

DeeDee Halleck

OURMedia III, Barranquilla Colombia May 20, 2003

First like to say thank you to our terrific hosts who have made our visit here so inspiring and for me so resonant with other projects that I have witnessed and/or participated with in other parts of the world.

Last night we saw a street projection at the Plaza of Bolivar which reminded me of street screenings I organized in 1961 in the Lower East Side in New York City of work by our Henry Street Settlement film club. It was also like the projections of experimental video I saw one evening on a building in downtown Havana of work produced by the Cuban Video Movement as part of the Latin American Film Festival in the 1988. It resonated most closely, I suppose, with a screening by TV Maxambomba I attended in a favela of Rio in the nineties with a screen attached to a VW microbus.

These screenings were of OUR MEDIA. There may be different equipment, different themes, different imagery, different formats: It might be through the airwaves, the rumba drums, the xerox machine, the computer, or, as we saw in Cartagena at the Colegio de Cuerpo, the dance stage. It may be in villages or barrios, in attics or basements, it may be on roof tops or bill boards, on a satellite or a mola. Our Media are united by being made and shared by people on a completely different basis from that of the mass media. This is media for cooperation and exchange, for peace and against exploitation and greed.

Much of the discussion today has focused on development media projects in Latin America and Asia. Within the "first world" we have our own "third world": there are many communities totally excluded from mass media. With the growing militarism of George Bush's presidency it is more important than ever that we have spaces for those who disagree with the war fever that has gripped our channels. We who are in the "belly of the beast" have our own needs for information equity.

There is a lively community of alternative media projects in the United States, many of whom have an even harder time to raise sustaining funds than projects in the so called Third World-- from foundations who sometimes find it difficult to fund projects too close to home.

I would like to briefly describe three projects with which I have been involved. One is Paper Tiger television, founded in 1981 this collective makes programs that critique the media. One thing that the mass media does not do is analyze or comment on the media, so we founded Paper Tiger to look critically at TV, newspapers, radio, magazines and films. We have made over 400 programs which have been shown every week since 1981 on the community channel in Manhattan.

In the US we have community channels in almost every city because of the local agreements between the cities and the cable corporations. They are required by law to provide channel time, equipment and funds for community media. In exchange for allowing the corporation to use city streets and public space.

The second project is Deep Dish television, which is a way of linking the community channels from around the country via satellite. We take programs from these access channels, from other community groups and independent producers and organize them into series often grouped by themes: we have done series on health care, on the environment, on prisons (a growing industry in the US where there are more people in prison percentage wise than any other country in the world). We also did a series in 1991 on the first Gulf War. We are now organizing a series on the current war called Shocking and Awful: a Grass roots response to the war in Iraq. Deep Dish programs are transmitted on satellite and are downlinked and played back by community channels across the country. At first we used commercial satellite transponders which we had to rent on a hourly basis, but now we have a 24 hour channel which has been reserved for non profit use called Free Speech TV and we do not have to pay for the transponder time.

The third project grew out of the work of Deep Dish and Free Speech TV: There is a community radio program called Democracy Now, a daily news program on radio in six cities, which is very popular and we were able to make the program into a television show, and send that to satellite. So for the first time there is a national daily alternative television news program that is going into the homes of over 11 million people. It is available via DBS satellite, but also on 130 community channels on cable.

On my way to Colombia I picked up a copy of the Financial Times and found an article which I think highlights the difference between our media

and theirs... There is a lot of talk about the digital divide. The article is about a project of Hewlett Packard and Unilever corporation and is being touted as bridging the digital divide. It proposes to give Indian women palm pilot mini computers, or as they call it “personal digital organizers” Why? Well first they say to access information about hospitals, schools and food prices in this test village of Chirummari which is two hours from Hyderabad. Then to quote: Later the pilot project will be “up graded” to allow the women to buy and sell shampoos, soaps and other Unilever products...Unilever is working with “self-help” groups to sell its products in rural India in places which are beyond the reach of formal distribution networks. Corps rural markets generate 50 % of Unilever’s Indian turnover. There are 600,000 rural villages in India. We reached a level (of only 100,000 of these villages)that could not be improved alone...that’s why we partner with self help groups....it is “low risk”...Some of the women were alarmed by concepts such as margins for goods that they were selling to their neighbors. The deep community spirit among women meant that they were not competitive in pricing goods sold to neighbors. We told them it was not wrong to charge a margin. Our aim is to turn illiterate women into entrepreneurs.”

This project is not Our Media. It is definitely Their Media.