



## Center for Social Media

### **Beyond Broadcast 2008: Mapping Public Media Rapporteur's Report**

By Kate Schuler and Jessica Clark

#### **Introduction**

The 3rd annual Beyond Broadcast Conference, titled “Mapping Public Media,” was held June 17th, 2008 at American University. The conference was organized by the Center for Social Media, with co-planners from Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society; NYU’s Center for Media, Culture and History; MIT’s Comparative Media Studies department; the Annenberg School at USC; Public Radio Exchange; and the National Black Programming Consortium.

This year’s event was funded by the Ford Foundation, as part of its Global Perspectives in a Digital Age initiative. In his opening remarks, Orlando Bagwell, who directs the foundation’s Media, Arts and Culture program, noted how quickly the worlds of technology and communications have changed, and how that has allowed us to connect with each other in ways that weren’t possible even a few years ago. These changes are affecting the ways that people make and interact with media for public knowledge and action. “What does the ecology look like today?” he asked. “How does it all connect together?”

He pointed out that whereas the term “public media” used to mean “the one reaching out to the many,” it now means the many coming together to engage and be a part of public media. “There are many more opportunities in terms of what that constellation might look like,” he said. The job for the attendees of this conference, he said, was to try to get a sense of the scope and scale of what public media could be.

Continuing along the same lines, Pat Aufderheide, Director of the Center for Social Media, observed that the purpose of the conference was to “figure out the potential for public media in a digital and participatory era.”

She pointed attendees to the Center’s *Public Media FAQ*, the basis for the day’s conversations. For her, the important part of the phrase “public media” is the first word: public. She cited the work of scholars John Dewey, Yochai Benkler and Henry Jenkins as guides to how publics can work together through media to address common issues in a democracy. As she notes, anyone can create media; the challenge is building a public. When you’ve created a way for people to connect to each other—to share information about their problems and find solutions—then you have really created public media,

regardless of the platform or the funding source. “The media part is easier than it’s ever been...the hard part is the public part,” she said. “You don’t get to just be public media; you have to earn it every time you make a connection with someone.”

Aufderheide wrapped up by pointing out that throughout the day, the speakers on the panels would be sharing their ideas for how to grapple with creating truly public media.

### **Maps as Public Media**

While traditional maps have often served as tools of colonialism and top-down control, interactive maps are now becoming a tool for grassroots advocacy, storytelling, and community building, said Future of Public Media Project Director Jessica Clark. With the emergence of free and open source platforms that make it much easier to plot and visualize data, maps are a “rising and vibrant form of participatory media,” she said. Maps are also now serving as an interface to deliver and aggregate content from both traditional news outlets like The New York Times and user-generated media platforms like Twitter. A wave of new low-cost, GPS-enabled mobile devices will only push this trend further, allowing users to geotag and post content on the fly.

Clark noted that the theme for the day cut two ways: in addition to serving as public media, maps and visualizations can help media and policy makers understand large-scale shifts in the media landscape. She pointed attendees to a number of hands-on examples in the demo space—including a community media hub—as well as examples from the Atlas of Media Maps that she had created for the conference.

The moderator of the day’s first roundtable discussion— Jacquie Jones, president and CEO of the National Black Programming Consortium—pointed out that maps are now being used far beyond their traditional geographic purpose. Map interfaces now reveal social networks, and election maps have almost become their own genre. However, she observed, few maps are truly bottom-up endeavors. She challenged the discussants to address issues of power and access when presenting their maps. “What are our maps telling us about how we mobilize and inform publics?” she asked.

Lee Banville, Editor-in-Chief of the *Online NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, presented a collaborative 2008 election map that acts as a portal for information on local and national races. The goal for the election map, Banville said, was to create a single public broadcasting map for the elections, instead of having separate entities such as PBS and NPR or local broadcasters creating their own.

By creating a single entry-point, Banville said, the project allowed them to harness the geographic power of public broadcasting – funneling content from all around the country into one place, allowing the detail of local programming to be aggregated. Such attention to local information is particularly important, as small locales may suddenly become a focus of attention in close national elections.

With more than 2400 stories linked from the map, “It is highly iterative and we’re starting to inject just a bit of fun,” Banville said. One new feature allows users to predict how different states might affect the election outcome.

Paula Le Dieu, Director of Open Media at Magic Lantern Productions, suggested that as a storytelling medium, maps are powerful visual tools. As an example, she presented Breathing Earth, a map of the world in which flashing points and meters simulate carbon emissions and real-time births and deaths around the world. Le Dieu praised the map as a starting point for telling many different stories about the world’s issues and resources. “We all know that more people are being born in India and China,” she noted as one example, “but when you see it like this, it becomes that much more powerful and obvious.”

While such maps have power, the medium faces some obstacles outside of the United States, Le Dieu noted. In the UK, “the Crown owns our maps, and charges money for us to use them. As a result, we haven’t seen anything like the same flourishing of maps as in North America,” she said. However, a project called OpenStreetMap sends people with GPS units around the country to re-point the data set—going so far as to attach GPS units to bicycles and taxicabs to create the maps.

Le Dieu also talked a bit about her involvement in the BBC’s efforts to adapt to the participatory, digital environment; see the video above for more details.

Chaacha Mwita, Training Director at Media Focus on Africa Foundation based in Nairobi, said that his organization’s map evolved organically over time rather than as a deliberate result of a decision on how to present data.

“At the center of the mission of Media Focus is giving marginalized people a voice. We gave community information volunteers mobile phones with video capabilities. They then sent [reports] through community information centers for uploading,” Mwita explained. “For us, the map was just a way of presenting that information.”

The content on the Media Focus map is hyper-local, driven by the immediate circumstances of the people in communities. But the audience, Mwita said, is largely made up of Kenyans living outside of their home towns who want to keep abreast of local events.

The impact of mobile phones on small communities in Africa has been profound. “Mobile phones did a lot of good for these people that television and radio never could,” Mwita said. He added that SMS messaging allowed for a real exchange of information during the crisis that followed Kenya’s elections, while traditional media outlets were unable to provide accurate and current reports.

While maps are quickly evolving as a participatory media form, panelists did sound a note of caution.

Jones agreed with an audience member's observation that maps are still a contested medium. Maps like Oakland Crimespotting for example, which "mashes up" police data with a geographical interface, "can serve to reinforce what we think we know about crime," and who commits it, she said.

Banville said that while mapping is a powerful tool, if used incorrectly it can misrepresent a story. The map "doesn't necessarily tell a story, it introduces a story." Otherwise, he said, there is a danger of a map simply being a data dump.

### **High-Order Bit**

How are "do-it-yourself" (DIY) media makers using low-cost equipment and open platforms like YouTube to create their own public media? Adrienne Russell of the University of Denver's Digital Media Studies program was one of the co-organizers of 24/7: A DIY Video Summit, which took place at the University of Southern California in February.

The 24/7 event "conceptually mapped...the fundamental transformations that are clearly occurring now about how we create, share and view video," she explained. DIY forms of video—defined as "bottom-up, user-generated video created and distributed outside of commercial media"—are interacting in new ways with existing cultural industry structures. The conference organizers worked with various communities that are creating DIY video to curate the program, bringing together disparate influences and goals. Russell noted that collaboration is central to these emerging forms of video, which relate to a long tradition of people "taking technology into their own hands to solve their own needs."

DIY video technologies work as public media because they are inclusive, allowing people to "communicate in ways that they see fit." The very act of creating media also engages people more deeply with communities and the larger society, she said. The practice allows citizens to become "cultural partners" and provides a wider range of sources and views to traditional journalism projects.

### **Visualizing Public Media Futures**

The roles of traditional public broadcasters and journalists are changing rapidly as technology allows many more people and organizations to create their own content. The day's second roundtable discussion suggested how mapping and visualization tools might help us to grasp the dramatic shifts in the media landscape.

Calvin Sims, Program Officer at the Ford Foundation talked a bit about his experience at the New York Times, labeling himself "old school." He began the discussion by asking how the ethics and standards of traditional journalism could be applied in the open media environment: "Who will curate this new space?"

Dennis Haarsager, Interim CEO at NPR, said that as more people create content, the goals and missions of traditional media outlets are changing. He demonstrated this in a visualization of content flow that he created for his blog, Technology 360.

“We’re trying to envision a world in which everyone can be a producer, but thinking about how to visualize this new world can be a challenge.” Haarsager said his organization is looking at their work in layers, the top being the goal of “enhancing human understanding.” The next two layers that are considered, then, are “what we do and where we do it,” Haarsager said.

“I don’t know that there’s any one of us, even a national network, that’s going to be able to set an agenda for public media. We’ve now given voice to anyone that has an internet connection,” said Haarsager.

The current challenge is finding the diverse voices that are out there and making sure they’re heard. “You can nominally distribute something by throwing it on YouTube, but making sure someone finds it requires techniques that are beyond the capabilities of many individual content producers. So there is still a role of an aggregator.”

Anthony Hamelle, Vice President of RTGI/Linkfluence, said that the maps of blogs and media websites that his company has developed show that media sites themselves are becoming part of communities. The map of the “U.S. Political Blogosphere” shows the interconnections and relative influence of various media outlets, as well as the borders of political communities as revealed by constellations of links between like-minded outlets.

Because of such interconnectedness and dispersion, he said, “it will be much harder for any single actor to set the agenda, because they would have to be present in every community.” Instead, “media actors will have to work with local outposts in terms of providing information and setting agendas,” Hamelle said.

Wendy Levy, Director of Media Arts and Education at the Bay Area Video Coalition noted the explosion of interest in public media mapping projects. BAVC last year had one mapping project being developed at their Producers Institute for New Media Technologies. This year, six of the nine projects are devoted to developing maps, she said. Documentary filmmakers are becoming multimedia-platform producers.

Levy, too, suggested that agenda-setting would by necessity be fragmented and multivocal in the new environment. BAVC is working on creating “tools and pathways where voices continue to be democratized, and no one entity is saying ‘this is what’s next, and this is what’s important.’ ”

Discussants also considered questions of citizen journalism and ethical standards for the exploding array of user-driven public media projects.

Levy suggested that encouraging higher-quality citizen media starts early with education and a sharing of best practices rather than legislation. “We need to let a certain natural evolution emerge in that space,” she said.

Hamelle noted that community pressure is very strong. “If you want to exist within a community, you have to abide by the code of that community. It’s a very effective way to correct what a new media actor is going to do or say,” he said.

Sims also raised the point that media conglomerates might still try to acquire many of these entrepreneurial startups. But Hamelle suggested that they will never have enough money to buy them all. “Given the dispersion, that it’s very decentralized, it will be impossible to get all of them.”

Haarsager added there is a space for both commercial and non-commercial ventures. “It all comes down to being found. We create information faster than we can assimilate it. We have to have increasingly sophisticated ways of finding that information and sharing it among ourselves,” he said. “The role of public media is to find a way for [high-quality media] to rise to the top.”

### **High-Order Bit**

Jake Shapiro and Persephone Miel of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society presented highlights from ongoing events and research related to participatory public media and journalism.

The Executive Director of the Public Radio Exchange, Shapiro also helped to organize the 2006 and 2007 Beyond Broadcast conferences. He spoke about the evolution of experiments and conversations since the first event.

“The thesis that we put forth was that there’s terrific potential at the intersection of public and participatory media,” said Shapiro, and now “public broadcasting has a chance to make media with the public, and not just in their name.” He noted progress in bringing together the public broadcasting and open media communities, but wonders what it all adds up to. While many outsiders can see the “tremendous assets” that public broadcasting has, there are multiple questions about how to measure success in the online environment. He suggested that there is still an untapped potential for collaboration between pubcasters and commercial or open source projects. In addition to the Ford Foundation, a number of public broadcasting funders are now casting a broad glance across the field, such as the MacArthur-funded project that Miel heads up, Media Re:public.

Miel’s presentation, which offered several preliminary conclusions she’s come to during the course of her research, are available on Slide Share, an open platform for sharing and creating community around presentations.

### **Mapping the Money**

Henry Jenkins, Director of the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT, joined the conference via Skype from Boston. He kicked off the final roundtable discussion with some reflections on the value of participation in the new media economy.

Jenkins made clear that a distinction should be drawn between “interactivity,” which he sees as a technological property, and “participation,” which he considers to be a social and cultural response. He also observed that much of the viral content online right now has emerged from partnerships of new media makers and traditional non-profit organizations. “There is a new opportunity for alliances,” he said. But he cautioned that non-profits and public broadcasters also need to be aware of ethical issues such as the debate about free labor—“not just in terms of uncompensated labor but the sense of consumer-driven content being exploited.”

Additionally, public media makers need to consider the “participation gap.” He notes that participation requires time and specific competencies that are not available to everyone. He also cautioned that diverse groups of people must feel empowered to participate.

“As exciting as it might seem to funnel content and have a DIY ethos, we still have a ways to go before we achieve the goals of diversity,” he said.

As participatory media and user-generated content continue to grow, public media makers need to move rapidly to find new business models. Discussants at Beyond Broadcast’s afternoon session “Mapping the Money” offered various perspectives on this unsettled question.

Diane Mermigas, Editor-at-Large of *Media Post*, moderated the conversation. She suggested that public broadcasting and commercial media outlets are all faced with the same issues and that public media makers must begin to take action. This might mean making moves such as putting content up on a major online clearinghouse site, as PBS has just done with some of its content on Hulu.com—feeds that are bookended by 30-second commercials. It is also imperative, she noted, to build rapport with users, allowing sponsors to connect with a target audience. Mermigas expands on a number of emerging business models for public media in a piece she wrote in conjunction with the conference.

Keith Hopper, Product Manager at Public Interactive, advised media makers to focus on getting more online users and building user interaction—such as product downloads, references in blogs and social networks, and participation in online discussions. “User interaction is the new currency,” he said, noting that Google and Yahoo give away most of their content for free in order to build users. “This buys you significant leverage with partners and underwriters,” he said, adding that currently, “Most public media doesn’t have enough user interaction to monetize.”

Craig Reigel, Vice President at the Nonprofit Finance Fund, suggested that regardless of user participation, “there are only four ways media companies make money: They participate in commerce, they advertise, they have specific support from people who have a vested interest in what they’re saying, and they take investors’ dollars.”

“In the future there may be a way to monetize viewers,” Reigel said. “But right now, public media needs to figure out how to piggyback on those four models.”

Vince Stehle, Program Officer for the Nonprofit Sector Initiative at the Surdna Foundation, points out that while it is a time of great change for public media, “it’s a total freak out for commercial media.” But commercial entities have adapted more quickly and dramatically, he said, pointing to Radiohead’s experiment with a pay-what-you-want pricing structure for its latest album. In the for-profit world, “it’s a revolution,” he said. “But in the public media, that is a business model.” Public broadcasters have been offering viewers and listeners the chance to define their own contributions for years.

But in other ways, public media outlets need to rethink some business models. “The subscription model for public radio and TV audiences is pretty rigid. Where’s the iTunes, 99 cent experience for public media?” He suggested that users who are reluctant to pay large donations annually might be willing to pay in smaller increments for content that interests them.

Ernest J. Wilson, Walter Annenberg Chair in Communication and dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, changed the tone of the panel a bit to increase the sense of urgency in the discussion about the future of public media.

“As we think about business models, I want to reintroduce the notion of why we care about this—representation, openness, freedom, democracy,” he said. “If you don’t get this right pretty soon, the quality of democracy will decline and stagnate...and it will be our fault.”

He urged public media makers to innovate at a rapid pace. “We are way behind the curve in public service media in adjusting to what is taking place on new digital platforms. It is frustrating and ridiculous,” Wilson said. He urged media makers to step out of the four silos of media he sees right now – print, digital media, public broadcasting, and commercial media—in order to come up with new inventive business models.

Wilson then called for public media leaders to set an agenda and follow through: “I can assure you NAB has an agenda and MPAA has an agenda, and if you don’t have an agenda, you’ll probably lose.”

### **Keynote**

Larry Irving, President of the Irving Information Group, also urged participants to work together on forming an agenda during Beyond Broadcast’s closing keynote address.

“One of the things I want to say right up front is that it is not enough to have an agenda. You have to have an agenda that you can articulate. You have to have people that can advocate it, and you have to break it down so that your mother and your grandmother can understand it,” Irving said. “The average staffer, the average member of Congress, the average person in the Commerce Department—even if they care deeply about what you are doing—doesn’t have anywhere near the depth of knowledge of what this industry is doing, what this community is doing as you do.... So, as I’m speaking, be thinking about

how you take what you know and what you do and explain it to folks who may support you, but aren't aware of how they can best support you.”

Irving made a case for public broadcasters to avoid commercial alliances and appeal to a broader demographic.

“When I read about [PBS adding content to] Hulu.com, I read it with dread,” he said. “Generally people have an agenda when they give you money. It is a very slippery slope,” he said. “I think there has got to be a commercial space and a noncommercial space. If there isn't a space that's not about selling widgets, or pounding an idea of a corporate interest, or selling children sugared candies, or trying to promote a political agenda that is paid for as opposed to a discursive political agenda, I think we lose something as a nation. ”

Pointing out that ad dollars are lower on commercial programming aimed at black and Hispanic viewers, Irving said, “The reality is that some of our nation is valued more than others.”

The country's demographics are shifting. “Public broadcasting needs to think about what's happening in this nation,” he said, pointing out that while the average age of a PBS viewer is 46, the median age of Hispanic males in this country is 24. “This nation is undergoing a profound demographic change that public broadcasting does not reflect in any manner.... We are going to grow by 130 million people between 1995 and 2050, and 90 percent of that growth will be people of color.”

This change is reflected in Congress as well, and questions will be asked about relevance. “You're going to see a lot more chairmen of committees who look like me,” Irving said. “When public broadcasting comes up for reauthorization next year ... they're going to say, why does this matter to me? What are you doing to be part of the community?”

It's no longer enough to talk about new media, notes Irving. New media has become media. He cited the example of the Slingbox, a mobile device he uses to watch DirectTV while he's on the road. “Appointment television is dead,” said Irving. “You carry it with you. You go where you want to go. You watch it when you want to watch it. We've got to start thinking about technology as it is.”

The change of administration will offer a chance to reconsider how public media is defined and regulated. “How do we take all of the great public institutions in this country, all the great people who have a public mindedness about them, and bring them into a dialogue together?” Irving asked. He noted that while mapping technologies are helpful in understanding the media terrain, more is needed.

“About 40 years ago, in March, Martin Luther King gave a speech in Washington, D.C. He said ‘There can be no gainsaying of the fact that a great revolution is taking place in the world today. It is a technological revolution, with the impact of automation and cybernation. We've made distance irrelevant, and put time in chains. Through our

scientific and technological genius, we've made this world a neighborhood, and yet we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood.'

"The mapping technologies that you guys and gals are using are defining the neighborhood," Irving concluded. "What we need to do over the next six to 18 months is to use this technology, use what we are learning to make this country a little bit more of a brotherhood."