# "PUBLIC ACCESS" VS. "PUBLIC CONTROL" IN THE AMERICAN MEDIA REFORM MOVEMENT

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"Rethinking Access," the theme of the 1994 Euricom Colloquium, inevitably entails re-examining "public access" as the conceptual framework for extending a free, critical and potentially oppositional public sphere.[1] The term access implies citizen use of electronic media operated by commercial or governmental entities. In contrast, the notion of public control suggests a greater degree of popular dominion over electronic channels of communication. This article provides an overview of the tension between the ideals of public access and public control in the American media reform movement, and reflects on the implications of that divide for media activists today.

## The Public Origins of American Broadcasting

The myth of a commercial system of advertiser-supported network broadcasting emerging inevitably in the United States during the inter-war period has been challenged by a group of revisionist historians — Erik Barnouw, Susan Douglas, Eugene E. Leach, Robert W. McChesney, David Paul Nord and Werner J. Severin, among others. Indeed, it has been said that "the early history of public radio is, in fact, the early history of radio itself" (Carnegie Commission 1979, 186). As with future communication technologies, amateurs and educators played a leading role in the development of radio before the medium's commercial potential was fully understood.

The discovery that cheap crystals could serve as detectors of radio waves launched the amateur boom around 1907, democratising the wireless. These tinkers advanced radio technology and provided the foundation for the first generation of radio listeners and professionals. For Barnouw (1966, 27), the importance of the ham movement prior to WW-I was not only technical: "Equally important was the bond it provided for a growing brotherhood, scattered far and wide, that already numbered thousands; a host of experimenters, of every age and status...." The desire to use the wireless in a democratic, participatory fashion was at odds with Marconi's corporate

application of his invention. In the years prior to the First World War, over a thousand ham transmitters were in operation. A growing number of wireless clubs met on the air on prearranged wavelengths. By 1910, they had established what Douglas characterised as a grass-roots radio community.

The Radio Act of 1912 was passed in large measure because of complaints from the United States Navy about the need to control radio interference from hams. New restrictions on amateur stations were opposed by most hams. They banded together in 1915 to form their own national organisation, Hiram Percy Maxim's American Radio Relay League, which sought to create a national system of amateur radio. On Washington's birthday in 1916, Maxim demonstrated that amateurs could constitute a national communications network through a country-wide relay of a message. Despite the constraints of the Radio Act of 1912, by 1920 about a quarter of a million hams monitored fifteen thousand amateur stations.

In addition to amateur radio enthusiasts, educators played an indispensable role in the origins of broadcasting in the United States. The earliest experiments in wireless transmission in the United States, dating back to the 1890s, took place at college physics and electricity laboratories. Probably the first person to broadcast regularly to a general audience, in 1909, was Charles D. "Doc" Herrold of the College of Engineering and Wireless in San Jose, California. Prior to the First World War, in addition to the experiment operated by Herrold's technical college, four universities operated radio stations to broadcast weather forecasts, market reports, and news bulletins: the Universities of Wisconsin, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Nebraska Wesleyan University. The land-grant colleges pioneered in the use of radio for the general public as a result of their mission to make higher education more of a community resource through the practical arts and sciences. As a result, Justin Morrill, who led the movement for land-grant colleges in the 1860s, has been called the spiritual father of educational and public broadcasting (Witherspoon and Kovitz, 1987). The University of Wisconsin, under the influence of the Progressive movement, played a leadership role in the educational broadcasting movement. Robert M. La Follette, Wisconsin governor from 1901-1906 and subsequently US Senator, fostered the "Wisconsin Idea" of public service by the university to all people of the state, and the application of that principle to broadcasting. Given the role of the land-grant colleges of the Midwest, it is noteworthy that the etymological root of the word "broadcasting" was agrarian, signifying a method and technology for sowing seeds in all directions.

Severin (1978) emphasised that by transmitting regularly scheduled messages intended for scattered audiences, the pioneering educational stations demonstrated the potential of radio for broadcasting at a time when commercial radio companies only used radio as a means of point-to-point communication. Up until the First World War, much of the early activity and experiments in radio took place in the homes of ordinary citizens and on the campuses of public universities. In the immediate aftermath of the war, as the popular radio boom gathered momentum, hobbyists and educational broadcasters resumed and expanded their pre-war activities. In addition to ham and educational stations, in the 1920s other public, non-commercial entities operated stations, such as the municipally-owned WNYC in New York.

The Paulist Fathers, a progressive Catholic order dedicated to the social gospel of service to the poor, broadcast non-denominational programming on WLWL in New York. A pioneering labour station, WCFL, was run by the AFL's Chicago Federation of Labour. Douglas (1987, 306) documented popular aspirations for the democratisation of American cultural and political life linked to the radio in the early and mid-1920s: "Those isolated from the mainstream of American culture would now be brought into the fold. Farmers,

the poor, the housebound, and the uneducated were repeatedly mentioned as the main beneficiaries."



The Alexander Bill, which would have permitted the government to acquire stations, was defeated after WW-I. Instead, RCA was established in 1919 under government auspices as a private "chosen instrument" of American radio policy and development (Sterling & Kittross 1978, 53). Radio advertising developed gradually during the 1920s and under strong public criticism, evolving from AT&T's common carrier-like notion of "toll broadcasting" and passive trade-name sponsorship of shows on NBC to the direct selling of products initiated by William Paley's CBS as American broadcasting entered the network era in the latter part of the decade. As the radio spectrum became increasingly crowded and chaotic, criteria for government regulation were established in Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover's four National Radio Conferences during the period 1922-1925 and in the Radio Act of 1927. By permitting the sale of stations with assigned wavelengths, Hoover weakened the earlier principle of government grants of temporary licenses, and "in effect made a radio channel private property" (Czitrom 1982, 76). FRC regulatory policies led to the dramatic growth of the commercial networks and the precipitous decline in the number of non-commercial stations by the beginning of the 1930s.

The decline of non-commercial broadcasting led to two sharply divergent initiatives for broadcasting reform, with one calling for the reservation of channels for non-commercial use and the other advocating collaboration between educational and commercial broadcasters. The former was led by the National Committee on Education by Radio (NCER), led by Joy Elmer Morgan. Morgan, a veteran of the anti-trust movement of the Progressive Era, "believed that it was monopoly business interests which had brought on the Great Depression and which were now undermining the high purpose of radio" (Nord 1978, 329-330). Morgan was convinced that broadcasting could be a determining factor in whether out of the Depression a century of chaos or a more peaceful world order would develop. NCER "could trace its blood lines back to the public school crusades of the 19th century" and "claim as ancestors the agrarian protestors and progressives of the pre-World War I years" (Leach 1983, 4). A coalition of broadcast reformers representing broad sectors of American society supported NCER's call to convince Congress to reserve channels exclusively for non-commercial, public use. The coalition included the land-grant colleges of the Midwest, major religious organisations, the labour movement, the American Civil Liberties Union, and prominent intellectuals.

The National Advisory Council on Radio in Education (NACRE) took a diametrically different approach to that of NCER, advocating a Doctrine of Co-operation in which educational programming on commercial stations rather than through a separate non-commercial system. NACRE's director, Levering Tyson, believed that educators should collaborate with commercial broadcasters within the framework of the free enterprise system. Thus, the commercial networks would provide educators with "access" to the airwaves. NACRE received substantial funding from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and especially from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which was "fully at home on Wall Street and comfortable with private initiatives in education" (Leach 1983, 4). The Carnegie Corporation and NACRE worked hand-in-hand with the networks, which feared that criticism of commercialism and corporate monopoly would lead Congress to create a system of non-commercial radio stations.

The conflict between NCER and NACRE came to a head with the Wagner-Hatfield Amendment to the Communications Act of 1934, which proposed to reserve a quarter of the broadcast spectrum for non-commercial use. Members of the NCER coalition such as Father John B. Harney of Paulist station WLWL. In New York and Chicago labour leader

Edward N. Nockels of WCFL helped draft the amendment and launch a national grass-roots campaign in its support. The Wagner-Hatfield Amendment was barely defeated as a result of the intense lobbying efforts of the National Association of Broadcasters, which relied heavily upon the Doctrine of Co-operation and NACRE's programming to justify its position.

The defeat of public, non-commercial broadcasters was devastating. By the end of the Second World War, non-commercial AM licenses that had numbered over 200 in the 1920s had been reduced to a mere 29, and of those only 13 had 5,000 watts or more power, and just two were permitted to broadcast during night-time hours (Severin 1978). In defeating the remnants of the forces that had invented broadcasting and championed its public uses, the industry also sought what McChesney (1990, 47) called "ideological closure": commercial broadcasting was celebrated as a foundation of a democratic society and alternative perspectives were removed from historical memory. Thereafter challenges to the network and advertising dominated system would be largely outside the pale of legitimate discourse. The developments of the inter-war period would profoundly affect and circumscribe the fate of non-commercial radio and television in the United States: "The 'industry' emerged from the war commanding the lion's share, not just of broadcasting's resources but of the power to define the medium's purposes and potentials in the public mind" (Leach 1983, 16).

## Pacifica Radio and Community Broadcasting

Following the Second World War, in 1949, KPFA-FM went on the air in Berkeley, California, initiating a new era in the history of non-commercial broadcasting in the United States. The station was founded by the Pacifica Foundation under the leadership of Lewis K. Hill. Although there is no evidence that Hill was familiar with the media reform movement of the Depression years, he resurrected and synthesised the principles voiced by Joy Elmer Morgan, labour leader Edward Nockels, the ACLU's Roger Baldwin, and other allies of NACRE. Pacifica Radio represented an attempt to establish a new form of non-commercial radio grounded in public control rather than co-operation with commercial broadcasters. The Pacifica experience is an object lesson in both the immense promise and daunting obstacles inherent in the project to maintain truly independent electronic media in contemporary America.

Unlike his spiritual heirs of the 1930s, Hill was forced to recognise the domination of mainstream broadcasting by the commercial networks as a given. This is not to say that KPFA represented an accommodation with the status quo. The opposite was the case: KPFA represented a radical model for a non-profit, community-based radio station operating outside the parameters of mainstream broadcasting. Hill based KPFA on principles that defied the broadcasting and political conventions of his day. On the eve of the post-war economic boom, Hill concluded that only a non-commercial broadcasting system financed by listener-sponsorship could be free. On the eve of the McCarthy era, he envisaged KPFA as an electronic gadfly, providing airtime to groups and perspectives ordinarily absent from the airwaves. In light of the hegemony of the networks, KPFA was fashioned as an alternative radio station. KPFA's historic experience has been characterised as providing "a conceptual and operational prototype" of an independent form of radio (Lumpp 1979, 4). Pacifica Radio became a major alternative model to commercial broadcasting in terms of its relationship to its audience, funding, programming and internal structure.

Lewis Hill, born in 1919 and infected with the enthusiasm of the ham movement, built a working crystal radio in a shoebox at the age of six. Volunteer trainees — that is, amateurs — would later play a central role at Pacifica stations. Hill was a peace activist

and conscientious objector in WW-II, working instead in the Washington, DC office of the ACLU. A "Radio Prospectus" written by Hill indicated that the station's primary objective would be to promote human understanding among nations and people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. Toward this end, the station would provide in depth news and public affairs programming, drawing upon sources untapped by mainstream commercial news operations. At the same time, the station would serve as a cultural resource for the musical and literary talents of the local community of listener-supporters.



KPFA was conceived as an alternative radio station by virtue of its internal organisation as well as by its programming. Hill wished to provide a model for a collective and egalitarian radio operation. According to Hill's design, the KPFA staff would be responsible for what would be the authority of management. A key principle was equality of wages regardless of position. A committee of representatives of the local community provided outreach and accountability. For Downing (1984), the element of self-management and internal democracy was the most significant feature of Hill's undertaking. Pacifica represented an example of "prefigurative politics" in which the practice of alternative institutions anticipates a more equitable society of the future. Downing (1984, 22-23) praised emancipatory communication systems like Hill's that engage in "movement-building with self-managed media" by remaining open to popular social movements.

Hill's vision of Pacifica radio had both liberal and radical elements, defined in turn as providing a neutral market-place of ideas and a vehicle for social action. The radical component was extended by a new generation of media activists during the 1960s and 1970s which went beyond Hill's gentle pacifism and emphasis on intellectual discourse. As the protest movements of the 1960s took shape, Pacifica approached its audiences more as collective entities — minorities, women, the anti-war movement, for example — as less as individual listeners. Its stations became a major resource for the New Left — for teach-ins, for popular mobilisation, for debate within the movement — and centres of controversy and conflict. Cultural and political revolt found expression in free-form radio, a montage of music, commentary, studio interviews and call-ins. A Pacifica programmer wrote:

> *We are...not just an institution supported by the community, but the community itself - the people in microcosm. By combining the economic model of listener-support with the electronic mode of the "Phonecast," our community has created for itself an entirely new forum for public dialogue, an electronic Town Hall....So when women are discussing women's issues on the air, we are not reporting an event, we are an event — another meeting of the community through a "Phonecast"....when war resisters discuss war resistance; when junkies discuss junk; when homosexuals discuss homosexuality; and when prisoners and jailors discuss jail — we are not a news organisation; there is no mediation, no outtakes. We are a publicly financed public instrument for public discourse. We are, in effect, the streets (Post 1974, 161).*

As a model of public control rather than public access, with a relationship of independence rather than co-operation vis-a-vis mainstream media, several points need to be made about the Pacifica experience. First, Pacifica was able to gain a foothold on the radio spectrum largely because FM was a new, undeveloped frontier. In 1938, the FCC, in a gesture to the marginalised educational broadcasting movement, reserved several channels in the high frequency band for non-commercial stations. After the Second World War, commercial broadcasters declined to develop FM because it would require refashioning the basic radio set at a time when the communications industry was focusing

on the development of television. One of KPFA's early tasks was encouraging residents within its signal area to purchase FM units. The relative obscurity of FM provided an opportunity to develop a new model of community radio and to acquire choice spots on the FM band for Pacifica stations in Los Angeles and New York City by the beginning of the 1960s. This illustrates a recurrent theme: the boldest experiments in public telecommunications take place when technologies are new and their commercial potential not yet fully apparent. The pattern held with the first generation of radio pioneers, with Hill's use of FM, and with the use of portable video equipment by public access pioneers. Indeed, non-commercial experimentation often revealed to corporate interests the potential to exploit new forms of communication for commercial ends, beginning a process of privatisation in which public participation became increasingly circumscribed.

A second point is how Pacifica Radio has paid dearly for its independent and often oppositional relationship to the state, in stark contrast to the symbiotic relationship between government and commercial broadcasters. Pacifica was the target of the notorious red-baiting publication ***Counterattack*** and of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Internal Security's investigation of Communist infiltration of the mass media. Information gained through the Freedom of Information Act revealed a history of surveillance by the FBI. Pacifica has resisted subpoenas from law enforcement authorities seeking to compromise confidential sources used to report on dissident groups. The FCC harassed Pacifica by delaying license renewals and permission to launch Pacifica's Washington, DC station. Pacifica's Houston station was bombed off the air twice by radical right-wing vigilante groups.

Third, Pacifica also paid a price for its financial foundation in listener-sponsorship — in the form of minimal and often inadequate funding for equipment and salaries. External political and financial pressure exacerbated internal conflict in an organisation dedicated to a significant degree of self-management. Pacifica's history of internecine organisational and ideological conflict date back to its origins, and was a contributing factor to Lewis Hill's suicide. Bitter strikes periodically forced Pacifica stations off the air. Pacifica has been plagued by conflicts within stations, among stations, and especially between stations and its central office. Conflicts and sectarianism within the left often reverberated within Pacifica's stations. Spark (1987, 580), a former programme director at KPFK-FM, Pacifica's Los Angeles station, posed the question in the 1980s whether Pacifica was shouldering an impossible burden:

> *Perhaps the obstacles to bucking the whole system of American capitalism and its media institutions are simply insurmountable at this time...this weakness is undoubtedly due in large measure to the objective situation of left movements, which by necessity consist of coalitions of large numbers of relatively powerless, divided individuals.... With oppositional media like KPFK so rare, and so many disenfranchised groups in the world, power struggles are bound to erupt.*

Despite its problems, Pacifica remains a unique and vital force in non-commercial radio. The existence of five strategically-located Pacifica FM stations — in Berkeley, Los Angeles, New York, Houston and Washington, DC — together with a central news bureau, tape library and national programme service, permits Pacifica to resist the threat of marginalisation or co-optation faced by other community radio stations. Pacifica's history demonstrates the greater degree of freedom as well as the financial and political obstacles experienced by autonomous and oppositional public media, as opposed to more dependent and benign forms of public access to government or corporate controlled media. As Blakely (1979, 125) observed:

*When one listens to the Pacifica stations, one is aware of how comparatively bland are the programmes of the stations dependent upon means of support other than the listeners and contributors. When one reviews the ordeals of the Pacifica stations, one understands why the others are cautious.*



## Public Access and Cable Television

Disenchantment with the federal form of public television, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Public Broadcast Service (PBS) network established as a result of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, contributed to the movement for an alternative form of public access on cable television. Just as the advent of FM afforded Lewis Hill the opportunity to create a new form of public radio, cable television and portable video equipment permitted the emergence of a different, non-broadcast form of public television. This departure had its antecedents during the latter half of the 1960s in the Challenge for Change programme of the National Film Board of Canada (Engelman 1990). Drawing upon a unique theoretical and practical tradition in Canada of viewing mass media as a public resource, Challenge for Change originally sought to use film as a tool for citizen mobilisation and communication with government officials in Canada's war on poverty. The introduction of portable video equipment and cable TV systems with channels reserved for the public permitted what was formerly considered impossible: television production by ordinary citizens and community groups. Some activists associated with Challenge for Change went beyond the conception of citizen-government communication to fashion more radical uses of video and cable for popular mobilisation and protest.

The possibilities for public access demonstrated in Canada were brought to the United States by George Stoney, who together with Red Burns founded the Alternative Media Center in 1971. The Center led the movement for public access during the 1970s, a period of crisis for CPB and PBS when many of the original aspirations for a more democratic and participatory form of public broadcast television were dashed. Community television on cable systems seemed to promise a purer, more independent form of public telecommunication. Nonetheless, many of the same forces that had shaped public broadcasting were again at play. For example, once more the group of elite private foundations engaged in social engineering took a leading role in shaping public access institutions and policy. The Ford, Rockefeller, Carnegie, and John and Mary R. Markle foundations made strategic interventions in the development of public access. The 1971 report supportive of public access issued by the Sloan Commission on Cable Communications, a blue-ribbon body comparable to Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, sought to balance the commercial and public benefits of a cable industry poised for explosive growth.

Indeed, early support for public access by cable operators came at a time when an emerging cable television industry, vulnerable financially and politically, needed to establish its legitimacy vis-□-vis "free" broadcast television. For a brief moment, the interests of the cable industry and the "video-freaks" of the radical video collectives appeared to coincide. Many of the latter, whose orientation was captured in Michael Shamberg's ***Guerrilla Television***, shared with members of the Sloan Commission an inordinate faith in the ability of new communication technologies to transform American society. For an historical moment, the spirit of the Doctrine of Co-operation between commercial and non-commercial interests was revived. Only a minority within the community television movement sounded a warning. Paskal (1971, 3-4) suggested in ***Radical Software*** that access channels would be an insignificant part of a new frontier of

consumer capitalism in which banking, shopping, information services, and entertainment would be supplied through the cable. "So," Paskal wrote, "community cable becomes the free gift and everyone packs in to the information supermarket."

Public access channels were dependent upon the co-operation of commercial cable franchises. As in the 1930s, the Doctrine of Co-operation was alternately advanced and discarded by corporate interests for tactical reasons. The industry-community television alliance broke down as the cable industry became more established. The cable industry's challenge to the right of the FCC to require public access was upheld by the US Supreme Court in 1979. Further attempts were made to weaken public access through legislation and obstructionist practices at local cable franchises. Some cable companies reneged on commitments of resources to public access centres. Others replaced public access on a first-come first-served basis with a system of "local origination," in which cable companies controlled public access. Here was another reincarnation of the Doctrine of Co-operation: the distinction between public and private control of non-commercial television was being obscured, as it had at PBS with the growth of "corporate underwriting." Halleck (1985) reasserted a vision of public access as an independent sphere of discourse, one of the "free spaces" characterised by Evans and Boyte (1992) as the locus of social change. She argued that true public access programming — not subject to control, rough around the edges, at times critical and even menacing — would inevitably conflict with corporate sensibilities and culture. Halleck reasserted the position of the ACLU's Roger Baldwin and other radio reformers of the 1930s that privatisation represented a fundamental threat to freedom of speech. Halleck (1985, 4-5) juxtaposed the principals of collaboration and independence, angrily reminding the 1985 annual convention of NFLCP that

> *local origination is NOT public access. Not is it a substitute for public access. Who's kidding whom? Public access is first come, first serve: open access to the channels of communication. Now that's pretty romantic. So is the First Amendment. But it's there to PROTECT freedom of speech. No abridgements, no compromises, no continuity selection. Romantic? Hell, yes. But the First Amendment's strength IS its romanticism. It is the strength of an idea. That idea cannot be programmed by a cable corporation, or a local cable authority, or a town board. That idea is the cornerstone of any democracy worthy of that name.*

Aufderheide (1992) noted, by the early 1990s public access survived in a mere 15% of cable systems nation-wide, and then only as a result of continuous struggles by local community activists. The use of the remaining public cable channels as an arena for meaningful civic discourse has also been hampered by the theory and practice of the access centre itself. The impetus behind Challenge for Change, the Canadian programme providing the original model for community television, was to enable citizens to use communication technology to address social problems. In some of the early Canadian experiments, public access centres were run by community-based boards, which engaged in outreach and administered the public channel collectively. The absence in the US of community-based boards operating access channels, as pioneered in Canada, often gave the public access project a more individualistic cast. Tension between the authenticity of the individual programmer and the collective nature of broader public constituencies, reflected in Lewis Hill's objectives for Pacifica Radio, also existed within public access. Too often public access became associated with the kind of vanity video parodied in the film Wayne's World, a perception capitalised upon by mainstream media to delegitimise public access altogether. At the other end of the spectrum, some public access programmers simply sought to replicate the forms of commercial broadcasting instead of creating alternative forms of popular discourse. "Unfortunately," Devine (1991, 10) lamented, "no

one is systematically training people to use video as a cultural practice, as a means for critique, for developing 'local vernaculars of analysis'..., or as a vehicle for creating and sustaining oppositional culture."

Devine, several years after Halleck's discussion of local origination, used the same platform of an NFCLP national convention to make a searching critique of the theory as well as the practice of public access. He noted that underpinning the use of public access primarily by individuals is a theory of pluralism that posits that "power is evenly diffused throughout society and citizens rule as consumers with the free marketplace of ideas" (Good 1989, 55). Such a view of public access, the antithesis of the critical approach to mainstream media as agents of social control, mystified the true role of elite groups and power relationships in American society. As Aufderheide (1992, 52) emphasises, "the public interest is broader than that of consumers, or even protection of the individual speaker."

A distinction needs to be made between the impact and the quantity of public access programming. By the early 1990s, about 2,000 access channels cablecast roughly 15,000 hours a week of original local programming, more than the three commercial networks combined produced in a year (Blau 1992). Nonetheless, Devine (1991, 8) concluded in his presentation before the NFLCP that "public access has been only marginal in setting a public agenda."

> *...as yet we have not consistently nurtured effective speech, created a literature of the people or developed a local approach to analysis. In spite of vigorous efforts on the part of access providers to democratize electronic communications, the "marketplace" of ideas remains essentially limited and skewed toward professional commercial speakers.*

Blau (1992) stressed the need to reconceptualise public access as a community resource instead of as a television show. Aufderheide's study (1992) of programming at 81 cable access centres found a significant if atypical strain of controversial programming. Yet the local character of public access meant that often programmers worked in isolation, unaware of other media activists engaged in related work elsewhere. In the best of circumstances, public access represented an arena in which dissident voices could occasionally be heard, but would rarely reverberate in society in the form of expanded debate or popular mobilisation.

Paper Tiger TV — the original series as well as its role in the development of Deep Dish TV and the Gulf Crisis TV Project — provided a model for the transformation a politically benign showcase of pluralism into an expanded oppositional public sphere. First carried on Manhattan public access in 1982, Paper Tiger TV presented critical readings of specific newspapers, magazines and television programmes. The goal of the series, which had produced over 200 programmes in the course of its first decade, was "to uncover the political agenda of corporate media, and explore possibilities for a more democratic and open communications system" (Marcus 1991, 31). The earliest programmes were produced by a volunteer staff in a deliberately informal, handmade style in order to make viewers feel that they, too, were capable of making such programmes. Tapes of the shows were distributed to other access channels, universities and museums. The cumulative effect, a comprehensive critique of the culture industry as a whole, set the stage for Paper Tiger TV's second major venture: Deep Dish Television.

In 1986, the Paper Tiger TV collective in New York City used satellite technology to create the first national public access network cablecast, a 10-part series of programmes received by more than 250 public access stations. Each of the ten thematically-organised programmes was dedicated to the work of independent video producers and public access programmers that addressed issues such as labour, women, racism, housing and

militarism. Deep Dish TV seemed to revive and expand the democratic aspirations of the earliest generation of amateur broadcasters exactly a half-century after Hiram Maxim's creation of a national ham relay in 1916. A year after Deep Dish TV's first cablecast, over one hundred people involved in the experiment from across the nation met to discuss the future of the network. In addition to organising another series of its own, the Deep Dish network distributed programmes for such organisations as the United Farm Workers and the International Women's Day Video Festival. Wallner (1991, 34), a Deep Dish co-founder, defined the project's concerns in such a way ask to evoke and transcend the model provided two decades earlier by Challenge for Change:

Deep Dish has become a laboratory for new ways of making media and distributing it. We are constantly asking what are the most democratic, the most empowering models for media production and distribution? Under what circumstances will local activists start using their access stations more? How can we make the programmes more interactive with viewers? How can Deep Dish collaborate with other media outlets, including PBS affiliates willing to take some risks, community TV and radio broadcasters, progressive print journalists, and the growing number of colleges and universities equipped with satellite dishes?

If Paper Tiger TV represented a critique of mainstream media, and Deep Dish TV network cablecasts constituted a national register of community television, the Gulf Crisis TV Project marked a third step: public access took a leap forward as a social instrument through direct political intervention in an international crisis. In collaboration with the peace movement, five hours of footage were assembled from sources both domestic and foreign to constitute a video teach-in, a multi-faceted response to the mainstream media's role in preparing the American public for the Gulf War and subsequently in interpreting the conflict. The series was presented before, during and following the conflict on over a hundred public access stations, dozens of PBS channels, and in Canada, Britain, Australia and Japan. Two chief objectives of community television — grass-roots participation and the presentation of diverse, alternative perspectives — were achieved in a context in which local video productions were shared on a national and international level. By using mass media as an instrument of peace and international understanding, the Gulf Crisis TV Project belonged to a strain of the media reform movement reaching back to Joy Elmer Morgan in the 1930s and Lewis Hill in the 1950s. The significance of Paper Tiger TV and Deep Dish TV, a lesson understood by Morgan and Hill, has been underscored by Nicholas Garnham: "It is cultural distribution, not cultural production, that is the key locus of power" (quoted in Blau 1992, 26).

Braderman (1991, 20), an associate of Paper Tiger TV, looking both backward and forward, has called upon the community television movement to "re-claim the utopian moment." She proposed this fully aware of the reversals of the apparent victories of the 1960s and 1970s, and of the collapse of the technological utopianism of the video collectives of the period. "What needs to be staked out and reclaimed is a different utopian moment," she writes, "the larger one, the one we're not supposed to even dream about anymore" Braderman, 1991, 20). Her video utopianism is rooted in a notion of radical democracy in which a vital public sphere of communication can foster free and diverse speech, a sense of community, and purposeful action. She observes that — despite the reversals and obstacles — the success of the Deep Dish TV experiment revealed the existence of a substantial sub-culture within which the struggle for community television continues. Of course that struggle must be extended, she writes: "That is a given. But we're imagining here, counting our strengths" (Braderman, 1991, 21). What Braderman seeks to revive is a social, not a technological utopianism, in order to use community radio and television to counter corporate and state control of mass media in the United States. It is a utopianism

in which the public seeks more than mere access to mass media, but control over its own channels of communication. "The public sphere in American society is nearly inchoate at a rhetorical level," Aufderheide (1992, 53-54) wrote. "But when members of the public have resources to raise issues of public concern, debate among themselves and develop ways to act on them, telecommunications becomes a tool in the public's organising of itself."



## Notes:

1. This article represents a distillation of themes developed in more detail in my forthcoming book Public Radio & Television in America: A Political History (Sage, 1996).

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