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Public access as public action : the activism of Berkeley Community Media's BTV

Terra Jae Lepper
San Jose State University

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PUBLIC ACCESS AS PUBLIC ACTION:
THE ACTIVISM OF BERKELEY COMMUNITY MEDIA'S BTV

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Terra Jae Lepper

May 2004

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Dr. Anne Marie Todd (Chair)

Dr. Deanna Fassett

Dr. Andrew Wood

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

PUBLIC ACCESS AS PUBLIC ACTION: THE ACTIVISM OF BERKELEY COMMUNITY MEDIA'S BTV

by Terra Jae Lepper

This thesis represents a process of self and social discovery of the role of the television medium for people who want to change themselves and the world. The research uses ethnography and autoethnography to explore the rhetorical dimensions of media activism within the context of public access television. Berkeley Community Media's BTV, the public access television station under investigation, provided a site from which to collect data in the form of activist television shows and interviews with producers who identify with activist concepts.

Three activist rhetorical strategies emerged to reveal how the definition of media activism within public access television implicates artifice and identity of self and community. These strategies are "awareness of community," "advocacy for community," and "artistry." The research also associates two overall modes of presentation with BTV's activism. These modes are reflexivity and reflectivity.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Before laying out what other people, such as other researchers, videographers, and activists, offered to inform this project, I want to give special attention to my positionality as both the researcher and a former member of the research site. I became interested in doing a project on the topic of public access television following my experience as an intern producer in 2001 at BTV, the public access channel of Berkeley Community Media (BCM). I began my graduate studies while still interning at the station, and I knew that my research would in some way touch on my work in television. I had no previous experience producing television before starting at BCM, although I had dabbled a bit in independent video as an undergraduate student ten years earlier. While I was a little intimidated by the idea of producing and hosting live shows, I decided it was a risk to my ego worth taking for what it would ultimately teach me about television technology, interpersonal relations, creative process, and the power I have to use media for social change. What I saw as an intern at the public access television station opened my eyes to what media could be in the hands of the local community and ordinary people like me. Higgins (1999) speaks of public access television, also known as “community television,” in terms of “the empowering aspects of television when freed from corporate and institutional control and put in the hands of the general population” (p. 624). I recognized public access as a potential site for social change, but did not yet have a clear way to articulate how this was so, and thus early on began to develop a graduate studies project exploring (auto)ethnographically the rhetoric of public access and activism.

As I progressed through my internship training and learned how to produce my own shows, I saw how access television could facilitate change within its community and within myself as I began constructing my own identity as an activist interested in the power of the medium. Higgins (1999) also describes public access television's moment in television history as "the use of video by non-professionals for the purposes of personal and group empowerment, community communication and development, and social change..." (p. 624). These visions for public access encouraged me to begin thinking about how television could be much more than a source of passive entertainment and a stimulus for increased consumer spending, and how public access television is not to be so quickly overlooked simply for its relatively low profile and somewhat negative reputation perpetuated by mainstream media (Halleck, 1998).

But I also wondered how the more specific term, "media activist," could be redefined to describe the more interesting work coming out of public access television. For many years prior to my first exposure to the use of a video camera, I assigned the responsibilities of activism and social change to people other than me, people with access to resources, knowledge, and even courage I thought I did not possess. I imagined the ideal of the activist as someone who chained herself to old growth redwood trees, shouted to crowds on the steps of city hall, walked in protest marches, or at the very least, waged major letter-writing campaigns. I thought of a media activist as someone who owned video camera equipment, and knew how to operate it--I was neither. I even thought television producers were employed by one of the major television studio companies, if not on their way to being employed by one. Little did I know that, through an internship

at BCM, I would eventually become not only a television producer, but also more activist-minded, and later, in combination with my graduate work, an ethnographer and rhetorical critic who would make her graduate career out of studying a medium people dismiss as self-indulgent and trivial.

Based on my experience at BCM, I began to question how public access television's existence could represent a form of active resistance and social change. I wanted to describe the rhetorical strategies of the producers who identify or in some way are identified with the idea of activism, whether as individuals, in their television work, or both. With many questions to consider, I began to research the history of public access television, particularly as it differs from prevailing forms of mainstream commercial television. Higgins (1999) notes that "Given its foundation as an alternative to commercial, corporate-dominated electronic media, the philosophical orientation of public access differs sharply from that of mainstream commercial television" (p. 624). I wanted to better understand and write about this difference of philosophical orientation, which I see also as a rhetorical difference. I knew from my experiences as an intern that there were people at BCM who could answer my queries, people interested in creating social change and actively and sincerely involved in productions at the station. They are the producers I included in my study. I have learned from my own experience as a producer and now as a researcher, that an activist orientation was not only central to public access television's early development, but remains a vital part of its underlying philosophy and practice today. I wanted to know how and to what extent this is evident,

and this thesis represents the culmination of those personal and public explorations and findings.

A Progressive History

The potential for public access television (also referred to as community television) to support democracy has yet to be fully realized, even though its history dates back to the visionary and progressive thinking of 1960s video artists and social activists in the US, Europe, and Canada (Engelman, 1990; Higgins, 1999). Public access television communities have developed their own political lexicon to describe their response to the media conditions of the time, inventing such phrases as the “community television movement,” “guerrilla television,” the “alternative television movement,” and “grassroots video,” all of which were phrases associated with then emerging uses of television to serve social change agendas, including resisting commercial television (Boyle, 1997; Engelman, 1990; Fuller, 1994; Linder, 1999; Trend, 1993).

The radical video collectives,¹ existing prior to public access television, emerged as public broadcasting was claiming to make television a public resource while losing ground on its ability to do so. In 1967, the Carnegie Commission on Educational Broadcasting published a report extolling the virtues of a public broadcast television system where education could be democratized, unknown artists showcased, and diversity reaffirmed (Engelman, 1990; Lee Artz, McCauley, Peterson, & Halleck, 2003). The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was also established in 1967, and the Public Broadcasting Act was soon passed, both turning an otherwise independently-funded organization into a mostly federally-controlled one, where programming decisions

had to contend with political pressures from the nation's capital, and funding came through Congressional appropriations instead of private foundations (Engelman, 1990; Lee Artz, McCauley, Peterson, & Halleck, 2003). Eventually in 1972, during the Nixon administration and in response to political pressures, programs with controversial content were more likely taken off the air, forcing public broadcast television, if it were to remain in the public interest, to begin to look for funding from sources other than the government (Engelman, 1990). When this began to happen, people who wanted to change public television back to serving the public interest began to explore a new philosophy and practice of public television and lay the groundwork for the development of public access centers around the country. These people, most of whom were novices to then newly developing video technology, were media activists in the sense of wanting to take on media's reform as their cause.

The introduction of cable television in 1948 and portable video technology in 1968 facilitated the production of television that was more diverse, decentralized, and accessible to the general public than broadcast commercial television (Boyle, 1997; Engelman, 1990; Trend, 1993). With easy to operate portable video cameras in hand, laypeople began to experiment with producing programs for three of the major public television stations of the time: WGBH in Boston, KQED in San Francisco, and WNET in New York (Engelman, 1990), and also WETA in Washington, D.C. and KCET in Los Angeles (Lee Artz, McCauley, Peterson, & Halleck, 2003). Greater accessibility to such revolutionary technology also meant greater flexibility for community organizing through media. Fewer people were required to operate the camera equipment, anyone could learn

how to use it, and expensive lab work was not necessary during the post-production phase. Projects could be started and finished with a few nonprofessionals and played back to small groups of people relatively quickly. However, despite the emancipatory function of new technologies, the public broadcast television system was becoming increasingly dependent on the support of corporations, and therefore was moving away from any programming that might seem controversial or otherwise unfavorable to the sponsors (Engelman, 1990). Nevertheless, public interest programming continued to air for free at these stations and presented groups that ranged politically from the far left to the far right. This range of programming continues to exist and cause controversy even today (see Footnote 2, paragraphs 1 and 3).

In part, it was these early community-produced public television programs that spawned the public access television movement. Examples of community-produced programs from the early and mid-1970s included programs where the public and local organizations could have a voice; “Catch 44” in Boston, “Take 12” in Philadelphia, “Your Turn” in Detroit, and “Open Studio” in San Francisco proved to be rather short-lived and low-profile in the world of the centralized Public Broadcasting System (PBS), but nevertheless set the stage for other projects to develop under the public access model (Engelman, 1990; Linder, 1999). Other television projects from outside the United States were also influential in public access television’s evolution. One especially worth noting, “Challenge for Change”/“Société Nouvelle,” began in 1966 and was based in Canada as the National Film Board of Canada’s service organization and became the model for community television in the United States. (“Société Nouvelle” refers to the French

version of project.) The project was a collaborative effort between several federal agencies and the film board to address the problems of poverty and other social ills. The goal of the collaboration was to promote citizen-government dialogue by directly involving silenced or underprivileged groups in the process of communicating through film with authorities their needs for social change. Following the lead of this Canadian project, public access television in the United States and the rest of the world began to evolve and distinguish itself from "Challenge for Change."

Guest executive director and producer for "Challenge for Change," George Stoney, is often referenced as one of the leading figures and even the "father" of public access television in the United States (Engelman, 1990; Fuller, 1994; Linder, 1999; Halleck, 2002). Following his work on "Challenge for Change" from 1968-1970, Stoney began public access television in the United States by establishing the Alternate Media Center in New York University (Engelman, 1990; Fuller, 1994; Linder, 1999). The center's main purpose was to promote the use of cable technology by local people and in their interests. More than simply a site for learning television production, the center also became active in social reform and media policy-making. Applying the principles of "Challenge for Change," the center became a political organizing force both by producing programs about social problems and by helping to establish other access centers around the country. The center's internship program led to the development of the national Federation of Local Cable Programmers, a major advocacy and membership organization for public access television participants.

The story of resistance found in the development of public access television requires some discussion of the development of cable television. As early as 1948, coaxial cable was used to send broadcast signals to outlying areas (Engelman, 1990). Community Antenna Television (CATV) was the eventual result (Engelman, 1990; Linder, 1999) with cable systems spreading and subscriptions increasing exponentially thereafter. Public access television at that time was not yet regarded as a space for the general public to have a voice, but rather as a more marketable alternative to broadcast airwaves. From that point, cable television began, unbeknownst to cable company managers, to take on a life of its own at the same time that commercial and public broadcast television moved further and further away from their original intended purpose—to serve the public's interest. Since the 1960s, cable television offered additional public spaces for people to communicate their ideas and artistry, and even push for social change. Public access cable television, considered by many to be a tool for democratic practice (Engelman, 1990; Kellner, 1990, 1999; Linder, 1999), began to develop at that politically turbulent time. The cable industry's evolving role in the development of television in the public interest, and the placing of television production in the hands of the laity, are critical for understanding the role public access television has in democracy and for activist work.

At first, broadcasters and cablecasters maintained a mutually beneficial and friendly relationship. Eventually however, this relationship became antagonistic as broadcasters, particularly the three major networks of the time, NBC, CBS, and ABC, feared losing their audiences and advertising revenue to the ever-expanding cable system.

Any threat to the dominating market position of network television posed by cable television would later be squelched by a 1966 court ruling where the FCC increased its control of cable television. The growth of cable television was halted between 1966 and 1972 while the FCC began to review broadcast policies and considered regulating the industry (Engelman, 1990; Linder, 1999). The networks perceived the cable industry as a potential threat as public access stations were beginning to present television as something that could be more socially responsible and in the public interest, a philosophy and practice that the majority of broadcast television networks, because of commercial interests, were not inclined to support.

Even during the FCC reviews, the public access television experiment proceeded, sometimes steadily, at other times in fits and starts, with franchise agreements made in Dale City, Virginia, and New York City. Disagreements over the terms of franchise agreements soon followed, and the medium experienced some significant growing pains. Nevertheless, by 1971, public access programming began to reach 80,000 Manhattan subscribers (Engelman, 1990). Finally, in 1972, the FCC issued a report wherein the franchise agreements between local communities and the cable companies would be limited by certain provisions to help protect broadcasters in the 50 largest markets, thereby allowing cable television to move from rural areas into smaller cities only. The report stipulated that local cable operators in the largest one hundred television markets would provide PEG television, defined as a configuration of three categories of programming: public access, educational access, and governmental access. Under this mandate, access channels would be provided as a part of the local franchise agreement

between the cable company and the city. Today access channels are often operated under the auspices of a nonprofit corporation. PEG channels are not mandated by federal law, but are given as a right to the franchising authority, a right the franchising authority may or may not choose to exercise. Franchising authorities may also require cable operators to make available equipment and air time so that citizens, educational institutions, and government officials, regardless of current training or experience, may make noncommercial use of the access channel. Access to the PEG airwaves is on a first-come, first-serve basis; the material produced can not be controlled by the franchising authority nor the cable operator, but content can be made subject to obscenity and libel laws. This immunity from content restrictions relative to the heavy controls on commercial broadcast television creates the conditions within public access for artistic freedom and at times, even messages of social and political resistance.

Public access television as it exists today represents a culmination of forces of resistance and movement, resistance to the status quo of broadcast commercial television and movements toward new media ideologies. Within its history of change, public access continues to evolve in accordance with the changing needs and interests of the communities who create it in response to the political and social conditions of the time. In ideal circumstances, with more education and publicity, public access television may begin to reflect the values of increasingly broader and more inclusive publics as they face social realities in need of greater questioning and change. Public access television may be one of a few public, democratic resources available for average citizens to act on behalf of themselves and their local communities to address their needs in ways that step

outside the confines of a media politic that tends to obfuscate the motivations behind the construction of social problems. In this way, the story of public access television is not only one of political resistance as is found in its programs about activist causes, such as freedom in Tibet, protests against war in the Middle East, or poverty and homelessness in the US, but it is also a story of resistance against the problems in our neighborhoods, our local governments, and mainstream commercial television.

The interplay of media, democracy, and resistance is not new nor is it exclusively characteristic of the so-called "Information Age" in which we currently live. Technology has played various roles in democratic practice. For example, the rise of the Internet in the 1990s has given new meaning to political organizing as activist groups communicate via email and web pages about the activities of various political causes. Recent protests concerning the US invasion of Iraq gained momentum in part through communication via Internet listservs, web pages, and emails about political rally agendas, meeting times, and locations (e.g., International A.N.S.W.E.R. at www.internationalanswer.org, MoveOn.org at www.moveon.org, Voice for Change at www.voice4change.org). People who create and access these sites are themselves looking to become actively involved or to organize other people around issues of social change. Public access television, when used to inform people so that they can act or think differently about social problems or get involved in a public access television station project, follows a similar grassroots organizing philosophy.

Aside from overtly political issues, the introduction of new media into our daily lives has inspired the use of language associated with revolution and change (e.g.,

“technology revolution”) in the same way that we retrospectively use the expression “industrial revolution” to describe social and economic conditions a hundred years before when power-driven machinery drastically altered the manufacturing process. The ends to which new media are applied in our current “technology revolution” both shape and are shaped by the rhetoric of their emergence. Hill and Hughes (1998), in their empirical analysis of political communication in the age of the Internet, note how “many people have suggested that the Internet and related technologies will revolutionize world politics” (p. 1). In their study, the authors seek to answer quantitatively the question of whether the Internet as a new medium will usher in a new age of democracy in the United States and throughout the world. While my study will naturally raise similar questions in the context of television, my research aims to analyze the rhetorical dimensions of the producers’ speech and their programs. Furthermore, my study looks at the public access television’s potentially democratizing and social change function of reinventing television as a new medium. Hill and Hughes (1998) note that “one of the truly revolutionary aspects of the Internet is that everyone is a potential broadcaster and participant in the realm of political communication” (pp. 22-23). Through my own research of public access television, I intend to emphasize a similar social dynamic where anyone, especially anyone who may hold an activist agenda, may be a producer and participant of television and help shape it as a new medium.

While Hill and Hughes (1998) employ quantitative research methods to investigate the application of the Internet for political purposes, my study explores through qualitative methods the political uses of public access television. I use both text

analysis and survey interviews as part of an ethnographically informed rhetorical criticism to explore a specific public access television station. The analysis identifies traditional themes of activism, delineates specific rhetorical strategies of activist theme presentation, compares public access television's strategies with those of mainstream television, and discusses my experience as an audience for the study's shows and as a former member of the public access television community. I also seek through the study to broaden the definition of media activism in general.

Technology and Democracy

Public access television may present a case in point demonstrating both negative and positive perspectives on technology and new media for democracy. As is indicated by its various competitions (e.g., WAVE Awards, AccessAwards.com, Hometown Video Festival Awards), and the occasional controversy that actually makes it into mainstream news,² public access television may present to some the best and to others the worst in new media. Halleck (2002) notes how, "public access does not figure positively in the American consciousness" (p. 97), despite the efforts of those who seek to acknowledge public access as a democratic project. On the other hand, there are those who laud public access television for its promise not only to be an alternative to mainstream television, but also help realize democratic practice with regard to our manner of problem raising and problem solving, including the problems of commercial television itself. For example, research at Cape Cod Community Television by King and Mele (1999) describes public access television in the following manner:

In a medium otherwise dominated by advertisements, canned programming and audience-tested newscasting, public access offers possibilities to probe and

address topics and concerns underrepresented in mainstream media. Most media activists envision public access channels as electronic public spaces where issues and concerns central to local communities are brought to the fore and democratically resolved through discussion and dissemination. They see public access as not only critiquing commercial television, but challenging it. Observations and analyses of public access television, therefore, must be subjected to a double theoretical framework of media criticism and normative democratic expectations. (p. 604)

The greater representation of local community interests through more sophisticated media forms is at the center of my research, but I also investigate how public access television as a new medium directly challenges mainstream notions of social change, including change needed for mainstream media practice.

The extent to which television as a medium can contribute to social change is the subject of much debate. There are plenty of critics who see public access television in particular as little more than vanity programming, a context where participants make few attempts to think critically with or about the medium. Interestingly enough, there are some who point out how the criticisms of public access television echo those of commercial television. Jesse Drew, Paper Tiger Television producer and San Francisco Community Television Corporation board member, notes in an essay how complaints about “amateurishness, wackos, vanity programs, foolishness” may just as easily describe current network programming (accessed October 9, 2003 at <http://online.sfsu.edu/~jdrew/articles/publicoasis.html>). Along with the criticisms that it is unprofessional or amateurish in its presentation, public access television must also contend with aesthetic expectations based on a commercial model, which do not entirely fit within the framework of a community-produced model. Despite major criticisms, one need recognize that public access and commercial television have very different

functions, and ongoing comparison between the two will be critical to redefining notions of media activism and appreciating the forms that activist thinking can take in the access model.

The value of public access television comes through in the ways technology, new media, and democracy interact to support social change philosophy and practice. With regard to democracy, Euchner (1996) identifies the major requisites as open participation, monitored for the protection of minority positions while authoritative majorities can form (p. 6). In a democracy, an authoritative majority includes a broad range of people and ideas, one where ordinary citizens can participate in deliberations or at least vote on issues of common public concern. Public access television exists to be a place of open participation by the community. Also important to the process of majority formation is the ongoing monitoring of open participation and protection of minorities, whose interests can be at risk for exclusion from the mainstream as majorities begin to form. Mainstream television excludes certain minority opinions and interests, especially if they are inconsistent with commercial interests. Morgan (1991) notes, "Through their Sixties experience, activists gained a radical appreciation that their democratic vision could not be realized within the systemic constraints of mainstream institutions—that the two were incompatible" (p. 264). Public access television aims to provide the public, including its minorities, with an open forum outside mainstream channels that allows open discussion of issues of common public concern while also allowing the minority opinion into that space.

To some extent, living within the complex combination of technological development, increasingly isolating and antidemocratic conditions, and significant social problems has contributed to creating less than ideal conditions for community building, problem raising, problem solving, and social change. Morgan (1991) defines participatory democracy in terms of some core values that came out of the 1960s experience and vision. He cites the antidemocratic influence of technology as we generally understand it as part of a technocratic culture rather than a community-directed one:

This technocratic culture is profoundly antidemocratic. By facilitating the increased scale of organization, by speaking a standardized language, by elevating the role of expert, technology reduces the meaning of public participation and undermines the emotive glue of community even as it expands its scope. It reduces the everyday person to the role of spectator or consumer. It emasculates politics by reducing political discourse to abstract issues of technique or cost-benefit analysis, instead of concern for what is good, beautiful, or simply right. (p. 261)

Technocratic culture removes everyday people from devising or imagining technological means toward democratic ends. Under such conditions, technology becomes a means to homogenize political thought and marginalize alternative viewpoints, and thus, prevent the possibility for social change. This marginalization and homogenization inhibits change because such conditions protect the status quo. One response to the fears of technocracy, that is, when technology risks overriding or undermining democracy, could be to make knowledge of technology accessible to ordinary people by placing the actual technological apparatus into their hands and teaching them how to use it in their communities. Public access television strives to provide this hands-on educational experience, often through workshops, volunteerism, and internships. In addition to

training people to use television technology, public access allows them the space to speak freely through their use of that technology, further democratizing the experience. In general, mainstream forms of television function in an antidemocratic, non-participatory, and non-communal way, lending to the public's overall tendency to disown and disavow political communication along with the potential for technology to facilitate political processes and social transformation. Furthermore, Morgan (1991) cites isolation as a possible result of this emasculation of public space and demise of community by technologies of individual action:

Encountering public space that has lost its richness of meaning, the individual person becomes increasingly prone to withdraw to the private realm. This inclination is enormously facilitated by technologies that are adaptive to individual wants and autonomous space, the automobile, television, the personal computer, and the 'Walkman' headset. Deprived of public experience that enriches personal meaning, faced with a staggering pace of technological change, the individual retreats inward. Participatory democracy disappears as community declines. (p. 261)

However, in mentioning television in his discussion, Morgan may not have considered the potentials of public access television to offer an enriching experience for people to engage with television as democratic practice, one where an understanding of technology and the building of community and public spaces are crucial. By reframing television technology in terms of facilitating individual expression and community involvement toward solving social problems, instead of isolating people from each other and the public spaces in which to question the status quo, we re-democratize the television medium. For example, there are those who connect increasing technology positively with more democratic communication and social change, as Hing-Yuk Wong (2000) does when she writes, "Technology, facilitation of alternative voices, and knowledge about

mass media manipulation area are all foundations for more democratic communication as structural transformations" (p. 32). This perspective embraces the potential of technology, including its mass mediated forms, for a democratizing, liberating, and facilitating function, rather than a marginalizing, homogenizing, and isolating function. Public access television, because it is fundamentally more inclusive of various publics and therefore more democratic, disrupts cultural expectations for passive acceptance of television as something magical, existing in a private space, and operating in the interest of corporations rather than in the interests of ordinary people in their local communities.

According to Epstein (1991), "The movements of the sixties began not with revolution but with the goal of making democracy real" (p. 39). She goes on to note that, "In the process of exposing the hypocrisy of what passed for democracy, the movements of the sixties began to develop new definitions of it" (p. 39). Public access television, because it is participatory, makes democracy more real because it redefines it within a mediated context. In the early years of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), for example, the term "participatory democracy" defined both a movement and ultimately a society in which everyone could speak and have an equal voice. Public access television, sometimes itself called a "movement" (Boyle, 1997; Higgins, 1999), may serve as an example of technology that supports democratic communication, itself providing a community in which everyone may speak freely and openly. Access to media could easily fall under the requisite principle of open participation contained in Euchner's (1996) definition of democracy mentioned earlier. How people use media outlets may not only determine to what extent citizens involve themselves with ordinary politics, but

also to what extent people with social change agendas also engage in “extraordinary politics.” Extraordinary politics include:

...protest, demonstrations, boycotts, alternative institutions, neighborhood activism, international citizen alliances,...challenges[sic] the foundation and legitimacy of the political regime. Activists tend to find ‘the system’ to be either unwilling or unable to address their concerns. To activists, ordinary politics is a source of frustration because of its hierarchies, entrenched interests, and specialized discourse. Working within the system seems futile. (Euchner, 1996, pp. 3-4)

Extraordinary politics have emerged with many important political issues, including civil and human rights, the environment, labor, war, and poverty, but they have also fueled the movement toward alternative forms of media, such as guerrilla video and public access television. According to Euchner (1996), “activists introduced issues and concerns to public debate that probably would have been excluded by formal or ordinary channels of politics” (p. 4). Other scholars explore the concept of open participation in democracy with regard to media in general and public access television more specifically.

According to Engelman (1990):

Community TV represented an attempt to break with mainstream forms of both commercial and public television by permitting broad participation in the most pervasive mass medium of contemporary American culture. ‘Access’ became the rallying cry for a new conception of television as a tool of empowerment, as a means for fostering a more responsive government and a more democratic culture. (p. 1)

The notion of access television becoming a “rallying cry” for change highlights the political component of public access television present not only in its content, but also in its form as it has deviated from mainstream television’s forms. Because “community television” is often a term inclusive of not only a channel for public use, but often also a channel for city government use, the generic term ‘access’ has come to define both. As

such, access television is produced by the community in which it is situated, and therefore relies on this community's participation for its continued existence as both a site of democratic practice through greater city government participation (government access) and uncensored political and cultural expression by individuals (public access). While there are examples where a city claims to have access television where in reality, one person, usually a part-time volunteer, manually operates a single tape output system, even those operations require tapes from people in the local community for the continued existence of that access channel. Mainstream commercial television channels, on the contrary, exist through the workings of corporations where audience ratings certainly influence channel content, but where local communities do not singlehandedly determine the content or the continued existence of the channel; the corporations do. Commercial television does not rely solely on community response and participation, whereas public access television is defined by those elements. For this reason, public access television as "neighborhood activism," a local "citizen alliance," and an "alternative institution" to mainstream media systems, represents extraordinary politics in action, but at a significant risk where funding is scarce or public profile is low. Therefore, public access television, driven neither by audience ratings nor advertising dollars, is a public forum for any number of people to have a voice on television regardless of topic or political viewpoint, although from a tenuous economic position based on the tide of local community support. Indeed, the original rationale for public access television was to enhance democracy through diverse public participation, as Kellner (1999) emphasizes in the following excerpt:

The rationale for public access television was that, as mandated by the Federal Communications Act of 1934, the airwaves belong to the people, that in a democratic society it is useful to multiply public participation in political discussion, and that mainstream television severely limited the range of views and opinion. Public access television, then, would open television to the public; it would make possible community participation, and thus would be in the public interest of strengthening democracy. (p. xi-xii)

Larsen (1995) offers a definition of participatory democracy as exemplified by Paper Tiger Television's programs: "at the heart of a truly democratic process: participation by a multitude of subjects, speaking and acting from the rich diversity of their socially rooted spaces" (p. 73). The diverse community that public access television seems to attract allows the vision of participatory democracy to be realized, because ordinary people of multiple social, economic, and political backgrounds can, through media, make things happen in their own lives, in their communities and beyond.

An informed and active public is vital to democracy and progressive social change, and this public will be more politically effective if it can locate and communicate with its own members and act on its common problems. At the local level, it is generally through town meetings or community groups that citizens discuss solutions to their problems, and it is rare that any of their concerns, unless clearly connected with a high profile event, get much television coverage. Visions of civic participation, social protest, and influence on public opinion are often confined to the rank and file of policed street rallies or the heavily edited and screened attempts at engaging newspaper editorial pages. While the former are worthy sites for at least initiating social change agendas, public access cable television as it evolves and matures is coming to offer additional layers of political and social empowerment. Scholars have noted how the need for certain

technological prowess limits the access and audience required to make the Internet, for example, a viable site for civic participation within democracy (Linder, 1999). The same argument could be made with regard to commercial television. However, public access television offers its audience not only presentations of social and political realities in their local communities, but also the opportunity to become involved in those presentations, thus influencing public opinion and the television rhetoric helping to construct a social or political problem. In other words, public access has the potential to create not only the technological, but also the rhetorical, conditions for a few, maybe many, people to respond through local community action.

Media Activism: The Rhetoric and the Message

Scholars have noted the power of rhetoric to shape our social realities (e.g., Wander, 1983), and the power of people to use media at a local level to invoke efforts at social control and social change (Hindman, 1999). Scholars also recognize the influential role of the First Amendment in the development and future of public access television (Fuller, 1994; Halleck, 2002; Linder, 1999). Running through any discussion of new media and political communication is the rhetoric of free speech. But to contextualize such a discussion with regard to public access television in Berkeley, one need understand some things about the history of free speech in Berkeley.

The Free Speech Movement (FSM) began in Berkeley (significant as the home of Berkeley Community Media, the site of my research study) in 1964 (Jerome, 1994; Morgan, 1991) and describes a time when politics and communication butted heads. This history is useful to frame our discussion of free speech rhetoric and the politics of

activism. The FSM ignited when U.C. Berkeley campus administrations banned some student organization tables on the university campus, an action that met with student protests and subsequent suspensions by administrators and arrests by police. Weeks of revolt ensued on campus (Euchner, 1996; Wollenberg cited in Berkeley Art Center, 2001). From there, the trajectory of student-led activism in Berkeley included both university-based and broader social issues. According to Morgan (1991), the basic conflict arose when students wanted to confront and eliminate university restrictions on student political activity, the impetus of which was University President Clark Kerr's invocation of campus regulations to prohibit student leafletting on the promenade at the entrance to campus in 1964. This sidewalk strip had for years been a site for politicking and open discussion, and as such, lent to the city's reputation as a place of free speech and other forms of uninhibited activity. Students rallied, held vigils, picketed, and set up tables to challenge the ban, all under the leadership of student Mario Savio.

The movement broadened its scope to include not only the particular ban on leafletting, but also the university's general approach to education, then criticized for being overly bureaucratic and narrow in its vision for higher education that was based on a technocratic future (p. 112-113). According to Morgan (1991):

Kerr's vision expressed the hope for a technocratic future in which continued progress required highly specialized knowledge in corporate and governmental institutions. It was a vision that was as uncomfortable to liberal arts traditionalists as it was to the student critics. The former emphasized the purity and timelessness of intellectual inquiry through detachment from society and its utilitarian demands; the latter embraced the integration of the university in society as a critical agent responsible for awakening and sustaining society's humane vision. (p. 115)

The notion of technocracy here implies that students were training to act in service of the state, industry, and military, rather than for morality, justice, education, or community-building, all of which were probably more relevant to their lives. It was from within the Free Speech Movement that activists questioned this specialized model for university education. Berkeley's history of free speech and democratic involvement is consistent with the development of a public access television station working within the same tradition of activists questioning the mainstream ideology, particularly with regard to commercial television ideology.

To further understand the interaction of activist communication and public access television, one must first define media activism before discussing it within the historical context of public access television's development. Found within the existing conversations about media activism is an overlap of two different interpretations of the term, providing an important rhetorical dimension to the concept and further impetus for this study. On the one hand, media activism can describe efforts to critique in order to reform media products and institutions. For example, Paper Tiger Television, a video artist collective begun in 1981 in New York, produces examples of media criticism as if the criticism were itself a form of activism. Noteworthy among its efforts at media criticism are the programs where Herb Schiller criticizes the *New York Times* on the air, one example among 225 other satirical and educational shows critiquing the mass media (Larsen, 1995). On the other hand, media activism can describe the activities of people who use media channels to communicate for activist causes, which might include issues of social justice, the environment, labor, war, etc., in addition to media products and

institutions. This study will explore this interpretation of “media activism,” a duality that makes public access television unique and useful, but also misunderstood.

Scholars in political science, media, and communication studies have their own definitions of media activism and activists. Hill and Hughes (1998), for example, define an Internet activist as “anyone that either posts or chats about politics” (p. 28). Larsen (1995) offers a more complex definition of activism by way of the example of Paper Tiger Television’s programming when he describes the collective’s activist programs as an “antidote to political passivity” and “the negation of things as they are produced by the discontented radical intellectual meeting the positive will toward change in the disaffected public” (p. 74). Laurie Ouellette (1995) offers a more practical definition of the media activist when she describes what people did with portable video equipment in the early years of public access television. According to her, media activists were documenting protests and other events ignored by the mainstream media, as well as filming police brutality and other oppressive activities of the state. Much as the Internet is today, video was used then not only to create programming for television, but also as a tool of political organizing. Posner (1990) defines activists as “people who want to persuade, organize, and mobilize others to undertake collective action—whether in relation to major social injustices like racial segregation or to particular issues, such as halting the construction of an incinerator near a residential area...” (p. 5). These efforts to define “activism” in the context of both the Internet and video, reveal the subtle distinctions to follow from similar efforts, including my own, to define “media activism” in the public access television context. On the one hand, “media activism” has referred to

political content (e.g., scenes of activists, perhaps in a demonstration) captured on video. One might consider the examples from mainstream news coverage of the 2003 anti-war demonstrations in San Francisco and elsewhere. On the other hand, “media activism” has described the practice of using video, aside from its content, as itself a form of political action or activism countering mainstream media. This thesis helps explain how public access television makes this duality of meaning useful.

Public access television operates at one or both of two modes of media communication that distinguish it from commercial television and therefore influences the definition of media activism in the access context. First, the people in the public access programs typically come directly from the community the station serves, so public access television functions as a medium that reflects (Cunliffe and Jun, 2002) that community. Second, public access invites its viewers to become directly involved in television production, and in so doing, television as a medium becomes demystified and sometimes becomes itself the subject of attention or criticism in its programming. In the second mode, public access television is operating reflexively (Aden, 1991; Cunliffe and Jun, 2002; Olson, 1987; Ott & Walter, 2000; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Vande Berg, 1989), often at an intertextual level (Fiske, 1987; Kristeva, 1986; Ott & Walter, 2000; Vande Berg, 1989). Based on a model that defines process as more significant than product, public access television exists not for people to watch from the position of consumer expectation, as in commercial television, but rather from the position of civic participation. Commercial television programs are broadcasted to a mainstream public who is frequently targeted to buy products in response to programming produced by

someone who is nearly always other than the viewer. Public access television, on the other hand, is "narrowcasted" to the community who themselves produce or perform in the programs, and who also may learn from the process and the resulting message.

Preview of Study

As discussed earlier, democracy calls for accessible venues of public participation in open discussion and debate where free speech, including political speech, is protected. Unlike commercial television, public access television, because it is a noncommercial venue, invites a broader range of views and opinions. Described as "one of the most exciting and controversial developments in the intersection between media and democracy" (Kellner, 1999, p. xi), public access television is becoming a national phenomenon in the United States,³ offering the important public service of a democratic free speech forum for the community. According to a recent article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "...with fewer locally produced television shows on the major networks and more voices that beg to be heard, public access cable may be more important than ever" (Hartlaub, 2003, p. D1). Clearly, the importance of public access television to free speech and public debate extends beyond academic circles and as is shown here, can even be found in such mainstream media sources at the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The San Francisco Bay Area offers noteworthy examples of high quality public access cable television. In fact, as Hartlaub (2003) notes, the San Francisco Bay Area has several examples of public access stations that are exemplary within their communities and the nation. According to Hartlaub, many of these newly emerging stations are in northern

and central California. One of these northern California access stations is Berkeley Community Media (BCM).

As the birthplace of the Free Speech Movement and one of many Bay Area cities whose character has been shaped by unconventional thought and leftist politics, the city of Berkeley has garnered the reputation of being an active civic community who endorses First Amendment rights. According to Lustig's (2001) discussion of the Free Speech Movement:

The FSM not only affirmed rights of free speech. It also asserted the right and the duty of dissent in the face of social injustice and revealed rudiments of a new radicalism that practiced a new kind of politics, redefined democracy, and laid the foundations for the 'New' Left. (p. 27)

The city's public access channel is one of many local institutions that reflects an enduring public image of the community as activist-minded. Surrounded by a community shaped by a history of political controversy and change, BCM, like other access television projects, serves as a rich example of media activist rhetoric, one that provides a useful study in how community-produced cable television pushes the boundaries of First Amendment rights in favor of political and social change.

Existing as a PEG station and operated as a nonprofit organization supported through a franchise agreement, Berkeley Community Media (BCM) has been providing a public access channel, BTV, for the past 9 years to the Berkeley community. Staffed by between 9 and 12 people, including 5 full-time employees and anywhere from 4 to 7 part-time employees, BCM provides the community in and outside the city of Berkeley with training, equipment, and studio access. Approximately 12 volunteers or interns support the daily operations of the station, and membership includes approximately 279

individuals and 60 organizations, 30 of which are actively producing for the station.⁴

Berkeley Community Media has the following mission statement, "Our mission is to build an electronic free speech forum in order to encourage democratic involvement and build community."⁵

Berkeley Community Media's access channel, BTV, has become an attractive site for people to communicate the need for social change without censure typical of commercial venues. The channel's content offers examples of everyday people acting to support social change through local media while asserting their rights to protected free speech. This study explores the possible definitions of media activism as they emerge in a sample of BTV's programming. To evaluate the potential of these programs to foster social change, I analyzed each show to articulate their rhetorical strategies for defining and communicating activist themes to a public audience. I related these strategies to the show producers' interview responses and my experience as both a public access audience and former producer.

Few places exist in the media where the average citizen can voice an opinion without the risk of some level of editing or censorship, particularly when presenting issues of possible political controversy. Activist ideology may be at most risk for such a controversial response. My research explores the boundaries of freedom as they are tested and challenged by the activist rhetoric present on a public access channel. I am also interested to learn what ways, if any, public access activism rhetoric encourages a reflective (i.e., people of the community speaking to and about their local community) or reflexive (i.e., media that critically comments on its own artifice or other forms of media)

mode of presentation or reception to push forward social change agendas. While broad scale audience analysis was beyond the scope of this study, in a self-reflexive turn, my own response as an audience was also explored throughout this project.

Overview of Chapters

In this chapter I have reviewed the history of public access television's development and have begun to define media activism within participatory democracy. The remaining chapters will continue to lay the groundwork for a study of public access activism at Berkeley Community Media, the local community television station for the city of Berkeley. This discussion will continue to draw from current literature to explain the impetus of the study, which is to explore the parameters of activist rhetoric as it shapes and is shaped by the medium of public access television. Chapter 2 will provide the theoretical orientation of the research by explicating the relationship among reflexivity, reflectivity, and public access activist rhetoric. Chapter 3 will define the methodological framework by presenting the research questions and explaining the study design employed for gathering data for an (auto)ethnographic rhetorical criticism. Chapter 4 will analyze the findings of the study, articulating the rhetorical strategies of activism that emerge from specific shows and in conversation with the shows' producers. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of how the results help redefine media activism within the context of public access television and point toward future research.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Orientation

This chapter will explain the theoretical orientation of this research by connecting media reflexivity and community reflectivity with public access activist rhetoric. Emerging from my theoretical framework will be my research questions and an introduction to the programs that were included in the investigation. The connection between public access activist rhetoric and the modes of media reflexivity and community reflectivity are significant for how they interact to inspire a media activist attitude.

Linder (1999, p.xxvi) identifies five key objectives of public access proponents. First and fundamentally, public access provides a public forum. Multiple public spaces for critical debate and discussion are necessary to democracy. Public access television provides an open public forum for the presentation and discussion of community concerns, including the desire to solve problems, educate, and entertain. Second, it empowers people by demystifying the television production process while providing a space for their messages. Community producers themselves learn to produce programming and can do so in their own interests. Public access television, in fulfillment of its community mission, offers media training classes to the general community. Third, it encourages public discourse and diversity awareness. Public access television exists as programming unlike anything else on television, for it reflects the interests of local community members, including people and situations typically excluded from mainstream television. Fourth, it provides a site where individuals and groups can interact and cooperate in the production of television programs. Public access television

producers are volunteers and they also recruit other volunteers from all walks of life to assist with projects, and in so doing, form their own diversified community. Anyone, from the media novice to the expert, may be working on the same project together. Fifth, it offers a way for people to use film and video to bring about social change. While all these points are important to any study exploring the project of public access television, it is this fifth point that is of particular interest to me and provides the impetus to my study.

Theories about media activism are grounded in discussions of political activism from the general position that media, in their multiple forms, play an increasingly significant role in activism. As media communication evolves, the savvy activist needs to be sensitive in his or her use of various media outlets and be aware that television rhetoric maintains significant influence on public opinion and behavior. Activism in the television context, therefore, is ripe for rhetorical analysis, not only for the purposes of deconstructing mainstream media myths, but in part because such analyses will help expand television research beyond typical effects research replete with studies on advertising and consumers, political campaigns and voters, or violence and children. Research that focuses on public access television in general, and on activism in that context, may offer greater depth of understanding in the unique rhetorical features of television whose goal is more public and communal than private and commercial. Understanding television as rhetorical may help television users demystify the medium's technological and political ideologies, and create messages in their own interest and in the interest of social change in their communities.

Media Reflexivity and Community Reflectivity

Public access television's promise for activism and social change may lie in how examples of its programming may distinguish access from commercial television for the former's capacity to be reflexive, reflective, or both. Scholars from the social sciences, as well as the seemingly far afield disciplines of public administration and social work, will inform my research and account for the distinctions between public access television and commercial television. Cunliffe and Jun (2002, ¶ 7), for example, define the social practice of "reflection," or what I also refer to as "reflectivity," as a process of mirroring reality, implying an objectivist way of experiencing based on the idea that there is an original we can think about, categorize, and explain. Their concept of "reflexivity," on the other hand, describes a process of critical analysis that exists as part of the construction of social realities, including how we relate to ourselves, to each other, and in the world. Contained within the concept of "reflectivity" (i.e., reflection) is the process of looking for patterns or order in what already exists from a position of objectivity, whereas, "reflexivity" describes a process of questioning the order of how we think, act and interact in the world from a position of active subjectivity. Through the radical process of critique contained in the notion of reflexivity in particular, Cunliffe and Jun (2002) describe opportunities for ideological transformation in the self and in society, particularly as it relates to their field of public administration. Goodall (2000) connects reflexivity to the dialogical process of being a good ethnographer: "Reflexivity and voice produce the rhetorical character of the self as revealed in and through the ongoing conversation with the world" (p. 140). From my experience at Berkeley Community

Media, I find examples of programming that are reflective, reflexive, or both, in the ways that Cunliffe and Jun (2002) and Goodall (2000) propose, although their objects of study were necessarily different. This analysis will reveal the importance of these modes for an emerging definition media activism within public access television.

Public access television's significance to social change lies in how it offers examples of television that are either reflective of the community it serves or are reflexive of the media or of the self, or do all three. In other words, public access may have program examples, many more than commercial television, where the viewer can see herself or people like herself from her community, experiencing or attempting to address social problems including media, on television. Commercial media, on the other hand, actively obscures the connection between viewers and the content of the program, except to remind them of their ability to make purchases rather than to make changes in society. The programs people watch on public access television are a reflection of their community, because they are produced by and about that community. Furthermore, the viewer may see a show that points a reflexive finger back at the artifice of the show itself, the media industry in general, or the artifice of his or her own life as a viewer or potential producer.

As discussed in Boyle (1997), guerrilla television, a precursor to the public access television of today, made reflexivity integral to production design. Consistent with the idea of self-reflexivity and media critique contained in the meaning of reflexivity, guerrilla television producers focused on the feelings of the events and the reactions of the people involved, including the videographers themselves. Also, they often filmed the

media makers filming the action of an event. And while their actions may have been reflective of social realities, their presentation was also a critique of the media establishment itself and their relationship to it, a reflexive move. Contrary to these examples, it would be dangerous for commercial media to criticize itself on a regular basis in this way, although public television occasionally tosses in programming that declares media to be manipulative or convoluted (e.g., PBS's "Mental Engineering," which began as a public access television show before entering a primetime network broadcast).⁶

Activist media may come to define the moments when at least one of these dynamics, reflexivity of media or of the self, or reflectivity of community, enter into television's rhetorical constructions. Not only may public access activism be interactive with the community and reflective of its interests, but it may also be reflexive in such a way to inspire people to critically address how the media itself constructs their self-identify and the meaning of social problems that affect their lived realities. Trend (1993) notes that "progressive activism can no longer limit itself to exclusionary and hierarchical forms of one-directional address" (p. 29). He cites the importance of recognizing the "reciprocal role of media as both reflective and constitutive of social formations" (p. 29). I would add that public access television activism provides the potential for television to become a new medium that not only reflects the community that provides content for its programs, but also creates the reflexive conditions in which the public can reconstitute the social relations of television and of self.

Reflectivity, Reflexivity and Activism

Few scholars articulate clear connections between activism and reflective or reflexive programming. Roger Aden (1991) does, however, identify the media literacy connection between a viewer and a “self-reflexive” (i.e., reflexive) television program: “By referring to themselves, texts force viewers to confront their own understanding of their literacy because in reading the text they also are reading about the text; the artifice of the narrative is acknowledged” (p. 401). It is worth noting, however, that Aden (1991) explores this connection within a framework of a primarily consumptive and politically decontextualized mode of television use, despite his reference to context. He maintains that

...exploring self-reflexive television requires students to understand relationships among text, genre, audience, and form. In so doing, students learn skills surrounding the text (television audience expectations, genre), analyze the surrounding text (form, language), synthesize the parts for the greater comprehension of the whole (the television program), and evaluate how the synthesized parts mesh with their context. These skills can then be applied to other television programs. (p. 401)

Such an approach is certainly a vital part of the media literacy necessary to being a media activist who performs reflexive rhetorical analysis in her shows. However, his strategy neglects the potential such textual forms hold for engaging the creative skills of the viewer as a television producer rather than as a consumer, and for teaching him or her to situate these texts and himself or herself within the socio-political context of his or her community. Aden’s concept of the connection between media literacy and media reflexivity requires a critical understanding of the texts of media in relation to themselves or other media texts, thus in isolation from the larger socio-political contexts of

community or society, or of the self in community or society. Public access television is reflexive in Aden's view in that it does present texts (shows) about itself and other media, but in contrast to his view, the media literacy and media reflexive connections within public access activism requires social context. Public access television has a social context, the community in which it is situated, usually a city, the members and dynamics of which are often a subject reflected in its programs. Furthermore, the existence of public access television itself requires a critical understanding of and resistance against the mainstream media; its mere existence is media reflexive. Public access television is also a social context in that it exists as a community of public access television media activists; its existence is reflective of the social context of its own community, and furthermore, the medium also allows that community's members the opportunity to be self-reflexive in the shaping of their own identities as either an audience or producer. Public access television is activist because it is media reflexive of other media and itself, community reflective of the city's people and the access facility's participants, and allows people to be self-reflexive about their relationship to the medium itself.

Traditional notions of activists describe people we see in the news who have entered the streets to demonstrate for a social or political cause. Traditional notions of media activists describe people who film those demonstrations or similarly take the camera to the scene of a social problem. Yet another definition of media activism that exists mainly within alternative media channels refers to the practice of reforming the mainstream media establishment. The third concept is one I wish to elaborate through this research study where the experiences of public access television exist as this practice

of reformation. Already within public access television, some producers create programming content that addresses issues currently on the traditional activist's agenda, such as social justice and human rights, poverty and homelessness, political protest, labor, war, capitalism and the corporate system, and the environment. Some public access producers take the reformist definitions of media activism even further by breathing a need for change into the media establishment itself by producing shows that criticize the media. One question of this research is how media activism defines the alternative realities that public access television creates by its existence in resistance to the dominance of commercial television's content and form. Another question of this research is how media activism describes public access television's efforts to encourage and protect community identity and self-identity within the community.

Chapter 3 Methodological Framework

Media activism, artifice, and identity of self and community are explored through a rhetorical criticism that is both ethnographic and autoethnographic. The ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches use the data of my prolonged engagement with the BCM public access community where I was both a producer and a researcher, gradually acquiring knowledge about the scene I was both studying and participating in as a member, and knowledge of myself in relation to that community. This study takes advantage of a unique research site, a vital communication link for Berkeley, a city with a documented history as an activists' forum and home of the Free Speech Movement (Jerome, 1994; Morgan, 1991). The rhetorical artifact under investigation consists of a sample of activist shows produced for Berkeley Community Media's BTV, supplemented by personal interviews with the show producers. The study addresses the following research questions: 1) What traditional activist themes emerge from the shows and interviews in the study, and what rhetorical strategies do the producers use to communicate those themes? 2) Given the producers' strategies, how might we define activism within the specific context of public access television so that it compares with or contrasts from mainstream television? 3) What might this comparison mean for a new definition of media activism? Answering the third research questions seeks to reinterpret the meaning of media activism where the concept allows more inclusion of less traditional rhetorical forms of social action and social change.

Foss (1996) defines rhetoric as "the action humans perform when they use symbols for the purpose of communicating with one another" (p. 4). Brock, Scott, and

Chesebro (1990) use a similar definition when they write, "Rhetoric may be defined as the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols" (p. 14). While these definitions on the surface may seem broad and obvious to an academic audience, all readers might note that each makes reference to the use of symbols to make something happen either as communication or cooperation. Television, as a richly symbolic medium, calls on people to construct meaning while using it, either as the viewer or producer. The television activist takes this process one step further by framing television messages so that something new in the social order could happen from watching these messages. As Foss (1996) indicates:

Rhetorical criticism...is an everyday activity we can use to understand our responses to symbols of all kinds in our environment, to reject those with negative impacts, and to create symbols of our own that generate the kinds of responses we intend. (p. xiii)

In the case of commercial television, those who construct the symbols (i.e., corporations) are rarely the same people who are called on to interpret them (i.e., the audience as consumer). Public access television, on the other hand offers opportunities for the people who construct television to be the same as or reflective of the interests of the people who may be watching it. In this way, public access television users are both the rhetors and the rhetorical critics of television. As a researcher who is both a rhetor and rhetorical critic of public access television, I sought to answer my research questions by selecting and studying the artifacts of the activist shows and the activist-related language offered by the producers in their interviews. This process is subjective because it is a process of selection and interpretation. To manage the level of my own subjectivity, I chose to combine the shows and the producers' reflections on their work to

corroborate my analysis. As Foss (1996) explains, “The description of the artifact is, to some extent, an interpretation of the artifact...In this process, the critic chooses to describe and thus highlight aspects of the artifact that are more important for and relevant to the analysis that will follow” (p. 17).

This project is an inquiry into the nature of activism on public access television, and as such, the construction of theory is tentative. Baran and Davis (2000) define a useful theory as one which defines and specifies the relationships between key concepts, describes some phenomenon through the use of those concepts, and offers predictions and explanations for the phenomenon’s occurrence based on those concepts (p. 32). The tentativeness of theory from this study suggests the need for additional research on public access television stations around the country. Broader scaled research could eventually, if research design were systematic and results were replicated, permit theoretical statements about the nature and workings of activist public access television. Given the scope of this thesis, I chose to focus on activist rhetoric at Berkeley Community Media because of the activist history of the surrounding city, my relationship to the research site, and because of something a BCM staff person said to me in an interview nearly two years ago, prompting me to wonder about the nature and workings of activism on BTV:

Because it seemed like Berkeley was a pretty, you know, it’s a very outspoken city, it’s like the bastion of free speech...But, I have to say that Berkeley is a city where there’s a lot of people who are very active from their armchairs. There’s a lot of people who are very big activists, and they’ll maybe even go down to a meeting, and they’ll write a letter, but when it really comes to doing something about things, they don’t want to put in the effort. (B. Scott)

Upon later reflection, I pursued this project because I question this individual’s idea of Berkeley as a city of many “armchair activists” and a few activists who only take action

through letters or at meetings about social problems. In fact, from my own experiences and my observations as a BCM producer and researcher, I wondered if those “armchair activists” could more often refer to television viewers, who in the context of their local public access television no longer merely sit in those armchairs before their television sets at home, but rather become the television makers and actors at their local public access station.

Because my personal experiences as a television producer, a television audience, and a part of the Berkeley Community Media community allow me to reflect on what it means to produce activist media, I include myself in the events and data of this study. Goodall (as cited in Goodall, 2000) describes autoethnography as “a story based on the represented, or evoked, experiences of a self, with others, within a context. Its theme is the persuasive expression of interpreted cultural performances” (p. 83). Not only do I interpret the “cultural performances” of my fellow producers at BCM, but I also consider my own production work, including the work of producing and redefining my self-identity, in relation to their work, self-identity, and the significance of our shared site of experience at the station. Lindlof (1995) defines ethnography as “a matter of the epistemic posture of the researcher, the manner of engagement with the social scene, and the kind of research story that is told” (p. 20). Even though I was no longer an active producer at the time of this writing, my epistemic posture remains as an audience to the shows, one who is looking through the lens of someone who has had the experience of being a producer for six months at BCM. It was from my experience as an intern that I, too, identified myself and my work as activist, but did not at that time articulate the

meaning of that concept for me, in this particular television context, or in general. The project represents not only the story of the producers in the study and the construction of the shows, but of myself as I construct and reconstruct my own identity as a producer, an audience, a researcher of public access television, and a member of the public access television community.

One of the limitations of (auto)ethnography is that one's personal experience has the potential to obfuscate one's analysis. To counteract this affect on interpretation in this study, I let myself be guided by what other people (i.e., BCM producers and staff) identified as activist shows. By letting others determine my sample, the risk of choosing to see only those shows I believe are activist based on my subjective experience is minimized. I let the themes of activism emerge from other people's choices and let the producers I interview help me maintain focus on what they see as activist in addition to what I see and experience as activist, preventing the risk of applying only my definitions of activism to them or their work. Alternatively, given that the choice to let the producers define activism may also discount my experience as an audience and a producer, I bring self-reflexive elements of interpretation to bear on the object of study in combination with methods of rhetorical criticism and ethnography. Such a combined method is useful because it allows for intersubjectivity, or an understanding of cultural meaning based on an individual's membership in a linguistic community (Edgar and Sedgwick, 1999). My experiences as a television producer, audience, and communication studies researcher combine with the study participants' experiences within a community we all constitute and share. Intersubjectivity is important for communication studies scholarship of this

type for how it affirms cultural identity within a community, in this case, the various manifestations of self within the community embodied and presented by a public access television station. The combined method of inquiry allows experiential evidence, from both the researcher and the study participants, to give depth and thickness of description to the analysis, enhancing our understanding of what the identity-affirming experiences of producing and watching activist media could be.

I interviewed five producers and analyzed at least one example of their public access television work. The shows included in the sample were selected based on feedback from BCM staff and producers about producers who may indicate an interest in activism. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, facilitated through BCM procedures for contacting member producers (see Appendix B for the Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board approval letter and Appendix C for the letter of consent). Recruitment for producers of activist programs required disclosure to BCM staff and producers of my interest in programs that may contain activist themes, but shows did not necessarily have to have been produced by people who self-identify as activist. I did not explicitly define "activism" in soliciting producer names so as to invite the staff and producers' choices to help ground my interpretation. Always allowing theory regarding activism, rhetorical criticism, and (auto)ethnography to guide my search, I ultimately left it up to the members of the community I was studying to determine the choices of producers to interview, who in turn determined my selection of shows to analyze. The result was a diverse group of producers and shows, opening the door to uniquely varied interpretations of what it means to be activist or produce activist media.

I recruited from a list of suggested producers and involved only those willing to participate fully in the study (i.e., producers who would both provide a show and an interview), and I included all but one of the producers' shows. In the spirit of public access television, which exists as a public medium, and contrary to the usual social science practice of replacing the names of participants and their work with pseudonyms, I use the producers' first names and the names of their shows throughout this paper. In case of one producer (Dhondup), I studied one show episode composed as a compilation of several segments from a series. In the case of another producer (Joe), I studied one show, not part of a series. Although he offered it as an additional example from his collection of activist shows, Joe's show called "Buy Nothing Day" (Liesner, 2002) was excluded from the study because a significant proportion of it was created by another media organization whose permission was not obtainable for this study. In the case of two producers (Gianna and Moby), I studied two show episodes from each of their respective series. In the case of one producer (Thomas), I studied one show episode, not part of a series. Ultimately, I reviewed a total of seven separate examples of public access television shows declared by the BCM staff and producers to have activist themes. The following programs were included in the study: "Glimpses from Phayul," "Stop the Bomb Where It Starts," "Of the People," "Pies for Lies," and "Watch This!"

Before being presented with the sample, I had at least the following in mind as possible traditional activist themes to watch for: 1) social justice and human rights, 2) war, 3) political protest 4) labor, 5) poverty and homelessness, 6) the environment, 7) capitalism or the corporate system, and 8) media. My goal was to describe the activist

rhetorical strategies of each producer's show for persuading the viewer to take action on an issue. From there, I planned to look for modes of presentation, which I predicted might include at least the following: 1) media reflexivity/media criticism, and 2) local community reflectivity/local community identity. For example, if I were to watch a show that presented something about anti-war demonstrations while also commenting on how the media portrays the protesters, I would note for that show the following categories: "war," "political protest," "media," and possibly, "capitalism or the corporate system," and then note at least one of these modes of presentation: 1) media reflexivity/media criticism and 2) local community reflectivity/local community identity.

"Glimpses from Phayul," is a compilation of portions of several episodes of a live show series, entitled "Phayul," which is the Tibetan word for "fatherland" or "homeland." Each episode is a half hour of Tibetan news and special interest stories about Tibetan people and cultural events inside and outside the Bay Area. The show is included in the study because it contains traditional activist themes of social justice and human rights, and political protest.

"Stop the Bomb Where It Starts" is a two-hour presentation of the 2002 Hiroshima/Nagasaki Day demonstrations and commemoration marking the anniversary of the detonations of the first atomic bomb in Japan. The event was held outdoors on the grounds of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The show is included in the study because it contains the traditional activist themes of war and political protest.

"Of the People" is an hour-long program offering a local perspective on social and political issues that may have national scope, such as support for the arts, drug

rehabilitation programs, and independent businesses. The show is included in the study because it contains the traditional activist themes of poverty and homelessness, and social justice and human rights.

“Pies for Lies” is a single 7-minute show composed of interview clips of a 1991 Persian Gulf War veteran interspersed with shots of the President speaking about the 2003 Persian Gulf War, shots of the recent war protests in San Francisco from both the producer and mainstream media sources, plus other news clips. The show is included in the study because, like “Stop the Bomb Where it Starts,” it contains traditional activist themes of war and political protest, but also media.

“Watch This!” is a program series of 30-minute shows, each of which consists of pre-recorded public events, demonstrations, or performances in combination with political or social satire performed as sketch comedy or monologue or some combination thereof. The show is included in the study because it presents several of the themes from my list, including social justice and human rights, war, political protest, labor, capitalism or the corporate system, and media.

My methods for identifying traditional themes of activism, specific activist rhetorical strategies, and later, general modes of presentation, were the first steps toward drawing connections between shows and producer responses in my sample. That completed, I organized all of the shows and interview responses according to categories of televisual argument and interview definitions for activism, combining examples in which producers or shows shared similar themes, definitions, or activist rhetorical strategy. I categorized by name the rhetorical dimensions of the programs into activist

themes by attending to the aural and visual rhetoric of each show. I watched for the different rhetorical strategies of in-studio productions and field productions, noting the use of some traditional symbols of activist visual rhetoric (e.g., picket signs, images of crowd mobilization, and other objects with political connotations or associations), leaving the analysis open to other signifiers of the producers' desire for social change. Open-ended interviews with the program producers supplement the textual analysis, offering further insight into the producers' relationship to activism in general and pertaining to their shows (see Appendix A for the Interview Guide).

In the next chapter will be my analysis of the shows supplemented by the interview responses. A summary of each show will help introduce the producers' rhetorical strategies of activism, and I will also relate their interview responses to my orientation as an audience to their show's rhetoric. The analysis will also connect the shows' rhetorical strategies of activism with my identification of a show's overarching mode of presentation as media reflexive, community reflective, or both.

Chapter 4 Analysis

As noted in Chapter 2, activism is an elusive term to define, especially in the context of television, a medium that typically encourages a passive viewer. The BCM producers in this study, however, reveal through their shows and interview responses different ways of reconceptualizing activism within the context of their particular medium, public access television. My experience as an audience for their shows has resulted in interpretations that sometimes align with and sometimes contradict their relationship to the concept of activism, but nonetheless open the door to new definitions for activism within their medium. For example, one of the producers in the study identified himself--but not his show--as activist, although I experience his show as a sincere effort to change people's awareness, understanding, and actions toward an oppressed group. Another producer neither identified himself nor his work as activist, but indicated a willingness to have others describe him as activist, which I was willing to do immediately upon speaking with him and after viewing his show, a brief seven minutes of compelling critique on the construction of mainstream commercial news. Three general categories emerge from the producers' interview responses and the rhetorical strategies of their shows: awareness of community, advocacy for community, and artistry. These categories are important for helping me explore and define each producer's self-identity within one or more communities, and to understand my own identity as a viewer and a previous member of the BCM community. Also, this study taught me new ways to distinguish mainstream television's rhetorical strategies from those of public access television. This research offers a new definition for media

activism within the access television context, one that takes into account not only program content, but also rhetorical strategies of presentation and the medium itself.

Activism as Awareness of Community

Dhondup Tsering, a Tibetan living in the Bay Area, produced “Glimpses from Phayul” (Tsering, 2003), a compilation of several clips from his live show series “Phayul.” Each episode of “Phayul” is a half hour of news and special interest stories produced by Tibetans about Tibetan people and cultural activities in the Bay Area. Local Tibetan traditions and events that are highlighted in the show include celebrations for Tibetan Democracy Day and Tibet Day, a parade by the Tibetan Association in Berkeley, and the local Tibetan community’s annual participation in the How Berkeley Can You Be? Parade. The viewer also sees scenes of Tibetans and other supporters at demonstrations for the release of political prisoners or to boycott Chinese goods. In the television studio, a Tibetan musician plays political songs about exile, discussing his music in terms of the effort to ensure the survival of the Tibetan culture. The traditional themes of activism that emerged as content in “Glimpses from Phayul” and thus oriented my initial reception include social justice and human rights, and political protest. Based on the show’s formal elements and the interview responses, this show’s activist rhetorical strategy can best be described as “activism as awareness of community.” An increase in awareness can form the basis of an activist strategy to reflect a community and engage the viewer as part of this community. Some discussion of the components of this rhetorical strategy compared with strategies from a mainstream television perspective will enhance our understanding of its implications.

The proportion of coverage in “Glimpses from Phayul” of political protests and the cultural characteristics of the Tibetan people far exceeds that which one would find in a mainstream commercial news story. Because of its broad and diverse audience, mainstream commercial news typically would not dedicate an entire show to the political struggles and community identity of one cultural group, and it is even more rare that any show would dedicate an entire thirty minutes several times a month exclusively to the Tibetan community in Berkeley or the Bay Area. In general, mainstream news is composed of soundbites, a few seconds to a few minutes long, rarely giving broad knowledge of any one community’s cultural perspective. As Baran and Davis (2000) point out in the context of the processing of television news:

Frequently, information is presented on television in ways that inhibit rather than facilitate learning...Most of us view television primarily as an entertainment medium...The typical broadcast contains too many stories, each of which tries to condense too much information into too little time. Stories are individually packaged segments that are typically composed of complex combinations of visual and verbal content—all too often the visual information is so powerful that it overwhelms the verbal. Viewers are left with striking mental images but little contextual information. (p. 274-275)

One of the fundamental rhetorical arguments in “Glimpses from Phayul” is that appreciation of a cultural group is best achieved through regular, in-depth, and engaging exposure to their activities. The show creates awareness through a balance of informative news and educational entertainment. This strategy responds to the debate, noted by Vande Berg, Wenner, and Gronbeck (1998), about whether the public interest lies in news or entertainment (p. 400). Television media can facilitate this process because of mass audiences. Berkeley’s public access television station, while reaching an audience that is narrow compared with mainstream commercial television, nevertheless has a mass

audience, not only among Tibetans in Berkeley who may rarely get to see their community in the media at all, but also among non-Tibetans in Berkeley who are curious about the Tibetan community and may want to support its cause. Also, public access television shows do not, as a rule, share their air time with commercials, so shows are more likely to be repeated twice and sometimes three times a week, thus increasing the opportunities for the BCM community of viewers to see "Glimpses from Phayul." The chances of seeing any one show on public access television more than once are high relative to audience target and size. So the nature of the public access television medium, as it differs from mainstream commercial television, supports the efforts by the access show producers to increase awareness of their chosen topic.

The more involved people are with a community, the more they can identify with it because they are invested in it personally and politically. People may not act at all unless they understand and sympathize with a community's plight. Mainstream television does not allow space for the details of a group's political position, especially if such representations could put mainstream ideology (perhaps dictated by corporate sponsorships) in question. With regard to activism, mainstream television allows little room for non-violent representations of forms of resistance. This concept will be explored further in relation to two other public access shows, "Pies for Lies" (Smyth, 2003) and "Watch This!" (Theobald, 2002), where we learn to critique the assumption that sensationalistic violence is acceptable as standard form for mainstream television and film. "Glimpses from Phayul's" rhetorical strategy of increasing awareness of the Berkeley and Bay Area Tibetan community is a form of non-violent, local action for the

Tibetan cause. By bringing visibility to the Tibetan community and showing it as an important part of the Berkeley community, we who watch the show become more involved, more interested, and maybe more invested in that community and its preservation, because we see it as part of who we are and where we live. We are more interested in preserving a culture with which we can more closely identify. As long as mainstream news coverage continues to marginalize Tibetan life away from the mainstream American life at the local level, few people other than Tibetans will identify with the need to preserve the Tibetan community in Tibet or anywhere else. "Glimpses from Phayul" employs the rhetorical device of engaging the viewer with the narrative of another cultural community concentric to the community of the city of Berkeley and the city's public access audience of viewers.

In identifying himself as an activist, evident by his connection with the Tibetan Youth Congress, Dhondup frames his self-identity in more activist terms than he does his shows, but I nonetheless consider his show's content and form consistent with my emerging definition of media activism. "Glimpses from Phayul" indicates that my emerging definition need contain a sense of resistance against the status quo. In this show, increased awareness functions as an act of resistance against the status quo of marginalization and injustice in two ways. First, the show's content publicizes and promotes the cross-cultural and inter-community effort to change the oppressive relationship between the Tibetan and Chinese governments, reaching toward an activist goal of achieving peaceful coexistence between the two countries. Second, the show's form represents a break from tradition in mainstream media, because if it were not for

BCM and other public access stations, a regular series produced by and about Tibetans would be nearly nonexistent. This is an example of public access activism that fits within a new definition of media activism. The show recontextualizes notions of social and political resistance through its effort to gain a deeper understanding of the Tibetan culture and community, and to enhance media representations of that culture and community. The main message of Dhondup's work is that resistance does not require violence for social and political change to occur. In fact, when I asked whether he considered his program as activist, the producer responded that "It's not about any kind of anger or violence. It's like about peace" (D. Tsering). The producer ultimately wants to help protect the Tibetan culture and lifestyle, and he does this through peaceful creation of a non-mainstream television show with the underlying premise of increasing awareness of the Tibetan community identity and the Bay Area people's role in the future of that community:

Tibetan culture is not dying, but it is under the danger [of dying]. In many ways, in Tibet, our culture is diminishing, because of the Western or the Chinese cultural influence. To preserve the culture and to defend our unique culture and all, I use this access, and it informs the people, not just the Tibetans, but the non-Tibetans through their being an audience. It helps keep the culture alive. (D. Tsering)

Because "Glimpses from Phayul" calls on me to engage with the community of Tibetans in the Bay Area, the show is reflective of concentric communities. Based on the show's images and the knowledge that I am watching community-produced television, I began to think of myself as a part of the Tibetan community, because while I am not Tibetan, I see images of many people engaged in the Tibetan cause with whom I could immediately identify: non-Tibetans, students, women, members of the Bay Area

community, young people my age. These images get me interested in doing something to protect the Tibetan community and identity, partly because I see how it includes people like me engaging in cultural activities that I, too, have an interest in protecting, such as art and musical performance, work and recreation, spiritual practice, and collaborative efforts at social change. Through its rhetorical strategy of peaceful awareness of community through the eyes of Tibetans, "Glimpses from Phayul" is reflective of a real community, and exemplifies how community reflectivity and self identity are important in our emerging definition of media activism.

"Stop the Bomb Where It Starts" (Liesner, 2002) is a two-hour show documenting the Hiroshima/Nagasaki Day demonstrations and commemoration marking the anniversary of the detonations of the first atomic bomb in Japan. The event was held outdoors on the grounds of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The show is a mostly unedited presentation of musical and spoken word performances, political speeches from members of activist organizations (e.g., American Friends Service Committee, California Peace Action, and Global Exchange), and the occasional camera cut to people in the audience, many of whom wield signs of political protest against war and nuclear proliferation. The traditional themes of activism that emerged as content from my viewing of "Stop the Bomb Where It Starts" and thus oriented my initial reception include war and political protest. Similar to "Glimpses from Phayul," the activist rhetorical strategy I identify based on the show's formal elements and supported by the interview responses is "activism as awareness of community" where we see a mirror reflection of an activist community. When asked what he wanted to happen as a

result of producing his two programs, Joe indicated the importance of people becoming more aware and finding ways to protest or otherwise take action against nuclear weapons. He defines activism in terms of depicting or inspiring social awareness, democratic participation and action:

Well, I define activism as presenting information that makes people more aware of mostly the failures of government and institutions in creating democratic participation and gives them the right to control their life and their environment. I try to make shows that either reveal how other people are engaging in political action, direct action, or symbolic action. And if the shows don't actually depict some action or demonstration, then they have content that will give people information to act on or act with or inspire them to get information. (J. Liesner)

Joe's interview response speaks to this interest in fostering awareness by reflecting the activist community in its unedited reality, and if not that, encouraging and inspiring social change by increasing awareness through the imparting of information. Some discussion of the rhetorical strategies of this show compared with highly edited mainstream television help analyze and elaborate this finding.

The minimal amount of editing of "Stop the Bomb Where It Starts" is partly responsible for increasing my awareness of community, because the raw footage encourages a greater awareness of myself as part of a "real" community acting in real time. In my own viewing of "Stop the Bomb Where It Starts," I became aware of myself as a member of the audience at the live event more than I might had I been watching highly edited and truncated version of the same event on a mainstream commercial news station. Because of the unedited nature of Joe's show, my experience watching the scene happens in real time with the feeling of being in a real space, and I have a greater sense of my position as a potential member of the audience of this live event and a member of its

community. There are certainly those who could argue that the producer's choice of how to film the event is itself a selection and therefore an editorial decision, imposing meaning on how and where I am situated as an audience to the scene. Indeed, the choice to film the event from an audience member's or potential audience member's perspective for the duration of the entire event without truncation was an editorial decision that supports this sense of being part of a "real" community. Therefore, "Stop the Bomb Where It Starts" is an example of *real* reality television, because it reflects the events of a real community as if it were live and is inclusive of me as viewer and participant, rather than composed of a series of edited scenes constructed for the purposes of a contrived reality or a "re-created actuality" (Mander, 1991, p. 89) that excludes me. Through its rhetorical strategy of awareness of community through a sense of shared time and space, "Stop the Bomb Where It Starts" is, like "Glimpses from Phayul," reflective of a real community, and exemplifies how community reflectivity is critical to our emerging definition of media activism.

Activism as Advocacy for Community

"Of the People" is an hour-long program offering a local perspective on social and political issues. I reviewed two episodes for this study, one about the director of a high profile social services agency serving the homeless of Berkeley and the greater Bay Area, and the other about the need for a drug and alcohol detoxification center in Berkeley. In the case of both episodes, the host and producer, Gianna, interviewed people in the BCM television studio, exploring the issues of homelessness and drug abuse among the mentally ill and the poor. The traditional themes of activism that emerged as

content from my viewing of the two episodes and thus oriented my initial reception, include poverty and homelessness, and social justice and human rights. Upon further analysis of the show and interview responses, "activism as advocacy for community" forms the basis of this show's activist rhetorical strategy. How mainstream television depicts the underserved populations in the United States compared with the rest of the world differs significantly from the activist rhetorical strategy in "Of the People" of depicting the underserved.

In the first episode of "Of the People," the viewer hears stories from a social service agency director about her life as it relates to her current projects to help the homeless and people in crisis. At various moments, she connects her life as a refugee from Southeast Asia, including the experiences of escaping war and political tragedy, to that of the "urban refugees," that is, the Bay Area's homeless people, she encounters through her work. She talks about how at one time the fight was for everyone's right to housing, whereas now it is a fight for the right simply to sleep outdoors in a camp or elsewhere. By drawing analogies between struggles in the US and in developing countries, this show presents a media format that questions the dramatic sort of rhetorical construction not allowed in mainstream cultural affairs or news programming. Mainstream television diligently separates the circumstances of struggling nations from the United States, obscuring real social problems in this country and maintaining an ideology that the US is the land of enduring freedom, richness and power relative to the rest of the world. Within this ideology the United States has problems, but their magnitude shall never compare with those of a developing country. "Of the People" can

make such analogies explicit on public access television where the production is live, timeslots are generous, and speech is protected. When public access television makes explicit the connection between the problems of a developing country's economy and that of a particular US community (i.e., the city of Berkeley or the Bay Area), the viewers, who are de facto members of the community they are observing, develop a greater sense of urgency as advocates for reform in the local community because problems are more immediate to them. Another producer from this study recognized the sense of immediacy gained by the public access television's representation of problems in other countries as well:

And you're able to, using video tape and using music and being able to interview people and being able to travel to places where things are happening. You don't just say, "Oh, things are really bad in Iraq." You can just say, "Look here's a picture of how bad things are." And you get, it lends an immediacy to it. (M. Theobald)

Another episode of "Of the People" is about bringing a drug and alcohol detoxification center to the city of Berkeley in which the host interviews a panel composed of social services providers, community development representatives from the city, and a homeless civil rights advocate. To include as a panel member the homeless civil rights advocate, a man who was both formerly homeless and a drug addict, was a political move on the part of the producer that helps distinguish public access television from mainstream commercial television. A mainstream commercial news or public affairs station is more likely in its programming to quiet the voices and hide the faces of marginalized groups. A homeless substance abuser who seeks social change encapsulates four marginalized groups: homeless, substance abuser, possibly disabled person, and

activist. In the episode about the social services agency director, the guest made a point of this marginalization:

I think intellectually people understand that homelessness does not have one face. I think what disturbs them is the visible face of homelessness, which is on the streets, which seems to get in their way of going to a restaurant, in their way of going to a movie, or just seems like those people shouldn't be there. (G. Ranuzzi)

The decision by this show's producer to identify the panel member as both "homeless" and "civil rights advocate" opened the door to the kind of thinking that puts the voices and faces of marginalized groups at the center of resisting the status quo so that change can occur.

The activist rhetorical strategy of "Of the People" is to create a space for people to advocate for the community and for themselves as part of that community. In the case of the episode about the social services organization director, the show strives to persuade the viewer to understand better what drives this local member of the community to operate an organization that directly advocates for and helps change the lives of people who are homeless, substance abusing, or otherwise in crisis. In the episode about the need for a detox center in Berkeley, the show's premise is advocacy for those who have been disenfranchised by the structure of city services, namely the homeless substance abusers who need the immediate crisis services of a detox facility. "Of the People" brings several marginalized groups within the community into the public eye. Furthermore, in the case of the civil rights advocate who was also homeless and in recovery, the show gave him a space to advocate on behalf of himself and others in those marginalized groups he represents. In her interview, Gianna speaks about activism in terms of advocacy for the local community:

I think people have to work on a local level and always have some space to work on a larger level than local. I think people have to get their own heads together, and then keep a space open to do common good... You know, I think the media can be a lot of different things. I think it can be artistic expression, educational, entertainment, and it would be nice if advocacy were an active part of it. (G. Ranuzzi)

Because "Of the People" calls on me to engage with the community of Berkeley by reflecting what it has to offer and what it lacks for the people who may be struggling to live there, I become acquainted better with the people behind the social services programs, including their clients. The show encourages me to develop my own position as an advocate through understanding homelessness from multiple subject locations. At one level, I come to identify with the homeless problem from the position of struggling nonprofit agencies forced through cultural expectation to be one authority on addressing the homeless problem. At another more grassroots level, I also come to identify with the homeless problem and the possibility for a solution from the position of a man who is not only an authority on the struggles of being homeless and a substance abuser, but also occupies the subject position as direct advocate for the community to which he is still connected. The multiple interpretations that are possible from his identifying title "homeless civil rights advocate," are no coincidence as he is both an advocate for the civil rights of the homeless community and a civil rights advocate who is himself homeless. Mainstream television would generally demarcate positions of power along more rigid lines, preventing any fluidity of authority in addressing a social problem. Ironically, a homeless person may be one of the strongest authorities on what the homeless community needs to address its problems. By bringing to the center the communities that mainstream television marginalizes and disempowers, "Of the People"

reveals the importance of advocacy for community to our emerging definition of media activism.

Activism as Artistry

“Pies for Lies,” is a seven-minute show presented as a montage of interview and news coverage of the Gulf War, including footage of the anti-war demonstrations and political figures speaking about the war. The traditional themes of activism that emerged as content from my viewing of the “Pies for Lies” and thus oriented my initial reception included war, political protest, and media. Upon further analysis of the show and interview responses, I see “activism as artistry” forming the basis of this show’s activist rhetorical strategy. The differences in rhetorical strategy between “Pies for Lies” and mainstream television news will help articulate the critique offered by this public access show.

“Pies for Lies” producer, Thomas, uses special editing techniques to compose his show as a brief but compelling media criticism. Belying the fact that this is his first video or television project, the show is provocative in its artistic composition. To begin, the viewer sees a 1991 Persian Gulf War veteran talk bitterly about his experience, followed by segments of President George W. Bush speaking at a press conference. The President’s praises of the bravery, skill, and sacrifice of the troops in the 2003 Persian Gulf War immediately follows the candid moments with the 1991 Persian Gulf War veteran vituperating about the corporate interests behind the invasion of Iraq. These clips show the stark contrast of interests between a soldier who was on the front lines and the President who cheerleads him and others like him onwards toward their possible death.

The viewer then watches the anti-war demonstrations in San Francisco shot by both KTVU reporters and the "Pies for Lies" producer. This artistic juxtaposition reveals the contrasts between the polished and tight soundbite format from the commercial news station and the raw, looser footage from of the public access videographer.

In "Pies for Lies," protestors march the city streets with their signs, negotiating with car traffic, as riot police prepare for any confrontation. The camera closes in on one riot policeman, whose uniform bears a name tag reading "McCarthy," symbolically recalling a period in American history when political dissenters were regarded as unpatriotic and disloyal to American ideology. Included in the show is a news segment by KTVU reporter Jennifer Jolly that paints the scene, despite it being mostly peaceful, with carefully selected demonstratively negative language such as "chaos," "alarming," "crazy," "tempers flaring," and "anger is flaring" (Smyth, 2003). Thomas includes these clips from KTVU to highlight the reporter's provocative rhetoric, including such phrases as "taunting the police," and "have no intention of obeying the police's orders," and that she's seeing "many, many more fights break out," and "several fist fights break out," in the midst of the protestors (Smyth, 2003). At one point, she notes that "Right now, we are dealing with some of the crowd getting physical with our van operator" (Smyth, 2003). Even though the rhetoric of Jennifer Jolly's report could give the impression that people are threatening her and her crew with violence, what I notice is in fact, a couple of people of African American descent, playfully dancing before a news camera truck, smiling and laughing, as if they thought that they might get on television. Sensationalizing news with violent language and racist depictions is often central to

mainstream news' power to distort events in order to capture audiences and reinforce our culture's fear of any disruption to the status quo. Offering its own version of a truth, news that capitalizes on audience fear in this way misrepresents and undermines moments where forward-thinking activists may be trying desperately to assert themselves and be accurately and fairly represented in mainstream media.

Because of his artistry in filming and editing, Thomas's show teaches the viewer a bit more about the construction of the news. In another move to critique how news is constructed, Thomas makes creative use of captions. For example, Jennifer Jolly mentions the cost to the city of a half million dollars a day in overtime and public works crews because of the protesters' mess, to which Thomas responds with a caption stating that Jennifer never mentions in her report the high cost of the war. Captions in mainstream news typically function to reinforce the ideological implications of the spoken words and visual images of the story. The carefully composed captions of "Pies for Lies" function to point up contradictions contained within the news' presentation of activism as inefficient and costly compared with military action.

The effectiveness of "Pies for Lies" as media criticism comes not only through the producer's skillful editing, but also his opportunistic timing in filming. Thomas follows Jennifer Jolly's report throughout the day and evening, and catches on film some behind-the-scenes discussion between an attorney and a KTVU news cameraman, both of whom make explicit reference to the construction of the news, especially its sensationalism and selection bias. The attorney states, "Our concern is that when the coverage highlights 'violence and property destruction,' and you've got ten thousand

people out here, and most of them are being really non-violent, it gives people the feeling it's not fair" (Smyth, 2003). The KTVU news cameraman responds, "I understand. But there's violence and destruction going on, and it's not like we can't shoot this (Smyth, 2003)." That conversation highlights, as described earlier, the news's reliance on violence and destruction to present a story. Seconds after that discussion comes the pinnacle moment of the show when Jennifer Jolly, standing nearby, gets a pie thrown in her face by a passing protestor. While Thomas had no prior knowledge that the pie-throwing was about to happen, he made a point of noting in his interview with me that the incident seemed "almost like it was rehearsed or something," speaking to his fortuitous timing and to his talents as a media critic (T. Smyth). Laying bare media biases, Thomas's show invites the viewer to understand a little better the motivations of the media makers behind the rhetoric we begin to accept as truth on mainstream television news.

"Pies for Lies" offers a presentation that is both community reflective and media reflexive. Because "Pies for Lies" calls on me to engage with the protests that happened locally, the show is reflective of community. Because this reflection of community is also artistically composed as a critical view from a position behind how mainstream news engages with the community, the show is also media reflexive. The title of his show also speaks to the viewer who willingly and uncritically accepts as truth the mainstream news stories, "pies" baked for easy consumption. However, these "pies" come to represent also the sensationalism and propaganda of these news stories thrown back into the faces of mainstream news industry by media activists, one with a pie in hand and the other holding a public access television camera.

Activism expressed through the artistic use of camera technology and technique forms the basis of the activist rhetorical strategy for “Pies for Lies,” and other shows in this study. For example, “Pies for Lies” producer Thomas made creative use of editing and character generation (for captions) to create his video composition. Long for a news segment, seven minutes is ample time for Thomas to send a powerfully critical message, whereas a mainstream television show does little more than serve as a carrier for advertising within timeslots of thirty to sixty minutes, or longer. When I asked Thomas in his interview what it meant for him to be able to produce for public access television, he spoke positively of his artistry: “It feels good. It means...It’s my first video editing...I don’t know...my first official piece of art, I guess. My first art. Like it’s like writing...it’s like getting published maybe” (T. Smyth). His response prompted me to consider how public access producers can create activist shows through the artistic use of video technology.

Mainstream commercial television rarely interpellates its viewers to consider the processes behind production, including technical and aesthetic choices. The seamless presentation generally smoothes out any reminders of the human agency behind the “reality” we are told we are watching. The more technologically advanced commercial television becomes, the farther removed it is from the people who produce it. The more viewers come to expect the visual consistency that comes with technological advancement, the more the television viewing experience becomes a process of aesthetic standardization. The more sensationalistic and propagandistic news reporting becomes, the less we are less able to see ourselves as part of the story or as the ones capable of

making a story. Public access television offers a response to these conditions of technological alienation and anesthetizing aesthetics.

To respond to prevailing notions of television as beyond the public's control, understanding, or talents, public access television facilities will often offer hands-on training in television production, including instruction in both its technical and aesthetic aspects. Such training shows the process behind the seeming "magic" or "wizardry" of television, proving that there are people behind the productions, people with certain interests and talents, and that we need pay attention to those men and women behind the curtain. For example, BCM offers workshops to community producers in three-camera television studio production, large television studio production, field production, basic lighting and audio, camera technique, editing and character generation, and show hosting. As part of my own training as an intern for BCM, I had the opportunity to complete additional workshops in media literacy and media aesthetics, which offered an education above and beyond the basic, helping me develop the background for media reflexive and artistic work unique to public access.

The workshops of public access television stations enable members of the community not only to produce television in their own interests and the community's interest, but to do so in accordance within professional aesthetic standards while leaving room for artistic creativity and critical thought. Such an education allows novice public access producers to understand media in ways that demystify the ideological power of mainstream commercial television. Previous research has commented on the tendency of access producers to give particular weight to the technical and aesthetic aspects of

production work, especially as it becomes a part of their learning process as new producers. King and Mele (1999) note how aside from profitability, the “mastery of technology becomes the yardstick by which public access producers measure their success” (p. 615). The producers in this study also exhibited this tendency in talking about their work, and in many cases the efforts at mastery were apparent in the final product. Regardless of how the producers in the study made use of the technology available to them, the rhetorical strategies of activism in their programs relied on their unique sense of artistry about television production so that they could creatively and persuasively communicate an activist message.

One producer in the study put enormous energy into the technical and aesthetic aspects of his program series, demonstrating the importance he gave to “activism as artistry.” “Watch This!” (Theobald, 2002) is a program series of 30-minute shows, each of which consists of pre-recorded public events, demonstrations, or performances in combination with political or social satire performed as sketch comedy or monologue or some combination thereof. I reviewed two show episodes, which are of particular interest for how they critique politics and the media. The traditional themes of activism that emerged from my viewing of the “Watch This!” and thus oriented my initial reception included media, war, and political protest. Upon further analysis of the show and interview responses, I see how the producer’s creative use of humor demonstrated “activism as artistry.” The rhetorical strategy of “Watch This!” is to create a media criticism of mainstream television and film, and exploring this editorial choice will reveal the artistry that is the show’s activism.

In an episode about violence and sex in the media, host and producer Moby points a critical finger at a city ordinance disallowing explicit sex on Berkeley's public access channel. Satirizing the hypocrisy of city ordinance, Moby learns that it is acceptable to show plenty of violence but no sex on public access. The response his show makes to this ordinance comes as a barrage of violent film clips, satirical skits, and performative monologues, where Moby questions why violence is so pervasive and seemingly acceptable in our culture, when explicit sexual activity is scorned as unacceptable and unallowable.

With his face and clothes stained with paint to resemble blood, Moby explains how violence seems to be "the main motivating factor of just about every form of entertainment we have in our culture" (Theobald, 2002). He highlights the instances in which violence pervades our daily lives, citing the violence implied by the children's toys he brings into the studio (e.g., the Incredible Hulk doll, toy machine guns, and talking toy soldiers yelling profanities). He points out the violence contained in our language, noting how "Because a thought, an idea, it's linked to the language. You can't have a violent thought without having to express it with words...Our language is a very violent language" (Theobald, 2002). He speaks of the entertainment industry as "appealing to the lowest common denominator" (Theobald, 2002). His blood-spattered appearance underlying his message, he questions whether public access is a genuine free speech alternative to mainstream media, when a city ordinance upholds the same contradiction of mainstream media where the quantity of violent content surpasses sexual content.

Because "Watch This!" calls on me to engage with media critically, the show is media reflexive in its artistry and activism. Furthermore, because the show's topic relates to a new city ordinance concerning BTV, the show is also community reflective in that its topic centers on local city political process. The show's media critique highlights the contradictions of the mainstream media establishment and how these contradictions spill over into public access television, a so-called alternative medium. Despite my appreciation of the producer's mode of engaging the viewer on an important topic, I began to question Moby's argument that violence is more the motivating factor in public's responsiveness to the entertainment industry than sex is. Sex, while not always as explicit as sexual intercourse, is as much a selling point in the entertainment, news, and advertising industry as violence is. As a viewer, I did appreciate Moby's articulation of the connection between thought and language however. His astute analysis of the function of rhetoric in shaping reality sets his show apart from the rare to nonexistent examples of media criticism available on mainstream television.

In an episode titled "Cruel and Unusual Times," Moby opens the show with a sketch comedy that pronounces the absurdities of homeland security policy enforcement. In the opening scene, an officer comes to retrieve a man from his home where he is keeping a few fireworks for his Independence Day celebration. This criminal investigation turns extreme when the man is taken to an unidentified location for questioning and in the process experiences numerous violations of his civil rights. Later in the show, another character, Thor Brontosaurus, gives a fascism update, where he bitterly questions the Bush administration, covering such topics as the pledge of

allegiance, school vouchers, and terrorism. The implication of Thor's character and performance is that despite the United States' effort at finding solutions to the terrorist threat, the US government's specific actions will lead to something comparable to a fascist state where the centralization of government and information is taken to an extreme. These particular performances use characterizations and farce to question hypocrisy and the extreme policies of the Bush administration.

Other characters in the "Cruel and Unusual Times" episode present rhetorical strategies that parallel mainstream news, continuing to artistically employ irony or humor to bring forward dangerous contradictions of current US foreign and military policy. For example, Norse Chetley, a satire of a news reporter, talks with a nuclear physicist about the distinctions between "clean" and "dirty" bombs, a reference to the media's repeated invocation of the so-called "expert" to endorse highly suspect military policy. Moby's use of low camera angles and a white coat explicitly question the cultural norm of blindly accepting the scientific expert as a trusted and qualified authority. Noting how the difference between "clean" and "dirty" bombs is "like the difference between a beer and malt liquor" (Theobald, 2002), Norse Chetley uses a straight man performance to highlight the connection for the viewer between the euphemistic language of technical expertise and its role in the construction of questionable power differentials. The implications of this critical performance are that the morally right, humane, or socially just choices for solving a problem do not logically follow from the power granted to expert opinion.

Moby, the producer of "Watch This!" spoke in his interview about the artistic aspects of his "little video vignettes" when asked about the challenges and pleasures of his creative process:

Oh, well, I can say for me personally, cable access has given me a forum to spout off and it's given me a proving ground to try out things, to experiment, to see what works, see what doesn't work. At the end of each show, I always set my VCR to tape the show when I'm doing a live show, and so, I go home and you know, I sit down, I take a couple of deep breaths. I have a beer and I watch it, and I see what stuff worked and what stuff didn't work. You know, I kind of do I guess a Monday morning quarterback thing. (M. Theobald)

A cartoon artist turned videographer, Moby saw BCM as an outlet for his art where he was happy to have the broader audience than his comic book projects provide. He also would like to see his shows inspire other people to pursue doing their own television show or other artistic pursuit. The idea that activism can involve artistry, artistry that reveals the artifice of media or of one's self as an artist, in television contexts or elsewhere, emerged in the interview with Moby. To him, the artistic "spirit" of BCM is ordinary citizens getting up on television and doing their own thing. Along those same lines, he sees public access as a space for artists and other talents:

Well, for the audience, I want them to be inspired to maybe pursue doing their own television show or their own artistic pursuit. I was talking to a friend just the other day about how so many people are talented and have some artistic bent, but they don't have any channel for it. They don't have any place to go with it, you know. (M. Theobald)

Considering how media reflexivity requires some level of understanding of media as a created object, it makes sense that the producers whose shows lean more toward being artistic would also be media reflexive. Media reflexivity happens, as Roger Aden (1991) wrote, when "the artifice of the narrative is acknowledged" (p. 401). More than simply

acknowledging the media as artifice, Moby and Thomas, through the unique artistry of their public access productions, critique the rhetoric of mainstream media, and in their interviews, highlight their own identity as artistic talents, so their shows serve as compelling examples of how through public access “activism as artistry” is possible.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Cable public access television, even while reaching relatively narrow portions of the overall television viewing audience (i.e., subscribers to the particular cable company that holds the franchise agreement with the city), holds an important position within the range of public spaces available for community participation and creative expression. Of those who produce for public access television, one need ask how they think about, talk about or use the medium, particularly if they show signs of wanting to use television for social change or simply to change the way we use television. This study is not only an attempt to raise the profile of public access television, but also highlight and explore the social significance of encouraging and protecting accessible spaces for anyone who wants to have a voice and a hand in creating social change, in their communities, in themselves, or in the role the media hold in shaping the connection between individual and community identity.

I began this research coming from my own personal experience where I was not only a student of rhetoric and media criticism, but also a television producer and an activist. I brought those aspects of my self-identity to bear on my investigations into the identities of people who were producers and whose television productions had been identified as containing activist themes. The producers of this study, in some cases, may have been rhetoricians, media critics, and activists themselves. I watched their shows, curious whether the producers would demonstrate some relationship to a concept of activism, whether or not they immediately identify themselves or their shows as activist. I knew they could teach me ways to think about what media activism might mean within

the public access television context. I did not know at the beginning of this project how much these creative and determined people would teach me.

After watching the producers' programs, I began to make comparisons between messages about social problems and social change in mainstream commercial television and the alternative public access television. I then came to the producers with questions about activism as identity and action, listening for definitions, both traditional and unconventional. Ultimately, I sought to redefine media activism to take into account the many layers of meaning that term has acquired through a history of alternative media where public access television plays a significant and enduring role. Throughout this study, I kept in mind the following research questions: 1) What traditional activist themes emerge from the shows and interviews in the study, and what rhetorical strategies do the producers use to communicate those themes? 2) Given the producers' strategies, how might we define activism within the specific context of public access television so that it compares with or contrasts from mainstream television? 3) What might this comparison mean for a new definition of media activism?

Before I began devising a context-specific definition for media activism within the public access television environment, three major rhetorical strategies emerged from the data that would lead me in that direction: activism as awareness of community, activism as advocacy for community, and activism as artistry. In the shows, these strategies connect with individual and community identity in different ways. I also kept my eyes open for cases where a show was media reflexive, self-reflexive, or community reflective, and in some cases all three, but I did not initially know where such knowledge

might lead in a definition of media activism in this context. What I did know before this research was that one example of public access television that excited me very much, “Production Deconstruction” (Mandzik, 2002), whose goals were both media reflexive and community reflective.

“Production Deconstruction” is a show about public access at BTV, which engages community member producers and viewers in television production training and community outreach. The show has four segments designed to teach people about the television as a creative medium (i.e., reflexivity) and about public access television’s function within the Berkeley community (i.e., reflectivity). The four segments of the series include information on station staff changes; equipment and company policies; technical and aesthetic components to effective television production; interviews with producers; community outreach for volunteer production staff; and publicity about upcoming programs and events.

An explicitness about the processes, artifice, and local community of public access television makes “Production Deconstruction” both reflexive and reflective in ways I have delineated for a context-specific definition of media activism. The news it communicates in the form of updates on the operations of BTV keeps viewers and producers abreast of the process model as it is applied to their own station as part of the community; this is an example of reflectivity. The training segments on technique for good production values call attention to both the process and product of the television artifice, thereby demystifying television as a both technology and a performance; this is an example of reflexivity. The producer interviews, community outreach, and publicity

segments reveal the men and women (most of whom are from the Berkeley and surrounding community) behind the curtain of television production, much as the guerrilla television videographers incorporated into their programs some footage of themselves and other media makers filming events; this is an example of community reflectivity, media reflexivity, and self-reflexivity. The program's title, "Production Deconstruction," echoes the structuralist critical practice of "deconstruction" to understand meaning in literary texts (Edgar and Sedgwick, 1999), and as a rhetorical device articulates the show's reflexive move to analyze and teach the processes of television text production and meaning-making. I consider this show as activist for how it assists in the transformation of television ideology by teaching ordinary people how to become the media, demystifying the process, and informing the audience about the local community in which they participate. Thus, watching the show became the initial catalyst for my search for how other Berkeley public access shows exhibit reflexive and/or reflective modes of presentation as part of activist rhetorical strategy.

I thought that an understanding of the rhetorical strategy of a carefully selected group of shows' would be the place to start my explorations of the activism of presentations that also communicated reflexively and/or reflectively. In the shows of this study where "awareness of community" was the guiding activist rhetorical strategy, I, as a viewer, was engaged with the show as a witness, and in different ways was invited to be a participant of the community presented. For example, "Glimpses from Phayul" and its producer, Dhondup, taught me to think of activism as a practice of becoming more aware of community and of self as part of that community through a mode of reception that is

neither passive acceptance of nor aggressive reaction to undesirable social conditions. Rather, activism could be an act of peaceful resistance through understanding and empathic desiring for community preservation. "Stop the Bomb Where It Starts" and its producer, Joe, taught me to think of activism as engaging directly and in unedited form with community, becoming aware of others who remember the past while imagining a different future without nuclear weapons.

In "Of the People, the show whose guiding activist rhetorical strategy is "advocacy for community," the viewer sees the use of analogy to collapse the power-based distinctions between the US as indomitable world superpower and other developing countries. "Of the People" also taught me how the power of authority or expertise can come by way of personal experience just as much, if not more than, education or social status. Advocacy, at its etymological roots, means to give voice to the cause of another. However, the homeless civil rights advocate in "Of the People" showed me how public access invites people to use their own voice to empower themselves and the community they share. This sense of activism where one gives voice to a cause or to a community who may be struggling applies directly to public access television, itself a struggling community in need of activists who will advocate for it. As producer of another access show, Moby, noted regarding the cause of public access television, "It's sort of like an adopted child that they sort of have to take care of but they don't really want to promote" (M. Theobald). "Of the People" and its producer, Gianna, also taught me to think of my work as a student and producer of public access television as the work of an activist who advocates for the access community.

In the examples where “activism as artistry” described the guiding rhetorical strategy, I, as a viewer, learned how the artifice of production becomes the means to social and self transformation. “Pies for Lies” and its producer, Thomas, taught me the role that media criticism can have in an emerging definition of media activism and how that can lead to social change in the role media has in our lives. Media already pervades the American psyche, and if it is true that the majority of Americans get their daily news through mainstream commercial television, then a tool for understanding how television news is constructed would empower those viewers to decide whose truth the television news story tells. “Pies for Lies” is a tool, artistically assembled for the viewers’ education and personal transformation from commercial television consumers to alternative television producers and critical television consumers. “Watch This!” and its producer, Moby, taught me ways to think about the interrelationship between politics, language and the media. In the episode about sex and violence in the media, I learned, as I did with “Pies for Lies,” the role that media criticism can have in an emerging definition of media activism and how such media reflexivity can lead to social change in the role media has in our lives.

I did not know I was going to be an activist, videographer, rhetorical critic, nor (auto)ethnographer until I started doing my own public access television productions. In my own production work, awareness and activism were inextricably linked and were the rhetorical strategies I used in the messages of social change I chose to create as an intern. In a show I produced on the sociology of casual carpooling to work, I wanted to explore

it as an act of social resistance, something I had personally experienced from the Bay Area community and a social phenomenon whose history was unclear.

Casual carpooling is a mode of driving across the Bay Bridge with minimal delay. Drivers visit special locations in their city to pick up additional passengers, people usually unknown to the driver, to share the ride across the bridge by way of the high occupancy vehicle lanes, also known as the carpool lanes. High occupancy vehicles, defined by the presence of three or more occupants (and in some areas two or more), allow the driver and passengers to avoid the toll booths and consequently the traffic jams, shaving minutes and dollars off their commute. There is no governing organization for casual carpooling nor are there any membership fees.

I learned about casual carpooling by accident one day when I was late for work because my bus had not yet arrived. A passerby pointed in the direction of a line of cars where people were casually getting into strangers' cars in perfect rhythm: a car pulls up, people get in until three seats are filled, then the car pulls onto the freeway exit nearby. A car pulls up, the next few people get in until three seats are filled, then that car pulls onto the freeway. There seemed to be such an air of cooperation and social etiquette about the whole process that what in conversation would sound very much like organized hitch-hiking, seemed perfectly safe, responsible and reasonable, especially as stepping into the next car would almost guarantee I would get to work on time. I proceeded to get into a stranger's car, and from there I became a regular rider. I was so impressed with the organization and self-policing aspect of casual carpool, I decided to do a show about it when I interned at Berkeley Community Media.

The reason I mention this example is for its role in teaching me that people can organize to make changes in their communities. Since the 1970s oil crisis, casual carpool stops have popped up spontaneously all around the Bay Area to respond to a social need and fill a gap in transportation services. I was very interested in the meaning behind this example of a collective activist response to a problem in the transportation system. In my show, I interviewed people as guests in the BCM studio and in their cars while I was their passenger. I felt the urge not only to understand, but also to share the story of casual carpooling with the audience I could reach with my public access show. I saw the potential of my show to motivate additional people to support the casual carpool system by seeing how safe and convenient it is. My rhetorical strategy was to create awareness of community by reflecting it in one of its more shining moments, and I felt very much empowered in the production of the show.

That sense of empowerment re-emerged in my experiences interviewing the producers for this study. During the course of my thesis work, I felt once again that I was a part of and defining myself within the public access community, sharing in the urgency of the shows that seemed important to produce, view, and discuss. Because public access television is reflective of community, the public access producer not only feels empowered by his or her ability to produce a show, but by the thought that the topics of the show will be relevant to its viewers because the shows are about their town or neighborhood. Hence, even the producer may feel a connection with the community his or her show reflects, and a sense that the show could have impact. Not only does the show reflect community and engage the viewer with that community through television,

but having been a producer myself, I felt more closely engaged with the community of viewers through my own show. My process of learning to become a producer made me aware of myself as a part of the community of viewers and producers—participating in the production of public access television became a moment of self-reflexivity for me. I felt engaged with the community of Berkeley Community Media. The process of producing a public access show not only encouraged my optimism about my show's potential for change in the community, but being an access producer and a part of the access community inspired a feeling of change in my self and my life. My (auto)ethnographic method revealed the various position from which I participate in the community of BCM—as producer, as audience, and as researcher. Producer Joe, who also produced his show using the rhetorical strategy of creating awareness of community identity as part of his effort at social action and social change, identified with this feeling of real community at BCM. Joe connects his own identity with the BCM community identity in terms of having a mutually shared interest with the people around him in the use of public access television itself:

Well, it's actually provided me with a real social community. I like to go in there and know people and be able to talk about, you know, different kind of things. With the equipment guy, I can talk tech and with the other people we talk what kind of shows are coming up. (J. Liesner)

This again raises the issue of how and to what extent greater awareness leads to greater involvement in and the desire to protect a community of which we are a part. For two producers in this study, myself and Joe, awareness became linked to activism for its role in helping people maintain a sense of control of their individual and community identities and destinies. Whether this is true for other producers may not be answerable based on

the data of this study, but I would surmise that the more aware and involved people become in producing for their local access station, the more they come to identify themselves as part of the access television community and the more interested they become in preserving that community's identity as part of the city and part of them. Perhaps future studies of public access could explore this question further.

The shows of this study and my own production experience qualify as activist public access television because they invite us as viewers and producers to engage with television actively and critically. Berkeley Community Media's public access television constitutes public action because the people become the media, both in its content (reflectively) and its forms (media reflexively and self-reflexively). The rhetorical strategies of activism I found on public access television that call for greater awareness, advocacy, and artistry are the means to creating television that is reflexive of self and media, and reflective of community. Such use of a medium seeks to change the landscape of television, which is currently predominated by messages of commercialism and corporate interests, and in turn this usage may change us and our communities.

Media activism, as I want to define it within the context of the public access television of BCM, describes the moments when the medium's content reflects local community by making people more aware or willing to advocate for social causes. Media activism at other times in this context describes when the medium's content is media reflexive and teaches people to be a more critical media consumers. Furthermore, media activism was revealed in my own experience and Joe's as a producer, as the moments when the medium of public access television itself penetrates the dominance of

mainstream commercial television, transforming the social relations of media in our individual lives, our communities, and in our culture. Lastly, as the autoethnographic elements of this study suggest, media activism came to describe the process of self-reflexivity toward self-transformation, where the artifice of our self identities comes to the surface in people's experience of becoming public access producers. Moby shared the importance of this self-reflexive relationship to the connections possible between media and activism:

In the general sort of approach to activism, you're kind of hoping that the press, the media, will come to you and tell your story. And in the more direct action way of activism, you know, using cable access, you basically become the media and you deliver your own message. You don't wait for somebody else to hopefully tell your story. You're telling your own story. (M. Theobald)

The questions raised in this research may point toward a theory of media activism that would describe how change is most possible when *we become the media* that critiques and changes us in our own lives, then in our communities, and beyond, rather than stand (or sit in our "armchairs") before our televisions or other media outlets looking for how the world is changing outside of us. Future research might explore the rhetoric of activism on public access television nationwide, continuing to ask the question of how and to what extent television created by the individuals of a community functions to transform their notions of self in community, and of self in relation to the rhetorical constructions (e.g., media representations) of social problems in our culture. Transforming oneself and one's identity as a media activist may be critical to activists who use media to address larger social issues. Public access activism is not only social action, but also a social attitude, toward creating the rhetorical conditions in which

television becomes a tool of democracy and public participation in addressing social concerns in local communities and in ourselves.

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Footnotes

¹Engelman (1990) lists examples of these “radical video collectives”: Raindance, Videofreeks, People’s Communication Network, Video Free America, Ant Farm, Global Village, and the May Day Collective (p. 24).

²The *Contra Costa Times* reported in a February 2002 news story about Berkeley Community Media (BCM) when the station became the subject of much community debate. The BCM board, at the prompting of concerned parents, changed the hours in which programs with sexually explicit content could be shown on its public access channel. Whereas before these complaints, sexually explicit programming could be shown only after 10 p.m. until 6 a.m., the board decided to change the time slot to between 2 a.m. and 4 a.m. in an effort to appease concerned community members and still allow the programs to be aired. The producers of two programs in question saw the move as a form of censorship, even though a 1996 US Supreme Court ruling allows public access stations to regulate when programs are shown, but not their content. The producers’ major criticism of the timeslot restriction was that it relegated their program to times when no one would be watching, thus resulting in de facto censorship.

On March 5, 2003, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported a story about the Community Media Access Partnership, the Bay Area’s public access cable network. The author of the article recognizes, too, the double-edged nature of public access television and writes, “At their worst, public access cable channels can be filled with poorly produced shows that do nothing for local residents. But the Bay Area has been rewarded in recent years with the opposite—several franchises that mirror their communities and are a model for the nation” (p. D1).

On September 2, 2003, the Associated Press reported a story about Community Television of Lane County, Oregon, the first line of which reads, “Government funding has been cut for a public access television channel that carries controversial programming by local groups ranging from evangelical Christians to anarchists” (p. 1). The article raises questions as to whether the budget cuts were an attempt to control free speech in general at the station, especially when the content of that speech could stir up tense debate.

³According to Kellner and Linder (1999), access facilities currently exist in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Madison, Urbana, Austin, Greensboro, and maybe as many as 4,000 other towns or regions in the United States.

⁴Figures based on July 11, 2003 data gathered through email correspondence with BCM staff.

⁵Information gathered from Berkeley Community Media’s website, www.betv.org as of October 2003.

⁶For more information about "Mental Engineering" see online article "PBS Goes for Mental Engineering on Super Bowl Sunday," originally published in Current Online, January 28, 2002.

Appendix

Interview Guide

Recruiting Announcement: "Hi, I'm Terra Lepper, and I'm doing a research project about public access television. I'd like to arrange to get copies of your program and later ask you questions about your work. Depending on your needs and availability, I would like to arrange a 30-45 minute interview with you either, preferably conducted by phone. I would like to audiotape the conversation. To participate in this study, I will need you to sign a consent form asking for your permission to use your name and/or the name of your program(s) in the results. The audiotapes from our conversation and the videotape copies of your program(s) will be kept for three years after the study in a securely locked area to which only I will have a key.

1. Tell me, in your own words, about the program(s) that you produce. How did you come up with the idea?
2. Describe your overall experience with television, either as a producer, viewer, or in any other role?
3. Have you ever produced for any other public access television stations? Have you ever produced for any other non-public access television stations? Tell me about your experience.
4. How long have you been producing for BTV? How long have you been producing for other television stations, if applicable?
5. Who is your target audience for the program(s) you produce for BTV?
6. What is the most important message(s) of the program(s) that you want your audience to receive?
7. What do you want to happen as a result of people seeing your program(s)?
8. What do you want to happen as a result of people participating in producing your program?
9. What has been the response to your program(s)? (Note: This could include the received response from people who participated in the production itself, BTV staff, etc...)
10. Tell me about the production process, including any specific challenges or accomplishments?

11. What does it mean for you to be able to produce for public access television?
12. What does it mean in general for people to be able to produce for public access television?
13. What additional topics would you like to see produced for public access television?
14. What do you like about public access television?
15. What do you not like or would like to see changed about public access television?
16. Do you identify your work as activist? How so?
17. Do you identify yourself as an activist? How so?
18. If "yes" in response to either question 16 or 17, describe the relationship between media and your activism? If "no" in response to question 16 and 17, proceed to question 19.
19. Describe the relationship you see between media and activism in general?
20. Is there anything you would like to add to this discussion about yourself, your television work, the media or activism?