TECH1502-18 Introduction to Community Media

Lecture Eleven: Against the Mainstream

David Cameron squirms as veteran rockers Squeeze launch fierce attack on Tory policy live on TV
https://youtu.be/2mpvRwIZkyY
https://youtu.be/sbIlR-moiR8

1   What is Alternative Media?
Alternative media challenges mainstream ideas about economic and social provisions, but this is not a simple undertaking. Having the intention to promote an alternative sensibility to the mainstream through the distribution of media is not the same things as acting as a resistant agent and counter-hegemonic force against the mainstream.

1.1   Resistance Media
Alternative media is often equated with political actions that are oppositional, and is sometimes, therefore, referred to as "'resistance' media," (Atton, 2002, p. 8).

Forms of resistance through which different types of creative and cultural expression, news reporting, discussion, and so on, are offered as "counter-hegemonic critique of the mainstream" (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpenter, 2008, p. 15).

1.2   Radical Media
As Chris Atton notes: "An alternative publication might then be interrogated as to its radicality in terms of its multi-dimensional character, a perspective that privileges the overlap and intersection of dimensions" (Atton, 2002, p. 27).

1.3   What Is the Alt-Right?
Jared Taylor, editor of American Renaissance, responds to Hillary Clinton's attack on the Alt-Right. He describes the political contours of the movement, as well as its major players. He notes that while members of the Alt-Right may be sympathetic to Donald Trump and Breitbart.com because of their strong positions on immigration, neither of them has spoken up for explicitly white interests. As a result, they should not be considered properly Alt-Right.
https://youtu.be/CJ3B6L2fUA8

2   Noam Chomsky on Media Propaganda
One of the most cited scholars in history, Chomsky has influenced a broad array of academic fields. He is widely recognized as a paradigm shifter who helped spark a major revolution in the human sciences, contributing to the development of a new cognitivistic framework for the study of language and the mind. In addition to his continued scholarly research, he remains a leading critic of U.S. foreign policy, neoliberalism and contemporary state capitalism, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and mainstream news media. His ideas have proved highly significant within the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements, but have also drawn criticism, with some accusing Chomsky of anti-Americanism and alleging that he is sympathetic to terrorism and genocide denial.
https://youtu.be/tmk00fst5Vc

2.1   Grassroots Accomplishments
Do alternative media producers and activists engage in counter-hegemonic politics on the basis of their grassroots accomplishments, as they are measurable over time? Are these counter-hegemonic actions expressed more directly as a set of assertive actions that repel the ideologies of the dominant mainstream? What are the forms of alternative media practice that "counteract mainstream media coverage and resist suppression" (Todd, 2010, p. 377).

2.2   Who is Controlling Media?
Even asking simple questions about 'who's' news is being presented lays within the scope of the counter-hegemonic, because it draws attention to the way that news values are bound-up with issues of ownership and control.

What difference does it make to have this knowledge and awareness?

Much of the discussion about counter-hegemonic media rests on the recognition that by introducing different social players into the news production process, then the forces of repression will somehow themselves be reversed.

2.3 How the mainstream media frames the political debate
The mainstream media frames the parameters of political debate. For decades the fanatically right-wing Thatcherite economic dogma (privatisation, tax cuts for the rich, repression of dissent, deregulated financial markets, repression of wages, centralisation of political power, neglect of manufacturing and industry ...) has been treated by the mainstream press as "moderate" and pretty much unquestionable. While anyone who tries to question the ludicrous assumptions that underpin right-wing economic dogma is treated as "extremist", "militant" or even "insane". http://anotheran-gryvoice.blogspot.co.uk/2016/05/mainstream-media-frames-debate.html

Britain has one of the most concentrated media environments in the world, with 3 companies in control of 71% of national newspaper circulation and 5 companies in command of 81% of local newspaper titles. The hacking scandal and its aftermath demonstrated how that power has been used nationally, whilst at local level community after community is losing the means to publicly hold power to account. Urgent reform is needed to reclaim the media in the interest of the public. http://www.mediareform.org.uk/who-owns-the-uk-media

Trump railed against AT&T's proposed purchase of Time Warner during a campaign speech in October. "As an example of the power structure I'm fighting, AT&T is buying Time Warner and thus CNN, a deal we will not approve in my administration because it's too much concentration of power in the hands of too few," Trump said at the time. In that speech, Trump complained about the media's coverage of his campaign. But it wouldn't be a surprise to see Trump back down from his pledge to block the AT&T/Time Warner merger. AT&T is encouraged by Trump appointing "former competition officials with a hands-off record on antitrust enforcement" to his transition team, AT&T sources told the Financial Times. http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2016/12/att-confident-on-time-warner-merger-after-talking-to-trump-team/

3 Alternative News
So, in championing different news producers in the mass media, and "introducing 'alternative social actors [such as] the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised and indeed the ordinary manual labourer, woman, youth and child as the main subjects of [their] news and features" (Traber, 1985: 2 in Atton, 2002, p. 16) the expectation is that social and political change will be brought about.

3.1 The Oppressed
The problem rests, unfortunately, on the dubious proposition that these oppressed people will really want to identify themselves as under-privileged or marginalised in order to serve this agenda? What as, a fig leaf?

Rather than simply placing people into stereotypical roles of oppression, it may be more effective to deprofessionalise and deinstitutionalise alternative media, so that it is more instantly recognisable as a form of communication that is different from the mainstream and mass media by being more accessible. As Chris Atton suggests, alternative media: "Must be available to ordinary people without the necessity of professional training, without excessive capital outlay and they must take place in settings other than media institutions or similar situations" (Atton, 2002, p. 25).

3.2 Counter-Hegemonic Media
Alternative media is bound to make clear and overt anti-commercial statements, and adopt methods that are antithetical to political conventions, because such statements are a way to demonstrate the "practical commitment" of the producers as they seek to advance their "political strategy," which is usually, but not always, "one that is against capitalism and managerialism" (Atton, 2002, p. 34).

3.3 Anxieties of Everyday Life
Alternative media are more concerned with the anxieties of everyday life and ordinary people's needs, is itself recognition that there is more to cultural and political resistance than "economic determinism" (Atton, 2002, p. 51).

By championing the needs of ordinary people it is possible to recognise that alternative media "falls outside the formal corporate mainstream media," and embodies instead the "Gramscian notion of the counterhegemonic" (Howley, 2010, p. 87).

3.4 Black Friday At Tesco 2016!! Crazy Riot!!
https://youtu.be/B6_jALbpZr8

4   Social Activism

"It is in the nature of activism to respond to social issues as they emerge" (Atton, 2002, p. 12), and that "even within a single area of alternative media there is much heterogeneity (of styles, of contributions, of perspectives)" (Atton, 2002, p. 8).

Understanding how people are subject to hegemonic forces, we might enquire how something is either subject to those hegemonic forces or it is not. There can be no in-between and indeterminate state, counter-hegemonic resistances cannot emerge as diversified and alternate perspectives as if by magic.

4.1   Alternative Perspectives

As Carlos Fontes explains: "Traditionally alternative media theorists tend to fall into two main groups. The first group defines alternative media from a macrosocial perspective and focuses on their capacity for counter-information in a struggle with the mainstream for hearts and minds of citizenry, as well as their role in building a counterhegemonic project of society. The second group of theorists focus their analysis on the way alternative media practices change subjectivities and everyday social relations in community settings and argue that the wider impact of alternative media can be detected cumulatively over time in the strengthening of grassroots organisations and struggles of local communities" (Fontes, 2010, p. 382).

4.2   Media Power

With this in mind there is an ever-present temptation to "conceptualise media power as a zero-sum game wherein media corporations are viewed as all-powerful while so-called ordinary people are powerless" (Howley, 2010, p. 19). Perhaps a more useful formulation for alternative media is to look at how it is part of a process that creates and sustains "solidarity among activists" (Todd, 2010, p. 378), and is able to maintain the momentum of political actions regardless of the mainstream media coverage they receive. Increasingly ICT and social media platforms are able to maintain high levels of communication with supporters of different causes and campaigns, and focus on enabling the technical infrastructure that facilitates a network of activists.

4.3   Symbolic Subversion

Often this might take the form of subversion, or subtervising, to make social points about issues that are being discussed. Indeed, the efforts are leading to community activists being encouraged instead to "remake the media," (Howley, 2010, p. 279) as digital and media production tools are becoming more widely available.

Hence, alternative media is well positioned to lead these emerging debates and discussions as there is a wide experience and history in alternative media groups of counter-hegemonic engagement through symbolic subversion and parody.

4.4   Activist Participation

To recap then, alternative media is self-managed, not-for-profit, embedded in communities, and resistant to corporate organisations and professional models of working. Alternative media gives space and resources to activists and participants to become directly engaged with deprofessionalised forms of media production that eschew the techniques and routines of the mainstream media.

4.5   Adbusting: Starbucks

https://youtu.be/oTELZYE1m6o

4.6   Partisanship

As Howley suggests, "in this way, community media provide a forum for dissent and a vehicle for cultural resistance and oppositional politics" (Howley, 2010, p. 234).

Therefore, alternative media encourages contributions from a wide range of people who are able to express their views from their perspective, while being entirely partisan about their interests and concerns.

4.7   Accomplishments

Avoiding balance and impartiality is an energetic expression of counter-hegemonic intent, so alternative, activist and radical media are creatively engaged when they are focussed on their accomplishments, and not on their organisational structures or production procedures.

Politics in this model is assumed to exist at all levels, and the primary question is who's interests are being served in the communication agenda being offered? This means that the challenge for alternative media, as with all political movements, is to think about how to "expand its audience beyond the choir" (Todd, 2010, p. 377).

5 Protest Media
Media activism is a broad category of activism that utilizes media and communication technologies for social and political movements. Methods of media activism include publishing news on websites, creating video and audio investigations, spreading information about protests, and organizing campaigns relating to media and communications policies.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_activism

5.1 Miners Campaign Tapes #5 - The Lie Machine - Miners Strike 1984 Media Propaganda
Number five of a series of DIY documentaries put out during the Great Miners Strike of 1984-1985, this one examining how the corporate media, especially the tabloid press, demonised and propagandised against the miners, their union and particularly their leader, Arthur Scargill.
https://youtu.be/gRuRq17pg5Q

5.2 Students Are Not Allowed To Speak To Media | Protest AT Sairam College
It was students protesting against the college diktat in Chennai. But it isn't anymore about the dress code- students were blocked from speaking to the media by police. It's proof of university clampdown. https://youtu.be/atVCedHgrm8

5.3 Hong Kong protest 2014: The social media revolution | Report #6
How have student organisers mobilised tens of thousands of protesters to sites across Hong Kong – facilitating supply routes, warning of assaults on protest camps, coordinating teams of medics? Social media.
https://youtu.be/MyPi0FYihjE

5.4 Media Freedoms
Protests have take place across Poland against new laws which demonstrators say gives the newly-elected government power to restrict media freedoms. Several thousand protested outside the main public TV station in Warsaw. The new laws give the government power to appoint heads of public TV and radio, as well as the civil service.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35272542

5.5 Culture Jamming
Culture jamming (sometimes guerrilla communication) is a tactic used by many anti-consumerist social movements to disrupt or subvert media culture and its mainstream cultural institutions, including (but not limited to) corporate advertising. It attempts to "expose the methods of domination" of a mass society to foster progressive change.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_jamming

5.6 Commercial Saturation
Culture jamming is an intriguing form of political communication that has emerged in response to the commercial isolation of public life. Practitioners of culture jamming argue that culture, politics, and social values have been bent by saturated commercial environments, from corporate logos on sports facilities, to television content designed solely to deliver targeted audiences to producers and sponsors. Many public issues and social voices are pushed to the margins of society by market values and commercial communication, making it difficult to get the attention of those living in the "walled gardens" of consumerism. Culture jamming presents a variety of interesting communication strategies that play with the branded images and icons of consumer culture to make consumers aware of surrounding problems and diverse cultural experiences that warrant their attention. https://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/CultureJamming.htm

5.7 Adbusters
Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, Adbusters is a not-for-profit, reader-supported magazine concerned with the erosion of our physical and cultural environments by commercial forces. Since 1989, the magazine has been featured in hundreds of alternative and mainstream newspapers, magazines, television and radio shows. Known worldwide for sparking Occupy Wall Street, Adbusters is also responsible for social media campaigns such as Buy Nothing Day and Digital Detox Week. https://www.adbusters.org/category/tags/culture_jamming

Campaign posters in the run-up to the general election – the originals, the fakes and the ripostes http://www.theguardian.com/politics/gallery/2010/mar/30/general-election-2010-labour

6   Summarising the Four Approaches to Alternative Media (AM)

Serving a Community	An Alternative to the Mainstream	Linking Alternative Media to Civil Society	Alternative Media as Rhizome
Validating and strengthening the community.	AM show that the 'third way' is still open for media organisations.	Importance of civil society (as such) for democracy, with AM as part of civil society.	AM as the crossroads from different types of movements and struggles meet and collaborate.
Treating the audience as situated in a community.	Alternative ways of organisation, and more balanced and/or horizontal structures remain an actual possibility.	Democratisation of media in relation to micro and macro participation.	Deepening democracy by linking diverse democratic struggles.
Enabling and facilitating access and participation by members of that community.	AM can offer counter-hegemonic representations and discourses that vary from those originating in the mainstream.	Democratisation through media: extensive participation in public debate and opportunities for self-representation in (or a) public sphere.	Highlights the fluidity and contingency of media organisations.
Topics that are considered to be relevant to the community can be discussed by members of that community.	Emphasis on self-representation resulting in a multiplicity of societal voices.		Questioning and destabilising the rigidities and certainties of public and commercial media organisations, at the same time making room for tranhegemonic and collaborations and partnerships.
Opening a channel of communication for misrepresented, stigmatised or repressed societal groups.	Diversity of formats and genres – room for experiment.		Elusiveness makes AM (as a whole) hard to encapsulate – guaranteeing their interdependence.

6.1   Democratisation
"When focussing on alternative media's role in facilitating participation, we need to distinguish between participation in media and through media, similar to the way in which Wasko and Mosco (1992: 7) distinguished between democratisation in and through the media. Both participation in media and through the media see the (mass) communicative process not as a series of practices that are often restrictively controlled by media professionals, but as a human right that cuts across entire societies" (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 11).

7   References
Atton, C. (2002). *Alternative Media*. London: Sage.

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