere. Ideally, the more democratic capacities of the internet would somehow balance the more professional opinions commonly voiced in television news. However, this is not the case. Conservative voices dominate cable television news ratings, where progressive and independent voices are marginalized. Independent voices are innumerable online, where progressive voices receive more readers than conservative online voices, but the impact of these

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independent and conservative online voices are difficult to ascertain. These power inequalities based on the affordances of different technologies and cultures of production and consumption result in a skewed or imbalanced public sphere.

Both Current and FSTV see their role as independent and progressive nonfiction television networks as increasing diversity within the American public sphere. They believe that the offerings of news on television neglect progressive voices. Throughout my fieldwork with FSTV and Current, the mantra of increasing diversity through inclusion of marginalized voices was heard. For example, Hyatt and Rojas both are quoted as saying they want to be the "anti-Fox" news channel (Dana 2012, Ostrow 2011). Nevertheless, it isn't only about being a liberal broadcasting network to complement Fox News. Consistent and progressive programming is necessary for a richly diverse American public sphere. Hyatt criticizes MSNBC, another liberal television news network. "It's liberal at night, conservative in the morning, and in the middle it's nothing at all because it needs to fit in under its NBC parent" (Clark 2012). FSTV and Current are attempting to provide ballast, with balance being a key component of the diversity model.

Public Resource Model

The writers of the 1927 Radio Act understood the problem that the radio spectrum was a limited public resource being doled out to media corporations. They understood it well enough to mitigate the giveaway but not to stop it. To triage this negative impact of including the media spectrum within the theory of corporate liberalism, the FCC required licensees to consider and make small provisions for the "public interest." The pay-back-for-scarce-public-resource-spectrum model is founded on the defensible notion that the commons is public domain. In corporate liberalism, media spectrum is a public resource managed by the state in order to be

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capitalized by media corporations. Nevertheless, the state also has a waning obligation to the public. The enactment of this public obligation by the state requires considerable mobilization on the part of the public advocating for access to their resource.

A year after President Kennedy introduced satellite technology in 1961, NASA and AT&T partnered to create the Communication Satellite Corporation (Comsat), which was a private company tasked with privatizing the new communication technology. The pay-back model as regards satellite television develops from an argument that satellite technology developed out of public federal investments and that investment is now being exploited by the private sector, so they are responsible for paying back this government investment (Halleck 2002:101-102). Radio, the internet, and satellite were all publicly financed industries presently enriching private industries. These corporations are now limiting or potentially limiting public sphere broadcasting. The core of our private and public communication infrastructure "owe their research and development to the enormous public expenditures by the U.S. space and military programs. A few corporations have become very wealthy by using that research as the basis for their business" (Halleck 2002:102). The public resource model believes that because of these public sacrifices, these enriched private license holders need to substantially provide for ways the public can produce for and access these media systems.

Like satellite, cable television also has a payback component. Cable companies require right of way through the municipalities they hope to serve entertaining content. This right of way is through the public city lands, and therefore the public and the city council have a right to ask for a payback to use it. This model has been used to acquire public access channels throughout the nation. The payback model is within the frame of corporate liberalism that presupposes the corporation as the primary licensee of the public media resource that kindly returns a small

portion of the treasure to the state and public. Payback is but one of the minimal "technocratic corporate liberal adjustments" (Streeter 1996:195) necessary to secure their licensee rights to the public resource. In this calculation, the public needs to *idio facto* address the corporation and the government for access.

I was unable to observe actions or overhear discussions while I was within the ranks of FSTV or Current directly performing the public resource model. FSTV is a direct recipient of successes in the public resource model in the form of satellite (DBS) and public television (PEG) set-asides. However, the notion that media systems and spectrum are primarily public resources is a fundamental component of the media reform movement and was a dominant issue in the conferences I attended with FSTV.

Technology Model

The technology model posits that technology alone will not achieve the goals of media reform without vigilant activism. Media reform broadcasters resist the temptation to believe that the internet or the next networked communication system is going to democratize media production and distribution and thereby dethrone the incumbent media system and its elites. Each networked communication system emerged with these utopian promises, and each networked communication system becomes owned and operated by elites. Cable television was first championed as providing unlimited capacities for public interest broadcasters and commercial broadcasters alike. As Wu (2010) notes, what tends to result is each emergent communication system being colonized by commercial companies. Thus it is an irrelevant argument that the internet, for instance, as an inexpensive publishing system, has made media reform issues irrelevant. Media reformers argue against the notion that the infinite "long tail" (Anderson 2006)

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of shelf space provided by the internet has created a new media world in which state and federal regulation, and finance are unnecessary. Powerful economic forces soon transform democratized communication systems into commercial entities. New technologies are not enough; public funding is necessary if the conditions for the public sphere are to be met on any present or future networked communications systems (McChesney and Nichols 2010).

Like other political economic media scholars such as Douglas Kellner, Robert McChesney is also a public media producer with a show, *Media Matters with Bob McChesney* on 580 AM Illinois Public Radio. He is the founder of Free Press, today's leading media access project in the United States and has appeared numerous times on FSTV. Though I never spoke to him, I consider him a secondary informant because of his involvement with the NC MR and my access to his writings, audio, and video. McChesney criticizes the "conventional wisdom" that says "With the rise of multicultural television, with the rise of the Internet, with the 'end of scarcity,' there's no more need for public service broadcast. After all, even the minutest need can be met on the Internet, if not on cable television with 500 channels. So apparently the justification for public service broadcasting is gone" (McChesney 2003:11). McChesney is baiting the reader with the common wisdom that the internet is improving democratic mediations. With the exception of select scholars (Morozov 2011), it is accepted that the internet facilitates democratic practice from the days of the internet bubble in 2000 to the social media–assisted revolutions in Iran, Tunisia, and Egypt; the hackivism of Anonymous; and the online mobilizations of the Occupy movement. McChesney (2003) argues that the problem is not the way we use the technology but how we finance the use of the technology for private economic and not for social gain. He doesn't think that the opulence of technology should justify the lack of response to the democratic communication problem. Infrastructure isn't enough. What is

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needed is an opening up of the media to public and federal investment in journalism and communications. At the NC MR, which I attended with FSTV, I met with Bill Nichols, *Nation* writer, who stood by his and McChesney's theory that what is needed is a refocus on public media and its public funding, not new technology (McChesney and Nichols 2010).

Case in point, Current and FSTV endeavor to undergo the difficult, years-long operation of acquiring a cable and satellite television license instead of focusing singularly on internet broadcasting. Despite evidence in support of techno-utopianism at Current, Gore knew that neither the internet nor any technology alone is enough to create the conditions for an American public sphere. Each network needs to use all available technologies in addition to grassroots organizing and fundraising to create a pro-democracy movement.

Democracy Model

The democracy model states that democracies should promote democracy-facilitating practices like investigative journalism and its distribution. This means that the state should manage media resources first for the promotion of democracy. This would mean an emphasis on public sphere and guardianship models and a minimization of the impact of the commercial model. The media reform movement has been arguing the democracy model since before the 1934 Communications Act that gave broadcasting licenses to the telecommunications companies.

Trumping the public resource model and inclusive of the technology model, the democracy model argues that the state should advocate for pro-democracy practices. Media reform

> has nothing to do with scarcity of resources or an abundance of technology. It is much more fundamental than that. The founders of public service broadcasting...said that

democracy needs a healthy nonprofit, non-commercial media sector. That's the core issue involved here. You can't have a democracy without having a healthy, democratic media system. … That scarcity stuff was something lawyers and politicians cooked up later, to sell public broadcasting to legislators, judges, and bureaucrats. You can't get people off their butts on the scarcity thing. You organize a movement on the vision of democratic media, not all this talk about gigabytes in the spectrum. (McChesney 2003:16)

McChesney makes a clear argument that the central point of media reform is improving the vibrancy of national democracy. I quote this passage at length because it is a definite statement from a partner with FSTV. McChesney and Current Chairman Al Gore are in consilience on these points regarding culture, technology, and power (Gore 2007). The democratic model for which he argues here is shared by FSTV, Current, and the social justice media organizations with which they associate.

Gore draws from the democracy model: "The remedy for what ails our democracy is not simply better education (as important as that is) or civic education (as important as that can be), but the reestablishment of a genuine democratic discourse in which individuals can participate in a meaningful way—a conversation of democracy in which meritorious ideas and opinions from individuals do, in fact, evoke a meaningful response" (Gore 2007:254). Gore argues that the for-profit motivation in today's television news networks creates conditions that singularly elevate profit over public service. This process is making the viewer less reasonable, less logical, and less based in facts. Gore asks, "Why has America's public discourse become less focused and clear, less *reasoned*?" (Gore 2007:2). He argues that consolidated media results in an emphasis on entertainment and a degrading of the news, which leads to less reasonable, more distracted, and less capable citizens. This tendency has a deleterious impact on democracy. This democracy model frames the necessities of media reform in terms of democracy itself. As such, the democracy model is the most principled of the media reform models.

Chapter 2 Summary

In this chapter I have briefly introduced the numerous models used by broadcasters and media reformers to articulate, motivate, and justify their media reform activism and broadcasting activities. Broadcaster's models are arrayed across public sphere, guardianship, and commercial models. Guardianship and commercial broadcasting models are represented aesthetically with traditional news broadcasting featuring wizened television journalists. The public sphere model, requiring transformation of the audience into media producers and shareholders, is a less prevalent yet more radical broadcasting model. Any single broadcaster, Current and FSTV included, may move through these models or use a number of them simultaneously. This practice reveals how broadcast models are cultural inventions, flexible in their application into realms of hegemonic power.

Most media reformers want serious reform and believe that the media are public resources that have been given to commercial interests. Their project is to mobilize a suite of models to challenge the privatization of public media resources and defend public control over the scant examples that remain of public interest media. A range of models are used by media reformers with entry points beginning in anti-monopoly, public interest, free speech, access, public resources, emergent technology, and democracy.

These models are used in concert to defend or regain access to public media. The broadcast models as well as the media reform models are both cultural interventions into the American public sphere. Current and FSTV syncretize various models throughout their tenure to motivate specific results. This flexible use of media reform models reveals the mobility of cultural interventions but may also symbolize the resourceful deployment of mission and market admixtures necessary to generate profit.

CHAPTER 3: PRACTICES OF FREE SPEECH TELEVISION

This chapter's history of FSTV reveals a narrative of a small, non-commercial, media reform broadcaster with remarkable perseverance on several networked communication systems increasingly dominated by commercial interests. FSTV uses the public interest model to achieve carriage on public access channels and local cable television systems. The television news network successfully lobbies for public access on the new satellite systems. It pieces together broadcasting continuity and community solidarity during phases of economic marginality. In moments of profound progressive political fluorescence, such as the lead-up to the 1990 Gulf War and the 1999 WTO protests, FSTV showed its adaptability and adopted citizen journalism and guerrilla satellite systems to report opposition on American televisions. During the period of my fieldwork with FSTV (2010-2012), it embarked on an ambitious revision of the television network, which included hiring new management, a rebranding centered around social media, and an expanded commitment to partnerships with progressive media institutions. The result was a stunning success for the network as the satellite content provider DirecTV accepted FSTV as a satellite public interest channel and an expanded commitment into internet video, both of which provided an avenue for a post-satellite future, should the network want it, and a new audience of financially contributing viewers.

Throughout these periods, FSTV elaborates upon guerrilla television strategies, working both technology and policy to create access for its public interest television network. In the course of FSTV's 23 years of history (including its earlier iterations), it has exhibited how

models are mobilized in acts of survival. It reveals how institutions are adaptive, how technologies are infused with hegemonic and counterhegemonic power, and how policies are culturally constructed to favor public access and voice (Couldry 2010).

Cultural Interventions of a Guerrilla Television Network

FSTV is a politically progressive, satellite television and internet video network that launched in 1995 and is located in Denver, Colorado. FSTV, throughout its history, defines itself against corporate media and through using hacker, DIY, guerrilla, and grassroots practices to transmit its content and work the boundaries of policy impacting broadband and broadcast technologies. A study of FSTV provides scholars an opportunity to observe how explicit political participation in the public sphere is defined and performed against a backdrop of state-based policies, emergent technologies, and cultural affinities. More broadly, FSTV exhibits a wider truth of how cultural interventions, as fluid models, discourses, and practices, invigorate technological competencies and discursive arguments to mobilize forces capable of creating temporary openness in systems of overwhelming political and economic power.

FSTV is in the business of trafficking politically progressive, moving, visual media using a mix of public sphere and guardianship models. Its goal is to use new technologies and new policies on a limited and precious budget and even at a loss of visual fidelity to achieve as wide a distribution as possible. FSTV has used every new media distribution platform and every legal opening available to expand its audience. It has sent VHS tapes to seven leased networks with 24-7 programming. When consolidated media saw FSTV as an unaffordable externality, it sought to sever its public interest responsibility and cut its channel. FSTV stayed the eviction for a bit, and following its rejection on local cable it kept its brand and mission alive by sending

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VHS tapes to 50 public access stations for consistent and unscheduled programming. FSTV's minor successful interventions into realms of overwhelming economic, political, and technological media power is noteworthy. Faced with a deficiency of material technologies and physical competencies, it pioneered online video streaming 11 years before YouTube in 1994. It received carriage on two different corporate forms of satellite transmission, DISH in 2000 and DirecTV in 2010. It allows more than two hundred public stations to take its feed and broadcast it locally. FSTV exhibits on social media and persistent and multiplatform internet video. This legal and technological mastery shares the logic of the guerrilla television producer and the entrepreneur and shows the variability of the practices of media reformers.

Emergent networked communication technologies require the use of a scarce public resource: microwaves that carry communication and on which networked communication systems (and media empires) are built. This public resource of possible microwave communication is called spectrum but can be colloquially called the "airwaves." The federal government and its communication administrative board, the FCC, are tasked by the American citizens to regulate the use of the airwaves. The history of this process reveals an overwhelming tendency, from the 1934 Communications Act to today, to essentially give the public resource of media spectrum to commercial entities, not the public. This should come with little surprise. Neoliberal doctrine and its market fundamentalism require all public resources and services to be privatized, subject to capriciously regulated competition. This includes the microwave spectrum on which our communications are carried.

Representative governments are in charge of deciding how to allocate the scarce media resource. In capitalist societies the immediate profit potential for private corporations usually trumps the long-term public interest. For example, in the United States the for-profit industries of

radio, television, cable, satellite, and the internet are historically provided with the majority of

the telecommunications spectrum. They provide entertainment to audiences and profit to

shareholders, but have little responsibility to the public interest. Using adaptive interpretations of

policy and technological hackery, FSTV is a poacher in this hegemonic system. The prehistory

of FSTV is a story of the adaptive and immediate exploitation of disruptive technologies and

responsive public policies.

Yet in the present U.S. state that retains performances and aspirations of public-servicing

democracy, certain injunctions are initiated by the government to prohibit the totality of the

public resource from being given to media industries. Indeed, in those instances in which

governments attempt to reserve certain "interests" for a "public," the scarce resource of the

airwaves becomes a key battleground. How much of a nation's communicative capacities should

be reserved for the non-market public? How much of spectrum, if any, should be given to

corporations to make money through advertising? On one hand these open questions express the

concerns of the corporate liberals: to what degree should corporations do the work of the state?

On the other hand, in theory, neoliberals refuse state sponsorship of public services. In practice,

however, state functions provide to the private sector public resources. This neoliberal market

fundamentalism reduces social life to relationships afforded by consumption, not citizenship.

A vibrant and diverse democracy requires explicit participation in a vibrant public sphere

via networked communication technologies. The conception of an American public sphere that I

conceptualize does not exclude the communicative capacities of commercial television networks

because they are profit driven and usually non-interactive. My conception of a vibrant public

sphere includes commercial news along with the often underrepresented independent and citizen

participatory voices coming from public interest television and the internet. How does an

investigation of FSTV expose how the U.S. government values diverse public engagement and democracy itself? This history of FSTV exhibits how the United States puts into practice its valuation of the communication spectrum in the service of democracy.

FSTV exploits the access that can emerge for independent media when progressive public policy regulates disruptive, networked, communication technology. These policy-technology openings are mobile. Public policy can shift from progressive to neoliberal, and FSTV can lose its public interest carriage in the face of profit potential for the telecommunication sector. FSTV's perseverance and existence is the result of adaptability and the financial assets and techno-political insights of its founder and primary backer, John Schwartz. With these cultural interventionary tools, FSTV has been able to be a longstanding critical anomaly on cable, public, and satellite television.

FSTV adapted and recreated itself to Congressional acts of policy power. The Fairness Doctrine, a policy of the FCC, was introduced in 1949. Before it, the FCC required the holders of broadcast licenses to present controversial issues of public importance. President Reagan abolished the Fairness Doctrine in 1987. The Cable Communications Act of 1984 requires terrestrial cable networks to provide channels to non-profits for "leased access" to public service stations. In addition, the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992 and its November 1998 FCC guidelines require direct-broadcast satellites to provide 4 to 7 percent of their channels for public access. Throughout its relationship to public policy, FSTV has manipulated its self-definition as well as its operations in order to abide by or surmount policy power. Throughout the same time, the state has undergone its own public policy and media history, seesawing from providing some of the public spectrum to public broadcasters to

providing little, forcing these diverse broadcasters to compete in a vastly uncompetitive market for the scarce spectrum and audience.

FSTV's perseverance throughout this history can be conceptualized as the result of cultural interventions. FSTV is a community of cultural producers that observe technological and political transformations and reflexively modify its performance, approach, self-definition, and technological orientation. FSTV's cultural interventions are primarily formed around the challenge of adapting to the quickly modifying context of policy and technology. Throughout its decades of existence, the only consistency at the network has been its discursive or cultural identity in a vast progressive political community that includes producers, audiences, and activists in disparate movements connected through a resistance to neoliberalism. Cultural interventions are discursive, modular, and practical tools with which to adapt to policy and technology while increasing relevancy.

FSTV's political identity as progressive is expressed throughout its choices to produce live programming. It reported the lead-up to the 1990 Gulf War, the 1999 World Trade Organization protests, the Democratic National Convention in 2000, the 2003 Iraq War, and the 2011 Arab Spring and Occupy movements. FSTV's technological identity is also observable in the savvy ways it integrates with the world of policy and technology. For example, it exploited PEG regulations, the Fairness Doctrine, leased access, and program service opportunities. In each instance, the grounding force for FSTV's survival wasn't proprietary control of technology or the cultural capital of political access, but the adaptability of discursivity, modularity, and praxis.

This cultural interventionism has diachronic continuity. In the past, FSTV worked to gain carriage by exploiting U.S. policy regarding media corporations' public service responsibilities,

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creatively using emergent and cost-effective technologies, and by forging partnerships with other media and progressive entities. During the 2008 global financial crisis, FSTV hired new management, rebranded itself, reformed its use of internet video and social media, began anew with in-house and live production, and orchestrated new partnerships with progressive media groups. The period of my fieldwork with FSTV, 2010-2012, represented a culmination of these efforts as I observed a two-pronged campaign consisting of new studio news and live political event programming paired with efforts to maximize audience engagement through social media. In this new iteration of FSTV, its cultural identity as adaptive, independent, and progressive persevered.

I worked alongside FSTV as it produced live and packaged news from the NC MR, Netroots Nation, the NAACP national convention, and Take Back the American Dream; I observed the planning meetings for these efforts in the social media "war room" in Denver; and I participated in the production of the studio news program, *Newswire*. Part of the 2010-2012 revision of the network was rebranding it as interactive and the satellite capacities as a type of public property for progressive political partners. In this endeavor, the new programming and social media projects were designed recursively with the affordances of the internet and its viewing participants in mind. Through this process, FSTV drew from its historical practices of opposing corporate media and hacking existing and emergent technologies in the formation of political identities.

This chapter discusses FSTV's work with federal communications policy, new technologies, and partnerships as attempts to create and fuel the actions of political publics in the hopes of diversifying the American public sphere. As a cultural producer capable of transforming its systemic foundation, FSTV can be seen as constituting a "recursive public." Kelty (2008)

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describes a recursive public as "a public that is vitally concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives" (2008:3). The recursive public under investigation consists of the network of partner programs within which FSTV is a primary player. This study of the activist network as forms, norms, and technology aligns this research with the work of Juris (2008), who investigated similar phenomena in anti-corporate globalization protests.

As a non-federal, public-supported public utility for progressive activists, as well as a modifiable socio-technical platform, FSTV qualifies as a network-based recursive public. This ethnographic analysis of FSTV provides to anthropologists opportunities to observe the development of cultural interventions as recursive publics in the context of new technologies, cultural pressures, and policy negotiations in light of overwhelming neoliberal political and economic power. As social justice movements continue to grow and organize alternative democratic processes outside of and resistant to neoliberal theory, these instances of relatively long-term cultural survival will be increasingly valuable examples of the survival of the democratic social form and any post-capitalist future.

The Fairness Doctrine was an FCC policy that required broadcast licensees to provide debate and diversify their opinions. It was revoked, leaving independent, public, and citizen media with one less option for joining the dominant public sphere on television. Leased Access was written into the Cable Communications Act of 1984 and requires cable companies to provide distribution and discounted access to independent producers. Provisions of the PEG system require cable providers to give 4 to 7 percent of their channels to non-market content producers.

DBS set-asides apply the same logic to satellite providers. The goal in both PEG and DBS set-aside projects is to codify diversity into the hardware and legal operations of television industries. The Fairness Doctrine, DBS, and PEG are all examples of a corporate, liberal, social state empowering corporations to develop the conditions of the public sphere through providing a minimal amount of the media spectrum to diverse, independent, and critical content producers.

FSTV deployed two specific cultural interventions, Leased Access and Program Service, in order to distribute its content within the broadcasting system. Both of these cultural practices are more of a compromise than DBS, PEG, and the Fairness Doctrine, each of which considered and responded to the economic inequality of the independent content provider by giving the content networks discounts on their broadcast access. On the contrary, Leased Access and Program Services are pro-market solutions to the problem of decreasing opinion diversity. While economic costs are always present, the economic burden is held by the independent content provider in the Leased Access and Program Services. The Cable Communications Act of 1984 requires cable providers to open their distribution platforms to independent producers, often at a discount. Program Services is not a legal requirement by the FCC or Congress but rather a non-market response to reduced distribution opportunities. Program Service describes a way of simply distributing content, usually through "bicycling" it in material form from one PEG station to another. It describes a way content producers distribute content with the burden on distribution carried by the producer. In sections below I will describe how FSTV's cultural interventions used each of these policy opportunities to gain access and distribution.

Policy, technology, and cultural interventions intermingle in various forms in the years leading up to the formation of FSTV. Policy issues affecting FSTV's transmission and independence during this time include the Communications Act of 1934, the Fairness Doctrine of

1949, the Cable Communications Act of 1984, the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992, and the infamous Telecommunications Act of 1996. While policy evolved, so too did technology. The roots of FSTV begin in the early 1980s, and FSTV transitioned from "bicycling" tapes from station to station to the use of relatively inexpensive satellite technology. Culturally, FSTV was influenced by progressive community television projects such as the 90s Channel, Paper Tiger Television, and Deep Dish Television and projected itself culturally into the anti-corporate globalization, pro-democratic, and anti-war movements. In these practices, FSTV attempted to include its progressive content in the dominant public sphere.

In the following historical subsections I describe how FSTV worked within a number of models in the pursuit of greater access to the hegemonic public sphere. In these instances the public interest model, access model, and anti-monopoly model are each mobilized through discourse or practice with varying degrees of success.

Public, Education, and Governmental Channels

FSTV exists because of policies empowering and protecting non-market television. These policies must be understood through a discussion of PEG channels. These channels were first proposed in 1969. In the First Report and Order, the FCC attempted to empower local content providers to distribute news, information, and cultural programming on cable television systems. The FCC stated that "No CATV system having 3,500 or more subscribers was allowed to carry the signal of any television broadcast station unless the system also operated to a significant extent as a local outlet by cablecasting and has available facilities for local production and presentation of programs" (406 US 649). This rule was quickly overturned in 1971. The

replacement was the statement that cable operators have exclusive control over how they allocate their PEG channels.

In 1972, the FCC issued in its Third Report and Order a ruling that all major cable providers make available three access channels. In 1976, the rule was amended to force cable providers with more than 3,500 subscribers to provide four PEG channels, including equipment and studios. This provoked hundreds of PEG channels to develop across the United States. However, this creative era did not last, as the cable companies vigorously argued that this regulation hurt their business. In two Supreme Court cases involving the Midwest Video Corporation, the Supreme Court eventually rejected the PEG set-asides. In 1979, in *FCC v. Midwest Video Corp,* 440 U.S. 689, the Supreme Court decided that the FCC had overstepped its Congressionally approved power. Before this ruling, cable television providers were considered "common carriers"; they were given a charter for their business if in good faith they provided a public resource of providing all people access to carriage. In *FCC v. Midwest Video Corp,* the Supreme Court rejected the concept that cable providers should bear the burden of this public responsibility. On the contrary, the Supreme Court ruled that cable television providers should not be compelled toward public service because they were mere private persons under the First Amendment, and forcing these corporate citizens to provide public services is a violation of their right to free speech. The argument was that, as people, these media corporations have the right to free speech, and the PEG requirements forced these companies to say certain statements over other statements. The survival of PEG channels shifted away from the Court and back to Congress in 1984.

Small protections for PEG channels were provided by Section 611 of the Cable Communications Act of 1984, itself an amendment to the Communications Act of 1934. This

statute requests but *does not compel* cable operators to set aside channels for PEG use. Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater wrote the following into the 1984 Cable Communications Act: "A franchising authority ... may require as part of a cable operator's proposal for a franchise renewal ... that channel capacity be designated for public, educational, or governmental use." (47 USC § 531(a)) The franchise agreement is between the city and the cable providers and, because of the contracts clause of the U.S. Constitution, Congress cannot step in and force the municipality to enforce the PEG channel requirements. Thus it falls upon the city to enforce the PEG requirement, and because of the lucrative franchise fees from cable providers, municipalities opted out of enforcing PEG channels.

In its Guide, the FCC describes the 2012 PEG requirements:

Franchising authorities may also require cable operators to set aside channels for educational or governmental use on institutional networks, i.e., channels that are generally available only to institutions such as schools, libraries, or government offices.
    Franchising authorities may require cable operators to provide services, facilities, or equipment for the use of PEG channels. In accordance with applicable franchise agreements, local franchising authorities or cable operators may adopt on their own, non-content-based rules governing the use of PEG channels. (Public, Educational, and Governmental Access Channels 2011)

The FCC's statute regarding PEG channels is not particularly strong. Franchises "may" or may not elect to facilitate the development of PEG channels. The rulings were without teeth, leaving it up to the cable providers and the municipalities to provide airtime, equipment, and studio space to PEG channels. Nevertheless, some did, and the PEG program was one way that FSTV expanded its audience.

There are more than two hundred "Free Speech TV Affiliates" across the United States. FSTV is also carried by several university stations and on public television stations. These local PEG channels are on domestic cable systems such as Comcast; examples in California include Community Television of Santa Cruz, which is on Comcast channels 27/73 and 26/72 and takes

all of FSTV's content Monday through Friday from 12:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and from 11:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. Another example is Treasure Valley Community Television (TVCTV) that broadcasts on channel 11 in Boise, Idaho. From its website: "TVCTV's mandate is to give members of the community a voice. We provide the equipment and training; you make the television programs. Any individual or organization can register to become a community producer."

When TVCVT is not broadcasting forms of citizen video journalism, it broadcasts *Democracy Now!* from FSTV's DISH Network Channel 9415 feed Monday through Friday at 10:00 p.m. These PEG channels must use 8 hours of content but not more than 84 hours a week. The process of providing this content to PEG channels is called subdistributing. FSTV provides all of this content for free. FSTV warns the Affiliate that "should DISH Network revoke Free Speech TV's right to subdistribute programs or substantially increase the amount it charges Free Speech TV for such right, the Agreement will be terminated immediately."

FSTV's Campagna took over from Than Reeder the position of overseeing the Affiliate program; when I spoke with her she suggested that the PEG subdistribution strategy exists in a legal gray zone. Because of this legal ambiguity we were unable to discuss it in detail. However, it serves my argument nonetheless. The PEG subdistribution strategy reveals the legally ambiguous use of distribution technology (broadband and satellite) in concert with a legally ambiguous public policy regarding PEG channels. It is these types of cultural interventions that have the capacity to produce openings in hegemonically closed systems.

The access model was most evident in this moment within FSTV's history. The network used federal mandates for PEG channels to access the hegemonic public sphere on television.

Leased Life on Corporate Telecom (1989-1995)

Wu (2010) attributes the drive for empire as fundamental to the transition of closed to open communication systems. Nevertheless, this craving for power is often balanced by an enlightened pledge for public good. AT&T President Theodore Vail held his telecommunications monopoly as a patriotic cause (Wu 2011:56). He wanted or needed to convince himself or Congress that he would use the monopoly to create "a system as universal and as extensive to every one in every other place, a system as universal and extensive as the highway system" (in Wu 2011:9). This is the concept of "common carriage" that some services needed to be completed for the public and that private enterprises would do it and not discriminate and also be fair in their pricing. AT&T would be an enlightened monopoly for the common good. This "common carriage" is quintessential corporate liberalism—corporations doing the work of the state. FSTV's cultural interventions into such "enlightened monopolies" reveal what happens to public interest television networks in transition from social liberalism to neoliberalism.

FSTV and its progenitor, the 90s Channel, did not evolve because of the FCC's PEG suggestions to cable providers. FSTV co-founder John Schwartz and Laura Brenton co-founded *The 90s,* a landmark television series on public television, and the 90s Channel, a full-time progressive network airing independent productions such as Deep Dish TV and Paper Tiger TV on seven cable systems owned by the cable conglomerate TCI, which was the largest cable company in the country at the time. The content production practice was relatively participatory as it solicited content from any would-be documentary producer. As such, the content on the 90s Channel was progressive, exposing environmental decay; race, class, gender, and sexual inequality; and loss of personal freedom.

In order to prevent monopoly control over television content, the Cable Communications Act of 1984 (Public Law 98-549) required cable operators to make available several channels for

"leased access." The 90s Channel acquired TCI carriage not because of PEG statutes but because of this "leased access" mandate. The FCC set the maximum price for leased access content, and it is designed to be less expensive to increase diversity on television. PEG or public access television is either free or requires a minimal fee. FSTV was able to survive under this policy approach for six years in the form of the 90s Channel on TCI. The 90s Channel produced two hours of content every week, a promotional "bumper," and a PSA. It packaged this content on ¾ VHS tapes and sent those tapes to seven cities covered by TCI. These tapes would run on a loop all day until the next tapes arrived the following week. This project was intended to "utilize the power of television to give a voice to, and build alliances with, social justice organizations, independent media organization, and grassroots activists," according to FSTV co-founder Jon Stout (interviewed March 10, 2011).

In 1994, 90s Channel co-founder John Schwartz traveled to Los Angeles to participate in the LA Film Forum on a panel titled "Scratching the Belly of the Beast: Cutting-Edge Media in Los Angeles, 1922-94." The event was an unprecedented celebration of the rich tradition of alternative media in Southern California and included 27 evenings of screenings, tributes, and roundtable discussions over seven weeks. It was dedicated to the experimental and alternative media that had grown up in the shadow of Hollywood. Schwartz met the curator of the program, an experimental video artist and activist by the name of Jon Stout, and they shared opinions on video, art, and politics. After the conference, as Stout was driving Schwartz to LAX, Schwartz asked him to become the executive producer for the 90s Channel. Stout accepted the position in August of 1994 with the knowledge that the 90s Channel was going to be deleted on Halloween 1995 from TCI's offerings. TCI was also going through its own problems at the time. Despite the apparent blessing from Vice President Al Gore and others interested in building an information

infrastructure for the nation, TCI's $33 billion merger with Bell Atlantic, which would have created both consolidation and a more efficient information superhighway, was abandoned not because of anti-trust accusations but poor stock ratings and different corporate cultures.

In the neoliberal era, pledges such as those made by AT&T's Theodore Vail for an enlightened monopoly are unnecessary; the profit motive is enlightened enough to justify state support. This was the case with TCI CEO John Malone, who didn't use the language of public good when discussing the public interest; he saw no reason why, in a free market, he should have to subsidize public interest networks like FSTV. Malone spoke against private financing of public services: "Nobody wants to go out and invent something and invest hundreds of millions of dollars of risk capital in the public interest. One would be fired as an executive of a profit-making company if one took that stance" (Malone 1993).

The reason why Malone was able to extinguish his commitment to the 90s Channel and the public good was based on a conflict between the 90s Channel and TCI. Schwartz originally signed the leases with United Cable, a company TCI purchased. Immediately after TCI bought United Cable, TCI sent the 90s Channel a notice. Schwartz was able to work out the duration of the original contracts for an additional two years, "but the end was near" according to Stout (interviewed March 10, 2011). The loss of the seven full-time cable channels was no "small setback, I want to stress that we remain[ed] committed---if anything, more strongly---to the task of building a network for progressive television," concluded Schwartz in a press release (Schwartz 1995). The year the 90s Channel folded, Free Speech TV was born.

Schwartz's policy competencies allowed the 90s Channel to exploit the Leased Access provision to acquire distribution on TCI. It cobbled together a "bicycling" approach to bringing content to cable television networks in seven cities. When the closure of the moment of access

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occurred because of the neoliberal values of Malone, the 90s Channel mobilized its cultural interventionary assets to create openness in the next networked communication system: satellite. However, there was one important historical phase before FSTV's arrival on satellite. This was the program service phase.

The anti-monopoly model was mobilized by FSTV during this leased access phase as Schwartz and others developed a criticism of monopolistic practices of major telecommunications companies. Drawing from American ideological resistance to the anti-capitalistic practices of trust, FSTV developed its anti-monopoly model in league with public interest, diversity, and access models. This evidence reveals the hybridity of modeling in acts designed to access the hegemonic public sphere.

Program Service (1995-2000)

Program service describes a way content producers distribute content with the burden of distribution carried by the producer. When the 90s Channel/FSTV was kicked off TCI's seven stations, it borrowed a page from Deep Dish TV. FSTV produced four hours of content and shipped it to 50 PEG stations, who then shipped the tapes to a second and sometimes a third tier of stations. FSTV called this process its "program service." In this way, they could continue to broadcast, develop an audience, remain a brand, and stay in the industry. However, the total audience was smaller for FSTV during this period than in the days of the 90s Channel when Schwartz and Stout had seven dedicated channels. Under the early FSTV plan, it had more channels but less total airtime. The 50 public access channels would air the block of programming not on a schedule but mixed in with the heterogeneity of public access talent. Despite its difficulties and lack of consistency, this "program service" period was strategic for

FSTV. Because of Schwartz's longtime dedication to media reform, he was aware that the possibility that the guidelines for satellite set-asides might change to favor FSTV. The "program service" phase helped FSTV prove that it was capable of providing content for a satellite television provider needing to broadcast public interest television on its DBS set-asides.

The 1994 Cable Communications Act requires that DBS systems, DirecTV and DISH being the most prominent after the acquisition of Echostar, set aside 4 to 7 percent of their spectrum to PEG-type channels. In 1996, a federal circuit court reviewed this requirement, and the FCC enforced the provisions. A DBS like DirecTV with 175 channels was forced to offer 7 to 12 channels of public, education, or governmental programming. With the drop in viewership, total hours broadcast, and a consistent distribution system, the program service phase was difficult for FSTV, but it illustrates an important point regarding cultural interventions and neoliberalism. As TCI's Malone was able to ignore his public interest responsibilities in an era consistently favoring profit over purpose, FSTV was able to use its cultural interventions to adapt to new socio-technical conditions and avoid extinction.

To get a channel, the aspiring networks had to be willing to pay half the costs of a usual cable television license. This cost is anywhere between $10,371 a month on DISH, which offers around 40 non-market channels, to $6,350 on DirecTV, which offers 23 non-market channels. Some in the media justice movement think this economic burden ensures that the non-market networks have little extra funds to invest in programming. The networks "have no funding for staff or content, have marginal audiences, depending either on the organizations that back them or on the kindness of strangers who donate in response to on-air pleas, to let them limp from year to year" (Aufderheide and Clark 2010:7-8). This precarity certainly fits what I saw in my fieldwork with FSTV. It was always preparing for another stressful pledge drive right before the

next financial crisis was about to strike. During the program service, FSTV utilized public interest and access models to remain in business.

Acquiring Access on Digital Broadcast Satellite (2000)

In November 1998, the FCC released guidelines for the 1992 Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act (Public Law No: 102-385). The guidelines said that all direct-broadcast satellite companies must set aside 4 to 7 percent of their channels as public interest, educational, or non-commercial channels. The FCC gave the satellite companies discretion about how to do it. Schwartz had long lobbied Congress for these public interest set-asides, and when they came FSTV was ready. Stout told me that "we were waiting for this day to come" (interviewed March 10, 2011). Stout said that the interim period between the 90s Channel and the FCC's 1998 guidelines when it was "bicycling" tapes on its "pedestrian network" was difficult, but it was necessary to continue to broadcast. "It was important to develop a library, identity, infrastructure, and audience, so when the time came to apply for a satellite channel we existed as a network, not just in paper" (interviewed March 20, 2011).

Despite the guidelines that apparently opened a space for independent television, another process was constricting this marketplace for the broadcasting of ideas: consolidation. In 1998, when Schwartz began lobbying the DBS systems to allow FSTV a channel, there were nine different satellites. By December 1999, there were only the two we have today, DISH and DirecTV, cutting the possible satellite set-asides considerably. Despite the consolidation, DISH provided three channels for educational programming in January of 2000. Two were evangelical, and one was FSTV. Schwartz and Stout were elated and also stunned, "We went from being a programming service, a syndicator of content, to a full-blown national television network. We

went from coming up with four hours a week to send out to the country to 24-7 365 to fill," said

Stout (interviewed March 10, 2011). Clearly, the access and diversity models were useful tools

for gaining carriage on these satellite systems.

Progressive Satellite Television (1999-2000)

With its political mission and now a satellite network, global politics, namely the anti-

corporate globalization movement, the 2000 U.S. political party conventions, and the Iraq War,

in addition to the rapid price drop in video technology, made for an exciting environment for the

production of nonfiction television content. FSTV's Mamoun said,

> In 1999, an unprecedented convergence of anti-globalization activists, video collectives,
> print journalists, and photographers at the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle
> launched the first Independent Media Center. The IMC became the center for journalists
> and videographers, who in collaboration with Paper Tiger TV, Deep Dish TV, Whispered
> Media, and Free Speech TV, produced daily reports on the street protests and police
> repression surrounding the WTO meeting. FSTV's website hosted video streams that
> were webcast around the world. (Mamoun 2003)

FSTV had its first website in 1994 and was an early pioneer of video streaming.

After 9/11, FSTV, knowing President Bush's likely response, initiated a program, *World

in Crisis*, directed by Eric Galatas, a veteran from Indymedia Seattle and FSTV's WTO

coverage. According to Stout, FSTV would take a crew of four to five people to Cheyenne,

Wyoming, where its satellite uplink was located. They would camp out overnight and in the

morning set up a makeshift studio with "really flimsy movie lights on a clamp, aluminum foil,

duct tape, and old TV monitors spray painted black and stacked up" as the studio backdrop, Stout

said (interviewed March 10, 2011). From here they would go live from a video camera wired

straight to the satellite and report on the events leading up to war in March 2003. This makeshift

studio, from which progressive content was created, was within the budget and aesthetic of guerrilla television.

FSTV continued to broadcast live political reporting and commentary partnering with *Democracy Now!,* a program hosted by Amy Goodman, Indymedia (IMC), and Deep Dish TV to cover the Democratic National convention in 2000 in Philadelphia. This was "the first ever live satellite-distributed protest coverage under control of a grassroots-based, independent media coalition" (Alston 2002). Schwartz is independently wealthy and "kicked in another $70,000 to fund the daily satellite uplink, which consisted of the satellite time and a van equipped to communicate with the satellite" (Alston 2002). *Democracy Now!* and *Crashing the Party* with host Laura Flanders were broadcast live from the conventions. This was the impetus for transforming *Democracy Now!* into not just a radio but also a television program. After 9/11, there was even more motivation to keep *Democracy Now!* coming to FSTV viewers.

Democracy Now! has been airing on FSTV ever since. The show uses a groundbreaking method of distribution:

> Each day as the show is aired live (9 to 10 a.m. EST on Manhattan Neighborhood Network), the show is simultaneously encoded into an MPEG2 file. Immediately following the show, engineer Chase Pierson FTPs the file to a server in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The transfer takes about an hour and a half over a T1 line. Once received at Cheyenne, the file is decoded by Free Speech TV's equipment to an NTSC composite signal and bundled with FSTV's DBS programming package. A scheduler in Boulder, FSTV's home base, enters programming information into the electronic play list. Noon finds the show being nationally broadcast on the DISH Network, Channel 9415. (Alston 2002)

As far as Pierson knows, no other access show is distributed nationally on this scale, let alone on a daily basis. It hadn't been possible before. "We've piecemealed some existing technologies into a new application," he explained (Alston 2002). Stout further elaborated how FSTV delivered content to the DISH satellite. It rented an office space in downtown Cheyenne

where there were two consumer grade video decks and an encoding system plus two T1 internet lines that ran from the office to DISH's head-in on the other side of town. Stout says, "It was very low tech, and you would walk into this room and it was an empty room with three pieces of equipment in it; this was our broadcast head-in. … There was no precedent for this, but our tech people researched what was the cheapest way to accomplish it. It flew in the face of TV, but it worked" (interviewed March 10, 2011). Eventually, FSTV moved its entire broadcast system to @Contact, via QVidium. With this technology it streams in *The Thom Hartmann Show* and *Democracy Now!* With access on a satellite provider, FSTV was able to capitalize on its diversity model by bringing progressive content to television audiences.

From the first experiments in citizen video journalism at the turn of the century to bleeding-edge and cut-rate uses of broadcast technologies, FSTV mobilizes its cultural interventions to achieve its goal of diversifying the American public sphere and critiquing the impacts of war profiteering while remaining independent. This practice of satellite broadcasting, live reporting, and PEG subdistributing worked for nearly a decade before a global financial crisis and the disruptive affordances of the internet made another wholesale change necessary. The Global Financial Crisis and the Internet (2009-2011)

Thus far the majority of this dissertation has been spent engaging with FSTV's historical record. However, as the historical phases grow increasingly close to the present, this emphasis on history gives way to ethnography. This section begins to utilize the ethnographic observations and interviews collected throughout the course of my fieldwork.

In December 2006, Schwartz said he was going to step down as president. FSTV had two rounds of interviews for a general manager to replace him. In the second round in May 2008,

Dennis Moynihan, previously the outreach director for *Democracy Now!*, was hired. Moynihan was interviewed on-air by his boss, Amy Goodman, on his last day at *Democracy Now!* There he spoke about the role the conversion from analog to digital would have on FSTV:

> The digital transition in television is going to create new channels, so where one channel exists now, there will be up to four. And this is particularly important with public television channels. … The public television stations are going to be looking for content for these channels, and the currency of that transition really is the full-time channel. If you have a full-time channel, you can present it to the stations. And so, at Free Speech TV I'll be doing that, hoping to expand the audience and the reach of important programs like *Democracy Now!* (*Democracy Now!* 2008)

Like FSTV's imperative to continue its brand after TCI's ejection and into the program service phase, the expansion that came along with conversion to digital prioritized public interest networks with a pattern of 24-7 programming. Moynihan saw the station proliferation that was to accompany digital conversion as an excellent opportunity for public interest networks and FSTV, a long-running 24-7 network, as ideally poised to expand.

Despite these insights, Moynihan's hire didn't work for either party. He left in December 2008. Then FSTV was hit hard by the economic recession in 2008. The yield from its pledge drive in 2009 fell by 30 to 40 percent from the year before. Foundation money dried up. In late 2010, it remained very difficult to raise money from the philanthropic community. The recession dragged on and the recovery was very slow, with both having an impact on FSTV's operational funds, Rojas told me (interviewed November 8, 2010). Despite this, FSTV conducted a new search for a general manager. In the process it received two applications from people of Caribbean descent, Don Rojas and Giselle Diaz Campagna. Rojas got the job of general manager and FSTV offered the position of marketing and development director to Campagna. Despite the economic difficulties, beginning in February 2009 they organized a rebranding and revisioning of FSTV as a multimedia company. FSTV relies mostly on viewer pledge support, doing

between two and three pledge drives a year. It gets no money from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which funds the PBS. Thus FSTV receives no form of taxpayer funding. It receives 70 to 75 percent of its funding from the public, compared to NPR, which receives 55 percent from pledge drives.

Before Campagna and Rojas were hired, FSTV's social media projects were minor. Campagna set up the first Facebook page for FSTV in mid-2009. Since that time, according to Campagna, the internet has forced FSTV to modify its self-definitions. She says, "The use of social media, really embracing what it is to be out there in the e-world, has changed the way we view ourselves as an organization. It is certainly the way our board wants us to embrace this because we see it as obviously a way of surviving, and moving forward. It is a survival thing for us" (interviewed February 3, 2011). The participatory capacities of social media and the internet correlate with FSTV's economic imperative but also with its mission. Social media has provided FSTV with an opportunity to return to its core mission of activism. As Campagna says, "We really want to change the way people view us. We really are a movement. We are in this because we are activists. So the push was, how do we take this into real time?" (interviewed February 3, 2011). The immediate interactivity provided by the internet is seen by Campagna and the FSTV board as a way to embody its mission to galvanize social justice and engage the hegemonic public sphere while remaining economically viable.

As the network was "literally brinking on bankruptcy," it hired Campagna as marketing and development director and asked "'You are hired, we are about to close the doors; what can you do?'" (interviewed February 3, 2011). FSTV decided to spend much of the remaining cash flow on a whole rebranding strategy. The new look was not only cosmetic but was inclusive of a renewed sense of partnership with allied colleagues and with the affordances of the internet in

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mind. The intent was to be able to bring this new look and direction to meetings with DirecTV and get a new set-aside satellite channel. "We had to get suits; we are a bunch of hippies and punks, so going into that boardroom was hysterical," Campagna related to me (interviewed February 3, 2011). With the vastly increased audience of DirecTV, FSTV hoped that its pledge drives would be more successful and allow the network the resources to rebuild. It was a risky endeavor, but it paid off on the last day of 2010 when General Manager Don Rojas got a call from DirecTV informing him that the efforts and wardrobe change paid off and FSTV was now in millions more homes and with excellent placement on the dial, amidst the other news channels such as MSNBC and CSPAN. DirecTV extended its public interest channels by three; two were Christian networks from the South and FSTV was the third. It was in light of this growth and techno-optimism that my fieldwork began with FSTV.

Fundraising and carriage expansion are linked together as two important structural endeavors at public interest television news networks. As the network acquires more carriage it can address a larger audience during pledge drives, and with a larger audience it has a more powerful argument for its impact when pitching to major funders. With more money it can reinvest in branding, marketing, programming, diversity outreach, and the other issues that make the news network more attractive to new carriage markets as a public interest network. This fundraising and repitching cycle consumed much of the board's time and energy. The recent success at acquiring the DirecTV channel inspired more efforts towards carriage expansion. During my fieldwork with FSTV at the NAACP meeting in Los Angeles, Rojas had to leave during the second day to take a meeting with DirecTV, and he was consistently interested in getting meetings at Comcast. In each of these projects FSTV's cultural interventions, consisting of technological competencies, policy knowledge, and traditional cultural markers of diversity

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such as class, ethnicity, and gender, were mobilized in acts persuading openness where there was closure on hegemonic networked communication systems. And yet, from Moynihan's comments to the remarks and efforts of Rojas and Campagna, FSTV expressed a model that runs against the technology model, which advocates for the position that technology is not enough to improve media democracy. Its techno-utopian discourse that new technologies, from high-definition television to social media, might help solve its problems of accessing the hegemonic public sphere, is the exact position McChesney and others warn against in what I called the technology model in chapter 2.

US Social Forum (2010)

FSTV's first attempt at "marrying," as Campagna calls the process (interviewed February 3, 2011), the offline grassroots activism with social media was the 2010 US Social Forum (USSF). That operation had both success and failure and prepared FSTV for the next operation, the One Nation March, which established a method that it has since repeated throughout my fieldwork.

One of the first initiatives of Rojas-Campagna, internet-enabled FSTV was to produce live coverage of the USSF in Detroit from June 22 through 26, 2010. The USSF, according to its website, "is the next most important step in our struggle to build a powerful multi-racial, multi-sectoral, inter-generational, diverse, inclusive, internationalist movement that transforms this country and changes history" (http://www.ussf2010.org/). A day after FSTV acquired carriage on DirecTV, Rojas was interviewed by Laura Flanders on FSTV's *GritTV* at USSF. Rojas said, "What we are trying to do at Free Speech TV is to make available to independent media producers around the country a television platform on two satellite networks." FSTV as an open

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"platform" for activists is a theme throughout this most recent iteration of the network. Campagna is adamant about this point, saying a number of times during my fieldwork that she is attempting, in effect, to give away the network to activists. She challenges large activist organizations to consider "what they would do with a television network" (interviewed February 3, 2011). The new cultural approach at FSTV brought in by Rojas and Campagna was one open to change and collaboration across platforms.

In the interview with Flanders, Rojas discusses that in decades of media work he's never seen such cross-platform synergy among print, television, and internet partners before affirming that "The internet is going to be the common platform for the delivery of all media: voice, audio, video. On top of that you have social media, which allows viewers to participate with producers of media and allows feedback in real time." He chuckles, "It's a brave new media world we are on the cusp of, and this is really an experiment in collaborating to fully exploit this new world of media." Despite this "brave new media world," satellite television stations remain a paramount distribution source, as Flanders, before going to a clip of Danny Glover speaking with *Yes!* magazine, clearly states as she concludes the package, "And, folks, did you hear Don? We are now newly as of this week on DirecTV channel 348, the second satellite service to be hit by FSTV." For FSTV, the internet and the television station are complements. The USSF was the first time FSTV streamed live on both the internet and satellite. However, as Rojas and Flanders make clear, for the time being the cable television network, because of its proven audience, is a major focus. Rojas explained to me that "While we look to expanding [cable] carriage, we also recognize convergent media. So we are spending energy to produce web-based programming; we can't rely upon cable, Our future is web TV." Also, Rojas wants FSTV "to become a media station, cable, satellite, web, social media, mobile, everything" (interviewed November 8, 2010).

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It was these challenges and the opportunity provided by the internet that galvanized the cultural interventions I observed during my fieldwork.

FSTV's social media projects began in 2009 and were focused around live television experiments and how to best magnify the social impact of that content across a number of different platforms and including various partners. Each live event required the marriage of online and offline practices and cultural spheres. In FSTV's multimedia campaigns attached to its live programs, Campagna would work with a team of interns or volunteers. Before the event they would call grassroots organizations. It required "a lot of canvassing, good old-fashioned work" (interviewed February 3, 2011), Campagna states to contrast this with virtualized slacktivism that seems to dominate some online activism.

The successful operation that FSTV developed for the One Nation March in October 2010 proceeded as follows. It would produce live coverage, which it would stream online and broadcast on television. Short clips would be produced from the live video stream. Campagna would give interns and volunteers editorial comments on each video clip. Beforehand they would spend hours online and identify more than six hundred social justice blogs, from large blogs such as Crooks and Liars and the DailyKos, to much smaller, personal blogs. Campagna would then contact these partners at 10 minutes before 10:00 a.m. asking each if they would embed FSTV's live feed on their blog. In this way, FSTV's video player would be seen on the webpages of such magazines and organizations as *Mother Jones,* the *Nation*, and the NAACP. If they would, Campagna would ask the partner to send her the link so she could verify it. She and the interns would then use social media to "buzz" throughout the days of the live coverage. "My interns would start buzzing online, on Facebook and Twitter, not as employees but as people," she said (interviewed February 3, 2011). "And we would send them [the social media audience] not to

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FSTV['s website] but to their group, because it is trust in their community that is important. But I gain the eyeballs because that is our player," (interviewed February 3, 2011). FSTV's goal is to spread the political message of the live video coverage online and quantify its breadth through the plug-in that counts the views, downloads, or impressions on the video player. It does this regardless of where the video player exists. This technological affordance and the quantifiability of internet video encourages "shareability," as Campagna calls the social, economic, technological, and political practice (interviewed February 3, 2011). I say economic because it is the number of views on these video players spread across the internet that becomes a significant talking point for board meetings and pitch sessions to possible funders. It is also technological in that the quantity of viewers contributes to arguments in favor of the television network focusing more resources on the internet as opposed to television, which does not produce quantitative results. As she said, "But what ended up was something amazing, eight people full time and staff here, and we do it all, from production on, and we were able to beat our satellite viewer numbers by thousands. And clearly that is a new audience, that is a different demographic because we know TV and web audiences are different. So definitely a win, baffling to us that we could do this" (interviewed February 3, 2011). What I observed at four additional conferences was the repurposing of this method and the enactment of these economic, technological, political, and social values. In subsequent chapters, I will reveal the details of how these cultural interventions—increasingly performed in the realm of the internet—are mobilized to create openness and critiques of neoliberalism.

Following this discussion of internet-television convergence, in chapter 4 I give a detailed description of one mission-driven cable, satellite, and internet television news network, Current, as the workers attempt to negotiate how best to integrate the affordances of the internet

with television in the age of neoliberal pressures, with the hope of diversifying the American public sphere and improving the nation's democracy.

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 illustrates key instances of FSTV mobilizing models and engineering cultural interventions into the hegemonic public sphere. Chapter 3 investigated how FSTV mobilized its cultural assets to add voice to the hegemonic public sphere through the public, education, and governmental channels, leased access, program service, satellite system, and the internet. In this process it used the access, public interest, diversity, and anti-monopoly media reform models. FSTV had to migrate its content and diversify its approach to gaining access. First it was on seven cable networks (1989-1995) before being ejected by an anti–public interest telecommunication conglomerate CEO, John Malone. FSTV's liminal stage was the five years (1995-2000) in which it was a program service, packaging content that it bicycled to any public interest channel that would air it. Finally, DISH, under pressure to provide for public access, gave FSTV a deal on an out-of-the-way channel, and the network was on its first satellite. A decade later it was on its second DBS, DirecTV. FSTV had appropriated internet technology to distribute its video as soon as it was available in the mid-90s. When Web 2.0 technologies made social media promotion possible, FSTV was prepared to implement a synergistic approach to media distribution. Throughout this process, it promoted progressive content such as *Gulf War Crisis*, *Democracy Now!,* and live programming from the 2010 USSF. FSTV has achieved this with no federal funding and only the most limited federal support, which pressured networked communication system owners to set aside some channels for public access.

This lack of federal funding and support exposes the logic of neoliberalism at work on negating public media. A government whose functionality is adjudicated by market logic cannot long support public media structurally or financially. In this neoliberal calculation, public media needs to cease its publicness and become private media and thereby test itself in the competitive marketplace. FSTV, as a low-budget, viewer- and foundation-supported television news network, certainly competes for the attention of audiences that translate into donated revenue just as audiences translate into commercial revenue for commercial broadcasters. The lack of parity is that FSTV isn't provided the same competitive advantage given to conglomerated media corporations more embedded within the neoliberal regime via the advocacy of Congressional lobbyists. Thus, despite the rhetoric of "independence," FSTV is situated within competitive and market practices. Its cultural interventions to secure access for voice in the hegemonic public sphere are circumscribed by the very neoliberal practices it textually and aesthetically resists through programs such as *Democracy Now!*

CHAPTER 4: THE MORAL TECHNICAL IMAGINARIES OF CURRENT

While the previous chapter on FSTV focused on the techno-practices of policy, this chapter on Current will focus on the moral discourses of technology, particularly what is termed the "moral-technical imaginary" (Kelty 2008). This moral discourse on technology tends towards techno-utopianism and is therefore a reversal of the technology model that states that media reformation should not rely on media technology to solve the democracy deficit. Current is a for-profit media company grounded in two forms of media reform throughout its history. Early citizen video journalism projects VC2 and Current.com followed the public sphere model of democratizing community media production, access, and distribution. The second project, referred to below as the Hollywood phase and consisting of professional punditry, follows the guardianship model of professional news production critical of neoliberalism.

Current's technological practices to achieve media reform are distinct but related to those of FSTV. Throughout Current's history, it experimented with various ways of discursively conceptualizing and practically implementing a convergence of television and the internet in such a way as to be profitable and achieve the mission of democratizing media production and diversifying the hegemonic public sphere. In the most recent iteration, FSTV too is focused on how to mobilize internet-television convergence to produce the conditions for a diversified yet hegemonic public sphere. Both networks conceptualize their use of technology in terms of social impact. Current did not require the same technological interventions into the emergent broadcast technologies of satellite and cable as FSTV. It was not directly involved with policy, as was FSTV with the satellite set-asides. As a for-profit television network it had the capital to finance its broadcasting system. Current was not a recipient of policy-based public interest set-asides; its

history is much more immediate. Current came to market at a time when the network communication technology that was disrupting the established system wasn't cable or satellite, but the internet. Despite the differences in technological platforms, similarities in patterns of cultural intervention unify these two networks.

The technologies and policies have changed, as have their distinct historical contexts, but what unifies these two case studies beyond progressive values and the technology of television are the ways they mobilize their cultural assets—models and discourses—to attempt to achieve mastery over disruptive technologies in the hopes of succeeding in the inclusion of diverse voices in the hegemonic public sphere. Throughout, Current attempts to mobilize its cultural interventions to achieve technological competency and profit-production and accomplish its mission of inclusion by democratizing media production and broadcasting progressive voices.

The last ten years have seen the "convergence" of television and the internet and the rise of a new kind of cultural industry employing a mix of skilled technologists and creative artists. The language of convergence helps make sense of their technical labor, but it also reflects moralities about how the world *should* be. In this chapter, I analyze narratives and practices of internet and television convergence as both technical terms and codes for moralities. Current was designed to be a for-profit corporation and energize citizen involvement within the American public sphere. Current imagined the convergence of the internet and television as a technological inevitability that it wanted to harness as a model of and for discourse within democracy.

Based on four years of participant observation as a television producer and more than thirty interviews with executives, producers, designers, marketers, and engineers, this chapter documents Current employees' "moral technical imaginaries" (Kelty 2008:140)—the way they imagine and discuss technical work and reveal moral codes. I focus on how information workers

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imagine the internet or television as different moral systems in the hopes of achieving their goals

of improving democracy through access to the hegemonic public sphere while securing a profit. I

focus here on the tensions concerning how Current employees, both the creative executives

(television producers and journalists) and the technologists and managers (internet engineers and

executives) discuss and seek to implement the technical imaginaries of convergence. Part of that

tension is the moral difficulty of generating a citizen-driven video movement while increasing

profitability. The global financial crisis beginning in 2008 impacts the development and

enactment of public sphere projects and invites the development of securely profitable

endeavors.

Public Spheres and Moral Technical Imaginaries

Television news executive Diana Christensen (played by Faye Dunaway) rants in her

office above Manhattan. She wants to turn her news division into a moneymaker. She yells at

one of her underlings about what type of scintillating programming she needs to see recast as

"news:" "I want counterculture, I want anti-establishment!" In the opening pages of *The Assault*

on Reason (2007), Al Gore retells the story of Paddy Chayefsky's *Network* to show how the

television "journalism profession morphed into the news business, which became the media

industry and [is] now owned almost completely by conglomerates" (2007:18). Gore then

immediately relates *Network* to Habermas's theory of the "refeudalization of the public sphere" [4]

(quoted in Gore 2007:18). According to Gore, Chayefsky and Habermas both critique an

entertainment-driven television news industry that is ruled by elites and inaccessible to citizen

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[4] Gore's conception of the public sphere is an ideal type. Like Habermas, Gore idealizes the bourgeois
public sphere. They both assume it to be rational, universal, inclusive, discursive, and capable of
productively influencing democracy. In fact, there are numerous counterpublic spheres that develop around
class, gender, and ethnicity.

producers. Gore later cites Habermas's idea of how the "structure of public forum" has closed and how this closure threatens democracy (2007:26). Based on these ideas, Gore imagined Current would use the open and accessible internet to "democratize" citizen media production in the large "public forum" of television to defeudalize the "public sphere," thereby improving the deliberative discourse of individuals within American democracy.

This ambitious goal of reinvigorating the American public sphere was explored intellectually and experienced practically by Current's workers, who attempted to use the technological affordances of the internet and television to enact Gore's vision. In the process, they created (and I recorded) documents of experiments and narratives about how best to use the internet or television to produce an inclusive, hegemonic public sphere. If culture consists of the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, then Current can be understood through the way it imagines itself as a corporation with a social mission to use both the internet and television to improve the discourse within the hegemonic public sphere. However, most informants don't speak directly about the public sphere or quote Habermas. They instead speak about technologies, aesthetic decisions, and legal issues. For example, "The defining story of Current TV," according to Online Marketing Manager Joe Brilliant is

> the constant cultural and business conflict between the goals and objectives of the TV and filmic based components and the web-centric elements of Current; how those two things were both at the table; how they were reconciled and how they were not in some cases; the challenge of being a new media company where you are trying to draw from both pools and satisfy different distribution platforms and customers and consumers. (interviewed May 26, 2010)

Information work is both moral and technical. Information workers bring their own subjective morality to the corporation. This is augmented by the corporate imperative: in this case, the desire to improve the public sphere through media democratization. Despite the ethnographers' best methods, these subjects rarely speak directly to these moralities. Instead, they speak to the

technical, aesthetic, or business elements of their work. These narratives are explicitly technical and implicitly moral and form the subjective epistemology of information work. In fact, one could argue that all technical talk is always moralistic. Brilliant's narrative is about convergence, but it is also about the challenges of creating inclusion in the hegemonic public sphere with existing technologies, communications policies, market constraints, and talent pools.

These models of convergence form what Kelty calls "moral technical imaginaries" (2008:170). Speaking about open software and the internet as both technical and moral systems, Kelty says, "By moral, I mean imaginations of the proper order of collective political and commercial action; referring to much more than simply how individuals should act, moral signifies a vision of how economy and society should be ordered collectively" (2008:140). In this chapter I distinguish "technical" from "moral." Technical talk is that which is spoken by an informant. Moralities can be but are not often consciously apparent without speculation. Both are persistently interwoven and collectively constitute imaginaries—the intellectual work performed just prior to and during practice.

An example of moral technical imaginaries may come from internet hacker culture. Despite often being demonized as criminals, hackers consistently express moral technical imaginaries. On one level, hackers' moral technical imaginaries begin with technical discussions of computers, networks, protocols, and their distaste of proprietary software. On another level, hackers' talk reveals moralities regarding free speech, meritocracy, privacy, and individualism. Hacker "morality" (Coleman and Golub 2008:267) is experienced in the context of networked participation and resistance and thus offers a revision of selfhood, property, privacy, labor, and creativity for the digital age (2008:267). Talk about convergence reflects personal and corporate moralities—the way the world ought to be socially and politically. For Current, the American

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hegemonic public sphere ought to include diverse voices. In attempts to accomplish this, Current went through five iterations: Current's Prehistory (1991-2005), Viewer-Created Content (2005-2007), Current.com (2007-2009), Nonfiction Television Phase (2009-2011), Hollywood (2009-today).

With a sound engineering metaphor, developer Dan Linder describes Current's history, "We are in this sine wave thing. Before we let ourselves dip way up high or way down low again, let's get a band pass filter in there and keep it bouncing around in the middle, rather than today we are a web company, tomorrow a TV company, tomorrow a web company" (interviewed October 11, 2010). This technical imaginary of fluctuating allegiances to techno-social systems also reflects the fluctuations of the moral commitment to inclusion within the hegemonic public sphere. Others are less delicate than Linder. "Current is a neurotic company. I define neurosis as actions you return to time and time again even though they don't work," said Current producer Jimmy Goldblum (interview February 6, 2011). This neurosis is a problem Current workers tried to solve through imagining the proper use of broadband and broadcast technologies as well as its modulating affinity to enriching the hegemonic public sphere.

Foundational Ideology: Al Gore & the Information/Ecology Model

A good example of moral technical imaginary as cultural intervention comes from the television news network's chairman and co-founder, Al Gore, who wrote a book about media reform while he was conceptualizing and founding Current. Current debuted in March 2005, and *The Assault on Reason* was published in 2007. It can reasonably be assumed that after the debacle of the 2000 U.S. Presidential election and the U.S. Supreme Court ruling for Bush in *Gore v. Bush,* Gore focused his energy on addressing the problems he saw that resulted in this

anti-democratic election and an increasingly passive and dupable American public. The issue he addressed was media reform. *The Assault on Reason* (2007) was the discursive template, and Current was its practical implementation.

Media reform, journalism, networked communication systems, and television broadcasting were not new for Gore, who wrote his undergraduate "senior thesis on the impact of television on the balance of power among the three branches of government" (Gore 2007:9). He worked as a journalist during the Viet Nam war. As a Tennessee Senator, Gore was instrumental in the development of the internet. Robert Kahn and Vint Cerf, who did indeed invent the routing structure of the internet, wrote: "Al Gore was the first political leader to recognize the importance of the Internet and to promote and support its development" (Kahn and Cerf 2000:1 of printout). The High Performance Computing and Communications Act, or the "Gore Bill" created the National Research and Education Network that facilitated the diffusion of the network outside computer science. Kahn and Cerf (2000) state that Gore "provided much-needed political support for the speedy privatization of the internet when the time arrived for it to become a commercially-driven operation" (Kahn and Cerf 2000:2). Gore was the key politician who created the internet by helping it become a tool of education, science, and business. From his bachelor thesis, to his work as a journalist, to his labor as a legislator and his projects as a media entrepreneur, Gore has implemented a network model, a dialogue about how relationships are mediated by systems. This is most evident in his work forming Current. Gore believes this model was necessary to create a "dialogue of democracy" (Gore 2007:224). Gore's systems or network model and its relationship to democracy come together in the following statement:

> I believe that the viability of democracy depends upon the openness, reliability, appropriateness, responsiveness, and two-way nature of the communication environment. After all, democracy depends upon the regular sending and receiving of signals—not

only between the people and those who aspire to be their elected representatives but also among the people themselves. (Gore 2007:248)

Gore's conceptualization of the normative or natural state of networked interactivity can be understood not only in his explicitly media reformist work but also in his books on ecology. Gore's published works put forth two theories of networks or systems, one ecological, another informational. A theory of how humans are interconnected—via ecological principles or information networks—motivates the environmentalism and information activism of Gore. Gore's unified network theory emerges from an American pragmatism regarding the implementation of technology to better democracy, a Christian sense of service to the underprivileged and suffering, and a metaphysical ontology about the earthly Gaian network and its teleological progress toward utopia or dystopia.

In Gore's ecological books such as *Earth in the Balance* (1992), *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), and *Our Choice* (2009), he provides an explicit articulation of the Gaian theory within which all species are networked together on underlying and co-evolving systems of mutual co-dependence. A similar theory is put forth on information infrastructure in *Scientific American* (Gore 1991). The same year the "Gore Bill" was passed, Gore wrote an academic article, "Infrastructure for the global village: computers, networks and public policy" (1991), in which he argues in McLuhan fashion for a global community connected by networks. In both his ecological and informational writing, Gore deals in models. A "network" is a word and a metaphor for the patterned interpenetration of beings and objects. These models are discursive cultural interventions—ideal ways of saying how the world could or should be.

For example, in *Earth in the Balance* (1992) Gore writes about early 20th-century Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's "faith in the future" when technological evolution is guided by spiritual values. Teilhard establishes the prophetic fundaments for this ecology/information

network. His notion of the Omega Point is that technology and consciousness are merging and evolving toward a critical moment. This idea has been taken up by radical futurists, like Current host Jason Silva, as the notion of the singularity that humans and technologies are evolving to a point of unity. Teilhard's concept of the noosphere—that human consciousness is transforming the biosphere—is a necessary component of the ecology/information model.

Both the Omega Point and the noosphere influence a group of scholars and politicians that include Gore. Robert Wright in his influential book *Nonzero* (2001) cites Teilhard's noosphere concept as a major influence for his thinking on the progressively complex and interdependent world we live in. In accepting the Dayton Peace Prize in 2001, Bill Clinton spoke about how Wright influenced his thinking on the engineering of peace in which a zero-sum game results in both people winning because they are interdependent (Clinton 2001). This is the positive logic of the sustainable ecology theory and the ideals of a decentralized, open, and free internet that was prophesized by Teilhard and warned about and implemented by Gore in articles, books, policy, business, and Current.

I am choosing to call Gore's model of system networks and interdependency the ecology/information model. This model has utility across a range of practices. It can lead to globalization and its necessary component, privatization: negatively impacting indigenous and natural environments. The ecology/information model can lead to pro-conservation and pro-democracy projects as well. The versatility of the ecology/information model reminds us of liberalism and its conflicting social and economic manifestations. Gore is a quintessential liberal subject, politically left-leaning, economically pro-business, and fanatical about networked communication technologies. Current embodies the ecology/information model.

Taken together, the epistemological information theory and the ontological ecological theory are myths about the Network of Networks—be it a decentralized digital network or a balanced ecology. The ecology/information model dominates today to engineer or naturalize the human-technological evolution, and as counterculture communications historians Fred Turner (2006) and Eric Davis (1999)—who calls Gore a "New Age policy wonk"—sometimes wildly argue, is always simultaneously shot through with both a pragmatic epistemology and a metaphysical ontology. Numerous computer geeks have revealed the mystical undertones and psychedelic inspirations for their creations, but few public figures of Gore's stature have published and implemented their distinct metaphors for global sysop.

The ecology/information model consists of Gore's ecological thinking, information policy, and concept of television-internet democracy—it is ecological without being brutally Darwinian, technologically augmented without being technocratic, and invokes guardianship progressivism without social engineering. The dominant qualities in the ecology/information model are interdependence and a zero-sum game that can be boiled down to lateral interdependency, with communication being fundamental.

The ecology/information model of interdependency and communication is not natural but requires sustained and diligent upkeep. Kahn and Cerf's internet protocols and routers need to be vigilantly kept open and the nodes fiercely defended as spaces inclusive of all players— regardless of class or species. Thus progressivism that keeps power in check is a necessary value in creating inclusion and expanding voice.

In *The Assault on Reason* (2007), readers get a full-blown critique of the media landscape, including how conglomeration is *contra natura* to the ecological connectivity modeled in effective democracy. Ecological systems work between species symbiotically, so the

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read-write Web 2.0 social media technologies that emerged after the 2000 election reignited

Gore's eco-information pragmatism. While he was writing *The Assault on Reason* in 2005, he

was launching Current, an attempt to empower people to tell important stories and present them

for mass audiences on TV. Current was to be an intervention in the crimes against democracy

and reason that conglomerated and low-bar television networks were inflicting on America and

the world. Gore's democracy moves forward on a network of information dependent upon

infrastructural systems. In Gore's ecology/ information model is an epistemology about the

information superstructure and the important role of agents as creators and curators of these

fragile networks. In the internet Gore saw a model of ecology, how all species are interpenetrated

with co-dependent species-being. This network model links Current to an ecology, a public

sphere of diverse, co-dependent media producers, viewers, and citizens.

    The Assault on Reason (2007) affords us a detailed description of how Current was

conceived in the model of media reform. Not unlike Habermas (1991), Gore begins by

discussing a past that was welcoming to public sphere communication. Citizens of the Roman

forum and the early America documented by Tocqueville (2000) understood that the "public

forum would be an ongoing conversation about democracy in which individual citizens would

participate most commonly by communication with their fellow citizens" (Gore 2007:5). The

transition from print to television is key to Current's public sphere model. Arguing against the

active interpretation theory of British cultural studies (Hall 1980) and feminist film theory

(Mulvey 1989) and for the cultural industry critique (Adorno and Horkheimer 1977), Gore gets

into neurobiology and screen theory to explain how television is more evocative and more

stupefying than print reading. Television creates a "quasi-hypnotic state" (Gore 2007:264).

Television invites passive reception as opposed to active interpretation, Gore claims. While it is

agreed that active interpretation can be overstated, the latter and opposite can be exaggerated as well, and Gore, with his particular penchant for alarmism, does overstate the hypodermic thesis of media reception. Gore's argument is that the salvation of the American public sphere can be achieved through independent corporate media's facilitation of voice (Couldry 2010) and Current is one possible platform for the curation and performance of voice.

Gore illustrates the role of media technologies, from the printing press to cell phones, that facilitate this public sphere dialogue before addressing television and the internet as the latest powerful networked communication technologies that may or may not engender the public sphere. Soon thereafter, as early as page 6, Gore discusses Current in a long parenthetical statement following how the internet is a "source of great hope for the future vitality of democracy" (Gore 2007:6). He says, "I have sought to hasten the arrival of truly interactive television with a new kind of network—which I co-founded with my partner, Joel Hyatt— Current TV, which bridges television and the internet" (Gore 2007:6). The point is that Current was designed by its founders to improve American democracy and is enmeshed within the ecology/information model. Current is a tool to enact the laterally mediated interactive participation that is a necessary component of a vibrant American democracy and sustainable global ecology.

Gore situates Current within the public sphere model, not the guardianship model. Gore directly criticizes the guardianship model: "advocacy organizations—progressives as well as conservatives—[who] give the impression that they already have exclusive possession of the truth and merely have to 'educate' others about what they already know" (Gore 2007:253).

The model criticized by Gore is the guardianship model most notably seen in television news broadcasts that lack interactive components, citizen journalism, or collective ownership.

For a short, important, and innovative period, Gore's Current experimented with a public sphere model by encouraging collective journalism, both explicit forms of video production and implicit ways of interactivity with online posts. Today, with the ascent of the professional model of guardianship broadcasting by Uygur and others, Current contradicts its chairman's statement above by addressing the audience not as co-producers of a public sphere but as consumers needing education from television pundits.

Gore's public sphere model is like his ecology/information model. Both models are cybernetic, requiring a system of feedback for self-management. The guardianship model, however, contradicts these patterned ways of communication. As Current transformed from a citizen-fueled public sphere to a pundit-led guardianship broadcaster, it also began to contradict the ecological and informational model that motivates much of Gore's core philosophy. The public sphere model is wary of punditry and expertise and believes in the wisdom of the crowd (Howe 2008, Shirky 2010). For that reason, Gore rarely appeared on Current during the public sphere VC2 phase. Now, in the Hollywood phase, he has appeared on *Countdown* and *The Young Turks* numerous times. While Gore is likely excited about the possibilities of an independent, progressive television news network competing with Fox and MSNBC leading up to the 2012 Presidential election, this excitement is likely tempered by how this guardianship model contradicts the core values he expresses in *The Assault on Reason* (2007) as well as his information society legislation and ecological activism.

A clue to why this contradiction exists is within *The Assault on Reason* (2007). At the end of the book, Gore reintroduces Current as "*a new business model* that empowers individuals to join the democratic discourse in the language and medium of television" (Gore 2007:264, my emphasis). Current's original design was to bring the public sphere model to America as a

competitive and political business within the free market. The problem is that the values embedded within the public sphere model—collaboration, amateur engagement, and democratic decision-making—are incompatible within a business that needs to prioritize efficiency, professionalism, and chain-of-command management. Current's challenges illustrate the difficulty of creating democratic institutions within neoliberalism.

Examples of successful public sphere businesses are few, and Current is not on the short list. The creation of the conditions for the public sphere are likely the responsibility of governments, non-government organizations, and collaborating "publics." Internet entrepreneurs can become wealthy building businesses around citizens creating and sharing information in deliberative ways, but costs of producing and distributing television content are prohibitive for public sphere broadcasters. Most importantly, neoliberalism liberates corporations from moral and ethical responsibilities to the public. Corporate liberal businesses can survive and retain a modicum of commitment to the public, but they must do so through adopting entertaining and performative strategies such as being polemic and bombastic while negating public sphere co-production. Thus public sphere businesses are unlikely to exist for long and impossible to continue within neoliberalism's negation of corporate responsibilities to the public.

Gore begins and ends *The Assault on Reason* (2007) with his solution to the problematic refeudalization of the public sphere: Current. Gore references the Leaderboard when he claims that Current staff "rely on the Internet for the two-way conversation that we have every day with our viewers, enabling them to participate in the decisions on programming our network" (Gore 2007:264). The Leaderboard was a weekly competition for citizen video journalists to submit their short documentaries online and have the online community vote for the pod that would be purchased and shuffled into the programming. VC2, the Leaderboard, and the idea that the

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channels between the VC2 community, the audience, and the television producers were open led

Gore to the improbable conclusion that "Current TV is demonstrating that democratizing

television can facilitate widespread participation in our national discourse" (Gore 2007:264). The

VC2 program only lasted a few years and with its demise came the end of the explicit public

sphere model in exchange for the guardianship model.

In the VC2 phase Current was "not political or ideological"; instead, it was focused on a

"cornucopia of points of view" (Gore 2007:265). Like TVTV, it was focused on developing a

process, a "conversation of democracy," not towards achieving a goal (Gore 2007:265). The

result of this non-ideological approach was youthful, multicultural, and cosmopolitan content, so

it predominantly expressed socially liberal values. The VC2 phase claimed to be of and for the

public, collaboratively created, and non-partisan. The present Hollywood phase is professional,

partisan, and progressive. The transition from the explicitly participatory activism of the public

sphere VC2 phase to the Hollywood phase was the result of business pressures compounded by

neoliberalism.

It is often a breathless exercise to review how the world and the nation would be today

had Gore and not Bush assumed office in 2000. Gore is a non-apologetic deregulator and an

early proponent of American information neoliberalism. Clinton's second term was about small

government, deregulation of the financial and technology sectors, and expanded globalization.

Gore's privatization of the internet was one facet of a larger privatization scheme. This lack of

government regulation encouraged the speculative practices that led to the 2008 financial crisis.

While he was a neoliberal, he was not a neoconservative, and so the protracted war in Iraq would

likely not have occurred. In addition, we might imagine that federal investment in green

economy would have boosted. Nevertheless, the financial crisis Gore facilitated would have

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happened regardless of whom was in office. We can be certain that had Gore assumed the Oval

Office, he would not have founded Current, and this experiment in public sphere broadcasting

would not have happened (nor this dissertation in the present form). The question of

deregulation, a process that Gore in office energized, invigorated conglomeration and led to the

present crisis in independent broadcasting that Gore designed Current to solve.

Current Prehistory (1991-2005)

Gore didn't invent it, but he did have a major legislative role in proliferating the

infrastructure of what was to become the internet. As a Tennessee Senator his Congressional bill,

The High Performance Computing and Communication Act of 1991, led to the National

Information Infrastructure (NII). Gore said, "high speed networks must be built that tie together

millions of computers, providing capabilities that we cannot even imagine" (Gore 1991:150). In

1994, as Vice President, Gore gave a speech about convergence: "Our current information

industries—cable, local telephone, long distance telephone, television, film, computers, and

others—seem headed for a Big Crunch/Big Bang of their own. The space between these diverse

functions is rapidly shrinking" (Gore 1994). Three months later, Gore discussed the potential of

the information superhighway for democracy, claiming that computer-supported "networks of

distributed intelligence…will spread participatory democracy" (Brooks and Boal 1995:xii). In

Gore's *The Assault on Reason* (2007), readers get a full-blown critique of the media landscape.

He argues that conglomeration is antagonistic to the ethos of democracy and that the internet can

improve democratic functions by routing around conglomerated forces. The information

superhighway was one technological way of achieving a democratic moral order. Gore's

reformative mission would be "a democratization, 'small d,' of media on television,"[6] according

to Senior Vice President of Programming Justin Gunn. He continued:

> After he lost the election, Gore was sitting there looking at the consolidation of media companies. Fox News was popping up on the radar. And it just looked like there was no independent voice out there…. He did not want to create the liberal answer to Fox News. He did not want it to be a mouthpiece for big D democratic politics (interviewed August 4, 2010).

Gore and Hyatt began to conceive of a media outlet that could diversify the discourse within the

American public sphere. They approached people capable of helping with this vision. Hyatt, a

Democratic Party contributor who made his millions through creating a franchise that provides

inexpensive legal advice, became a co-founder and CEO. Joanna Earl, with broadband and

personalized video as well as strategic planning experience for entertainment conglomerates,

joined Gore and Hyatt. Gotham Chopra, son of the New Age guru Deepak, a well-connected

television journalist, and representative of the target demographic, was brought on board.

Michael Rosenblum, a teacher of citizen video journalism, also joined the team. These

individuals were all active believers in the moral imaginary of the internet's capacities to

diversify the hegemonic public sphere but lacked the technical imaginaries to put it into practice.

For that they needed creative workers.

As early as those first meetings, the technical imaginaries of television and the internet

came into conflict. Chopra said they would consistently ask themselves, "Which one, the internet

or TV, is the real platform and which is the complement? It was a debate. Joanna [Earl] was

adamant. She thought that online was the portal" (interviewed September 13, 2010). Within this

small think tank, opinions differed. Chopra, with experience in television at Channel One,

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[6] The imaginary of the internet facilitating the production of a renewed democratic society has a legacy in the works of Electric Frontier Foundation founder John Perry Barlow and *Wired* magazine going back to the 1990s.

carried more of the television imaginary. Rosenblum likely agreed but also was a fierce supporter of how inexpensive video gear and the internet would revolutionize television. Gore describes both as equally important: the two-way communication of the internet paired with the wide audience of television. Hyatt had little experience in either television or the internet. Each original member of Current brought a different set of talents and expectations that had an impact when Current implemented its moral technical imaginary.

Rosenblum shared this sentiment with Gore: "The notion that five people can control the content for 300 million people is inherently destructive to any kind of democratic society" (interviewed August 31, 2010). They were high on morality and low on television's technical imaginary. "My motivation was always to disband television," Rosenblum proclaimed. In those early days, "We were trashing professional, reality TV, and not having ever met you we were saying 'you are capable of doing much better,'" worried Chopra (interviewed August 4, 2010). Throughout 2004, these five individuals debated the merits of various forms of programming that could be both economically and politically powerful.

Beginning in 2004, Chopra, Rosenblum, and Gore's assistant Jamie Daves traveled to the country's top university journalism departments giving dog-and-pony shows about media democratization. Chopra would film these outreach events to show future venture capitalists that there was immense interest in an operation vaguely based on media democratization—"people would be going wild," he added (interviewed August 4, 2010). Evidently it worked. The initial investors in what was to become Current were from four specific cultures: technology, venture capital, Hollywood, and the Democratic Party insiders (Wallenstein 2004). This mixture of politics, technology, and the culture industry highlights the tensions that would play out within Current.

In May of 2004, Gore and Hyatt made a surprise appearance at the National Cable & Telecommunications Association convention, where they announced that they had acquired the news and information network NewsWorld International (NWI) from Vivendi Universal for $70.9 million and renamed it INdTV. Hyatt said, "We have bought a property that's making money, a good medium for growing distribution" (Wallenstein 2004). Inheriting NWI's lucrative carriage deals with cable companies, INdTV was instantly profitable[7]. With a television network they could proceed along a number of paths toward producing content that would satisfy their lofty moralities of improving the public sphere. They could make a liberal television network, but that already existed in the non-profit progressive network Free Speech TV. They began with Rosenblum's idea of hiring 200 Digital Correspondents (DC) who would shoot and edit nonfiction stories from around the world. Rosenblum clarified the proposal by saying let's "put them through an intensive training course...like a Peace Corp [and] put them on two-year contracts for minimal amounts of money and essentially create this army of new young bright journalists with video cameras [who] go all around the world and make stuff for next to nothing" (interviewed August 31, 2010).More than ten thousand applicants flooded them. They scrapped this plan and hired but one DC, Christof Putzel. Current's eventual plan for content was to ask you, me, and anyone to shoot, edit, and sell short documentaries to the network renamed and launched in April 2005 as Current.

In the prehistoric phase, Gore's morality regarding the "information superhighway" led into technical talk about how a television network could diversify an American public sphere with diverse voices. As Current began to form, it hired technical employees—engineers, producers, designers, journalists, outreach personnel—each with various moral technical

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[7] Current personnel often cited the network's profitability, but the IPO filing depicts the opposite situation.

imaginaries about the internet and television, and best constituted by the public sphere. During

this phase, the moral chorus was strong as discourse remained in the theoretical as opposed to the

applied and technical.

Viewer-Created Content (2005-2007)

> In the days of Thomas Paine and Patrick Henry there was a vibrant debate in every tavern
> and every town square, and where was that debate on television? Nowhere. Why?
> Because no one wanted to have it because it wasn't in the business interests of the
> vertically integrated corporations to facilitate it. So I think [Gore] had a very idealistic
> notion that this was essential for democracy to bust open this monopoly. (interview with
> David Neuman April 19, 2010)

At his ultra-chic cliff home perched over the Hollywood Hills, Programming President

David Neuman explained how a new television network paired with the interactivity of the

internet would solve Gore's perceived problem of the American public sphere: "The selections

of stories would be democratized, and the sourcing of the stories would be democratized, and the

content of the stories would reflect open thinking that wasn't available elsewhere" (interviewed

April 19, 2010).

Neumann was the chief programming officer for CNN when he got a call from Hyatt and

later Gore in 2004. He suggested to them that instead of following Rosenblum's idea to hire and

train 200 DC, the network should use an internet-based video site to train, critique, and collect

the works of any video journalist in the world. His plan was to use the internet to crowdsource

content production, not from a few well-trained professionals but from thousands of less-trained

and globally distributed media workers. Neuman called this program Viewer-Created Content or

VC2, and it was not just a technical but also a moral imaginary.

Neuman responded to Rosenblum's DC practice of hiring and training 200 professional

video journalists by saying: "Why 200? Why not thirty thousand? It is virtual. Why not put your

training up on the web and teach everybody how to [produce citizen journalism]? And that is

what we ultimately did" (interviewed April 19, 2010). Chief Operations Officer (COO) Joanna

Earl believed that if you gave this talent pool enough "structure, assets, assignments, training,

support financially, inspiration-mentoring, then the end result would be good enough to put on

TV" (interviewed September 3, 2010). Neuman and Earl knew that if this new approach to

diversifying the public sphere was going to take hold, it needed to be reproducible through

education. The internet as a free and automatic educator appeared like the perfect solution. They

were going to reach thirty thousand citizen journalists through an imaginative faith in social

media to scale and educate.

Neuman confided in me that he would prefer to have no employees and outsource the

entire production operation to freelance VC2 producers. I challenged this assertion by stating:

"But it doesn't create a living wage for 200 people." He quickly stung back,

> No, it doesn't...I didn't think that was really what the company was about; the company
> was about facilitating the democratic dialogue. The company wasn't about how many
> full-time jobs we can create with benefits in San Francisco for an elite cadre of young
> creators. In fact, we never intended it to be that. In fact, I wanted to have no full-time
> employees, really. To me the ideal would have been eBay. … my desire was, let's have
> thirty thousand people making content for Current TV. That would be beautiful.
> (interviewed April 19, 2010)

Neuman clearly was borrowing from the internet technical imaginaries of scalability here,

despite his decades in television. A living wage was not a part of the morality Neuman needed to

fulfill in his focus on the public sphere.

VC2 was one type of nonfiction and participatory programming where it was possible to

see the conflicts between the technical imaginaries of television and the internet. Current's VC2

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model was that anybody with a camera could tell a story. But the internet isn't about stories; it is

about clips[8]. Current program *Vanguard*'s Vice President Adam Yamaguchi stated that Current

would give you five minutes "to craft a story from beginning to end and we will air it. That is

citizen journalism." He contrasts VC2 with YouTube, the attitude of which was producers "don't

care about the story. Give us the raw ingredient. Give us the clip. That was something we

struggled with a lot at Current. Which is it? In the end it was the YouTube thing that resonated,

at least on the visual medium." While Current attempted with VC2 to get not the clip but the

edited pod, YouTube exploded on the premise of the clip. Thus Current focused on the narrative

techniques of television, the complete story, as the best way of achieving the morality of

improved diversity in the hegemonic public sphere.

Both VC2 producers and Current employees and executives were aligned with the moral

imaginaries of the need to improve diversity in the hegemonic public sphere in the age of

consolidation. But the VC2 program encountered the difficulty of matching the technical

imaginary of the rogue and amateur internet-enabled video producers with the technical

imaginary of professional television. This exercise translated an amateur and authentic

documentary into a civilized and professional product, exposing the incompatibility of two

competing technical imaginaries, one linked with professional and finalizable television content

and another linked with amateur and what Zittrain (2008) calls "granular" internet content.

Furthermore, as I describe below, the television and internet technical imaginations manifest in

conflicts around the aesthetic relationships of VC2 to Current's studio, the Chemosphere, the

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8 Current was not interested in what Zittrain (2008) identified as one of the core design principles
of the internet, that is, its capacity for granularity, its ability to process small units of content. Granular
content indeed became the building blocks of massive internet sensations such as YouTube. The failed
predecessor to Wikipedia, Nupedia, demanded substantial quality contributions and didn't succeed until it
became Wikipedia, to which anybody could contribute granularly.

unorthodox shuffle format, and the strict intellectual property rights requirements demanded by Current (the latter two described in chapter 2). Here, the technical imaginaries began to conflict.

Television on the Internet: Chemosphere Studio

Acquiring VC2 pods wasn't easy. The estimates vary, but I was one of maybe fifty to two hundred "super-contributors" making television-quality pods for Current. Including the viewers and the online commentators, it was a small public sphere, if one at all. Current needed to build a department of people tasked with finding, contacting, and soliciting content from producers like myself if VC2 was going to activate a diversifying hegemonic public sphere.

Current put out a job advertisement on Craigslist for its outreach department. My then girlfriend Sarah Evershed was working as a production assistant for a predominantly queer documentary and reality television and film company in Hollywood, World of Wonder, specializing in content about celebrity, sex, pop science, and other spectacles for Showtime and HBO and such downscale cable franchises as Oxygen. She submitted her application, and the next day Current creative executive Brandon Gross called her and said he had her resume in front of him. He asked her if she would meet him at Current's Los Angeles office the next day. He wondered if I would also come in and do a "wrap" in their studio, the Chemosphere, on *Tantric Tourists* (Fish 2007b) and *Whose Sacred Land?* (Fish and Evershed 2007), the two pods I shot in Sikkim in 2005 and sold to Current in 2007. We both agreed. After a late-night interview with VC2 head Ezra Cooperstein, she got the job, moved to San Francisco, and joined a team of seven outreach workers whose job it was to translate Current's imaginaries into amateur-made yet television-ready content.

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Later that day I ran across the busy intersection in Hollywood's Media District to the Chemosphere studio. The Chemosphere is where Current hosts introduce and outroduce the VC2 pods. It was unprecedented for someone like me, a VC2 freelancer, to be in the Chemosphere. I met the stage manager smoking Marlboro Lights in the parking lot packed with new sedans. He gave me a prompt and asked me to write some lines to be fed into the teleprompter. He told me that no Chemophere hosts write their own lines. I bumped into a few hosts in their cramped green room/office; a number of them knew of my work but didn't have much critical feedback. In my roguish way, I brought my camera in as a prop, wanting to personify citizen journalism's always-on imaginary. They did my make-up, sat me in the Chemosphere, and jibbed in a camera as I flubbed my lines repeatedly, trying to sound too earnest. Confirming my suspicions, the Chemosphere is not a house in the Hollywood Hills as it appears but a fake set designed to look that way. The artificiality of the set and the numerous takes they gave me to say my lines gave me a look at how Current's technical television imaginary works.

The Chemosphere has been a subject of derision for the internet-savvy engineers and serious television journalists. The journalists for Current's guerilla journalism program *Vanguard*, Christof Putzel and Mitch Koss, went out for dinner with Neuman on the night of the network's launch in April 2005. Neuman asked Putzel what he thought about Max Lugavere and Jason Silva, the handsome Chemosphere hosts and Gap models, who had no production credentials except for their audition reel, *Textures of Selfhood*, a psychedelic and sexual romp through South Beach, Miami, which landed them the cushy job. Putzel spoke honestly, "I don't think they reach the audience we are trying to reach" (interviewed June 16, 2011). Neuman immediately retorted, "So everyone has to be like Christof Putzel, the journalist who travels!" (Putzel interview June 16, 2011). Neuman had the most television and journalistic experience as

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an executive at CNN, ABC, Disney, DEN, and Channel One. Yet Neuman scoffed at the elitism of television.

Putzel wondered why Current didn't give more VC2 producers the experience I had had introducing my own work. *Vanguard* producer Jeff Plunkett elaborated, "If we are going to be this network that is preaching authenticity and globalism, then we should have people on air that are beacons of that mentality. And I don't think early on we had that" (interviewed September 1, 2010). The hosts were selected and insisted upon by Neuman, who, as president of programming, had absolute say over what appeared on air. Neuman thought that the Chemosphere was necessary as a television imaginary to ground the programming to a recurring location. The Chemosphere and hosts were also in Los Angeles, and much of the criticism was waged from the San Francisco internet-focused office. This further exacerbated the division between the two cities as well as the internet and television divisions and their different imaginaries.

Numerous informants isolate what happened in the Chemosphere studio as indicative of Current's failure to do neither the internet nor television well. "The Chemosphere undermined all that we were doing. Especially those who wanted to see Current as a rebel, a rebellious differentiator, they would see these shiny preened LA people and we would lose credibility," Brilliant complained (interview May 26, 2010). Putzel agrees that while executives said Current was "getting rid of Hollywood, it didn't, it still had that Hollywood image" (interviewed June 16, 2011). Thus, on television sets, as VC2 content flowed into the Chemosphere, the dissonance of the differing technical imaginaries of television and the internet and the distance of the television technical imaginary from the inclusive internet morality became evident.

Collective Journalism head Fitzgerald explains the cultural friction resulting when the VC2 content contacted the Chemosphere studio: "I think it was the heterogeneity of the content

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and presentation…it existed in two separate worlds that we tried to combine on a daily basis. If you watched the network it was a hard viewing experience because you were being pulled in and out of these different worlds. You kept coming back to this world that was definitely not a part of any of the worlds you dipped into" (interviewed May 26, 2010). The multiplicity of the technical imaginaries collided daily on screen.

"If we had locked down authenticity in 2006 we could have had shows by end of 2007 that would have thematically congealed and pulled an audience in who earlier had been samplers of the content, and then potentially developed a following that would befit an insurgent network, which we were," Fitzgerald thoughtfully assessed (interviewed May 26, 2010). They had authentic content, but how they wrapped that content, with slick graphics and hosted intros and outros from photogenic talkers situated in the plush yet alien Chemosphere studio, shattered that authenticity. Without transparency or authenticity the development of a diverse public sphere is impossible.

The Internet on Television: Shuffle Programming

Several informants thought that Current attempted to bring the wrong internet imaginaries to television. Current did away with the practice of scheduling specific shows at particular hours and replaced it with the shuffle format, where short content was randomly presented throughout the day like an Apple iPod on shuffle. VC2 producer Josh Wolf describes the experience of viewing Current:

> The combination of serious journalism with Current Hottie left people with "what the fuck is this?" We had sex trafficking, base-jumping, and male model sexography all on the same day, in the same 10 minutes. On launch day all three were on there. They fractured the audience in this idea that they thought all 18- to 34-year-olds were a weird mix of people. (interviewed September 3, 2010)

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Current appropriated the short-term and inconsistent viewing patterns from internet video and applied it to television. A number of informants considered this shuffle format as an artificial grafting of the internet imaginary onto television. About the shuffle format, Brilliant simply said, "It doesn't work on TV, so they picked the wrong battles" (interview May 26, 2010). The failed battlefront was imagining that the television could be viewed like the internet. This was also a failure of linking the technical imaginary to the morality through practice. While the shuffle modeled the rich diversity of voices necessary in a public sphere through visual simulation, it did so at the expense of the practical model itself.

Current employees imagined a better network, one that resists the temptation to adopt some scintillating aspects of the internet and retains other traditional television technical imaginaries. *Vanguard* producer Plunkett was frustrated with two expressions of the televisual technical imaginary: "Of all the accepted practices of TV, we plucked that one—we needed pretty people and a pretty set—instead of picking we needed routines and block programming" (interviewed September 1, 2010). Many, including Plunkett, thought that Current needed to "work within the structures of TV, namely the block programming [and] build routines around big personalities and high concept shows"[9] (interviewed September 1, 2010). In the pre-launch era, Gotham Chopra was all about finding a star, but Gore and Rosenblum were against it. In addition, Gore didn't want to be the star despite being one in 2007 and 2008 when he won an Emmy, Oscar, and a Nobel Peace Prize. No, Current rejected some traditional expressions of television's technical imaginaries, block- and star-driven programming, while appropriating hosts and a studio. It combined this with the internet technical imaginaries of amateur content

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9 Current tried this several times, with the animated series *Super News* and *Vanguard*. It hired Emmy-winning Madeleine Smithberg from the *Daily Show with John Stewart* to executive produce *InfoMania* but only with limited success.

and shuffled viewing. It was the mixture of these technical imaginaries that Current hoped would

achieve the morality of diversifying the hegemonic public sphere.

The odd hybridity of the two technical imaginaries led to or fueled Current's identity

crisis. Plunkett asks, "Are we a news station? Should we send people to cover Katrina? … Who

are we competing with? CNN? Are we trying to be a younger, more authentic news gathering

agency? Or are we trying to be 'current' in a trendy way, the purveyors of cool. ... We wanted to

have it all" (interviewed September 1, 2010). Plunkett's remarks should remind us of

Goldblum's statements that Current is a neurotic company and Linder's description of Current as

having a wild sine-wave fluctuation. The shuffle format, the alien Chemosphere, and the

contradictory hosts didn't help Current make a profit or diversify the public sphere. Making

these matters worse, Current appropriated strict intellectual property rights management from

television's technical playbook as opposed to the shareable and remixable internet moral-

technical imaginary (Lessig 2008).

Social Media, Social News, and the Emergence of Current.com (2007-2009)

Geographer Bradley L. Garrett and I watched the Democratic Primary debate that

occurred in Las Vegas on January 15, 2008. As two Westerners we were upset that the

candidates did not discuss Western issues, particularly the growth of the housing market paired

with a mounting drought in Nevada. A few months before the election, a blog post appeared on

Current's website from Daniel Beckmann requesting pods on any issue being discussed by the

2008 Presidential election candidates. We started work on a pod, *Sin City Ghost Town* (Fish and

Garrett 2008), about unchecked growth in the deserts of Las Vegas. A number of our informants

stated that they were experiencing the local impact of global warming. We shot the pod featuring

12 speakers from conservationists, Democratic and Republican party spokespersons, developers, and homeowners. We locked down in a seedy hotel on the Strip to edit the pod in a frenzied 24 hours. We were happy to be informed that our pod was selected, along with several others, to anchor Current's 2008 presidential coverage.

Current paired our pod with its *Hack the Debate* televisual experiment. On September 26, 2008, Senators Obama and McCain debated live on national television. Current licensed a broadcast of this feed and "hacked it." Members of the public with a Twitter account could send 140-character messages to a battery of Current employees, who would vet and then publish these real-time messages from the debate-viewing public on live national television. "The new pace of democracy is real-time," Twitter co-founder Biz Stone said. "Current is helping Twitter amplify the opinions, news, and trends that matter right now. Together, we're influencing more than media—we're evolving conversation" (McCarthy 2008). "We chose the name *Hack the Debate* for this interactive TV experiment because our young adult audience often uses 'hack' to mean cleverly modifying something by adding access or features that otherwise aren't available," said Chloe Sladden, vice president of special programming at Current and later employee at Twitter (Harper 2008). As explored by Coleman and Golub (2008), hacking is an internet imaginary but also a morality of free speech and meritocracy, brought to television with varying results.

I tell the story of *Sin City Ghost Town* (Fish and Garrett 2008) to contrast it with *Hack the Debate* to illustrate how Current transitioned around late 2008 from explicit media democratization through citizen-produced television to implicit participation through short, internet-based commentary like Tweeting (Fish et al. 2011, Schafer 2011). During the 2008 election it is possible to observe Current simultaneously trying out both the television and the internet imaginaries before abandoning much of the rhetorical power of the internet imaginary.

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Current's primary source of income isn't its internet but its television property. Television advertising sales are more profitable than internet advertisements. Television is better at finding repeat viewers. The profit from television carriage deals is superior to the free viewing of internet video. All around, television is a better business for immediate and steady profit. On the other hand, the gamble of investing in internet industries is potentially more lucrative because internet properties can exponentially scale and quickly become billion-dollar properties. "TV doesn't have the explosive potential," claims *Vanguard* Executive Producer Mitch Koss (interviewed May 24, 2010). Cable television companies can grow profit by acquiring more profitable advertising and subscription deals, but the growth is incremental and not as exponential as it can be on the internet, where new customers are almost infinitely distributed anywhere there is a networked computer or mobile device. This is a social fact that influences the tenor of moral technical imaginaries.

In the Current.com phase Current embraced the internet and convergence, and like many others rushed to be the winner of the web 2.0 sweepstakes. However, this internet moral imaginary belies tensions inherent in a media company with competing internet and television departments as well as the divisive cultures between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The tension was clear between the engineers and the creatives (consumer features vs. "feel") and the tension between making something new no one has seen before (Silicon Valley, San Francisco) and competing in a saturated market (television in Los Angeles). In the movement toward the internet, individuals working on the television programs felt sidelined. The social fact of the internet's scalability, influencing the profit motive, silenced or masked how technical imaginaries and moralities were envisioned.

Nonfiction Television Phase (2009-2011)

Current's next phase was into nonfiction adventure television with previously released programs like Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman's motorcycle bromance global circumambulation *Long Way Round.* Inspired by Current, by 2009 I had developed a significant body of short-form, nonfiction video work to make me eligible as "talent" to those agents and production companies attempting to sell inexpensive nonfiction programming to Discovery Communications and its subsidiary channels National Geographic, Animal Planet, and its flagship the Discovery Channel. They would find early drafts of my short documentaries shot in India, Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, Iceland, and beyond on Current, Vimeo, or YouTube and contact me, offering me a chance to be on television. To be honest, I maximized this attention by producing "greatest hits" reels and using search engine optimization to ensure that my videos were tagged with the search words that these talent scouts would use to find would-be hosts. Words like "anthropologist," "archaeologist," "adventure," "talent," "traveler," and "reel" worked well. Thus my experiences at Current translated into opportunities for professional development. By paying me a small contract for work, I was able to produce the content that got me noticed by more prominent television production companies and networks. A rare few other VC2 producers were able to step off from their freelance work with Current into paid positions; many more others like Nick Vivion, with whom I spoke, still struggle to find repeatable employment in nonfiction travel and adventure video production. Contrast this precarity against the fact that almost all of the Current employees I spoke with, all of whom have moved on, are gainfully employed in successful production and internet video talent start-ups. As I wrote earlier, Neuman told me his job wasn't to create employment with benefits for hundreds of San Francisco's unemployed television aspirants. However, for us VC2 producers the hope of becoming professional television producers was part of the unwritten bargain for the free or

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inexpensive labor. I had my PhD as a back-up economically and motivationally. However, my

friends freelancing for VC2 did not, and their aspirations of using their Current experience to

open doors to major television deals usually did not happen.

For several years I was contacted by Discovery Communications and nonfiction

television companies attempting to gain production contracts from networks inside the Discovery

Communications conglomeration. When representatives from these production companies called

me, they invariably asked me what idea I had for a television series. "Write me an email

detailing ten television programs you would love to host" was an inspiring provocation I often

heard. I would dutifully imagine exciting programs syncretically mixing ethnographic empathy,

political upheaval, shamans, degrading historical sites, vanishing languages, and urban

countercultures in various admixtures and provide these documents to numerous production

companies throughout Los Angeles. For example, after being contacted by Alice Wapt[10] at

Southeast Productions in New York City, I pitched the following two programs:

> SPIRITUAL SEEKERS: Two weeks to adopt a religion; doing the most austere of
> the physical, mental, and emotional practices. Fight Quest meets God. Episode samples:
> Zen Mountain Running Monks, the sadhus of the burning ghats of Varanasi, Islamic
> martyr marches, Tibetan monk Himalayan cave retreat.
> WORLD'S WORST TRAVEL SHOW: Bad Travels, Terrible Tortures, Horrible
> Food, Bourdain in Hell. Two funny, sarcastic travelers do the most touristy package, the
> cheesiest hotel, the most kitschy indigenous entertainment; roughest, most physical, and
> torturous mosquito tours; the worst of world cuisine. Episode Samples: Cannibal Tours of
> Papua New Guinea, gay senior citizen Caribbean cruises, Amazonian leech treks.

Obviously these didn't make it to air, and I am better for it. As these more titillating

projects were rejected, I pitched projects closer to my politics: guerilla journalism in East

Jerusalem, Afghanistan, and Iraq, for example. They were fascinated with my on-camera skills

and my graduate school pedigree in anthropology and not so interested in me as a producer. The

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[10] A pseudonym.

more political my pitches, the less interested they were. However, it wasn't just the content ideas

for the shows but the impressive amount of free labor they expected that drove me away and

gave me an insight in their work. Here is an example of the type of email I would receive during

this period of professional development and ethnographic fieldwork:

> From: XXXX
> Date: February 27, 2008 12:31:29 PM CST
> To: rawbird@gmail.com <mailto:rawbird@gmail.com>
> Subject: Question from TV Producer
>
> Adam,
>
> I'm hoping this reaches you—I'm an Executive Producer with XXXX Productions. We're currently developing a new series for Travel Channel that will have an anthropology slant. The concept is to send an anthropologist to a wide variety of ethnic enclaves around the U.S. to find out about their culture and then try to 'become' like them.
>
> Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn...Cajun alligator farmers in LA...Surfers in southern Cal. It's a combination of travel and education. The political spin is that we're all Americans and enough of this red state/blue state stuff.
>
> We're looking for someone to host this show—someone with bona fide anthropology credentials—but who also has the fun energy we need to carry the show. And we need someone willing to "inhabit" the characteristics, dress, and speech patterns of the local ethnic population.
>
> Having found/seen your reel on YouTube I think you would be an excellent candidate. Please let me know immediately if this is something you're interested in.
>
> FYI we just launched a new series on Travel called "The Deal Hunter with XXXX" so this is not a pie in the sky deal. Travel came to us looking for ideas.
>
> Thanks,
>
> XXXX

I was contacted in January 2008 by Oil Factory, a documentary, music video, and

commercial production company networked with noted documentarian Doug Pray, auteur of *Big

Rig*, which screened at the AFI Film Festival in 2008, for a print and online video advertisement

campaign featuring undiscovered, talented, politically engaged artists. Pray hired a casting director to find the talent. In her search to fulfill the contract, she decided to contact Current. She spoke with Current Creative Executive Ben Stein, who recommended me for the campaign. I was contacted via Gmail with the headline: "Jim Beam Ad Campaign—Emerging Web Journalist Wanted."

The alcohol purveyor Jim Beam did not require a "Web Journalist" but somebody who could bring bourbon to the web-enabled 21- to 35-year-old American demo. I was quick to inform Stephanie that, "bourbon was an important variable in my production and editing processes." Pray and I had a good rapport, documentarian to documentarian, and after several months of responding to their need for various "assets"—video, on-location stills, project ideas, et cetera: "I need five or so... [headshots] of you in Iraq, of you in Vegas, on the Reservation." A month later I received an apologetic email from Pray saying that Oil Factory was to be replaced by EnergyBBDO, an ad agency out of Chicago. Precarity exists for those in the middle as it does for those at the bottom of the production chain.

I share this personal anecdote in order to situate Current and my own ethnographic fieldwork/production practices within the present unstable industry of internet-television convergence and nonfiction new media production. To its credit, Jim Beam wanted to identify with the emerging phenomena of new media celebrity. Oil Factory recognized that the type of rogue, embedded journalism I produce would be attractive to young would-be bourbon drinkers. Current, with its performed authority over internet-television convergence, was recognized as a source of undiscovered talent in the new media environment. Through branding and framing all four corporations—myself included—I attempted to capitalize on the serious sensationalism of new media activism emerging at the convergence of television and internet. This is proving to be

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a difficult chore for all involved as the present and future manifestations of nonfiction convergent identities are in flux. This challenge results in anxiety, which is observable in corporate culture, which in turn results in public therapeutic actions to demonstrate to audiences and shareholders corporate competency over the fluctuating field of convergent production.

After these nonfiction production companies acquired the better of my ideas, they wanted my time to edit together a reel of my best on-camera moments from my previous documentaries. To this reel of greatest hits they wanted me to add a segment of me shooting and answering a set of questions specific to their needs. "Tell me a story in which you overcame an obstacle" was a typical question these production companies loved to see me answer. Originally, their attention was flattering and provoked in me dreams of moving on from Current to more prominent cable television networks, but the more time I put into writing series pitches for these television companies and editing my reel to the particularities of their programming idea, the more I understood that I was a source of uncompensated labor below the unpaid interns staffing the production companies in offices throughout West Hollywood.

In the nonfiction television phase (2009-2011), Current acquired television programs from one of these similar processes. Either the network knows what it generally wants and sends a Request for Proposal (RFP) to several production companies, or the independent production companies propose a project idea to the network, to which the network responds with ambiguous enticement or a network producer's preexisting connections—this was likely Current's process. The first of these processes requires much work by several people and institutions for free, or what they call "on spec." In the first instance, when the television network issues an RFP to independent production companies, these companies each pick a way of addressing the problem. For instance, Edelman Productions contacted me as the talent for a Travel Channel RFP

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regarding a Wednesday night show on Americana. Edelman and I developed the project with a title that played off of my last name, "Fish Out of Water," that included a re-edit of numerous on-air instances from my Current pods and a "one-sheet," a description of the show and its iterations. Working with an independent production company on a network RFP is personally more rewarding than simply being contacted by a talent scout not attempting to respond to an RFP. There is much more of a chance that the program will go to air. RFPs are fascinating documents. In one Travel Channel RFP, which took the form of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation, I was introduced to the network's "Creative Filter" and its three points for being "on-brand" with the program proposal and host: "Lust for Life," "Immersive Exploration," and "Credible Authorship." Despite the greater investment in the "talent," it is still free labor by those aspiring to television stardom.

In the second instance, when simply mined for one's ideas and video material by an independent television company, the exploitation is transparent. The production companies are trolling for ideas, the originator of which may or may not be given credit. In some instances, I suspect that a talent agent isn't even interested in the quality of my work but rather using me to fulfill a quota of potential talent. They would hustle me for any video monologue, a biographical paragraph, or a headshot. Once they got those assets, they could satisfy a quantitative sum of possible hosts, and I would never hear from them again.

Current's VC2 program used comparable strategies to get free labor. The network would issue a blanket statement about what it did or did not want. It would ask for content like "More Vlogs and Viewpoints." One reason I was given for why Current was not going to purchase a pod I produced, the *Ghetto Van Gogh* (Fish 2007b), about a Pan-African street artist in Venice Beach, was that Current wasn't taking any more pods from Venice. Once a promising producer

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uploaded a pod to Current's website, Creative Executives would contact the producer and inquire into other pods the producer was interested in producing. If the Creative Executives could get the VC2 producer to execute the idea without a contract, they would. This would give Current an opportunity to opt out should the pod concept not work. I recognized this practice early on, and I would get a contract for a commission for all of my later pods before beginning to shoot or edit the video. This would ensure that I wouldn't be working for free and that my work would be guaranteed television broadcast.

Like independent television talent scouts, Current's Creative Executives would also be under pressure to hit quantitative numbers in terms of the number of uploads, phone calls, and pods they purchased. Henry Goldblum, one such Creative Executive that quickly moved up and out of his position in Outreach was infamous for bragging about how many "touches" he would get. These quantitative benchmarks allowed Current management to monitor workers so they would know who to triage in any upcoming liquidations.

While I was learning to understand Current's approach to free and marginally financed television and internet video production, both for my research and as a producer, I was also understanding the world of independent nonfiction production to such a degree as to be able to avoid exploitation. One instance is illustrative of this point. Alice Wapt of Southeast Productions had received a RFP from Discovery Communications for a show the network wanted to produce called *Bad Asses*. Here is a look at a quote from the RFP:

> In this new series for Discovery Channel, we'll learn the things that are important for every guy to know—and we'll learn it from the bad asses/experts in the field.

> Changing a tire from the Indy 500 winner's pit boss. How to build the perfect fire from a leading survivalist. Bagging a deer from the Marines' top sniper. Learning how to haggle for a used car from the FBI's lead hostage negotiator.

The filter here is the alpha male—the guy we all want to be. Other areas could include: tracking, gambling, firefighting, survival, or police work.

Wapt wasn't content with simply repurposing and re-editing my previous footage from adventures around the world into the package for the Discovery Channel's show. She requested that I find a way to travel into south Los Angeles to a paintball gun arena where there would be a small production company to shoot my monologue-dense adventure as a sniper. A year earlier I would have borrowed a car or paid for a taxi to get to the arena, but by now I understood the process. I insisted that Southeast Productions pay for my taxi, a bill of $150. After much back and forth, she agreed. When I eventually got "on location" I met another contestant—a much more manly man than I! I played along, rolled around in the dirt, and shot my paint gun, but I realized that I was not really a possible contender for the hosting position; rather, I was helping Wapt fulfill her talent quota from which management can draw in the possible situation that the trend toward shows like *Bad Asses* moves into shows featuring "on-brand" anthropologists, archaeologists, and rogue video journalists. They just wanted me in the roster.

Recognizing this, henceforth every time I received a call or email to submit myself and my "assets" as talent for a nonfiction television show, I grilled the talent agent with a line of questioning that confirmed my suspicion that television producers are in the habit of contacting any would-be talent first for their ideas, second to fulfill a quota for a pool of talent, and third as a possible host. After I got done questioning the agents, should they want any of my "assets" they would have to pay me the union wage as editor, cinematographer, or on-screen host. As testament to the strength of gossip in Hollywood, I've yet to receive many calls since.

Discussing the practices of independent, nonfiction, television production companies in Hollywood and beyond is illustrative not only because it exhibits the precarity of television production but also because it fills in a period of Current's history of which little is known. In

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2009-2011, before Current decided to produce most of its content in-house and before it hired

Keith Olbermann and rebranded itself as a progressive television news network, it functioned

like other nonfiction television networks receiving pitches from independent television

companies and issuing RFPs. During this period, Current filled its roster with nonfiction

television content that was acquired from boutique content companies such as the ones I worked

for uncompensated. This section has been an attempt to discuss this period of Current's history in

relationship to the tradition of precarity in nonfiction television production. The internet was not

creating opportunities for talent discovery; it was providing opportunities to find flexible free

labor and precarious creativity. These are hallmarks of neoliberalism.

Hollywood Phase (2009-today)

> A post on Facebook requested that we gather around sunset on a patch of grass along the beach in Santa Monica to hold a vigil for Current journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee, who were imprisoned in North Korea. There were only about six of us, mainly members of Ling's church. I brought rosary candles and we simply sat around and discussed how everyone knew Ling and Lee and what they knew about their situation. (field notes May 24, 2009)

This small vigil paled in comparison to the one that followed on June 4, 2009, at a plush

bar and hotel and spilled out onto Santa Monica's Fourth Street Promenade. Candles were

distributed to the several hundred vigil participants and a taiko (classical Japanese drumming)

ensemble led our hushed march. The exact details are sketchy, but *Vanguard* producers Ling and

Lee were arrested by North Korean soldiers after allegedly crossing the border from China on

March 17, 2009. *Vanguard* Executive Producer Mitch Koss was also with them but escaped. I

went with host Jason Silva in the new "green" SUV he was given to drive around West

Hollywood as a promotion. A handful of Current employees I'd now known for two years were

there. The next morning was Ling and Lee's trial, and later it was reported that on this night a North Korean judge sentenced them to 12 years in a labor camp for illegal entry. Though Bill Clinton returned with Ling and Lee on August 4, 2009, the incident reflects the dangers of start-up news organizations such as Current that do not have the financial backing of larger television networks (Stelter 2009). It thus illustrates the dark side of precarious citizen video journalism.

Some say that Current needed a hit show to follow Putzel's award-winning *From Russia with Hate* (Putzel 2007), a story about the rise and brutality of neo-Nazis in Russia (Babamoto 2009). With a small audience, these awards were the only recognition the television reporters and, more importantly, their executives received to know that they were doing important if not rabidly popular work. Current was desperate for good press; the journalistic awards acquired by *Vanguard* provided this cultural capital to an elite group of other journalists and television executives but did little to impress investors or attract audiences. The fiasco in North Korea was not the press it needed, not with an initial public offer (IPO) in the works.

Mitch Koss was Ling's cameraperson in North Korea and beyond. As one of the founders of the aesthetic of citizen journalism at Channel One, Koss actively helped the careers of Ling, her sister Lisa, and CNN's Anderson Cooper. The first time I interviewed Koss, in 2008, he was editing a challenging documentary about overcrowded California prisons. The second time he was looking at pilots for shows about medical marijuana dispensaries with photogenic female leads. This lower-profile detail was partially because of his involvement in the North Korean incident but also because Current was putting all resources toward producing hit shows. "I am working with freelancers because they want to outsource all the jobs," Koss soberly said (interviewed May 24, 2010). Current Vice President Gunn described this process as the "outsourcing production model," which includes: "executives in an office, ordering shows,

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taking pitches, commissioning pilots—traditional television" (interviewed August 4, 2010).

While Ling and Lee were in North Korea, Current was developing traditional television at the

same time Current.com was festering with citizen posts about the draconian North Korean

detentions that Current.com community managers dutifully scrubbed from the site daily. The

open and implicitly participatory Current.com had become a liability.

Koss wouldn't talk about North Korea, but he shut the door of his small office and

discussed Current's history with me. With his characteristic oblique irony, he empathized with

those trying to get out of the television game. Television is

> an interesting business if you like it, but if you don't like it, it is like a grocery store, there
> isn't a lot of profit margin. The competition is very fierce. You can be up this year and
> next year down. But you go up to Silicon Valley and ... I am sure the chastening they got
> this second [2008 dot com] collapse is wearing off in the culture there, and I am sure it is
> going to heat up and be like the Yukon. (interviewed May 24, 2010)

A scalable project on the internet is the only way, according to Koss, with "a little bit of

money you can leap frog if you don't want to come up the hard way." With this logic comes a

gamble. "If you put your headquarters in Silicon Valley, what is the culture? Roulette," he

calmly assessed (interviewed May 24, 2010). Koss affirms that Current's model was that of the

rest of Silicon Valley: inflate your worth and sell to a larger company or go for an IPO. Current

tried both. Having failed, it returned to television.

While Ling and Lee were in a prison work camp in North Korea, Current silently

withdrew its IPO. The investors for Current's 2008 IPO for $100 million were likely to be

attracted by Current.com, had it became wildly popular. It wasn't. Had the IPO raised the $100

million, Current would have a popular and profitable website and the investments needed to

revamp the television network, acquire proven television talent, and possibly revisit explicit

media democratization projects such as VC2, as several informants hoped. Instead, along with 16

other failed IPOs that year, Current withdrew its offering on April 10, 2009, citing "current

market conditions." Current tried to sell itself to Google and other companies for around $200

million before and after the IPO and failed (Lacy 2008)—a price Chopra said his Hollywood

mogul friends claimed was twice what Current was worth (interviewed September 13, 2011).

The final choice was to return to its only profitable property: the cable television license. The

"current market conditions" were the result of the global financial crisis, one could argue, a

product of the type of neoliberal deregulation earlier advocated by Gore while in office.

From Explicit to Implicit Participation and Now Active Viewing

The years of experiments with reaching out to citizens to encourage videographical

participation in the hegemonic public sphere left the company bloated with young personnel. A

week after the 2008 Presidential election, Current fired 30 employees and relocated 30. Exactly

one year later, on November 11, 2009, Current fired another 80 people, collectively cutting

almost a quarter of its staff. Tech blogs were calling it a "major bloodbath" (Rao 2009).

According to its press release accompanying the firings, the network was shifting away from its

trademark short-form video packages and "towards proven 30-60 minute formats." Current hired

a new CEO, Mark Rosenthal, ex-president and COO of MTV Networks, a network that also

exchanged its short-form for long-form content. COO Joanna Earl soberly admitted that, "we

have learned that short-form content is not the best to drive audiences and engage large

audiences on television" (interviewed September 3, 2010). Later, Earl told me regarding the VC2

phase "we are acknowledging that we did not do a great job on the cable television front"

(interviewed September 3, 2010). Under Rosenthal, Current will "start operating like a more

traditional network" (Schneider 2009). This includes program development, licensing and

acquisitions, and talent management—the practices I illustrate in the section on nonfiction television above.

> *Vanguard* Vice President Adam Yamaguchi said it this way,
>
> For a while we were so bullish about the internet changing everything, we didn't know where it was going and we didn't know what it was going to do and we jumped on it, whatever that meant. It turned out not to be the right move. We took a few steps back. We came to the realization that we have to embrace this somehow. We've also got this TV property. That is not such a bad thing. (interviewed April 20, 2011)

Vanguard producer Jeff Plunkett asked, "How much can you stand aside and say we are not a part of the TV world? And I think Current for a long time said, 'we are not a part of that ugliness'" (interviewed September 1, 2010). Yamaguchi and Plunkett, as *Vanguard* producers, were understandably supportive of a shift away from the internet and toward television. *Vanguard* was the most television-ready of Current's programs, the most independent from the internet, and therefore the least likely to be cut.

Others resisted or were fired. What had started as "an empowering, on the ground up conversation, became a Hollywood-down conversation," observed Wilson-Brown(interviewed July 1, 2010). "So suddenly the powers that be are controlling every fucking script as opposed to 'let's edit a few things out, but they have a voice'—it is a big shift," Wilson-Brown drily concluded (interviewed July 1, 2010). From a certain perspective internal to the corporation, this is a success story. The people who have been arguing for "proven" models of the television imaginary as illustrated by Plunkett and Yamaguchi finally won out over those "bullish" about the internet imaginaries like Joe Brilliant who could only gesture toward the future. With these contrasting technical imaginaries also came new technical imaginaries about how to achieve the public sphere morality.

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Earl describes the changes toward television, but in the language of Silicon Valley. There was a period when Current was developing Current.com that "scaled and monetized and was a big platform, and that is where we got divorced from a cohesive experience of the two screens. And what we have been doing more recently is unifying both screens under one brand proposition and provide, from a promotional perspective, more support for our shows. ... So there is a unification happening" (interviewed September 3, 2010). The unification is that of the internet and television and with a much less explicit form of citizen participation on the internet and more efforts on the TV property. Thus the American public sphere no longer required active but only latent or passive participation. In this phase, Current modified its morality by lowering the bar to participation. For Current, mere viewing of an independent news network was enough to achieve what remained of its morality.

Guardianship Television: *Countdown with Keith Olbermann*

After eight years (2003-2011) at MSNBC and six months off the air, liberal talker Keith Olbermann returned to television on Current. Gore said, "We are delighted to provide Keith with the independent platform and the freedom that Current can and does uniquely offer" (Schuker 2011). The unique qualities of Current include independence. "Nothing is more vital to a free America than a free media," Olbermann wrote, "and nothing is more vital to my concept of a free media than news that is produced independently of corporate interference" (Schuker 2011). With limited internet-based citizen participation, *Countdown* is primarily a television program, not a cross-platform entity. However, the recent hire of a new president of programming, with which Olbermann will work, signifies an increasing interest in cross-platform convergence.

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David Bohrman, an ex-CNN executive, became president of programming in August 2011, replacing David Neuman almost two years after he was let go.

Bohrman has an interesting background that sheds light on Current's continuing affinities to the idea of convergence. He has a long history of high-tech innovation in television news. In 1988, he created the first electronic site of election information for ABC News. He was the CEO of Pseudo.com, the infamous dotcom and bomb internet video company that churned through employees and millions but managed to be the first internet video news source to cover a national Republican Convention in 2000 (Scheier 2000). Later, Bohrman became senior vice president and the Washington, DC bureau chief for CNN, where he created the *YouTube Debates* in which viewers submitted video questions to candidates. While Current was broadcasting Tweets on *Hack the Debate,* Bohrman was broadcasting video from YouTube on CNN. "We are going all in as a political commentary and news analysis network," said Hyatt, and "all roads led to David Bohrman" (Guthrie and Powers 2011).

Today Current's synergy with the internet is negligible. None of Current's 2011 shows are available online either on its website or on YouTube, including *Countdown*. Current does not provide *Vanguard* or *Countdown* on Hulu or iTunes on an à la carte basis. This lack of legal options to watch Current programming online signifies a network desperately trying to monetize its cable subscriptions as opposed to exploiting some of the interactive and synergistic possibilities of the internet. *Countdown* and *Vanguard* reporters Tweet short messages, and both programs release trailers, behind-the-scenes shots, and short clips on YouTube, iTunes, and Current.com, but opportunities for interactivity are surprisingly rare. The "blog" for *Vanguard* consists of a highly edited collection of Tweets sent in by viewers and *Vanguard* reporters. Yamaguchi admits they could do more, but they are not motivated by their superiors to do so

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(interviewed April 20, 2011). Below the short videos on *Countdown* are vibrant debates. *Vanguard*'s participatory attempts are a far cry from the rich tapestry of voices, big and small, articulate or loud, competing for viability. After five years of doing everything the internet could, Current is now doing as little of the internet as possible. The "return" to cable television is not a simple return but part of a conservative response to the global financial crisis of 2008 and advancing hybridization of television and the internet created by (companies like) Current. This is participatory culture as an implicit form of interaction: participation in the production of meaning, not participation in the explicit production of media itself (Jenkins 2006).

Jenkins (2006) abandons the idea that explicit citizen participation is a feasible force for the diversification of a hegemonic public sphere. Current would agree. He believes that corporations as well as audiences are not going to give up the simplicity or the economic potential of implicit participation. The change Jenkins foresees is "towards consumption as a networked practice" (2006:244). These "consumption communities" (2006:245) will subtly but consistently reform a corporate-driven public sphere into a sphere of greater interactivity, listening, and engagement. This is very different from a media revolution led by video citizen journalists.

The technical imaginaries of Current's morality of the public sphere have undergone several transformations. First, VC2 producers explicitly made difficult documentaries, to "give voice to the voiceless," as host Jason Silva often said. Second, Current.com contributors implicitly provided story links. Now, viewers actively watch as "consumption communities" (Jenkins 2006:245). From the most to the least active, each is one form of engagement with the hegemonic public sphere. Citizens need only watch *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* or the newer shows, *The Young Turks with Cenk Uygur* and *War Room with Jennifer Granholm* to

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qualify as participants in a public sphere. This is because along with *Vanguard* and *Countdown* came a renewed moral focus on Current's status as an "independent" news network resisting the negation of access to the public sphere by conglomerated media corporations. It is this elite and professional independence to critique corporate media and oligarchy by a liberal pundit, not explicit citizen television production with VC2 or implicit user contributions with Current.com, that is going to provide the grounds for the development of voice within the American public sphere. This appeared to be the logic. And yet despite Current's full-scale movement toward television news, the internet imaginary cannot die.

In the form of interview-collected discourses, this chapter has investigated the moral technical imaginary at work throughout history within the offices of Current as it attempts to create a convergence of the internet and television in the hopes of securing profit while creating the conditions for a vibrant public sphere. The historical trajectory is from explicit to implicit participation, mobilizing the public sphere model throughout, before arriving at a manifestation of the guardianship model in the present Hollywood phase.

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 expands the definition of cultural interventions to include moral technical imaginaries (Kelty 2008). Examples of moral technical imaginaries come from Current's competing expressions of how a merger of television and the internet could increase voice in the hegemonic public sphere. Models of technologies assume distinct tenors when mobilized to produce profit. The pitch of these tenors is increased when the goals are social and progressive. An example of the technoprogressive moral technical imaginary comes from the work of Gore,

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who formulated an ecology/information model that attempted to mobilize policy, technology, and mythology (Mosco 2005) to find support for system conceptualizations.

Current employees' moral imaginaries manifested broadly in discourses about how technologies such as television and the internet should be mobilized to energize citizen engagement with the hegemonic public sphere and overcome the homogenization and elitism of media corporate conglomeration. This broad political and industrial thesis distills into specific imaginaries about technological practices executed in four historical movements.

In the first phase, Current's Prehistory (1991-2005), Gore and his colleagues purchased a profitable cable news network, imagined its future, and transformed it into the television network that envisioned viewer-created content as the solution to the absence of public voices in the public sphere. This section links to the final sections of Chapter 4 that explain Gore's underlying ecology/information model.

In the second phase, Viewer-Created Content (2005-2007), Current created itself as a network for the democratization of media production through giving citizens incentives and a platform for the transmission of personally "authentic" documentaries. The VC2 phase exposes how internet and television imaginaries and practices were brought together in a confusing and ultimately unsuccessful bricolage.

Two instances within the VC2 phase illustrate the models of television in encounters with the models of internet. In Current's Chemosphere studio and its unorthodox shuffle programming strategy, it is possible to observe how television and internet models weave and conflict in mission and market operations.

The third phase, Current.com (2007-2009), is marked by a turn away from explicit forms of citizen participation in the form of documentary production and toward making participation

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easier through only requesting citizens to link stories and make comments on the social media website, Current.com.

The fourth phase, Nonfiction Television (2009-2011), represents a liminal stage in which the network transitioned out of its explicit and implicit public sphere models and toward its guardianship, professional, or Hollywood model. During this phase, Current was neither progressive nor democratizing media; it was following the model of nonfiction adventure television. My experience with nonfiction television companies reveals the precarity of media work.

In the fifth stage, Hollywood (2009-today), Current focused on creating hit television shows and subservient websites around proven television formats, executives, and progressive media stars, with limited citizen participation. The network remade itself as a progressive television news network led by Keith Olbermann and featuring Cenk Uygur and Jennifer Granholm.

Chapter 4 reveals how models within cultural interventions are themselves conflictual. Morality and technological competency collide as internet and television imaginaries are entangled. Finally, this chapter also examines how models are mobilized in reaction to the emergence of new technologies and global economic forces. Despite these changes and contradictions, Current's "independence" is the only continuity.

In the public sphere model, Current attempted as recursive publics (Kelty 2008) to create a platform for citizen engagement in television journalism production. Afterward, Current tried to contribute progressive voices to the hegemonic television news systems. Yet throughout, Current remains committed to media reform broadcasting, with an overreliance on a techno-utopian model—the opposite of the technology model that warns against thinking that states that

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technology can fix the democracy deficit. However, Current's endeavors are mediated by

economic, technological, and political processes beyond its control, and precarity is the result.

Thus this historicity is influenced by the global financial crisis and the necessity to secure profit.

Chapter 5: DISCOURSES OF MEDIA REFORM BROADCASTERS

Chapter 5 is an attempt to illustrate my etic focus on models with emic use of media reform broadcaster's discourse. The specific discursive instances include three linked ethnographic vignettes from FSTV and their preparation for the 2011 NCMR organized by Free Press, a not-for-profit media reform organization. FSTV's Campagna and Gross begin by brainstorming about what elements they want to include in the "umbrella statement"—the private and public explanation for why we were going to a conference on media reform. First, the methodical processes of proposing, negating, and selecting justifications illustrate how FSTV discursively and practically applies itself to the problems of media reform. This discursive topography constitutes a number of media reform models relating to access, diversity, independence, media regulation, and corporate media. Second, this first vignette explores how a public identity is editorialized and constructed in reaction to policy and technology. As we worked and revised different concepts, we refined how FSTV sees itself and how it overlaps with partner organizations. Thus this process also mirrors the type of design-oriented, collaborative anthropological projects advocated by Rabinow and Marcus (2008) and Kelty (2009).

In the drafting of the FSTV-NCMR umbrella statement we discussed and analyzed what FSTV meant by "openness" and "access." Is FSTV open and therefore accessible for citizen video journalism, as is advocated by the public sphere models? Is the video content open and accessible for viewing, as is necessary in the guardianship models? Or is the network's notion of openness and access defined in relation to closed media conglomerations that situate their broadcasting within the commercial model? We follow this discussion by investigating FSTV's preference for strong state regulation in the social liberal tradition. FSTV's survival and the

survival of progressive media in general depends upon regulation of conglomerated media. Campagna, Gross, and I discussed how survival in this dual sense is dependent upon regulation that favors access. This final point reflects on FSTV as a recursive public (Kelty 2008). While FSTV advocates for the survival of progressive media through advocating for an open internet and the regulation of media corporations, it is also impacting its very existence. This capacity to reflexively interrogate and creatively re-engineer its means of production is evident in the next ethnographic experience that day, an interview with Sharif Abdel Kouddous of *Democracy Now!*

Without losing a step we exit the "war room" where we collectively wrote the mission statement for NCMR to take a conference call with Kouddous, Egyptian-American correspondent for *Democracy Now!* and speaker at NCMR. In the interview we address issues of technology and public policy. In addition to providing a glimpse into the fast-paced, day-in-the-life experience of television news and media reform workers, these instances show the fluidity of concepts regarding technology and policy. The discussion with Kouddous exhibits how television producers and activists in the era of the Arab Spring, net neutrality, and the hacktivist group Anonymous envision their work, as mediated through emergent technologies.

FSTV broadcasts *Democracy Now!* and Kouddous was prominent on the network during the Egyptian Revolution of January 2011. Kouddous illustrates how progressive media reform broadcasters need to be savvy users of mobile and convergent technologies. He relates to us a story of using a satellite phone, a Twitter account, and a U.S. proxy to get the story out on the revolution when Egyptian President Mubarak had shut down the internet service providers. This story provoked Kouddous to reflect upon the role of social media in promoting the Egyptian Revolution—a consistent, technofetishistic assumption made on hegemonic television news. Kouddous believed that social media facilitated mobilization for the Revolution, but even

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without it the Revolution would have happened. This sober assessment mirrors FSTV's own pragmatic approach to social technology and its capacity for cultural change: it can be used for virtual mobilization and information distribution, but it cannot replace the necessities of physical mobilization.

We concluded our discussion with Kouddous by addressing how neoliberalism structures a challenge to media reform broadcasters in the apparent state and corporate support for the end of network neutrality and the emergence of an economically classed internet. In both ethnographic vignettes above, Kouddous and Campagna reflect upon the innovative social use of emergent technologies to create openings in the hegemonic public sphere, structured as it is by the policies of neoliberalism. The concluding focus on network neutrality as framed as a battle against neoliberal media policy segues into our future experiences at the NCMR.

In the third vignette, we go to NCMR in Boston. I focus on a single panel at the 2011 NCMR, "Getting Out of the Silo: Editing Video As a Community," which featured FSTV Program Director Eric Galatas as well as other important partners for FSTV, the Media Consortium, and, most importantly, the UpTake, a citizen video journalism nonprofit organization. It is with this chapter and the third vignette that the broad models of media reform broadcasting begin to diversify into consistent discourses.

Silo is a recurring theme in internet theory and media reform broadcasting. It refers to the balkanization of the audience into affinity cultures or the segmentation of departments within corporations, as it was used by Current employees to describe Current. FSTV and its partners at NCMR address silophication differently as a problem resulting from the different media reform broadcasting organizations lacking effective partnership. This they hoped to address through intersectionality, the notion of which was described by the panel founder and Managing Director

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of the Media Consortium Erin Polgreen. The term is used to describe the instances of

overlapping concerns shared by media reform broadcasters. The goal of intersectional actions is

to provoke increased productive collaboration, an important theme of this panel. Like the

preceding two ethnographic vignettes, the third vignette in this chapter illustrates the work of

media reform broadcasters. They isolate a problem, such as silophication and address it via an

intersectional approach, of which a conference is a physical manifestation, with the goal of

transcending silophication through inter-organizational collaboration.

      As an opportunity to introduce the reader to the media reform broadcasting issues at

NCMR and as an example of collaborative, militant, and critical media anthropology, I present

herein a short document I wrote for FSTV's monthly newsletter shortly after my participation in

the NCMR conference:

> From its inception in 1995, Free Speech TV's goal has been to infiltrate and subvert the vapid, shrill, and corporately controlled American television newsscape with challenging and unheard voices. Fast forward to 2011, and in the age of viral videos, social media, and ubiquitous computing, the same issues persist.
>
>   An excellent, young, pro-freedom-of-speech organization, Free Press, called all media activists to Boston for the National Conference on Media Reform (NCMR), April 8 through 10, to celebrate independent media and incubate strategies to fight the tide of corporate personhood, monopolization in communication industries, and the denial of access to the public airwaves.
>
>   These are issues FSTV has long fought, first with VHS tapes of radical documentaries shipped to community access stations throughout the nation, then through satellite carriage in 30 million homes, and now via live internet video and direct dialogues with the audience through social media.
>
>   FSTV was at NCMR in full force, covering live panels on everything from the role of social media in North African revolutions to media's sexualization of women; developing strategic relationships with print, radio, internet, and television collaborators; interviewing luminaries like FCC Commissioner Copps; and inspiring the delegates by opening up the otherwise closed and corporatized satellite television world to the voices of media activists fighting for access and diversity during a frankly terrifying period in American media freedom.
>
>   One question haunted the many stages, daises, and dialogues at the NCMR: Is the open, decentralized, accessible and diverse internet—by which media production, citizen journalism, and community collaboration have been recently democratized—becoming closed, centralized, and homogenous as it begins to look and feel more like the elite-

controlled cable television system? For example, while we were in the conference, the House voted to block the FCC from protecting our right to access an open internet. The mergers of Comcast and NBCUniversal and AT&T/T-Mobile loomed behind every passionate oration. And yet FSTV was there to document when FCC Commissioner Copps took the stage stating he would resist the denial of network neutrality and such monopolizing mergers.

Internationally, examples of the power and problems of the internet exist. The Egypt-based Facebook group "We are all Khaled Said" had 80,000 members, many of whom amassed at Tahrir Square on January 26, instigating a wave of democratization that began in Tunisia—also fueled by social media—and hopefully continuing to Libya. Two days later, however, the Mubarak regime was able effectively to hit a "kill switch" on the internet and target activists using Facebook for arrest, an activity that worked against the desires of the repressive regime. At the NCMR, *Democracy Now!* reporter Sharif Abdel Kouddous said, "Facebook was down … so they hit the streets. It had the reverse desire and effect that the government wanted to happen."

In 2010, Reporters Without Borders compiled a list of 13 internet enemies—countries that suppress free speech online. The U.S. wasn't on the list, but U.S. companies Amazon, PayPal, Mastercard, Visa, and Apple were pressured to cut digital and financial support for whistleblowing WikiLeaks. The point is obvious: a vigilant press aided by an open, uncensored, and unprivatized internet are necessary yet threatened and are the focus of FSTV's coverage at NCMR.

FSTV embodies that ancient movement of ordinary people taking back power from entrenched elites. Today, every issue, from class inequality to ecological justice—is a media issue. However, our media sources, from journalists to internet and television delivery systems, are being co-opted by monopolizing corporations and lobbyists. As an independent, open, and interactive television network, FSTV is an antidote to the problems facing free speech and democracy as more media power is centralized in fewer hands. Thankfully, as we found out in Boston, FSTV is not alone in this dangerous and difficult operation of media liberation.

This newsletter synopsis provides a brief introduction to FSTV and NCMR but also

illustrates the types of complicit and collaborative work necessary to gain access in the tradition

of applied and militant media anthropology.

Writing FSTV's Umbrella Statement for the 2011 National Conference on Media Reform

Before I attended the NCMR conference I prepared along with FSTV in its office in

Denver. It was on March 8, 2011, that my FSTV informants went out to lunch and I stayed in the

office. I walked to the kitchen to procure my lunch from the fridge and on a bookcase found

NYU sociologist Eric Klineberg's (2007) book *Fighting for Air: Battle To Control America's Media*. I took a seat in FSTV's "war room" and read the chapter, "The Media and Democracy," which details the social movement for a more democratic media system. It begins with a short story about how media activist Josh Silver had read Robert McChesney's (1999) *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* while working a Clean Elections campaign. He looked up from the book to glance at the news program, the top story of which was the price of lobsters. This inane news programming infuriated Silver, who cold-called McChesney. Later, McChesney and his collaborator, *Nation* writer John Nichols, met with Silver in Washington DC, and the three launched Free Press.

This book dovetailed with what we were doing at FSTV headquarters preparing for Free Press's NC MR. When they returned from lunch I worked alongside Campagna, FSTV's development director, and Bonnie Gross, Outreach & Membership Services manager. We were preparing our umbrella statement for promotional materials and to assist employees in understanding why FSTV was at NCMR and also to equip these employees with intriguing information to help convince journalists to report on FSTV. Like co-authoring a research paper abstract, I typed out the ideas as we developed them, and Campagna and Gross could see the statement develop in real-time on their computers because we were sharing the same networked Google document. In this dialogue, the issues constituting the model shared by both FSTV and NCMR emerge: independence, access, and diversity, and an antagonism against corporate media and media regulation.

Campagna initiated the umbrella statement by saying "Free Speech TV—an open and independent television network." As a documentary television producer who had just finished experiencing and critically assessing Current's experiments with being an "open" and

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"independent" television network, I was immediately skeptical of this description of FSTV. The news network was increasingly less "open" in the public sphere broadcasting sense, in which citizen video journalists could submit content, than Current.

I disagreed with Campagna's claim that FSTV is "open," saying: "This is not it; we have to realize only the internet is open and democratized. Print journalism isn't; FSTV isn't open and democratized; I can't just come in here and throw my film on your television network, so are we talking about independent?" FSTV is independent and progressive, but the distinction is between "open" public sphere broadcasting models and "closed" expert guardianship broadcasting models. I was beginning to reveal my frustration with Current's failed public sphere to FSTV, and arguing with one's informants at the beginning of a joint project was a risky maneuver, but it seemed to work with the FSTV employees.

Both Campagna and Gross agreed that FSTV is more a guardianship than a public sphere network. Campagna modified the message for FSTV: "We can dive into the [open] internet in the second sentence, but maybe we could ... pose a question: 'Is independent media posed to compete and thrive in a landscape that is becoming more and more privatized and government regulated?'" In this phrasing, Campagna situates FSTV against commercial broadcasting models. She shifts from promoting the public sphere "openness" to interrogating the commercial broadcasting models. We agree that this is a more appropriate description.

Gross thinks the threats posed by the commercialization of the public media resource are more serious. She suggests "survive" is better than "compete" to describe the media reform efforts in the face of neoliberal regulation and privatization. Revealing a moment of recursivity, Campagna agreed, "Right, can independent media *survive* in the landscape or environment that is becoming more and more privatized and regulated?" I openly wondered, "Do we really want to

argue against regulation?" At this early point in the research I was a novice in understanding

media regulation, and my naive and antagonistic understanding of neoliberalism is that it is

against all forms of regulation. Campagna is quick to remind me that regulation cuts both ways

for a progressive.

"Oh, yeah, that is going to come up," confirmed Campagna. "We are going to be

discussing that with the FCC."[11] Confused about this position apparently against regulation, I

sought clarity through reminding us that "the FCC and net neutrality, that is regulation."

Campagna agreed but told me that the issue of regulation goes beyond the issue of network

neutrality. "What about the conglomerates? Is there a role for the government to step in and

regulate that shit? So there is good regulation and bad regulation, too." This exchange helped me

to better comprehend neoliberalism and the progressive approach to it. Internet network

neutrality is the principle that the internet service providers should not filter, prioritize, or

marginalize specific types of information or users. According to Campagna, the internet should

not be regulated in a manner contradicting network neutrality. On the other hand, she applauds

regulation if applied to media corporations and their trust practices. These two perspectives on

regulation are consistent with American progressivism as I heard it throughout the week at the

NCMR and in the Occupy camps throughout the United States. Campagna does not merely

support regulation but "good" regulation that moderates conglomerates and works to keep the

internet open and independent. The achievement of these forms of regulation immediately

impact FSTV's "survival," as Gross contributed.

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[11] By "we" she meant the media reform movement in general, and she was also referring to the FCC town
hall meeting chaired by McChesney in which FCC commissioners were going to give a talk that FSTV was
going to broadcast.

"And then the other side of that coin is what is the evolving role of independent media?" asked Campagna. "Role and responsibility," Gross corrected her. Campagna agreed, "Responsibility, yes—the responsibility to guard and protect freedom of speech and a free press." Gross added, "Our responsibility to our audience is to remain independent and provide a platform for underrepresented voices and issues, so responsibility has a big role." The responsibility FSTV has comes from a contract with its viewer-supporters, partner institutions, and, most importantly, with the American people. This responsibility comes from the rights FSTV is given through DISH and DirecTV by the FCC to broadcast on satellite set-asides. The responsibility Gross experiences is because of the relationships she has to her work and the people who call in during pledge week. Thus, her feelings of responsibility are personal but also exist as a reaction to a structural element, the direct result of national technology policies.

Campagna continued, "In responsibility there is clearly an evolving role. What is that?" She recognized that FSTV's responsibility, and its models and discourses, will transform as hegemonic and counterhegemonic uses of technology and policy evolve. Even though Campagna had been at FSTV for less than two years, she understood that it is highly adaptive to new technologies and policies. Gross and Campagna proceeded to explore FSTV's "evolving role" and whether it can survive in a media landscape that favors for-profit and conglomerated media companies, unlike not-for-profit and independent television news networks like FSTV.

Campagna states, "There used to be a time when monopolies were an outright no. Now we see them everywhere. If Comcast ends up owning, or some other carrier, more and more of the pipeline, can we survive that? We know what Comcast is, it is a very conservative [company], and can FSTV gain a PI [public interest channel] there? Why wouldn't they give it to the evangelicals? What is the role when you have this huge party taking over? Can we survive in

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a privatized and regulated world?" FSTV feels it needs to react to corporate trust practices that are the result of neoliberal deregulation.

The question of survival appears here and earlier in this NCMR umbrella statement writing exercise. Survival concerns for a nonprofit corporation refer to both the survival of the institution as well as survival of the culture or phenomenon the nonprofit was given 501(c) 3 status to defend or promote. For FSTV, survival in light of Comcast means analyzing how to sustain and expand carriage on cable providers with a diametrically opposed ideology. Expansion into these unfriendly territories is necessary if FSTV is going to acquire a large audience and more potential for lucrative pledge drives and viewer-supporters.

There is a concern that its progressive ideology is a liability in its pursuit of expanded carriage. I heard FSTV employees, in fact, discussing how their name, motto, and mission— "free speech"—is seen as a moniker of left-wing extremism. Comcast is instructed by FCC law to relinquish a small percentage of its television spectrum to public interest networks, but it retains the right to select which networks acquire the channel. FSTV fears that it is being marginalized because its mission is often antagonistic toward corporate greed, media conglomeration, and conservative politics.

"Survival," in the second meaning, requires the perseverance of that which FSTV is tasked with defending, in a phrase: free speech. FSTV worries that its "role and responsibility" acquired when it received federally mandated satellite set-asides to defend the rights to accessible, independent, uncensored free speech is becoming increasingly difficult in a neoliberal era where the public interest is not protected, but big business and conglomeration is. Thus, FSTV and the diverse communities it promotes are equally threatened by neoliberal privatization.

Gross suggested that one of FSTV's responsibilities was to provide "access." This notion

of access relates directly to diversity. The way Campagna thought through the issue of access

was to refer to the internet. She shared the concern that the internet's network neutrality is

threatened. She believes it is going to become a segmented or tiered service based on the

financial class of the consumer. Campagna said,

> Access is diversity, but I don't see it as a diversity complex. I see it as more a social or
> cultural [issue]. There is diversity in that, but it is people who can access the free internet,
> not the diluted internet, where people are trying to sell you propaganda and diapers, but
> free of that. ... What are the public libraries going to end up with to offer a homeless
> person?

By "social or cultural," she is referring to the digital divide and how financial class will

impact access to the internet. Ethnic class is "in that," as she says, but it is access to technology

based on financial class divisions that is being threatened. FSTV is not a subsidized provider of

low-cost internet service to poor or rural areas. It provides content online without charging for

access, thus its free service does not recapitulate classed access. FSTV is at the whims of the

internet service providers and federal regulators for net neutrality of internet service providers.

Continuing this discussion, Campagna trusts that the media justice activists at NCMR

"know access" in its many forms. She qualified "access" by saying "or you can say democratized

access ... or fair access." Thinking about the distinction between public sphere and guardianship

broadcasting, I pushed her further by asking, "Is it access to view but not produce?" She clarified

that production and the public sphere model are not part of FSTV's conception, but access is

"fair access, equal access, equality to access, [and] access and freedom in a privatized and

regulated world." This is the argument of the digital divide as it pertains to network neutrality.

This concern that the internet is going to lose its network neutrality, and people from a lower

financial class are going to suffer culturally and economically, is a key issue addressed at NCMR.

As the brainstorming session continued, I proposed the verb "fight" to describe our methods against corporate media. Campagna disciplined my phrasing: "Remember, we are not fighting. We are a tool for the people." She counseled me that while FSTV is not engaged in citizen video journalism, at NCMR they are engaged with a form of public sphere broadcasting that is modeled on the guerrilla television (Halleck 2002) concept that television is a tool for social movement broadcasting[12]. In this respect we see the analytical category of public sphere broadcasting begin to be fragmented by the real life experiences of television producers. Campagna's statement also represents an essence of the internet imaginary—that networked communication technologies can be and are best when they are simple tools. This logic that technologies are best as tools mirrors a phenomenon observed at Current in the discussion regarding human online community managers or algorithms. In Silicon Valley there is an idea that technologies can facilitate democratic practices better than humans can because technologies lack human error and bias. As Current discovered, humans are necessary to moderate its online news platforms; algorithms cannot do it alone. Campagna exhibits a similar internet imaginary by articulating FSTV as a "tool for the people."

She goes on to qualify the statement. "What you can say is that we are there to provide ways for our viewers to interact with these changes and to take action. We are there to give them tools and see that this is how politicians are reacting, this is how the media is acting. And we are there to provide ways that our viewers can…." Campagna's phone rings and she leaves the "war room" to answer it. I ask Gross, "Do you think we can get that into that sentence?" "No," she

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[12] Guerrilla television also works for systemic change from within the system.

says and continues to offer a more nuanced statement. "We are there to give our audience access to these people. We are there more as a CSPAN peppered with a few interviews and letting the content speak for itself. What I always say, but it is too cutesy, is we give our audience a front row seat." Before her phone rang, Campagna was beginning to present a strong public sphere model that puts the responsibility of political action onto the viewer. When she left, Gross presented an approach based on a guardianship model in which FSTV's job is to provide guidance and information but not evoke participation. While Campagna relies upon techno-utopian imaginaries of networked communication technologies as being self-generating and self-moderating tools that serve the public sphere, Gross suggests that FSTV and its tool-wielding people provide useful but not necessarily actionable information. This distinction has much to do with the different personalities of the two, but it also illustrates a key division internal to FSTV and Current, that is, the differences between guardianship and public sphere models.

After Campagna's phone call, the meeting breaks up in the interpersonal flow of work and play in a cultural industries office. Campagna returns, followed by producer Lauren Winton, who tells us that they are going to shoot the pilot for the studio news program, *Newswire*. She asks if we want to watch from the control room. General Manager Don Rojas then showed up, and upon seeing Campagna's 5-inch-tall and rigid, red-rooted Mohawk, declares, "Free Speech TV has gone gothic or something!" Campagna brushed off the response from her supervisor, saying, "Don't worry, I won't wear it when the board [of directors] is here." We all laugh. Rojas had just had a difficult and long meeting with the board and was exhausted. Winton and Rojas leave and Campagna continues to brainstorm the umbrella statement for NCMR. "[Our goal is] to give our audiences access into the discussions and debates regarding the current state of individual rights to freedom of speech and democratic access to the internet..." Gross interrupts

Campagna to inform her that she just got an email from *Democracy Now!* correspondent Sharif Abdel Kouddous, freshly back from Tahrir Square in Cairo. He had been one of the only reporters to be able to freely report from Tahrir Square by using a satellite cell phone to send short messages or Tweets after the Mubarak regime took down the internet. Kouddous was going to be at NCMR, and as an upcoming star of progressive television news, Campagna wanted to interview him and use the transcribed interview in printed promotional material for FSTV's NCMR coverage.

These distractions got us slightly off topic, but we found ourselves speaking about media corporations and their strategic hesitancy regarding committing to a specific result of corporate conglomeration and its relationship to convergence (Sassen 1998). Campagna said "These are the top [issues]: threats to free speech, independent media, and equal access to the internet. Because, remember, independent media is threatened by corporate takeovers. Those are the three major areas." I agreed but continued to pressure Campagna to define what type of media corporation she is talking about. Was she talking about internet service providers like Time Warner, cable television companies like Comcast, content producers like the film and television studios, or internet search behemoths like Google? Which of these is the biggest threat?

Campagna recognized that the entire media industry is in a holding pattern waiting for the best moment to capture as much of the capital generated or freed up by deregulation and disruptions brought about by internet distribution. She said media corporations "don't want to react one way or another because there might be something in that pie for me." In her particular way, attempting to think the thoughts of a large media corporation's CEO, Campagna said, "'Wherever it rolls, I stand to make a profit, to sell my content, and then I have to hustle like a hooker." Massive media corporations have a diverse portfolio. They remain engaged in as many

different production and distribution sectors as is possible during these moments of regulatory transformation and technological disruption. Campagna continues, "So you don't want to alienate anybody. So you don't want to take a stand and let the public know what kind of a corporate whore you really are. But you certainly want to play when the corporate world takes over." FSTV doesn't have that option and experiences deregulation as a threat to its survival and the survival of its values. The NCMR was poised to criticize that corporate volition that rewards conglomeration—the more diversified a corporate portfolio, the less prone it is to loss in the event of one revenue stream failing. The media reform and progressive media-producing activists at FSTV critique neoliberalism as an illegal and unjust system. However, they also critique it because neoliberalism is impacting the survival of their values communities, as well as their capacity to have a securely employed life.

At the end of this joint umbrella statement writing seminar, Campagna reminded us that we wrote this to give the FSTV employees a statement with which to give their work meaning but also to ensure they could facilitate its survival. Addressing the obscurity of the television network and thinking about the participants at NCMR, Campagna stated, "They are not going to know who we are. Who is FSTV?" Gross perked up, "We are actually doing what we say our responsibility is—we are giving access to a national television audience." Echoing her statement regarding FSTV as a "simple tool," Campagna agrees. "[We are] opening the slates. We can help. Our responsibility is: we have a mainstream channel, access to 35 million homes, corporate media is extremely expensive, none of these people have access to it, and we are opening it up, and we are here too, and I think that is the story." She continued, "We are a slate. An empty canvas at this moment. We know there is an urgency. We have our own responsibility. We know we are unique in nature. We are progressive, and left, and we are here to open it up and ….. give

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these people access to the mainstream and see what happens." We then left to conduct a

speakerphone interview in an adjacent office with *Democracy Now!* correspondent Kouddous.

The eventual FSTV umbrella message for NCMR was:

What is the role of independent media in sustaining free speech and equal access in a privatized and regulated world? Free Speech TV, the non-corporate independent television and internet video network, is at the National Conference for Media Reform to give our audiences an intimate look at the debate and to open our airwaves to activists in the fight for free speech, independent media, and equal access to the internet.

We also provided a series of questions for the reporters who were going to produce

content for FSTV:

What is the problem? What's the "real" story here? What isn't being talked about? What is being overstated? Which sector—Silicon Valley tech, Hollywood TV, ISPs, U.S. policy—is going to impact the future of media in this country? How did we get here? What is the solution?

Besides providing to me an experience of the chaotic, creative, and political work lives of

these progressive television producers and activists, the brainstorming and umbrella statement

writing session with Campagna and Gross revealed a number of ways FSTV sees itself and

others. Specifically, FSTV has a number of concerns about its future existence; these refer to

economic pressures and the power that comes with oppositional scale and conglomeration, as

well as ideology marginalization. Campagna reveals her progressive position on regulation and

corporate media. Access is discussed polysemantically to represent access to media viewing as

well as production. Campagna and Gross discuss FSTV's relationship to its partners. Lastly,

FSTV considers itself as a blank canvas or tool for use by partners. This final point shares a

techno-utopian perspective with the internet imaginary exhibited by Current staff.

Throughout this instance, I noticed that FSTV workers held a number of definitions of

openness and access that reflect the shifting spectrum from the public sphere model to the

guardianship model. This experience suggested problems with the conceptual categories of

public sphere and guardianship broadcasting. Based on this experience, and what I observed at Current and throughout my fieldwork at FSTV, as well as in a detailed look at their histories, it is clear that the models of public sphere and guardianship broadcasting overlap.

Campagna and Gross left to prepare for the phone interview, and I met Stout in the hallway for the first time. We scheduled a time later that day to talk. Campagna, Gross, and I huddled around a conference phone in Gross's small office and called Kouddous. He began by explaining how he got to Tahrir Square on Saturday, January 29, 2011, a day after the infamous Day of Rage. His brother, a film producer in Cairo, called him and said, "Tomorrow we are going to overthrow the government" (interviewed March 8, 2011). Before the umbrella writing session I wrote the questions for Campagna to ask. The first question to Kouddous was: "What lessons can be learned by independent media about how well you were received versus how mainstream media was?" (interviewed March 8, 2011). He responded by telling us a story about how he had a U.S. satellite cell phone that could text back to the United States. He gave *Nation* writer Jeremy Scahill his Twitter password. He would text Scahill his play-by-play reports, and he would post it on Twitter. Kouddous's short reports via text, Twitter, and Scahill constituted the only Tweets coming out of Tahrir during the period of dictator-driven internet and cell phone blackout. Campagna was very impressed to know that Kouddous entered Egypt with 2,000 Twitter followers and left with 27,000. This was the period of heightened internet utopianism about how social media tools were influencing the toppling of regimes. Most can agree that technology is provoking a disruptive change to journalism, television, and social movement organizing. The answer remained a mystery as to actually *how* mobile media, social media, and the internet were going to facilitate progressive journalism organizations like FSTV and

Democracy Now! to achieve the type of cultural change they desire. For this reason, Campagna

was curious to learn about how new media was used by Kouddous in the field.

Answering Campagna's question, Kouddous described this technological work-around to

Mubarak's censorship:

> Independent journalists usually have to figure out ways to get the word out. They don't
> have the money, backing, technology, and crews. That kind of savvy is inherent to many
> independent journalists. We find ways around firewalls, and that was one way we did it.
> And it was successful; we managed to get the word out of Tahrir for three days when
> very few could. (interviewed March 8, 2011)

Using the text-Tweet technique, Kouddous also managed to write an entire article. The

social, technical, and economic limitations that provoke the technological "savvy" and

innovation discussed by Kouddous can be found throughout the history of FSTV as well as the

way Current cobbled together consumer-grade technologies and cameras in the creation of a

user-driven television network.

Campagna further queried Kouddous about the impact of social media, not on reporting

but in creating or assisting the movement of this revolution. Kouddous responded that it "ignited

the spark" but didn't cause the revolution. He said:

> The day they cut the internet on the 28th, it had the opposite effect of what the regime
> wanted, which was to calm the protest. What a lot of people told me was, they were just
> going to call their friends on their cell phones, check it out on Facebook, look at videos
> that were posted, and just stay at home—but they couldn't because the internet was
> down, Facebook was down, cell phones were down. So they hit the streets. It had the
> reverse desired effect of what the government wanted to happen. It also gives us a small
> insight into [how] sometimes social media can co-opt movements where people think
> they are doing enough by sitting at home and blogging and Tweeting and doing things
> like that, which has its place, but is not enough. But in Egypt we saw a perfect storm of
> these things coming together and exploding on the streets of Egypt peacefully on January
> 25. (interviewed March 8, 2011)

In summation, Kouddous said the "revolution would have happened without it [social

media], but it would have taken much longer" (interviewed March 8, 2011). The Mubarak

regime's internet and media blackout provoked attendance in the rallies in Tahrir Square and also

provoked journalists like Kouddous to create innovative solutions to problems. These grassroots

innovations will likely be reproduced and become tools of public sphere activists and

entrepreneurs. Both realms are of interest to Current and FSTV, hence Campagna's questions to

Kouddous.

We proceeded to discuss an issue Kouddous hopes to address at NCMR: network

neutrality. Kouddous explains net neutrality:

> It is a very important issue because it essentially tiers the internet, which was a level
> playing field, and that was the power of the internet. The power of it as an organization
> tool and a tool for communication was that it was completely democratic and available
> for anyone around the world to use it equally. With the absence of net neutrality, which is
> a real threat now, corporations and moneyed interests and those with more wealth and
> corporate power can tier the internet in a way that their sites, their information, is more
> accessible than those lower down on the social pole, than those at the grassroots level.
> For example, if you go to the *Democracy Now!* website it may take you four minutes to
> stream a video, and if you go to NBC's it will be very quick. So it is a very big concern;
> it should be a global concern. I think it affects everybody. Because the internet is a
> unique way of communication, it allows people across class levels and across physical
> borders to communicate on an equal plane as governments and leaders do. (interviewed
> March 8, 2011)

I quote Kouddous at length here because the issue of network neutrality is a cornerstone

concern that links FSTV, NCMR, and *Democracy Now!* It is key to contemporary media reform

broadcasters. Al Gore has spoken out in support of net neutrality, and had Current taken more

seriously the option of broadband over broadcast distribution, it too would also be more deeply

concerned with challenges to network neutrality that focus on limiting and tiering the distribution

of large files, such as video.

The internet is already deregulated. Media corporations looking to profit from prioritizing

certain information packets, such as their own if they are a content-owning ISP like Comcast-

Universal, are lobbying Congress to regulate the internet to give them the rights to null network

neutrality so as to be able to give preference to certain content while marginalizing other content. The class-based implications of this were expressed by Campagna and Kouddous in this chapter. Massive media corporations use neoliberalism's principles of deregulation and a minuscule government when it fits their needs, and they support regulation when it benefits them. This reminds me of what progressive Congressman Barney Frank recently said in opening remarks in the Congressional testimony regarding the bankruptcy of financial corporation MF Global, "You cannot logically and sensibly be for regulation in the particular when you have opposed regulation in general" (Frank 2011).

After the interview had concluded and Kouddous had hung up, Campagna expressed excitement about the number of ways this interview could be repurposed as informative promotional material. In an expression of guardianship broadcasting, she was hopeful that FSTV's audiences might honor and appreciate his stories of revolution and new media journalism. She was excited about the public sphere actions of the Egyptian revolutionaries and their collaborative partners across television journalism, social media, and grassroots organization across the world. This mixture of public sphere activism aided by decentralized social media and the internet, and translated by progressive internet broadcasters in the successful overthrowing of a centralized government, was inspirational to Campagna as it was to millions of other marginally empowered progressives around the world.

Kouddous spoke to us from his experience during the Egyptian Revolution about the "savvy" use of social media to produce compelling journalism amongst threats of internet blackout, censorship, and anti-network neutrality tiering. His narrative links with our earlier umbrella statement by identifying the dangers poised by manipulation of media structures by state policy for its own or corporate gain. Independent or progressive journalists, because of their

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"savvy"—a hacker response to their lack of political and economic power—are forced to mobilize their cultural assets, their models and discourses, to overcome these limitations. Sometimes, like in the case of Kouddous, these cultural innovations within technological worlds even transcend the limitations of dominant structures, such as dictatorial regimes and their censoring information policies and practices.

Getting Out of the Silo: Editing Video As a Community

Exactly a month later, on April 7, 2011, I flew to Boston to participate and observe the labor of FSTV at the NCMR. I stayed with Nat Taylor, with whom I produced the first two pods in India in 2005 and sold to Current in 2007, and rode the subway into the Seaport World Trade Center each morning for three days. My goal was to document how FSTV's progressive discourse, as framed in models by media reform broadcasters and articulated in the umbrella statement, situates within the models and discourses observable at the NCMR. I attended numerous panels across a range of issues. On Friday morning I sat in the front row in a ballroom and listened to Harvard internet lawyers Jonathan Zittrain and Yochai Benkler discuss issues in the panel "Censorship in the Age of Facebook and Twitter." Meeting these two mentors of mine was a treat. On Saturday I attended the panel "Egypt, Afghanistan and Beyond: Independent Journalism and International Crisis," featuring Kouddous and Al Jazeera English's Ahmed Shihab-Eldin, amongst others. After the panel I spoke with Shihab-Eldin, who informed me that Al Jazeera English had just hired Current's Andrew Fitzgerald.

The April 8, 2011 panel "Getting Out of the Silo: Editing Video As a Community" kicked off at 9:00 a.m. Unlike the other conferences I would attend with FSTV in which I was a scheduled television producer (Netroots Nation, 2011 NAACP), at the NCMR I was a free agent,

loosely attached to the social media and outreach personnel consisting of Campagna and Gross. I

later came to understand that Campagna, who has experience in graduate level anthropology,

was orchestrating my introduction to the progressive media movement. She knew that I needed

some freedom to explore the conference environment and cultural landscape, and that is what I

did by selecting this session on video and community. I was also curious about what the

organizers meant by "silo." Much of my research on Current was already complete, and I

encountered Current employees discussing "silos" as ways Current's departments had become

balkanized, the internet from the television departments, for example. The common usage is that

audiences get bracketed into homogenous circles because of personalization algorithms and filter

bubbles (Pariser 2011). This phenomenon is cited as being one of the signs of the "myth of

digital democracy"—that the internet is not creating the conditions for bridging diverse opinions

but reinforcing sameness (Hindman 2008). Will the session chairs refer to audiences or

producers as within silos of like-minded viewers and media makers? The topic of this session

was about production and editing, featuring media producers and media production managers,

not audiences or audience reception experts, so producers as well as audiences might "silo" into

similar tribes based on intellectual affiliation.

The public materials associated with the panel said it was organized by Erin Polgreen,

managing director of the Media Consortium, who introduced the panel. I wrote Polgreen on

November 25, 2011 to inquire into how it came to be. She wrote back on November 28, 2011

and said:

> I put it together with Tom Grasty of Stroome. He was interested in having a session
> focused on video collaboration, and he brought the Tiziano Project in. I recruited the
> UpTake and FSTV to round things out a bit. We were looking to create an intersectional
> narrative of collaboration, one that focused on tools (Stroome), engagement (the Uptake),
> collaboration with other outlets (FSTV), and skills-building (Tiziano). In terms of
> selection, once Tom and I firmed up the concept, we reached out to organizations that fit

those objectives. I've worked with FSTV and the UpTake for the last several years and knew they fit the bill. (email to author November 29, 2011)

Polgreen and Grasty "were looking to create an intersectional narrative of collaboration." This intersectionality would cross issues relating to tools, engagement, collaboration, and skills-building. FSTV, within this intersectional matrix, is known for collaboration. This recognition of FSTV as exemplary collaborators is significant coming from Polgreen, the managing director of the central nervous system for progressive media, the Media Consortium. Polgreen's "collaboration" is an analogy to Campagna's and Rojas's "partnering" or "partnership," which is a foundational concept for FSTV that governs many of its major choices. "How will this positively affect our partners?" is a question that is consistently asked by FSTV before it embarks on any major project. In fact, FSTV's greater inclusion of its partners was a major concern for the 2009 makeover engineered by Campagna and Rojas. Eric Galatas, a participant in the panel and managing director of FSTV, explores FSTV's concepts of partnership further below. Nevertheless, it is enough to say that this panel is an expression of the lateral and collaborative partnering ethos of progressive media. The horizontality of such partnerships within progressive culture is also documented in the anti-corporate globalization movement (Juris 2008) and hacker activists (Coleman 2011) and was instigated in the Occupy Wall Street movement by anthropologist David Graeber.

As an academic I am familiar with conferences, panels, and giving papers. The call for papers via listservs and websites, the panel abstract writing, the paper abstract scribing, the prepping to fit the allotted time, the before panel hang-out, the camaraderie on the dais, the anxiety and liberation on stage, the post-talk cocktails, the over-the-shoulder gazing for more interesting conversation, the loitering near the elevator, the promises of future collaboration and partnership—I get it. The NCMR was similar to these experiences, proving a sideways or lateral

scholasticism alongside media reform broadcasters (Boellstorff 2003, Maurer 2005, Nelson 2009). Like many academic and activist panels before it, this panel's formation is a result of principles similar to those that forged the partnership briefly discussed above. Partnerships and panels are the result of lateral networking amongst loose and strong ties of affiliated people (Granovetter 1973). Anthropologist Gabriella Coleman accurately describes how conferences allow computer hackers to "collectively enact, make visible, and subsequently celebrate many elements of their quotidian technological lifeworld" (Coleman 2011:50). Like hackers, the lifeworld of media reformers is largely a solitary practice in front of a computer, but conferences are opportunities in which "for a brief moment in time, the ordinary character of their social world is ritually encased, engendering a profound appreciation and awareness of their labor, friendships, events, and objects that often go unnoticed due to their piecemeal and quotidian nature" (Coleman 2010:50). I attended a number of conferences with FSTV, and NCMR and Netroots Nation in particular were focused on bringing together information workers whose labor was mostly computer-based. Coleman (2010) discusses the intersubjective intimacy and celebratory nature of hacker conferences. Of the four conferences, these two also stood out as being the most "fun," where people were most excited to see one another and celebrate together.

An example of old friends getting together in the spirit of partnership was the panel "Getting Out of the Silo: Editing Video As a Community." Polgreen began by saying that "collaboration really is the name of the game at the Media Consortium, and looking into new ways of collaborating around video content is where it is at" (statement April 9, 2011). Polgreen expresses the unscripted nature of this panel and the countercultural heritage of this particular iteration of progressivism in her phrase "where it is at." More importantly, her breathlessness about video is indicative of how video production has been democratized for most mid-sized

nonprofits and how video has come to dominate the broadband culture of the internet. These progressive activists know they must engage with the most evocative tools, and video is "where it is at." The industry of video is also in flux, and sophisticated players could position themselves to receive thousands if not millions of views, promote their nonprofit cause, and receive sustaining proceeds in the process.

In the panel were Jason Barnett, executive director of the UpTake, a domestic citizen journalism organization; Mara Abrams, director of business development for the Tiziano Project, a global citizen journalism organization; Tom Grasty of Stroome, a collaborative video editing site; and Eric Galatas, program director for FSTV. In the panel, Galatas began and introduced FSTV as a national television network—"old media, we also have a website, but our main strength is distribution on satellite and cable platforms across the country" (statement April 9, 2011). Galatas's introduction highlights FSTV's key asset for the partners. It is not the website but the satellite license that makes FSTV valued. Despite the hype regarding the internet, social media, and convergence, FSTV is first and foremost a satellite television network. Interestingly, after Current tried everything to monetize and culturally capitalize on the internet and convergence, it also realized that its television broadcasting license is its most important and complementary asset. This key asset is a result of selective yet favorable public media policy.

Galatas proceeds to show a marketing video featuring Rojas and the new and enticing content providers to FSTV: Al Jazeera English and its Arab Spring content. When the video ends, Galatas says, "We are talking about collaboration, so I thought I would take it up in a general broad sense" (statement on April 9, 2011). Galatas tells the story of how he joined FSTV in 1999 just before the WTO protests in Seattle and how there they organized a "video

contingency" of citizen journalists. In Seattle they worked with the Indymedia Centers and whoever else could handle a camera. Throughout his decade with FSTV, Galatas asks

> Why collaborate? The reason is: we have to because our goals are pretty large. Our goal is to become something of an answer for the progressive left for what Fox News has done for the conservative right. And we will never have as much money as they have, or have as many resources as they have, but we will also have more people than they do, because we simply outnumber them. (statement on April 9, 2011)

Here Galatas expresses the common progressive claim that quantities of people are the most useful resource, not finances. While it is undeniably true, the capacity to mobilize those people is dependent upon political and economic power. Even with network neutrality defended and access to the democratized means of internet-based organizing available, the expertise required to do this labor needs to be financed.

Galatas gave an example of people power over economic power, again speaking to the WTO protests:

> In Seattle during the World Trade Organization protests, about 85,000 people showed up to stop the WTO furthering its pro-corporate policies. CNN had a crew of three people. We had a hundred cameras on the ground, and when CNN started to report the general police story that they weren't firing rubber bullets at peacefully assembled demonstrators, we were able to put real time video on the internet showing the actual blood and bullets and forced them to change their story. The kinds of things you are seeing in Madison, the coverage that Al Jazeera is doing, show you that when people get together there is a lot of power and progressive change that can happen. (statement on April 9, 2011).

Galatas then tells the story of the coverage of the Homeless Marathon, which resulted in the mayor of Fresno responding to the media coverage of homelessness. He described the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit, which was the first formal collaboration with the Media Consortium. "Like the collaboration we were doing with Al Jazeera here in the United States … FSTV is in a unique situation because with a large television footprint we can help organizations that do not have a footprint gain access" (statement on April 9, 2011). These positive stories from the WTO protests, Homeless Marathon, Wisconsin, and U.S. Social Forum indeed show the power of

people and partnerships, not corporate money. These media actions were expensive ordeals, requiring partnership as well as finances. Galatas said he hoped to be doing more collaborations with "people in this room," highlighting that this panel was not only an opportunity to swap war stories but to also conduct important partnering work. Echoing his previous statement about the important asset fought for through policy by FSTV, its satellite license, Galatas's concluding advice was to encourage Media Consortium partners to use FSTV's television platform: "Television is not dead, not yet, and we have this real estate, and we might as well use it" (statement on April 9, 2011).

In concluding his introductory remarks, Galatas's advice for collaborators is to "find the *points of intersection*" and "operate in good faith—help others achieve their goals." Galatas echoed Polgreen's written description of the goals of the panel, to find "intersectionality," with his notion of "points of intersection."

A questioner asked Galatas about how to sustain a project. Galatas responded by discussing the importance of volunteer labor and partnerships; to illustrate his point he discussed *Indymedia Newsreel*, a project that existed successfully for eight years. He said the reason it worked was because it worked with "community organizations that really have a vested interest in telling their stories" (statement on April 9, 2011). Galatas explained that relying upon the passions of other activists intersectionally linked results in increased free labor. *Partnerships are formed at the point of intersectionality.* Successful intersectionality results in a number of benefits, including a reduction and distribution of labor costs. Intersectionality results from practices that help media reform groups survive. Intersectionality in league with networked communication systems and meatspace conferences form the cultural interventions necessary for marginally empowered people to advocate for their political positions.

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To further discuss the issue of silophication and its relationship to partnerships, I will provide the two following subsections.

Silos in the Corporation, Bubbles in the Audience

It started with a Tweet from progressive author, activist, and lawyer Lawrence Lessig, guest on FSTV, *Democracy Now!*, and NCMR about how much he appreciated Buddy Roemer, a rogue Republican and sometimes Democrat running a little known campaign for the U.S. presidency in 2012. Lessig wrote, "Wow! This is insanely great @buddyroemer" and included a link to Roemer's YouTube campaign video, " "'America, Listen to Them:' Gov. Buddy Roemer Speaks Out About Occupy Wall Street." In this video, Roemer explains that he doesn't accept donations over $100, effectively making it impossible for corporations to buy his candidacy. As of late, Lessig has focused on bi-partisan issues that can unify the divided nation. At the 2011 NCMR, he unfurled his new organization, Rootstrikers, an activist and research organization that is mobilizing dissent against the retailing of American democracy to mega-corporations. In his talk and on the Rootstrikers website, both corporations and politicians, Republicans and Democrats, are criticized as being in on the economic take and collaborating to make a sham of American representational democracy. I was happy to find out about the Republican Roemer. Moreover, the process I took to find him, through Twitter, and across my personal political border to a Republican, is an anecdote that reveals how Twitter can constitute a discursive arena that works to transcend the personal taste "silos" we find ourselves in.

Another example of Twitter serving to trump personal filter bubbles comes from the internet platform's hashtag search function. For instance, if you are curious about the day's events in the Occupy Movement, you can search Twitter with the hashtag #occupy or #ows. You

will witness a cascade of short posts; most are favorable about the movement. Some posters are using Twitter to inform fellow activists in real-time about police movements and apparent camp invasions. Some are simple retweets from news articles. But every so often a Tweet will come through that will be antagonistic, telling #ows protestors to get a job—any job, or a shower, or some other shout of defiance into the Twitterverse. The point is that Twitter and its hashtags can produce an ecology of opinions and news bytes that model the diversity of opinions necessary for a vibrant public sphere. This is because the hashtag search process is real-time and is not based on personalization "silos" but rather on hashtagged issues. Facebook's feed, to compare, is constructed from personally selected friends, and so the opportunity to break out of the silo of political identity and opinion is not as likely. Beyond my anecdotes, the phenomena of the filter bubble, silo, and the myth of digital democracy are confirmed with more certifiable methodologies by activist Eli Pariser (2011), anthropologist Pablo Boczkowski (2010), political scientist Matthew Hindman (2008), and journalism scholar and activist Ethan Zuckerman.

This section explores the polysemy around "silophication." This term has numerous iterations, and the informants represent the diverse meanings novel terms can quickly acquire. Current and FSTV both use the term or a synonym to describe a range of different elements. The polysemy of the term represents the numerous ways models are mobilized to create meaning and access to power.

"Engineering stakeholders, creative stakeholders...the designers are also there for visual layout...and maybe [virtual world creator] Will Wright is in the room and they are describing what they need and we are turning that into a technical specification," is how Current engineer Dan Linder described a meeting for Current show *Bar Karma* (interviewed October 11, 2010). Yet what Linder called a copacetic "collaborative process" belies tensions (interviewed October

11, 2010). Current's television and internet departments competed for limited resources, and the emphasis on one or the other shifted throughout its history. Others didn't like this "collaborative process." Brilliant was frustrated, "We had a really good web crew, but we always had to sit at the table with the TV company. … the TV held back the web [crew] being a full-fledged web 2.0 company. No other web company had to worry about a TV network" (interviewed May 26, 2010). Competition between the internet and television divisions illustrates the frictions within the technical imaginaries. They also affirm socio-technical distinctions between departments. While the quotes above reminisce about attempts at having different shareholders "sit at the table," an opposite process was at work as departments were self-balkanized.

"I want it to be this color, I want it to feel like this, I want it to sound like this, and at this point in the experience I want you to go 'wooo,'" Gunn says as he performs a creative producer in a brainstorming session, waving his hands in paired waves(interviewed August 4, 2010). Gunn contrasts this against an engineer, who asks, "What is the feature set?" with a slightly nerdy and irritated tone(interviewed August 4, 2010). "Those are fundamentally opposing ways of designing a product. You've got people in the same building, working on ostensibly the same product, coming at it from two different approaches. One has the vision for what it should look and sound and feel like, and the other [is focused] on the list of features," Gunn continued (interviewed August 4, 2010). Current show *Bar Karma* producer Jimmy Goldblum said, "Everyone is overworked at Current, and so people get entrenched in their departments" (interview February 6, 2011). Gunn called this process "the silophication of the company" (interviewed August 4, 2010), in which internet, television, and marketing divisions were not well integrated and taking different approaches to the same product.

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"All of our DNA was video- and TV-centric. What could we do that is native to the web...but also still not sell ourselves short [about what] makes us different as a media company, which is proprietary video content? So how to do both? It was a balance, but so many different constituencies to satisfy," Brilliant said (interview May 26, 2010). The problem? "We were trying to be platform agnostic; we were trying to do both" television and the internet, Brilliant explained (interview May 26, 2010). For example, media companies without television properties do not have to concern themselves with television's technical imaginaries of "aesthetics, programming restrictions, [and TV] ad sales. … So many different constituents and platforms to try to satisfy and all have unique criteria," but at Current, as Brilliant said, "you couldn't do one without the other" (interview May 26, 2010). This could describe much of Current's history of competing technical imaginaries struggling for moral alignment.

Gunn used the term "silophication" and describes its cultural significance in terms of departmental difference and competition. In this way, silophication is a synonym for internal corporate balkanization. FSTV, in contrast, sees silophication differently, in external audience balkanization.

According to Rojas, 53 percent of FSTV's viewers are white males. They have more viewers in states dominated by Republican voters. Surprisingly, according to Rojas, FSTV has "more viewers in red states than in progressive states because satellite has more presence in rural communities, in low-populated states, than major markets" (interviewed November 8, 2010). Rojas is stunned by this fact. "We are a progressive network, and most [of our] money comes from red states: Idahos, Montanas, Wyomings, South Carolinas" (interviewed November 8, 2010). This provides a "small but loyal constituency" (interviewed November 8, 2010). Yet it cuts both ways; FSTV's Colleen Finnerty told me that FSTV lost viewers because it aired the

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program *Gay USA*. When Finnerty asks "How do you sustain public media in a society like this?" (interviewed March 7, 2011) she is questioning how the cultural politics and its fragmenting of the audience can "sustain public media." This question is posed to the problem of silophication or fragmentation of the audience into affinity communities.

Rojas and Finnerty are speaking to the silophication of the audience as a result of television communication systems. The internet, on the other hand, and its socialization of media provide to those with the means of production opportunities to revisit their definitions of self and other. "Our approach was, if we could acquire a social media audience, that would be a new audience, because we knew we did not have that audience. That would be a new demographic," Campagna said (interviewed February 3, 2011). The internet encourages a critical awareness of identity, purpose, and community and is conceptualized as providing access to a distinct "new audience." The emergence of this new, internet-based audience is also cause for alarm for Campagna. "So the minute the internet started showing, a decade ago, a lot of profitability and capacity, I think you could see how they were skewing the fish into certain channels. And now the channels are much more clearly identifiable. You can go onto the internet and segment the types of users. What types of media attract an audience?" (interviewed February 3, 2011). Campagna sees a process by which media corporations and market specialists are able to corral audiences into profitable niche populations.

Grassroots activism networks, as well as social media and television news consumption and production communities, tend towards silos, filter bubbles, or personalized spaces of homogeneity (Pariser 2011, Boczkowski 2010, Hindman 2008). It has been recognized as fact in most studies of internet publics that users tend to engage with political material that affirms the user's identity. This is called siloing and is the result of personalization algorithms and personal

agency. The recognition of such social practices leads some to conclude that digital democracy is a myth and that practices on the internet affirm personal bias.

Thus from television to the internet, FSTV conceives of its audience in fragments, as constituting distinct cultural units. This iteration reveals silophication as a social reality, partially the result of broadcast technologies, as in the case of FSTV's high percentage of viewers in rural and mountainous "conservative" areas, a result of satellite technology. Distinct from this form of external silophication is the internal departmental balkanization experienced by employees of Current. Furthermore, the tendency for internet users to group into homogenous clusters and rarely engage with novel material that challenges their opinions compromises the dialogic dynamics of the American public sphere that media reform broadcasters are attempting to remedy. What is needed is a change in the culture of news consumption paired with the development of internet platforms that provide ways for users to bridge their filter bubbles.

What FSTV and others addressed in the panel, however, was a third variety of the silo. The conference in the actual and the Media Consortium in the virtual are attempts to overcome the disparate lack of communication between media reform broadcasters and instead transcend the silophication of the progressive media movement through intersectionality and collaboration. The silo is a serious problem for the generation of shared media reform models designed to access the hegemonic public sphere.

This emphasis on partnerships requires the following subsection for discussion and illustration.

Partnerships

The last morning of the NCMR, one of my informants invited me to a power breakfast at 8:00 a.m. at a 4-star hotel. An HD camera rested on a high tripod above two semi-private tables overlooking the Boston harbor through tall glass windows that shed morning light on flutes of parfait and silver pitchers of coffee. Having had a rather late night at the cash bar of the local whiskey establishment, we hungrily consumed our breakfast, coffee, and juice as we awaited our invitation to introduce ourselves. Magazine editors, television producers, community media activists, major funders, radio DJs, progressive television personalities, and one out-of-place anthropologist quickly gave their names in an audible wave around the tables.

Jay Harris, long-time publisher of the magazine *Mother Jones,* presented two timely issues that were cause for celebration and alarm. He wanted to celebrate a success that needed repeating—the powerful media presence and measurable impact it had in promoting the protests against the 2011 Wisconsin Budget Repair Bill. For that we needed to generate an institutional history of the media practices that worked: for example, the rapid response of video organizations like the UpTake that successfully coordinated with print journalists at *In These Times.* A small committee was formed at breakfast through a show of hands. As the house social scientist it sounded like a project that fit my skill set, so I volunteered. I was encouraged to visit the archive of programmatic and pragmatic emails that went quickly and passionately among the groups and individuals hustling to organize leading up to the days of the successful operation. Harris next proposed that we discuss our shared budget problems. There was not as much agreement, as can be expected, about what to do about the alarming situation, but engaged debate ensued about fundraising, the upcoming 2012 election, and ever-increasing media consolidation around corporate mergers. We agreed to partner. Nevertheless, what did partnership mean?

The small story demonstrates partnership, which is usually the tool for the underfunded and those organized to work for social justice. Partnership is a middle-range theory, between unincorporated or uninterested participation, and fully incorporated and economically motivated mergers. Partnership is a powerful lateral organizing tactic to resist hegemonic power and thus codes an antagonistic relationship to vertically arranged power structures while at the same time resisting the temporal transformation into hierarchy. Partnership requires a horizontally ordered strategy for internal practical formation. The lateral pooling of resources—sometimes with potential competitors as I saw at the power breakfast—proves that, in the social justice realm, the efficacy of the mission trumps the funding operation (sometimes to the point of compromising the efficacy). Despite the fact that many of these organizations compete for a decreasing share of philanthropic dollars, what was agreed upon was a commitment to partner, share resources, and attack the problem vigorously from the skill sets dispersed throughout the group. New media firms also exhibit partnership strategies as anthropologist Thomas Malaby (2009) showed in his study of collective problem solving and virtual world coding in Second Life. However, while the visionaries of Second Life devised such pro-corporate tools as the Love Machine, which enables collaboration and appreciation to flow laterally peer-to-peer across the company, partnership is not dependent upon digital technology and is a tactic innovated by the dependencies of social justice activism.

The lateral collaboration I viewed at the power breakfast was not an example of what we wrote about recently (Fish et al. 2011). This was not internet-enabled participation, but rather collaboration between people over eggs and hearty dialogue. Email is the most sophisticated "new" media system here. These collaborators are all technically literate and use very sophisticated technologies in their broadcast and start-up professional lives. However, they are

not dependent upon digital peer-to-peer networks for the sharing of Perl code, complex video uploading systems, or sophisticated medical record aggregation databases for their partnership. Rather, embodied meetings and simple text-based communications suffice. They set ad hoc goals and tasks and produce tools, data, and methods that are generative as opposed to being tethered to protocols within the collaborative community.

A significant member of FSTV's board co-wrote and published a book during my fieldwork on the ethos and mechanisms of institution-to-institution partnership. *Beyond the Echo Chamber: Reshaping Politics Through Networked Progressive Media* (New Press 2010) by Jessica Clark and Tracy Van Slyke (the FSTV board member) is a strategy guide about how four levels of internet-enabled networks have an impact on progressive journalism, political commentary, and activist organizing: 1) networked users, 2) self-organized networks, 3) institutional networks, 4) networks of institutions. The book is a field guide designed to identify new species of networked culture, their interrelationships in the emergent media ecology, their diverse communicative practices, and the values they seek to reproduce throughout society. The utility of this book for this project is that it reveals the partnership's ideals-in-practice of a key member of the media reform broadcasting community.

The four networks described by FSTV board member Van Slyke (and Clark 2010) go from the most abstract and loose to the most concrete and institutionalized. The first is "networked users," which includes "tens of millions of individuals" and is analogous to the "networked public sphere" (Benkler 2006). "Users" is deployed deliberately to define the confluence of "audience member and participant" (Clark and Van Slyke 2010:34). I like this simple term "user" better than the clumsy neologism "produser" (Bruns 2008), but the authors do not define the "networked public sphere" other than implying that it is public, semi-communal,

and potentially political and creative. If you hear some of the cyber-idealism of Yochai Benkler (2006), Henry Jenkins (2006), and Clay Shirky (2010) in these notions, then you are correct; they are cited throughout. Where the authors fail in describing these users is by ignoring the fact that they are networked not by some neutral, natural, or publically owned infrastructure but by privately owned or nonprofit platforms with their own set of affordances, prejudices, values, and persuasions that limit and provoke certain types of networks that are not simply user-driven but semi-hierarchical, striated, partitioned, unbalanced, and more often than not governed to maximize capital or commodifiable interaction. In their calculation there is an amorphous mass of politically minded people organized but unorganized. FSTV's audience of potential activists is Van Slyke and Clark's (2010) users. The second category Clark and Van Slyke (2010) recognize includes self-organized networks, which might be called organized publics (Fish et al. 2011). Organized publics develop without the formal economic or infrastructural assistance of institutions. Self-organized networks form pools around common projects, create webs around social communities, and aggregate around brands or hubs. The third category, the "network organized by institutions" is akin to the work of institutions such as the Sierra Club, National Organization for Women, and the ACLU that provide internet infrastructure to publics in order to seed activism. Finally, Clark and Van Slyke's fourth category, "networks of institutions," explores the lateral relationships between institutions, or what might be called partnerships. The key example comes from the Media Consortium, a 2005 journalism meta-organization in which both authors are intimately involved, along with FSTV, Free Press, Earth Island Institute, and Current's *Young Turks*. The Media Consortium serves as a nexus for meetings, conference calls, and email lists that coordinate messaging and projects across a number of progressive groups.

How do these netroots networks synergistically interact and self-generate? Examples come from the rise of Howard Dean's campaign in 2004, Ned Lamont's 2006 primary victory over Democratic Senator Joe Lieberman, and Virginia Senator George Allen's 2006 resignation over the viral video of him calling an opponent's aide "macaca." A more elaborate case comes from the media reform movement's work on network neutrality. In this movement there was a strong "network of institutions" with 850 organizations constituting the SavetheInternet.com Coalition.

The Media Consortium is an example of "networks of institutions" and is the central node in the progressive media partnership and collaboration network. The Media Consortium includes all major players in the progressive video and independent journalism field of production. It had 48 members and several associate members as of November 25, 2011. Throughout my research I worked for, observed, or had significant dialogues with 12 of the 48 members: Free Speech TV, the UpTake, Brave New Films, *Democracy Now!, GRITtv*, Link TV, *Earth Island Journal, Mother Jones, The Nation, In These Times*, *Young Turks*, and the Real News Networks. I targeted these members because of their investments in video or television (Free Speech TV, the Uptake, Brave New Films, *Democracy Now!, GritTV*, Link TV, *Young Turks*, Real News Network) or encountered Media Consortium members who focused on print (*Mother Jones, The Nation, In These Times*). The final unaccounted for Media Consortium member, which is neither video related nor was encountered in my fieldwork, was the *Earth Island Journal*. Actually, the *Earth Island Journal* is also partnered to another organization like the Media Consortium, the Earth Island Institute (EII) EII includes more than forty projects for which it provides fiscal sponsorship and publicity. These types of consortiums or institutes are materializations of partnerships. They are institutional loci for intersectionality. They could be considered

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conglomerates of partnering practices, progressive modeling, and financial and instrumental need. It was networked partners like these that Fox News host Glenn Beck interrogated as signs of underlying left-wing conspiracy and the powers of George Soros to destroy America through leveraging the powers of the tangled web of progressive nonprofits.

I had previous experience working within one of these intersectional partnerships. Working with funds from a Ford Foundation grant, from 2002-2003 I was the film distribution coordinator for the Sacred Land Film Project, one of the most successful of the projects under the umbrella of the EII, a partner of the Media Consortium. The parent organization was so influential that our formal name was the Sacred Land Film Project *of the* Earth Island Institute. In this endeavor, and per the acknowledgement of the executive director, Toby McLeod, our most important asset was our Rolodex, our list of past and present contributors. This list of contributors included numerous partner programs of similar weight and notoriety in a range of nonprofit activities. In Clark and Van Slyke's (2010) terminology, this would be "networks of institutions."

The list of donors and foundations in that Rolodex was second only to the relationships with McLeod's partners in the EII. On November 25, 2011, I visited the EII's webpage describing its partner projects, and leading off the page is a quote by McLeod: "At Earth Island, we are part of a community of creative activists with a great track record and cutting-edge worldview. This community provides us a network of peers and opportunities for cross-pollination." EII and the Media Consortium are examples of lateral partnerships that help the pooling of resources and the exchange of skills necessary for media justice movements.

Much of the essence of this partnership, its planning and operation, occurs online via listservs or on the phone between representatives of different paired organizations. Conferences

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serve as opportunities to physically meet, enact forms of partnership around these media-intensive weeks, and solidify friendships. Thus my 2002-2003 experiences at the Sacred Land Film Project of the Earth Island Institute illustrate the nested networks of intersectional partnerships within progressive media activism.

Rojas too is a major supporter of partnership, even reaching out to potential competitors such as Link TV, the other most prominent liberal, nonfiction, public interest television network in the United States:

> In the long term it does not make any sense for us to be fractured. And I am a big proponent of collaboration and partnership. We offered them [Link TV] our election feed. They first accepted it; then at the last moment they didn't go along with it. … We are all living in our little *silos*, but I believe we won't be able to survive the long term, now that the political climate has shifted so far to the right. We need an antidote to Fox, but we can't do it alone. We need to work in collaborative ways but driven by a mission to bring a balance to the media landscape that is more and more driven by corporate media. So that is our long-range vision. It is probably a little naive considering the current situation we are in, but that is the only road we can take to survive; we have to band together our meager resources. (interviewed November 8, 2010)

Rojas addresses the important points in partnership and expresses the collaborative ethos necessary for partnerships to be successful. Pooling best practices and models is the only way to compete with an extremely effective and profitable Fox News. Nevertheless, in order for these partnerships to occur, each partner needs to transcend the silos within which they are suspended.

Current does not have partnerships in the same manner that FSTV does. For-profit television networks do not pool and share resources amongst complementary organizations in the ways that not-for-profit television networks do out of necessity. The radical individualism of for-profit organizations does not believe that a rising tide lifts all ships but rather sees all potential collaborators as either clients or competitors. With this said, it is an insightful exercise to conceptualize who would constitute Current partnerships analogous to those of FSTV. Partnerships require mutual sharing of resources and interconnected benefits. Potential partners

for Current might include the satellite and cable companies like Dish and DirecTV. If Current's ratings do well, they will attract more viewers, and DirecTV will be able to raise prices on Current. One might be able to conceptualize the manufacturers of the products sold on commercials between Current's programming as partners. If Current's ratings increase, so too does the visibility of the products. Current's commercial partners might include those that advertise on its network for online education, loan refinancing, and anti-computer virus software—ubiquitous on upper-echelon and down-market American cable television. Current, of course, has investors from Hollywood, the Democratic Party, and Silicon Valley—folks like Democratic Party donor and Yucaipa investment firm founder Ron Burkle. According to Current's IPO file, Comcast owns 10 percent of stock in the company. On a fundamental level, these stockholders and angel investors are a fitting analogy to FSTV's partners. They often have more than an economic interest in the success of the network. Burkle's support of Gore and the Democratic vision of democracy is an example. Should the networks do well, so will Yucaipa. While Current's progressive politics are certainly at odds with Comcast's conservatism, Comcast as a 10 percent stockholder, benefits economically if Current succeeds.

This subsection illustrated partnerships, how they are discursively conceived, physically formed, and curated with the aid of technology. Partnerships are necessary in the not-for-profit sector. In the for-profit sector the concept of collaboration is quite distinct, complicated as it is by how economic relations alter social relations. The economizing of social relations and public interest projects are qualities of the neoliberal turn. While Current, because of its for-profit status, is firmly situated within this logic, FSTV and its partners continue to resist the reduction of social to economic relations and continue to do their nonprofit business in horizontally arranged partnerships. The tactics of intersectionality and partnerships are methods of

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overcoming the silophication of media reform broadcasting groups. This is an example of the discourse level of cultural interventions mobilized to create instances of openness and access into the hegemonic public sphere.

Chapter 5 Summary

This dissertation focuses on cultural interventions into the hegemonic public spheres. These cultural interventions assume a number of discursive and modular formations. For FSTV, the work is a matter of "survival" and "responsibility." Employees see their network as an "empty canvas" and thus "a tool for the people." FSTV mobilizes its knowledge of "regulation" to create "access." It is against "conglomeration" and "censorship" and for "network neutrality." Its most important assets are its "partnerships," the impacts of which are the results of "intersectionality." These varieties of discourses and models develop from the higher order values of "progressivism," "independence," and "media reform." The eventual object of these models and discourses is the creation of "diversity" and "access" in media systems closed to public access by hegemonic power aligned with the ideology of neoliberalism. This chapter has revealed a few emic discourses of how the cultural interventions of media reform broadcasters are negotiated in private offices, on conference calls, and on conference panels.

In an exploration of two interlinked days of fieldwork, this chapter reveals how private discourses about FSTV's values and identity are constructed for public performances. Campagna, Gross, and I developed an umbrella statement for the NCMR, and in the process I recorded how the television network aligns itself with the social justice movement for media reform. This discourse of civic freedom and technology continued in a discussion with Kouddous, who relates to us his practices reporting from Cairo during the Egyptian revolution.

Kouddous continued to discuss media reform and the technological competencies of guerrilla broadcasters. In these practices, FSTV exhibits how cultural interventions are premeditated and designed in collective consultation.

A conference is a manifestation of collective consultation *en masse*. This chapter concludes with the documentation of a panel at NCMR, "Getting Out of the Silo: Editing Video As a Community." This panel featured FSTV and its partners: the UpTake, Stroome, Media Consortium, and the Tiziano Project. The intersectionality evident with these participants reveals how collaborations are possible around shared technological competencies and media reform models. This experience at the NCMR panel and subsequent messages with organizers reveals the important implication of intersectionality, a theory developed within feminist sociology to describe how subjectivity is constituted by numerous interwoven forces including gender, race, and class (Crenshaw 1989). Oppressive forces work in consort to produce a subjugated subjectivity. The way media reformers use the term is inclusive of the hybridity of the feminist sociologist's use of the term. However, intersectionality in progressive media reform describes the confluence of forces that act to empower group formation, not disempower subject formation.

The first vignette focused on how media reform discourse is mobilized, negotiated, and contested in the formation of a public-facing model advocating for media reform. As a "recursive public" (Kelty 2008), employees at FSTV addressed how privatization negatively impacts not only its survival, but the survival of the systems on which it and its partners are dependent. The second vignette reveals how an FSTV/*Democracy Now!* reporter in Egypt during the revolution used existing technology to create an inexpensive and innovative breach in a networked communication system closed to broadcasting. The final vignette takes us to the NCMR and the

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panel "Getting Out of the Silo: Editing Video As a Community." Here I encountered how the problem of silophication and the absence of effective partnerships are addressed through intersectionality and collaboration. Each of the three vignettes reveals the emic discursive strategies that formulate the etic/emic models used by media reform broadcasters attempting to access the hegemonic public sphere.

CONCLUSION: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

I initially began this project by focusing on how legacy media companies within the socio-technical horizon of cable and satellite television were responding to the economic, social, and political possibilities posed by the affordances of the internet. My hunch was that the internet would radically disrupt cable television by making it less expensive, more interactive, and generally more advantageous for responsive and emergent media companies to forgo cable and satellite and move their projects online. As time quickly went by and I continued to watch and listen to my informants, I began to recognize that the internet was not supplanting more established networked communications systems but was rather being incorporated into pre-existing socio-technical and economic forms. The internet provided an opportunity to challenge practical norms and experiment with interactive strategies, but it failed to fundamentally change the economic and political problems these media corporations face daily. The internet was yet another platform with unique affordances and also promises and perils. What surprisingly remained central to the economic and political models and practices of these television news networks was their legacy asset of access to cable or satellite television audiences.

In this chapter, I provide ethnographic details and analysis of Current's and FSTV's future. The relationship between the traditional broadcasting systems and the internet is a central issue around which I observed their modulating discourses and models. In the case of Current, the 2008 global financial crisis, the pressures of the profit drive, investors, and debt fueled a movement away from the public sphere model and toward the guardianship broadcasting model. This tendency forced Current to move away from the utopian rhetoric of the internet and toward

maximizing the market potentialities of its cable property. In the process, Current's employee diaspora illustrates the profit potential online.

In the case of FSTV, new technologies continue to afford the network new opportunities for inexpensive broadcasting. FSTV remains committed to guardianship broadcasting as well as its nonprofit status. Thus it is constantly under pressure from the satellite and cable companies that distribute its content. Its existence as a public interest network in an era in which neoliberal policy seeks to eliminate state support for media projects and privatize and deregulate public media is tenuous. Thus the internet, which exists with little regulation, remains a place where FSTV can practice progressive media without needing to secure public interest set-asides. Should there be regulation to defend public interest broadcasting on the internet, it is unlikely that it will surpass the satellite and cable set-asides in total impact. As McChesney and Nichols (2010) argue, the problem isn't technology but funding. Without sophisticated ways to finance, support, and promote progressive internet video content, its impact will be as minimal as it is on cable and satellite.

Free Speech TV Imagining a Future As a Multiplatform Media Institution

"Why even have a satellite network?" was a question I posed to my subjects and myself throughout my research. The costs to rent a satellite transporter and satellite time must be astronomical. The internet provides an opportunity to distribute evocative video. Why not shift all resources to the internet? These were the practical questions that galvanized much of my early inquiry. Campagna agrees, "I think our board is asking that question" (interviewed February 3, 2011). She reminds me to consider that "You are looking at a 15-year-old organization here; that has been our platform. We are a *television* network" (interviewed February 3, 2011). She

emphasizes the technological specificities through drawing out the "te-le-vi-sion." This is distinct from the internet-television convergent world that is, to some, and to younger people, a distinct reality. Continuing, Campagna says, "A television was a television just until a few years ago, up until I want to say YouTube, but not even YouTube because you are looking at a lot of user-base media, very short clips, again, broadband. Now Hulu came in and changed the world and all these things" (interviewed February 3, 2011). She differentiates amateur, short-form, and broadband YouTube content from the professional, long-form, and broadcast content of television. Hulu, the video site for professional content equally owned by Fox, NBCUniversal, and Disney to distribute their content, proved a successful online video business model. The point is that a small media reform, broadcasting nonprofit organization without an internet business model cannot afford to neglect its television assets.

The issue of cable expansion is both a policy and technology problem for FSTV. As Rojas admits, we are "still trying to break into cable" (interviewed November 8, 2010). FSTV is on two satellite systems, DISH and DirecTV, but not on terrestrial cable television systems. During my fieldwork, FSTV approached Comcast, arguing that it has not met its requirement for public media access. Rojas "argues that they need to do more. [But] trying to get a meeting at high level is like pulling teeth" (interviewed November 8, 2010). Rojas believes that "Because of the controversial Comcast acquisition of NBC, there is some public pressure on Comcast to open up the airwaves to more programming for independent television. We are hoping we can get a serious meeting" (interviewed November 8, 2010). While we were shooting live coverage of NAACP, Rojas confided that Comcast is also looking to expand ethnic or racial programming.

Rojas admits, "We are still trying to break in through the ceiling of the Comcasts, the Verizons, the AT&Ts" (interviewed November 8, 2010). The argument from these telecommunications companies

> is that they have already met their public commitment to providing a certain amount of bandwidth for public interest TV. And our argument is: "no, you still need to do more." ... But we have a prospect of a meeting in the next couple of months with the folks at Comcast. We don't know how that is going to turn out. If we make a little bit of a breakthrough there, that could be huge for us. Carriage is an uphill struggle, it took four to five years to get up to DirecTV (interviewed November 8, 2010).

FSTV still has to pay for the DirecTV channel, but at a discounted rate. It also has to apply, and it is wholly at the discretion of the telecommunications company whether it allows FSTV to continue or not. There is no federal agency that adjudicates these issues impartially.

FSTV was hoping to ride the wave of public scrutiny on Comcast in light of its controversial acquisition of NBCUniversal to a cable deal. Race played a large role in which channel gets on Comcast. FSTV did what it could to change the racial composition of its on-screen hosts. It was also focusing on race-based issues like the One Nation March and the NAACP annual meeting. During my fieldwork, FSTV expanded the racial, age, and gender diversity of its board and its employees. This racial work would become part of a pitch package to Comcast, which is attempting to fill its public interest channels with networks addressing racial disparity.

However, in late February 2012, Comcast publicized which new networks would be featured on its system. It did move toward expanding its ethnic or racial content, but FSTV was not selected. Comcast selected four minority-owned channels owned by rapper Sean "P. Diddy" Combs, retired NBA star Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Spy Kids creator Robert Rodriguez, and a Hispanic-owned baby channel. Long-time FSTV host Laura Flanders wrote, "The new channels are a direct result of a private deal cut with civil rights organizations in exchange for those

groups' support of Comcast's takeover of majority control over NBCUniversal from General

Electric last year" (Flanders 2012).

"As we expand we will become more than a TV station, but a media station operating

simultaneously on a number of platforms: cable, satellite, web, social media, mobile,

everything," Rojas said (interviewed November 8, 2010). For nonprofit television, the internet

provides ways to route around fundraising prohibitions that apply to television. At the same time,

FSTV attempts to prepare itself for a possible future in which it can convert strictly to internet or

broadband distribution. Rojas told me,

> in the meantime, as we explore carriage expansion opportunities, we keep our eyes on the
> future. We also recognize that all media are going to converge on an internet-based
> platform, radio and television in particular. With our meager resources we need to
> prepare ourselves for that brave new world of convergent media. So we are placing a lot
> of emphasis on building our web assets, our capacity to produce web-based
> programming, to stream major events on the web to thousands of concurrent viewers. We
> know that that is what we have got to do. We cannot rely upon cable or satellite networks
> for our long-term future; our long-term future is in web TV, there is no question about it.
> (interviewed November 8, 2010)

Rojas has long been an entrepreneur and experimenter with emergent media for public

interest broadcasting. He started and received angel investing for an internet-based African-

American radio network that eventually failed along with the internet bubble of 1999. With

FSTV he is less utopian and speaking more practically to the limitation and possibilities of

convergence. He becomes more sober later in our discussion.

This "brave new world" is structured, however, by financial constraints, as Rojas later

informed me:

> There is no proven business model yet for web-only TV, or web-only radio, or there are
> one or two examples that are showing potential in terms of advertising, attracting
> advertising money: *Huffington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*. Everyone else is paltry.
> YouTube hasn't made a penny. Yahoo is trying to figure out its future. Everything is in
> flux right now, though; everyone knows this is the future, but no one has a lock on a
> successful business model. We are small players in the game, but we are affected by the

same challenges, the same difficulties. The philanthropic community is not going to throw money at us. We are still hoping as we grow our audience, on web and TV, as we expand the pool of viewers, [that] that will effect an expansion of donor support from our viewers. [Our goal is] finding the balance between pushing the envelope on the content and production side and sustain[ing] revenues to keep [us] afloat. (interviewed November 8, 2010)

Small organizations like FSTV must surely give the content away for free instead of

erecting pay walls like the *Wall Street Journal* or contract for lucrative advertising agreements

like the *Huffington Post*. This free distribution online satisfies their guardianship practices but

does not provide a source of sustaining revenue.

With being a public interest network comes restrictions about fundraising. "We cannot be

ad-supported on the TV side of things. We are restricted by FCC regulations and by our contracts

with both DISH and DirecTV. We cannot run advertising. We can do a form of underwriting and

sponsorship, like PBS does on TV" (interviewed November 8, 2010). The FCC has not yet

installed regulations on public interest (PI) networks' distribution practices on the internet:

> There are no FCC limitations yet anyway, on commercial advertising on PI websites. We've researched that and had lawyers look at the FCC rules inside and out, and they have told us there is still that window on the regulations you can exploit—a little loophole. We are going after that. We are going to do commercial advertising on the web and sponsorships and underwriting on TV, and hopefully a combination of those will provide us with what we need to survive. ... The approach for us is a packaged approach in which we leverage all of our media assets online and offline. (interviewed November 8, 2010)

FSTV's future exists between television and the internet as both offer promises of

expanded audiences and hopefully access to donors. The majority of the available audience

remains accessible via television, but FSTV perceives its future on the internet. As the internet as

a video system develops in utility and popularity, so too will FSTV's use of the internet as its

primary distribution platform. In this respect, the network's future on the internet is dependent

upon the development of the internet by the conglomerated telecommunications companies it

ideologically opposes as media reform broadcasters. This contradiction illustrates the problem of public media resources, such as the internet infrastructure, being owned and managed by private telecommunications corporations. FSTV and its partners almost universally support public ownership and nationalization of telecommunications infrastructures. However, the rate of development would likely be slowed under such a socio-political regime, further retarding FSTV's transition from broadcast to broadband exhibition. Under a privatization scheme, technological innovations happen faster, but such capital-intensive practices exclude many contenders. FSTV currently survives because of the socially liberal policies of the United States in regard to telecommunication public interest policies that provide the network its access via satellite set-asides. Thus, it is is tenuously situated between being dependent upon the innovations of telecommunications companies and being a reviled public interest network in the era of privatization and deregulation.

Current's Imaginaries: From Utopia to Ideology

The following ethnographic vignette from Current illustrates the compromises the network has made in moving from the public sphere model to profit-aware guardianship broadcasting. Like Current in 2005, FSTV is hopeful that the affordances of the internet might sustain it and achieve its mission. As you will read, both networks see their future in guardianship programming as opposed to the participatory public sphere model. The public sphere remains a powerful if elusive project within the neoliberal information economy.

By late 2009, I wasn't watching much of Current. The network wasn't streaming for free online, it was difficult to afford a cable subscription as a graduate student researcher, and like many VC2 producers, I had lost interest in watching the docu-soap programs it distributed after it

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killed the VC2 project. In the transition to the Hollywood phase, Current moved out of its numerous eclectic offices ringed around a cozy cafe where one could literally bump into Current workers. Its new offices are in LA Center Studios, a gated skyscraper in downtown Los Angeles looming over Highway 110. Nevertheless, it was in these halls that I conducted some of the most compelling interviews and made some of the most interesting observations about the historical transition of public sphere broadcasting practices to guardianship practices in light of internet-television convergence and economic pressures.

On one such encounter, security buzzed me up to Current's 27th floor lobby on my way to conduct some interviews. Beside *Vanguard* promotional posters of Putzel and Yamaguchi with the words "No Lies" and "No Borders" painted in black across their faces was a large monitor that afforded me my first view of Current programming in a long time. Sometimes a network's promotional commercials are as interesting as its content. A commercial begins with a slick narrator saying "It's a Samsung summer road trip featuring Current journalists Max Lugavere and Jason Silva. Their destination? Catalina Island, California, to show how the Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 is revolutionizing the way we live." Max and Jason proceed to have a self-proclaimed "bromance" on this jewel of the Channel Islands guided by their new tablets. There was no "journalism" in this commercial, and if there were, "journalists" selling hardware is simply unethical. Max Lugavere and Jason Silva were the first hosts at Current. University of Miami film students, they submitted their senior thesis film, *Textures of Selfhood*, a hedonistic, narcissistic, and psycho-spiritual romp through South Beach, Miami, to Current before it launched, and Current immediately hired them. Their hosted recordings introduced pods in Current's Chemosphere numerous times throughout the day. They took a particular liking to my work, particularly the third pod I produced for Current, *Tantric Tourists*, a reflexive journey

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about spiritual tourists in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains of Sikkim, and we became friends. As the most recognizable faces to develop out of Current, Silva and Lugavere were kept on a retainer after the downfall of VC2 for just these kinds of collaborative projects with corporations. Silva and Lugavere were most identified with the VC2 project, and therefore any corporate collaboration with these two young men was an attempt to co-opt the movement of citizen video journalism for corporate gain. This commercial combined the technical imaginary of factual VC2 reporting with the morality of capitalism. Using the same voice-over announcer the network uses to introduce its programs, paired with the network's most prominent faces, this commercial has the dishonesty, slickness, and ambiguity of an infomercial. This unethical corporate-network collaboration to sell communication hardware reveals the ways the public sphere model can be mobilized for economic gain. The economic potency of public sphere broadcasting reveals the flexibility of broadcast models backed by economic motivations.

I arrived early, so I had time to kill and sat down and watched another commercial. This one was more disturbing. Like a VC2 pod, it starts with a text graphic clearly claiming to be "Viewer-Created Content" with the same narrator from the previous advertisement saying, "Here is a short film about escaping conventions, made by a Current TV viewer, about the new CT Hybrid from Lexus, the most fuel-efficient luxury car available." This advertisement was thinly veiled as a VC2 pod about someone "escaping conventions," the owner of Origami Vinyl, a record store in Echo Park, a hip neighborhood in Los Angeles. The ad was produced by Alejandro Heiber, who, according to IMDb, has been producing, directing, and editing films and commercials since 2004, and Salomon Resler, who began his career in 1999 working for famous advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi in Caracas, Venezuela, and is presently a senior copy writer for DirecTV. The point should be clear. These are not viewer-creators but seasoned professional

producers and marketers. During the VC2 phase, Current had a program for aspiring commercial producers called VCAM, or Viewer-Created Advertising Message, and it was housed in the advertising department. The journalistic version was VC2, and there was a significant effort to keep the separation of powers legitimate. These ads, however, were not promoted as VCAM but as VC2.

In these two ads is an attempt to co-opt the legitimate journalistic practices of VC2 in the pursuit of "advertising messaging." Much like the earlier advertisement featuring classic Current content, namely Max and Jason, this commercial also focused on a typical Current subject, urban youth's retro-nostalgia for material music in the form of vinyl LPs and Technics turntable-wielding DJs. Thus, in both advertisements Current conflates its VC2 with its Hollywood projects, the public sphere amateur aesthetic with professional production. Both advertisements were devoid of political potency. They were designed to sell luxury goods. The mutability of the public sphere approach in the pursuit of profit cannot be better illustrated than through a description of what I saw awaiting an interview on that office lounge couch.

I was saved from this disturbing conflation of the public sphere approach and commercial practice by Saskia Wilson-Brown, who breezed in after having had lunch with my interview subject, *Vanguard* Vice President Adam Yamaguchi. She was once the lead in Current's Outreach department and was now working on web audience curation. She missed the first round of job cuts in November 2008 because she was a "legacy asset" but was let go in November 2009. She returned to her work as an independent film organizer before coming back to Current, where her fiancé works. She quickly embraced me, looked at the screen and its commercials, shook her head, pointed at the screen, and said rhetorically, "They call this Viewer-Created Content!?" (interviewed April 20, 2011). Wilson-Brown was equally stunned by the gall with

which Current was fearlessly peddling its earlier "democratizing" mission for profit production. She believed in Gore's original mission and was one of the last to let go of its possible political potency. We reminisced about the idealistic era of VC2, speculated about whether "media democratization" was all just a sophisticated commercial ruse, and I caught her up on where her ex-colleagues were now working.

The commercialization of user-generated content and the professionalization of amateurs weren't just happening on the screen in front of us. Many of Current's employees tasked with finding "authentic" user-generated content and producers who were fired on November 11, 2008 and 2009, or left soon thereafter, are now successfully figuring out ways to sell those internet video producers, and the eyes they carry, to corporations. Their strategy is to get video producers to make commercials, embed products in their videos, and go into revenue-sharing deals with video websites like YouTube and Blip. For example, Joe Brilliant writes on his LinkedIn profile that after Current fired him he produced "proof of concept viral video ads illustrating marketing potential of user-generated content" for Butler, Shine, Stern & Partners, an advertising agency. Dan Beckmann started IB5k, a network of freelance video producers that make advertisements for such clients as Kraft and Bank of America. Joanna Earl left Current in September 2011 to join ngmoco, a mobile game start-up. Ezra Cooperstein, head of VC2, founded Maker Studios, Inc., a talent pool of the most subscribed YouTube producers. Maker Studios is a "one-stop shop for reach, control, customization, and quality…providing marketers with streamlined opportunities to further their presence" on YouTube (makerstudio.com/advertise). Brandon Gross, the first creative executive I worked with as a VC2 producer at Current, started Urgent Content, Inc. with three other Current alums. They describe themselves: "As pioneers of branded user-generated media, we help advertisers and their agencies implement content-based marketing

campaigns" (urgentcontent.com/about). VC2 Outreach personnel Sarah Evershed began by working for sxephil, the 13th most subscribed YouTube producer, and proceeded to marry and manage MysteryGuitarMan, the tenth most subscribed YouTube producer. Evershed founded The Cloud Media, a YouTube advertising start-up acquired by Big Frame that "works with online talent doing brand integration, talent development, ad sales and website creation." Prior to becoming the CEO of Big Frame, Steve Raymond was a vice president at NBCUniversal/Comcast. None of the user-generated content promoted by these companies is designed to inform but rather to entertain. The content produced by these Current alumni is orchestrated to sell merchandise, not improve diversity in the hegemonic public sphere. The political motivation many of these ex-Current employees described to me from 2006 to 2010 was not observable in their contemporary work practices.

Thus, to bring this research up to date, the leading internet video companies and those founded by Current's diaspora—much like the two commercials I saw in Current's high-rise lobby that day—use the form and aesthetic of viewer-created content in acts of commercialization. This, according to Flichy (2007), represents the shift that imaginaries often undergo from utopian rhetoric to corporate ideology. In ideology, capitalist domination is hidden or ignored, while the utopian rhetoric persists, yet as a falsity. Indeed, Max and Jason are not journalists, and Cooperstein, Brilliant, Earl, Beckmann, Gross, and Evershed's "branded talent" is not "authentic" user-generated content in the sense of the original morality but videos made by professionals with little political motivation. This dissonance between the utopian and ideological imaginaries is palatable for those who believed in the original utopian model. Departing, Wilson-Brown said, "Things have changed, and I can't watch it" (interviewed July 1, 2010).

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Current's "neurotic" or "sinusoidal" imaginary of television vs. the internet has provided

it a repertoire of ways to envision itself, here as a social media entrepreneur interested in the

public sphere, there as a for-profit television network. The employees, after leaving Current,

individually exhibit that same inventive imagination to reinvent themselves to suit their needs:

commercial capitalists here, media reformists there.

Dissertation Summary and Concluding Question

After exposing how applied visual anthropology (Pink 2008), militant ethnography (Juris

2008), and the crisis of representation (Marcus 1999) coalesced into the present research project

in chapter 1, I proceeded to introduce the core template of modular diversification present in the

media reform broadcasting community in chapter 2. Three broadcasting models are present:

guardianship, commercial, and public sphere. Media reform models are also present, including

the models of anti-monopoly, public interest, free speech, access diversity, public resource,

technology, and pro-democracy. These three broadcast and eight reform models were expressed

in numerous instances I observed. These models are exhibited in chapters 3, 4, 5 and the

conclusion. This dissertation details how these models were mobilized as cultural interventions

despite and often because of the structuring limitations of neoliberal media policy.

As explained in chapter 3, FSTV's cultural interventions into its perceived problem with

the American public sphere are detailed in several major socio-technical-political iterations.

First, it was on leased access on seven local cable television networks (1989-1995). After CEO

Malone ejected them from the conglomerate TCI, it kept its brand alive and relevant for the next

major communication technology (satellite). It was preparing for that media system through its

program service phase (1995-2000) by producing, archiving, packaging, and distributing four

hours of VHS content to 50 public access PEG channels around the United States. FSTV finally

secured national coverage in 2000 when the federal mandates for public access on satellite

networks (DBS) created an opening for it to access one of the major communication platforms of

the hegemonic public sphere. It was with this satellite footing that the network was able to

respond aggressively to the WTO meeting and the second Gulf War with the creativity and

passion mustered by *Democracy Now!* As soon as possible, and explicitly in 2010 (a rather late

date of entry into the social media phase), FSTV developed a convergent or multiplatform

distribution and advocacy system, merging the two-way internet and the one-way television

systems.

In chapter 3, the public interest model, access model, and anti-monopoly model are each

mobilized. In FSTV's earliest phase, when it was acquiring PEG stations throughout the United

States, the access model was most evident. The anti-monopoly model was evident during its

leased life on corporate telecom (1989-1995). In its program service phase and when it acquired

a channel on DISH in 2000, it utilized public interest and access models to remain in business.

With a satellite network it developed its diversity model in providing progressive political news

commentary when it was not present within the televisual hegemonic public sphere. In the final

phase I documented, focusing on the practices and discourses during the internet and

multiplatform periods, FSTV developed a techno-utopian model that contradicts the technology

model for media reform reminding activists and politicians that technology alone is not enough

to correct the democracy deficit.

Throughout chapter 3 were examples of FSTV's broadcasting models. The public sphere

model is used during its pledge drives, working communally for sustaining revenue, and in

partnerships with other media reform networks. News programs utilized the guardianship model,

addressing the audience as deficient in progressive politics. Throughout FSTV's history are examples of hybridities of media reform and broadcasting models.

FSTV and Current aspire to be providers of hegemonic balancing content in the American public sphere. As detailed in chapter 4, Current attempted to diversify the hegemonic public sphere with several iterations: VC2 (2005-2009), Current.com (2007-2009), Nonfiction (2009-2010), and Hollywood (2009-2012). In the VC2 phase, the network used a surplus of investment capital to experiment with explicit forms of participation in the form of citizen-produced television journalism. VC2 failed for ideological as well as commercial reasons. It produced content few advertisers wanted to run advertisements against, and it was difficult to schedule. Moreover, it failed ideologically, as it became apparent VC2 wasn't going to become a pro-democracy media movement but rather a small farm team for aspirant commercial producers. Current lowered the bar with Current.com, a website for the promotion of pre-produced stories through links and socialized media. Its bout competing with YouTube for internet video destination ending in inglorious defeat, competition for the social news world was equally intense, with Digg, Reddit, and soon Facebook taking most of the traffic that could have gone to Current.com. This was Current's Silicon Valley/IPO phase; it wanted to make a website that, if not popular, at least looked like it so the network could get public investment and remake the cable television division. With Current.com's failure and the IPO withdrawal, it returned its focus to old media, television, first filling the network with inexpensive nonfiction adventure content before re-creating Current as a progressive and independent television news network. As this fieldwork ends, the Hollywood news phase is in a tenuous state. Olbermann was fired on March 30, 2012, and the network seems to have an epic lineage of failures to its credit. These historic moments dramatize how policy, economic power, ideology, and technology come

together to form a hegemonic public sphere and how the same confluence of forces do not prohibit opportunities for cultural interventions by marginally empowered actors.

Chapter 4 details how Current workers discoursed on the moral technical imaginaries of the internet, television, and their convergence. The second order modeling of its responses to these new socio-technical affordances includes a reversal of the technology model that resists the temptation to claim democracy's salvation through new technologies. Like FSTV in its latest iteration attempting to secure audiences through internet video and social media, Current also upheld a techno-utopian model. However, in the practices I was able to observe and participate in, such techno-utopian ideals were shown to be difficult to uphold. As the networks matured, citizen journalism experiments failed and financial pressures mounted, and the political possibilities of the techno-utopian or techno-progressive vision were replaced by a pragmatic turn away from the public sphere and toward the guardianship model of broadcasting. Current reveals how the conservative guardianship model emerges when mission-based ideals subside. These pro-corporate historical tendencies reach an apogee in the diaspora articulated in the conclusion.

Chapter 5 picks up with FSTV and its media reform models, documented as we co-authored a public-facing slogan for the network, interviewed an innovative journalist in Egypt during the 2011 revolution, and prepared for a media reform conference. At NCMR, organized by the leading media reform non-profit organization Free Press, we took that FSTV pitch and engaged with other media reform activists and broadcasters. This conference and one panel in particular, "Getting Out of the Silo: Editing Video As a Community," revealed the core discursive practices of media reform broadcasters in television, internet video, and policy domains.

Chapter 5 documents the real-time unfolding of discourse in a busy office and busier conference panel. Within these dialogues it is possible to identify several models and how they are conceptualized in order to create openings in the hegemonic public sphere. Public interest, democracy, access, diversity, and anti-monopoly models are recognizable in these instances in Denver and Boston with FSTV and at NCMR. Participants at NCMR held a pragmatic notion of the technology model that infrequently drifted into technoprogressivism. Silophication, the balkanization of institutions, appears as an emic term for the problems faced by media reform broadcasters attempting to link and energize their reform models. Overcoming silophication requires intersectionality and partnerships capable of cohering spatially disparate but ideologically linked models despite discursive heterogeneity and resource competition. While this dissertation presents the cultural interventions of media reform broadcasters, chapter 5 reveals the flash points of challenge and opportunity across the field of cultural production. Without ways to overcome silophication, media reform broadcasters' models may remain isolated and their aspirations to secure more diversity in the hegemonic public sphere will be stifled.

The conclusion investigates how Current and FSTV envision and practice their future. As FSTV always has, it is attempting to position itself for the next cost-effective networked communication technology to emerge, which it sees as broadband internet. In the process, the network mixes broadcasting and media reform models into a practical assortment, avoiding some of the trappings of techno-utopianism. Current's future remains focused on professional television news. Current's employee diaspora from mission-driven television to profit-driven internet video entertainment reveals the increasing professionalization and commercialization of

this field of cultural production. Current's models and imaginaries regarding its political objectives are less frequent than the rhetoric of its techno-utopianism.

This dissertation has documented how two media reforming television networks work with existing technology and policy to produce greater diversity in the hegemonic public sphere. This small sample set reveals a range of reform and broadcast models that are used by media reformers to challenge the dominant economic and political media powers. As this work was historical, their models (and their mixtures) and their conceptualization of the hegemonic public sphere changed through time until, by the end of my fieldwork in early 2012, much of the techno-utopian rhetoric had been replaced by either a sober practicality with FSTV or an emphasis on for-profit production at Current.

The conclusion looks at the immediate present and upcoming future of both television networks before posing a few questions about the fate of democracy in a state where media policies are dominated by neoliberalism. FSTV takes a practical approach to becoming a multiplatform media institution employing the public interest and anti-monopoly models while cautiously expressing the technology model. Current and Current's ex-employees, on the other hand, have embraced pragmatism in another direction, attempting yet another re-branding in the hopes of securing profit. In this endeavor, media reform models are unsurprisingly absent, except in the nostalgic, and the network has turned toward the conservative guardianship broadcasting model and away from the experimental public sphere broadcasting model. With the small sample set investigated within this dissertation, to what degree can we possibly ascertain the health of democracy in this media ecology?

Media reform and broadcast models motivate discourse and mold practice throughout the worklives of media reform broadcasters. Some of the models I described in chapter 2 were not

identifiable resources from which these activist television producers drew. Despite the "free speech" in its name, FSTV rarely echoed the Constitution's first amendment clause to defend its rights to speak in the hegemonic public sphere. Current was also reticent to discuss how it was promoting "free speech" with its VC2 project. FSTV was more prone to discuss the VC2 project in the less political and more trendy way of "building community." The public resource model, which says that corporations and governments need to provide media access to the public in exchange for corporations being given right of way through their communities, was also absent from the discussions of intervening into the hegemonic public sphere.

Throughout, the technology model is a flashpoint for contention. FSTV and Current both discursively express the opposite of the technology model, a techno-utopian or technoprogressive hope that technology will provide a pro-democratic disruption in a state with a democracy deficit. They continue to hope that technology will provide a new window of opportunity for under-resourced organizations. Their practices, however, reveal a more pragmatic understanding of the technology model, that economic and political resources remain centrally necessary in projects attempting to engineer access to the hegemonic public sphere. How might identifying and addressing this schism between what is said and what is done in relation to technology and its impact in pro-democracy projects help media reform broadcasters perform their work?

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Did Current solve the democracy deficit in the hegemonic public sphere through the addition of diverse voice? The mounting tide of monopolization evident in the work of Current's diaspora is evidence of the market surmounting mission as fields of cultural production develop.

Television news is as acerbic as it has ever been, with Congressional bi-partisanship leading up to the 2012 election at an all-time low of 9 percent. There is more consolidation on the horizon, and new problems for diversity in the American public sphere are resulting from top-down "solutions" such as Apple TV, Google TV, and Netflix; AT&T's bid to merge with T-Mobile and corner over 70 percent of the market; the general scramble to control the internet itself by these big players; and the relative obscurity and commercial temptations of open source video companies such as Kaltura and Miro.

Perhaps a new imaginary or model is needed. Alternatively, perhaps the flexibility of an imaginary proves quite malleable to suit immediate needs but not the longstanding needs of democracy and the hegemonic public sphere. One-time Current host Jason Silva is now a Fellow at the Hybrid Realities Institute and defends human imagination as that meeting point between science and art. Perhaps the imagination is also that subjectively liberated space between economics and politics. Perhaps it is not an imaginary, but rather something more substantial that might drive this network of information workers towards consistent political engagement. As Taylor (2003) described the "modern social imaginary," social theory precedes the imagination that motivates action, practice, and politics. This dissertation is an attempt to reverse-engineer the television and internet imaginaries with the hopes of finding core assumptions of socio-technical cultures.

Perhaps an engaging democracy needs to emerge from the archived theories of social liberalism and civil society. This dissertation describes two television news networks that mobilize their cultural assets to engineer cultural interventions in realms of political, economic, and technological power. Flexibility is required of such models that oscillate between profit and politics. These carriers of imaginaries have the agency to select where and how to direct their

creative energies. At the end of this story, that agency has brought these people nearer to corporations and further from politics. Must all roads end in the treasury as opposed to the agora?

Following the early independent filmmakers, satellite hackers, and early media justice reformers, FSTV and Current use their technological interventions to gain access into emergent communications technology (DBS, cable TV, PEG TV) and cultural models to engage with policy (media reform models such as access, free speech, public interest, anti-monopoly, right of way). The difficulty had by progressive television news networks to gain access reveals the poor health of direct democracy in an age of neoliberal media privatization. My argument about the internet is that, taking a page from Wu (2010), technological hacking precedes policy interventions. As the Wild West ends online we rely upon policy to acquire the rights we had as technological competencies before regulation and commercialization. Moreover, as we enter the policy phase, open culture and public interest tend to be truncated. How can capitalism and democracy co-exist in this age of media overabundance?

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