Building Working Class Media

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This brief paper is an effort to draw a picture of the kinds of issues we face as activists developing media strategies to support working class self-organising activity. The paper refers to work I am involved with as a member of the Community Media Network (CMN), although its main consideration is broader.

For working class needs to be articulated, heard, and for people to have a real say in decision making, we need the forms and ways of producing media that 'fit' with working class people's activity as it is lived in communities. Many questions revolve around <u>how</u> working class people incorporate the production of useful knowledge into their lives, the question extends to how media may be useful to self-organised activity; and this is not the same question as how audiences perceive media. If working class people are to successfully utilise media we need to look at media the other way round. The direct engagement in media that is most often necessary indicates that this query is better approached using sociological and political frameworks rather than cultural / media studies.

Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, and Paulo Freire – along with critiques that expand their contributions – provide theoretical anchors for this discussion.

Table of Contents

Introduction:

What does working class media mean? Why does it have to be built?

Right now working class people are required to pay the bill for the gambling debts of privateers – it's global and protests are reported on media.Workers in the media industry may have common cause with ordinary workers as the job loss count goes up, pay is cut, and pensions slashed; perhaps the role of media workers could become significant – but I won't focus on that question because it is now a historical fact that media and media workers are not where working class people can go to get heard or to Get The Message Out – GTMO – when they have an issue.

The media institution that prevails in our world is controlled by elites, it provides a voice for the dominant group in society, those who have the money to pay – to pay for technology needing skilled operators, armies of journalists, highly paid 'anchors' – creating a veritable fortress. This institution allows elites disseminate certain ideas and ignore others. It is stacked against any initiative that goes 'against the grain' or against the dominant group. Some argue that the issue is about who is in control, but unless there is radical change all that happens is the replacement of one elite by another, leaving working class people to self-organise around their needs – and this activity is constant.

New technologies, social media, mobile phones, email, are used as organising tools – this is no different to lighting fires on hilltops; it is not strange, wonderful, or new. It is simply people using what they can get their hands on to serve their objective. And those in control when threatened will cut the power, dismantle the networks, take down the masts; as happened in Egypt in Spring - or with pirate radio stations in Ireland- to bring it closer to home . . .

But technologies may provide opportunities so we speak of access to media as an issue – but perhaps we need to look at it the other way round – as the bar: the denial of access to some and in so doing the creation of elites, and the amplification of the voice of the elite – drowning out others.

In this paper I want to:

- ⚲ identify issues around media that point to an underlying problem that also affects the kinds of organising happening in communities.

- ⚲ outline some of the things that are important to working class people using media drawing on the work that has been done within CMN;

I contend that, just as in mainstream media, this way of working inevitably involves a set of values that guide how people use media and establishes how they operate. We need to look to our ways of working if media is to be a useful tool for working class self-organising.

1. The problem with 'media'.

1.1 What is it?

Our practice - if we are to build working class media - must encompass a critique of mainstream media and why and how it fails working class people. Raymond Williams says we must first look at the nature of an activity and then we may understand its conditions; he also draws a typology of media that demonstrate its functions as amplificatory, durative, and alternative (see Table 1 for an exploration of these function). (It is important to note that Williams used the word alternative here in terms of communications in an historical sense meaning specifically the development of objects as signs, development of writing, graphics etc.)

There's a lot that can get in the way of finding clarity in this query, just as it can seem very difficult to understand Karl Marx's assertion that "the primary freedom of the press lies in its not being a trade" (Rheinische Zeitung,No. 139 Supplement. May 19 1842) . This goes to the heart of what we are discussing when people involved in self-organised activity want / need to use media. To engage in organising people have to communicate and they must use whatever means allow them do that job. What are we dealing with? Firstly we have to clarify what we mean by 'media' and then also look at how this is produced; we have to understand what tools we have access to and in what ways we can use them.

"Media is a plural" (O'Connor, R. http://roryoconnor.org/) – that is to say that there are various media and we have come to know a certain formulation of these as 'the media'. This particular beast is produced by an industry marked out by its relationship with advertising. Its primary aim is to deliver audiences/markets to advertisers; it attracts audiences /markets by using a range of content - current trends focus on 'niche audiences' so market surveys try to collect lots of information on 'your interests' (you know, all those questions when you sign up to Facebook, LinkedIn, etc). By convincing advertisers that millions more 'eyeballs' will see their products advertised, media operators manage to sell 'airtime'. But they are actually selling the audience - for without the audience the 'airtime' is worthless, it produces no revenue. The audience is what is sold at this market.

The primary activity that uses 'the media' is selling. Advertising has been described as 'Media life-blood' – it brings in the money that keeps the newspaper/ radio station/ tv channel running. It is for 'advertising' contracts that media operators compete; competing for the rights to football matches simply reflects the numbers of people the media operators expect will watch these events and therefore how much they can charge for pulling 'x' amount of 'eyeballs' for the advertisers. Big sponsors dominate too – Heineken, Diageo. Profit motive dominates.

It is when their advertising is threatened that media operators respond to demands - as when the Irish disability movement acted to pull health adverts from the Sunday Independent. This resulted in a journalist who had made unacceptable comments about the para-olympics being removed from her post. Libel cases taken by politicians against media operators are daily events and more often than not it is the media who pays or backs down from publishing.   Money talks, and attacking the pocket seems to get quicker and more effective results than any reform movement with agendas around journalistic ethos or democratising media has achieved to date. Wealth rules.

1.2 Why do we put up with it?

We could be forgiven for believing the purpose of media is to produce news where developments of public interest are announced; or current affairs programmes where discussions and debates are held in what is seen as a 'public sphere'. But this is not media's purpose, rather it is our need:- news and current affairs are probably the main thing we turn to media for beside entertainment, but what we are fed maintains the status quo and we often have to seek important and useful information elsewhere.

When the news and current affairs that we get is examined we find that it is again selling – selling ideas and ways of doing things. When we examine the idea of the media as a 'public sphere' we find that it's quite private in reality, and access to this sphere of media is carefully controlled. Chomsky and Harman's filters make this abundantly clear. When we look at the achievements of commercial media we find top of the list is a complete and utter failure to provide crucial information during disasters, resulting in shocking levels of injury, death, and general mayhem which we find now documented on the pages of www.comminit.com and tracked by Media for Development networks. Eric Klinenberg exposed the mistake of leaving public services in private hands when he documented the role of a US radio station, Clear Channel, in a chemical poisoning incident in a town that left one person dead and thousand of injuries. The channel's license stipulated that it was to provide an information channel for emergency services; there was no one in the channel at the time to perform this function – it had been automated. Over every 'disaster' area hovers media that research has shown does more damage than good (Klinenberg, E. 2007)).

But despite all this 'the media' hold sway and we still want to hear what is on the news. As Stuart Hall and many others have demonstrated, we don't believe everything we hear - so we may well ask what it is that we do get from it? We get extremely frustrated by the lack of diverse views, by the bland discussion panels devoid of oppositional voices, so the show host has to become obstreperous to jazz it up; by the reporters who do not ask the important (obvious to us) questions. We gape as the obscenely huge salaries that are paid to those who mediate mainstream talk-shows

are published on front pages; we note that armies of 'researchers' vet those who call the shows and we know where we heard one voice there are thousands who do not get past the gateway; we understand that journalists compete for 'scoops' to propel themselves further up the ladder and exploit people as fodder for their 'human interest' stories.

Despite all the research, media reform movements, community media activism, alternative media, the monster lives on. We have to deal with the reasons why. As a community media activist I am constantly asking why we are not more successful.

What remains a fact is that working class people do not have access to media tools that allow them to communicate – working class people engaged in struggle particularly find access to media problematic. What we see when people in struggle try to get access is that news rooms are invaded as happened in Greece a few years ago; burning cars are filmed; riots are reported; but the working class voice addressing its issue _does not have a right_ to space in this so-called 'public sphere'. No amount of 'how to access the media' courses / seminars / workshops will unlock the studio door when the key is held by those who want to silence dissent.

2. How working class people use media

2.1 Media use and access

People use media to convey a message, to pass on information, to communicate; people who organise around an issue want to use media to Get the Message Out – GTMO. How to do this and who to get the message to poses problems and this has given rise to a whole raft of 'media and communications advisors/consultants' who ply their trade with rich and poor alike.

There is an evident and common need for voice that would seem on the face of it to be an achievable democratic demand, "Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) www.crisinfo.org has developed a framework which addresses policy contexts. What seems to me to happens with this work, necessary as it may seem, is that its falls into the ongoing problematic of policy not being reflected on the ground because what is happening on the ground is the closing down of opportunity for the kinds of communication initiatives they are proposing. Yes, community media is legislated for in Ireland but we still do not have the means. We have the policy bur not the access – and along with everyone else we face the advancing austerity measures.

Behind the event where people "grab the microphone', the camera, or to occupy the TV newsroom - is the need to communicate around burning issues. Efforts to establish 'free media' that people can

access 'without fear or favour' to meet their information and communication needs have taken many forms - legal and illegal. My main involvement has been in community media which I define here as that which supports the common ownership of media products, enables voice as a collective rather than individual labour, and promotes control of the means of intellectual production as a key strategy for the formation and action of working class consciousness. This is primarily an activity rather than any entity and involves a re-working of the relationship between the process of media production and a re-assessment of what the product/ products actually may be. (I will return to this again as it is a key concept for building working class media).

However, despite many years of media reform and activism we do not seem to have developed one straightforward way to provide this essential means of communication. And we have not succeeded in establishing the right beyond threat – even where they operate as the norm community channels in the US must spend time and energy in a fight to hold onto franchises long awarded. In Ireland we lobby for funding to enable what we have in principle but cannot realise – so we struggle.

2.2 "Has anyone seen the other way around"?

A favourite postcard of mine shows a marching crowd and asks "has anyone seen the parliamentary road to democracy?". Media is pervasive in our society, some find it hard to see how we can do it differently; one media activist described the challenge as:

> *"you do all this work with people, a full critique of the media; they go "oh yeah" then a week later they're full of the same stuff again, they've been saturated with media!"*.

This saturation is held responsible for the kinds of expectation communty organisations have for media production and the issues that arise around production values.

The issue of what are called "production values" I will return to again – these are often moaned about – poor quality in lighting, composition, and particularly sound that render the production ineffective – a poor effort at communication – or, it could also be said, an effort to communicate that contains distracting elements that detract from the intent.

Access is there for those who can afford it – this 'affording' needs to be put into perspective; it is a bar that is set within society. The bar needs to be understood in the context of exclusion, and the importance given to literacy, skills, education, wealth to a persons ability to participate in society and at what level. Working class people have always had to get around these so that they can organise in their own interest; working class self-organised activity is also marked by the capacity to tap into skills and capacities that exist within the class.

People gain media skills in similar ways to how people learn to drive a car; or we learn to use technologies for employment; or it is part of our culture in the way that mobile phones are in Ireland – this kind of access differs greatly around the globe.

Effective communication is another matter – this is not simply using a megaphone, transmitting a television signal, or using a mobile phone - it is a process of knowledge exchange and development produced in the pursuit of an objective by human beings together – as Marx so clearly stated in Grundisse.

> "The human being is in the most literal sense a political animal, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society." (p.84)

The kind of process employed by community organisations builds on peoples lived experience; a developmental process allows the means of intellectual production to be collectively owned, yet shared by the individuals involved. This is where we need to situate our media production – as part of the group's process of knowledge production. Authorship issues only from the group collectively.

2.3 How to approach the issue?

John Downing (2001), a major contributor to research and theoretical study in media that operate on the margins of the mainstream, said what is needed is a sociological approach to developing theory for alternatives to mainstream media. Downing deserves better attention than I'm giving him here; along with other media activists he has developed the global network – OurMedia – to emphasise the issue of ownership of media and promote alternatives - yet this network remains largely academic. Ownership and control of community media entities such as radio stations and television channels is often contested by competing interests within the community and it is a struggle to establish an egalitarian and participatory ethos such as that enshrined in the AMARC Charter. These need to connect, as do other involved in producing media that aims to put the needs of the working class first.   But we also need to ensure that our activity is based in working class self-organising, and this is the challenge..

Working class use of media means a whole turn-around of how we understand media to work – we need 'ways of seeing' that allow us to look at media the other way around.

3. So where *do* we start?

Because working class activity must 'fit' with what is happening both in the community, in people's lives, and in the group's they participate in, CMN's efforts are focussed on organisations that are

formed to address their community's needs and to engage their own people in developing solutions to problems. The way these groups work is to build on peoples lived experience, drawing on a wealth of thinking in community development and adult education ranging from Raymond Williams to Paulo Friere. Solutions developed in this way form a knowledge base which people can use to support action to change their circumstances and maintain the healthy functioning of their community.

Collective learning is part of the process of development. I have said that using media to support communications is nothing new, but technologies can also provide opportunities for participation: people can speak into microphones and talk to cameras without needing to read or write; it may demand different abilities to use the microphone/ camera and to edit recorded material, but it has been done without college degrees or even school education. Sugata Mitra's (Judge, 2000)Hole in the Wall project demonstrated the capabilities of Indian street children to use computers, from whence came the notorious advert "if you want to learn how to use a computer, find a child . . . .". So if children can use it . . . . what and where is the bar? In CMN activists have spoken of the skills necessary for community media as being the equivalent of "writing a coherent letter". We need to think about that. What is a "coherent letter"? What about the "clear message" - what constitutes that?

We know there are huge benefits for people participating in community media. Activists make a lot of the kinds of skills that people can learn as part of the process of media making such as team work, interpersonal skills, organisational skills. The usefulness of these skills to employers improves job opportunities and is always mentioned particularly when lobbying politicians or looking for funding. They are also useful skills for supporting self-organised activity. A group can grow and develop bonds in the process of making media; understanding of themselves and those they wish to talk to is also a fundamental part of the process of making any media.

CMN activists have in the past called for provision of training and resources as vital to developing community media. But we have been challenged by the realities when we work with community organisations.

I have been working with community groups responding to problems arising from drug use in Inner City Dublin; they present a number of areas and issues that need to be addressed and understood if we are to develop suitable media that will meet their needs.

3.1 CMN activities

Community groups working with Community Media Network (CMN), have a range of interconnected needs, and their need to use media is part of those – they do not have separate media needs. CMN therefore finds that "a web of strategies" is often a more appropriate way of thinking about media than seeing 'the web', any single form of media, or accessing the institutions

of media, as a strategy in itself. We achieve nothing by producing a television programme, a website or a newsletter unless it is firmly attached to activity – MJ Kim describes this neatly as – no online success without off-line activity. The importance of the media we produce is its contribution to our activity and problem solving. CAN TV uses a slogan – "sometimes TV is the solution, not the problem"; a community radio station announces "your community radio station is listening". It depends how you use it, how you see it, and how such a media operator sees it's role. CANTV and the community radio station present a way to view media that is a reversal of the mainstream – TV as a solution; a radio that listens. This opens a window to another approach - but is this enough?

3.2 Where do we acquire the skills to handle media?

If schools and colleges are designed to prepare students for work in the media industry – these are unlikely to be the places where we find ways to use media to support working class self organised activity – logically this would provide those students and the media industry employees with tools to organise against job losses, pay cuts, and profit driven attacks on their working conditions. Nor will the rules and procedures, standards and values, quality controls, and job demarcations of that industry provide us with a framework that will meet working class communications needs.

The saturation of our world by media values means that people have expectations of what media products should look like; they are also afraid to look 'amateurish' or low quality, and they have not learned to look at media production outside the box. Community organisations can often want 'professional' standards produced in non-professional conditions. What is needed here is a framework that allows both groups to learn: the community media organisation needs to learn about the groups' concerns, their way of working, and how they can use a camera with the group without distracting from their activity. The community group needs to learn what is possible given their circumstances and activity and how they can use a given medium to best support their work. These skills can only be developed in a context where the group has media production skills amongst its members or in a collaboration between the community media workers and the community group.

In CMN's experience problems arise in a context where there are few resources, and probably even less people, and a dynamic exists that not only perpetuates the problems produced by mainstream media, but also inhibits any capacity building amongst working class groups. This dynamic involves both the groups in the community media sector and community media organisations. The underlying issue is the quest for funding and the impact this has had on both.

1. Community organisations with funding engage commercial producers where they think they will get better quality than by working with community media groups. This means they:
   a) continue to work in mainstream ethos and close off any opportunity to develop an informed critique for themselves of mainstream media practice
   b) close off opportunities to develop a community production process in which they are engaged
   c) maintain the 'professional expert' and 'technician' work ethos of professional mainstream media and inhibit their capacity to engage in the process of production
   d) put funds at their disposal into commercial, for-profit companies
   e) identify what should be community, self-organised activity as a market for commercial operators
2. Community media entities in an effort to make themselves a part of the market
   a) seek college graduates and independent practitioners to provide skills;
   b) begin to organise their work in a similar manner to commercial producers
   c) seek funds from 'media' production rather than community funding streams

For our practice this means that:
- ↟ people with skills are being parachuted into working class communities and there is no capacity building in the community on any level
- ↟ the group has a product but has gained little from the production process which operates in the same way as mainstream media; very often the group has a problem with the product due to lack of editorial control and this cannot be redeemed

3.4 Finding the means – funding-driven problems

Many community organisations regularly use media, newsletter, websites, social media, and their primary aim is often GTMO. In Ireland many community groups employ independent media producers and this costs money, the organisation needs to raise funds; the result is that only those who have funds have a voice, and that voice is moderated by the groups need to maintain its relationship with its funders.

Anna Lee writing about community development in Ireland (2006) noted that funding-driven approaches in community environments has led to a number of problems including:

- a shift towards partnership and consensus-building,
- emphasis on the local level and 'mistrust' between the local and national levels,
- the delivery of services as opposed to work for social change;
- short term support – limited to two to three years;

- reliance on public funding; and
- a move towards 'managerialism'.

This is also found in other contexts, the tendency towards bureaucracy is exacerbated by the professionalisation of community organisations which encourages hierarchical organisational forms and whose managers run the operation within frameworks that are designed to attract the funders (Bekkken, 2000). This is also an issue arising in community television in other countries (Klein & Mollander, 2005) and Indymedia (Coleman, 2004).

The most divisive issue for Irish community media activists was the result of efforts to establish a fund. After the passage of the 2001 Act the community media groups lobbied for a funding mechanism – and proposed that 5% of the TV Licence Fee be put aside for community media. In 2003 the Braodacsting funding Act was passed, establishing the fund for the production of community content. The fund created a pool in which community proposals were assessed alongside 'independent' media producers and according to art-house production criteria. This fund was impossible for community groups to access, and remains so. The effect on both community radio and community television has been negative, forcing the channels into independent production mode, and creating a shift from volunteer driven to independent-driven radio production.

Essentially this initiative has bound community production to commercial production values; it has introduced competition between the stations and channels whose relations were based on mutual support and collaboration; the conflicts that dominate mark this as the most undermining initiative for community media in Ireland to date.

4. CMN's revised strategy

CMN took advantage of a window of opportunity to review its operations in 2008/9. In the previous years, responding to the legislation in 2001, CMN was concerned with developing the technical organisation to support community television, in particular DCTV[1], but found that in this process there were significant gaps where community organisations were finding difficulties in accessing the channel. A revised strategy in 2008/9 instigated work with a number of community organisations to explore their needs and develop media work with the groups; the strategy is described below in terms of how it worked out and headed by the dominant.

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1   Dublin Community Television (DCTV) launched in 2007

4.1 CMN current practice:

The following section is a work in progress and is being developed as the projects grow. It is not intended to be definitive but to highlight the important processes that we are dealing with.

CMN projects have arisen and been supported in the main through a small number of factors:
- ⚔ historical relationships;
- ⚔ CMN's engagement as a member of the community sector; and
- ⚔ maintaining a core funded project, even if small.

The current work with five groups originated in 2004 when their network approached CMN to ask could we provide media supports to an annual event. Now, seven years on, we can say that the kind of practice this has opened up has allowed CMN to produce documentation of their processes, promotional videos for their events; support their engagement with community television; and to develop research with their involvement.

The kind of practice that has evolved has been shaped by exchange, mutual dependency, and need. In essence we have become an organisation that accepts a certain nomadism as an important part of its role. CMN had always held that it should operate through its network and resist centralising its operations – we have found that the greater the funding, the more centralised the organisation needs to be. Being so deeply engaged with the development of other organisations also means being prepared to withdraw when that organisation no longer needs the support. We work towards our own redundancy and this is also a vulnerability. This was the case with CMN's involvement with various coalitions including an IMC in 2004 and building Dublin Community Television (DCTV) from 2000-2007 – these efforts drained our resources without renewal. What we want to see now is a situation where this devastation of resources does not need to happen.

What we have built, particularly over the past five years since DCTV launched, is a practice that works on different and, it has to be said, sometimes opposing principles to the 'media centre' or the 'channel/station' studio – it is decentralised in nature and means firstly that we go to the groups and work with them in their base.

Working alongside Groups: our starting point is their understanding of what they need to do and the understanding they have of media and its use for their work. We work with them to enable their workers and volunteers become familiar with us, having media in their environment, and what media processes demand. Generating a capacity to engage with media *in a manner that suits their need and their capacity* is a primary concern and is what guides our activities. We work in whatever way presents itself; the important factor is the Group's interest in exploring how it can

develop its capacity in relation to using media. Essentially the community media worker becomes an extended member of the Group.

Small building blocks: we have found that small building blocks for learning are more successful in developing knowledge and confidence for the groups and their participants. This can operate on a level of perception – where the development of a small media product is in the interest of participants; a small production of a DVD showing a training session in alternative health practice provided an opportunity for self-awareness for the trainer, heightened esteem of the training in the eyes of both participants and the organisation, and for all a heightened awareness of the value of the media to the group. It had no monetary value, it cost an afternoon in time to film, and a day's editing; but it had high impact for the group and opened a path for the use of media internal to the organisation. Our next step here is to find easy ways for them to produce small scale work like this for themselves.

Integrated practice: Finding ways that media actions can be built into their work practice means more integrated learning for the Groups and a more integrated practice for us. The Groups have done a lot of this already, many will have a website and someone who is capable of maintaining it and producing a range of small scale media - which can make us seem redundant at first until we start working in on an activity. For those who do not have these activities or participants with media knowledge, we can help them start.

The principle of two-way learning: CMN brings media skills to the groups, but CMN needs to learn about the groups processes, what is important to them, and to look for ways to work together. The groups themselves have been challenged in this way in their own practice and won't accept a community media person who cannot attempt to deal with the same, particularly when they are engaged in making re-presentation of the community's issues. Community workers in the Groups tell us that when they, as people from the inner city who went to college and graduated as social workers, returned to their communities they had to engage with live issues. Many undertook Addiction Studies to equip themselves to deal with the realities. The engagement that happens in these groups aims to enable and empower local people to become workers who can be effective in dealing with their community's issues. Their experience is that those engaging with communities must be prepared to see themselves as learners. CMN needs to engage in a similar manner. We find that opportunities exist where volunteers are being trained and the CMN group works alongside them, documenting the course. Volunteers are exposed to media operating within their environment and CMN people are exposed to the training, the processes in action, and the kinds of issues that are being dealt with. This can mean we will attend far more sessions and collect far more footage than we would were we dealing with the group as an objectified 'subject' of a media

piece. We are operating here in a totally un-media-like manner. This will be frustrating for media-minded operators.

Trust and Community Contracts: The understanding that is built between CMN and the Groups involve both formal and informal elements. When a group wants CMN to do work, CMN issues a formal Letter of Commitment that states the purpose of the project and clarifies ownership of the material produced. This is an important part of the process as it represents conversations that have taken place - CMN has had opportunity to explain its purpose and the group starts to understand that it's ownership of the material also means it has responsibility for that material and its use.

This basic understanding is also explained to any of the Group's workers or volunteers that come in contact with the media activity. The reassurance that media produced will be controlled by the Group allows their participants to relate to the media activity in a more open, but also more confident manner. What we have found is that people may tell the 'camera' to "go away now", or to proffer themselves as interviewees, as having something they want to say, or are simply able to ignore it and concentrate on their task in hand.

Engagement of this kind involves trust and the spread of a sense of ownership amongst those who participate is significant. Because this involves many people it can also raise issues – the Group needs to understand that with media produced in this way they must remember that a sense of ownership lies with all participants. Therefore those people will feel they have a right to be involved in connected activities. This can challenge the Group to exercise greater levels of participation in key activity.

Declaring sides: The community media operator must understand itself as being as much a part of the community as the groups with whom it works. This can pose real problems, but if the CM entity is not engaged as are others with creating and maintaining community infrastructure, and seeing itself as an integral part of that, it will fail.
The issue here is how the CM operator engages in the issues that concern the community. This is where the basic claim of community media is crucially important - as a tool for social justice, a means to combat exclusion, a channel that celebrates diversity, and an enabler of voice for those who are excluded.

4.2 CMN current work.

In CMN's current work we take the community organisation as the starting point and seek an engagement with groups that encourages conversations addressing their perception of their media

needs. What has evolved is an ongoing dialogue and a demand for CMN to respond to needs that sometimes arise quickly on the ground from community organisations. These needs may arise from their practice, e.g. documenting events, activities, and recording their ways of working; they may also arise from their need to be heard – lobbying authorities, funders, and engaging with the mainstream. A range of strategies are needed to address these needs – it's not addressed by simply pointing a camera in the direction of the activity.

Firstly, the idea that community media groups could simply address the needs by providing training to groups to produce their own media, or making equipment available was de-bunked by a number of factors located in the realities of community organisations. These groups:

- Are not interested in becoming independent media-makers, they need other supports but they need to access media.
- Need to discuss what they have to do, after all they are only thinking of using media because they hope it will help them in their objective.
- Are short on time and people - it has proven difficult to find participants within the groups who will learn to operate the camera. This is either because the purpose and objective for many participants is not to produce media; where there is someone who can, they are usually also needed for a variety of different things; or because the participants are unable due to pressures arising from their circumstances – they are recovering from drug use, or they have other issues.

CMN has answered the need by providing a two person crew to do the filming and is working with them to find another approach to developing the skills in the community.

Conclusion

None of what I talk about is unusual in community media activity, and I don't claim it as a unique approach on the part of CMN. However I think we need to ensure that the *primary activity* takes priority over 'media production' in how community media concerns are presented.

This is a core problem for community media activists – whose needs do we as community media activists meet? Are we embroiled in a struggle to control the airways and does this take our time and energy? Or do we build another practice that cannot be shut down, that builds a capacity in our communities to produce media in a way that is integrated into their known ways of doing things; that brings down the skill and technology bars to a level that can be traversed without extensive training and expert aid; and that allows an engagement with media that gives primacy to the objectives of working class self-organised activity.

There are choices that have to be made; one of these is to let our concern with establishing media entities be led and driven by the needs we meet in the groups we work with rather than producing media around and about them.

We need the courage and conviction to forge ahead with that, to engage as equals in self-organised activity and to drop our 'expert' personas. Then we might be have a 'free' media.

Bibliography

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Table No 1: Williams Typology of Media Function

Type	Devices	Historical place	Skills involved	Access controls
Amplificatory	Megaphone	Amphitheatre – historic early electronic –recent	To speak, to hear,	Amphitheatre -Spatial Electronic - Small cost
	Live Radio	Recent	To speak, to hear, and to interpret	Transmission equipment, license, control by 'codes of practice', legal
	Live TV	recent	To speak, to hear, to gesture, to observe, and to interpret	Transmission equipment, studio for production base, license, control by 'codes of practice', legal
Durative	sound recordings mean durative quality for speech,	recent	To speak, to hear, and to interpret	
	Painting, sculpture,	late	To see and feel – touch	Classed and 'cultural' controls such as education, ability to travel,
Alternative	Use of objects as signs; development of writing; graphics, and means of reproduction	early	Reading, writing, observe, interpret	Socialisation; Education; industrial training

Table No. 1 drawn from Williams typology of media

Appendix: Tomaselli's table of Differences

Community and Professional Video: Table of Differences

Community video	Professional and conventional video
Communication	
Group media animates and mobilises personal experience in group contexts	Mass media informs and homogenises personal experience in individual contexts
Non-profit motive	Profit motive
Develops human relations	Develops techniques
Communication associated with process	Communication associated with technical quality
Knowledge	
Produces new knowledge	'Restricts' knowledge or repackages & reconstructs it in new ways
Recuperates local histories	Emulates dominant view of world
Retains local cultural specificity in terns of subjects	Homogenises local cultures in term of markets and techniques
Questions of Democracy	
Emphasises relationships	Fragments relationships
Horizontal/participative working relationships	Imposed/top-down working relationships
Transformative	Reformist
Coding	
Creates new codes, if often crude, but organic origins address community's agenda	Refines conventional styles, sophistication often hides local issues and specificities
Refers to processes beyond the community	Literal/if processes not shown, they do not exist
Production, Distribution, Exhibition	

Production cannot be executed in terms of predetermined schedules	Production must be executed in terms of pre- determined schedules
Process precedes product	Product is only goal. Process is concealed
	Develops national and international markets
Develops local audiences	Crew alienated from its labour
Crew not alienated from its labour	Are alienated from their audiences through independent distribution
Participant video-makers are part of local distribution networks	

Power, Empowerment	
Decision-making power vested in the subject-community	Decision-making power retained and secured in the production crew and/or producers
Initial power relationships exposed and negotiated between crew and subject-community	Nature of power relationships mystified by crew in *its* relations with the subject-community
Empowers/active response	Disempowers/passive response
Community networks strengthened	Community networks exploited and/or weakened
Community must take responsibility for completion of video	Crew takes responsibility for completion of video
Facilitates both video and political theory building	Prevents theory building by concealing processes of production
Producers are part of subject community or are drawn into it	Producers are outside subject-community
Collective decision-making	Hierarchical decision-making
Long-tenn relationship between crew and community develops	Short-term relationship develops
Viewers have political expectations	Viewers want to be entertained
Empowerment takes place, if differentially, at every level of production, from production techniques to recovery of local histories and catalysation of community organisational networks	Usually only film/video makers are empowered. Sometimes subject-communities can be detrimentally affected through exposure to alien influences and payment for acting services.