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What is This?

The last PEG or community media 2.0? Negotiating place and placelessness at PhillyCAM

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Abstract
This article investigates the changes, challenges and opportunities present in American community media through a case study of PhillyCAM, a community television/media center in Philadelphia, PA. From this ethnographic study, it is suggested that community media navigate the tensions between television and digital media/user-generated content through reliance on place and liveness. In shifting from 'community television' to 'community media' these organizations are able to situate themselves as dynamic components in a local and participatory media ecosystem, develop new programs and strategic partnerships, and differentiate themselves from other organizations, while remaining consistent with their original mandates.

Community television is a forgotten facet in America's media ecosystem. Once lauded for its potential to democratize the mediascape, many have all but brushed it aside in favor of the potential democratic facilitation of user-generated content (UGC). During the 1984 Congressional debates over cable legislation, for instance, it was exclaimed, 'Public access channels are often the video equivalent of the speaker's soapbox or the electronic parallel to the printed leaflet' (United States, 1984a: 4667). Today, such praise is largely absent. Instead, many have preferred to focus on the perceived empowering potentials of UGC, and what Bruns calls 'produsage' or 'the engagement of participants in a hybrid user-producer role' (2008: 84). Some even suggest the internet is a

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replacement for community television (see ACT, 2010: 17; Linder and Kenton, 2010: 16). Such a perspective, however, fails to account for community television organizations, which have embodied user-generated media production since the mid 1960s (Engelman, 1990). This is not to say that community television is the *sine qua none* of democratized media, only that it should not be forgotten in an era of what Turner (2010) calls 'digital utopianism'. Despite this historical amnesia, community television stations, 'public access stations', or, as they now prefer to be known, *community media centers*, continue to fulfill their mandates of giving voice to the voiceless, empower community residents through media production, 'demystify' the media production process and foster digital literacy skills (Ali, 2012; Higgins, 1999; Howley, 2005; King and Mele, 1999). Such activities are present at over 3000 American community media organizations where over 1.2 million volunteers and 250,000 community organizations produce upwards of 20,000 hours of weekly original programming (Goldfarb, 2008: 1).

Over the past decade, these organizations have seen their role as television production centers morph into larger mandates for the training of digital and media literacy, computer education, radio production and a host of other non-television related services (Fuentes-Bautista, 2009). The aforementioned semantic shift from 'community television' and 'public access' to 'community media center' speaks volumes in this regard. Such a shift however also suggests that these organizations are struggling to remain relevant in an era of the 'produser', YouTube and the decreased salience of linear television (Bruns, 2008; Waldman, 2011). How do these organizations maintain relevance and resonance in an age when anyone with a broadband connection and a smartphone can produce media (see Ali, 2012)?

Community media centers, however, continue to add to their ranks despite threats of de-funding, regulatory dismissal and obsolescence. The newest entrant is PhillyCAM: Philadelphia Community Access Media. Launched in October 2009, PhillyCAM is a unique site from which to interrogate community media in the United States. What makes PhillyCAM distinct is not only its infancy, but also its contentious past and liminal future. Indeed, it took two court cases, four mayors, 80 community organizations and 27 years to realize PhillyCAM. Moreover, at the time of this research, PhillyCAM operated out of a temporary location, without a studio and without the capacity to cablecast live. While it moved into a permanent space in 2011, this transitional moment made this a unique opportunity to investigate what place and television mean for a community media organization.[1]

Using PhillyCAM as a case study, this article interrogates the tensions between television and digital media for a community media organization in the US. It seeks to better understand the roles of linear television and digital media for a community media organization, and, from a larger perspective, interrogates the relevance of community media in an era of 'placeless' UGC.

The shape of PEG

There has been resurgence in recent years of research interrogating community media in various national settings (Howley, 2005; Rennie, 2006; Rodriguez, 2001). Despite such global interest however, we have not seen a parallel resurgence in critical analysis of

American community *television*. American community television is officially designated public, educational and governmental ('PEG') access television (United States, 1996). These are cable channels 'set aside for use by the general public, by local schools, colleges and universities by elements of local government' (Goldfarb, 2008: 1). While each section operates under its own requirements, the focus of this research is on *public* access – the 'P' in 'PEG' – which Linder defines as:

> Consist[ing] of people not affiliated with the cable operator, using their own equipment or equipment provided to them by the cable operator or local government at no or minimal cost, to produce non-commercial television shows that are cablecast over a channel that is provided, at no cost, solely for public access television. (1999: xxvi)

While suffering from numerous regulatory false starts, PEG was officially sanctioned by the 1984 Cable Act, which permitted municipalities to request that cable operators provide and fund channels for public, educational and governmental access in return for a cable franchise (United States, 1984b). Much to the chagrin of PEG advocates, these channels are not mandatory but rather must *requested* by municipalities during franchise negotiations. In addition to PEG channels, municipalities may levy up to 5% of the cable operator's gross revenue as a 'franchise fee' for possessing a virtual monopoly on cable distribution (Linder, 1999; United States, 1996: §621). Often, these fees are used to fund PEG access centers in the form of rent, equipment and salaries. Public access television rests on a First Amendment commitment to free expression, and stations operate on an uncensored, first-come, first-served basis (Aufderheide, 2000). Often, anyone who has completed a training program can produce and air a program so long as it falls under the First Amendment (Linder, 1999: 45). Despite its reputation for airing contentious programs, controversial programming represents less than 1% of total programming (Linder, 1999: 45).

Scholars have debated the value of community television for participants, viewers and a democratic public sphere. Normative theory sees the value of community television in its ability to 'empower' individuals and communities by demystifying the media production process; fostering media and digital literacy; contributing to the marketplace of ideas; offering television training; and engendering the more 'nebulous' qualities of 'personal enrichment, social awareness, and social activism' (Higgins, 1999: 625; Howley, 2005). Public access has also been seen as a vehicle to disrupt the hegemonic flow of mainstream media, and 'eradicate many of the institutional and technological barriers that prevent other non-commercial information providers from reaching the public' (King and Mele, 1999: 606; see also Howley, 2005). At its loftiest, public access is said to 'act as an electronic public space' or electronic public sphere (Aufderheide, 2000: 140). Howley aligns these qualities with those of deliberative democracy, whereby community media are 'strategic initiatives to counteract a climate of political apathy and social alienation that confounds a sense of belonging in local communities' (2005: 35).

Scholars have also begun to critically interrogate these taken-for-granted qualities. King and Mele (1999) argue that proponents of public access have focused 'too narrowly on the content of such programs and discount critical possibilities inherent in the *production* of public access television' (King and Mele, 1999: 607). Instead, they contend that

experiences such as 'mastering technology', 'getting a message across', 'tolerance of diversity of views' and 'creating community through shared activity' need to be registered alongside content and marginalized voices in the public sphere as salient outcomes (see also Aufderheide, 2000: 127; Higgins, 1999). Similarly, Ali (2012) argues that there is a disconnect between community television policy and practice that obfuscates the importance of place, bodies and practice.

Many of these older studies, however, are unable to account for the recent challenges of UGC and regulatory dismissal. This is where a paucity of *recent* academic assessments is palpable, and where it becomes helpful to draw on various institutional reports (e.g. Breitbart et al. 2011; Fuentes-Bautista, 2009; Goldfarb, 2008; Waldman, 2011). These reports note several political-economic challenges to community television in the digital age. In particular, concern has mounted over the growing trend of state-wide franchising, which removes cable authority from the municipality and grants it to the state (Fuentes-Bautista, 2009; Goldfarb, 2008). In these situations the franchise fees are allocated to the state, and often do not find their way back to PEG organizations, thus cutting off the primary source of funding (Goldfarb, 2008; Fuentes-Bautista, 2009). Led by telecommunications companies (particularly AT&T and Verizon) seeking easier access to the lucrative video distribution market, over 20 states have enacted some form of state-wide franchising, with 10 states zeroing out PEG funding altogether according to American Community Television (ACT, n.d.; Goldfarb, 2008)

A second concern is the challenge posed by digital media and UGC to the relevance of community television (ACT, 2010; Breitbart et al., 2011; Fuentes-Bautista, 2009; Linder and Kenton, 2010). According to Rennie, community media is now forced to justify itself in an age 'when media participation is seen to occur at no cost elsewhere' (2007: 27). Similarly, New America argued, 'YouTube is in some sense an access center of the 21st century and its existence means every center has a new competitor. This is transformational for PEGs as they no longer can play such a unique role' (Breitbart et al., 2011: 4). The FCC's recent *Information Needs of Communities* report also observed:

> At their best, PEG channels … help a community develop its ability to communicate…. At their worst … PEG channels provide an unnecessary platform for self-expression, as it is now available in abundance on the Internet, and thus take up cable capacity and funding that could be used for more valuable or worthwhile programming. (Waldman, 2011: 172)

These statements suggest a tension between linear television and digital media within PEG discourse, and intimate that PEG may no longer be seen as 'the electronic printed leaflet' it was originally proposed to be.

In response to these challenges, advocates have pointed to the physical presence of the community media center as a key marker of differentiation between community media and what Rennie calls 'amateur media' (2007: 31; see also Ali, 2012). PEG advocates have argued that the internet is essentially 'everywhere' and 'nowhere', suggesting that while the internet has permitted an expanded global dialogue, it is inherently 'not local' (Linder and Kenton, 2010: 18). In an earlier article, I argued that, in addition to giving 'voice to the voiceless', community television gives 'place to the placeless' through community media centers (Ali, 2012: 1129). Similarly, New America argued

that it is the community media center's ability to 'localize communications infrastructure … that distinguishes it, by and large, from the individuals and institutions that began their participation in the media with broadband access' (Breitbart et al., 2011: 27). These examples point to the importance of community media's 'sense of place', where, by offering a physical location, PEG centers are inherently different from user-based content platforms and file transfer protocols (see Howley, 2010: 9; Rennie, 2007). Demurring, however, Fuentes-Bautista argues that we misinterpret the problem by juxtaposing community media and UGC:

> The key question is not whether YouTube, videoblogs and social networking replace broadcasting or cable television as media technology, but how citizens and localities can use the complete set of electronic media tools and distribution systems to expand and support activities for community building and citizen use of new technologies. (2009: 49)

From this, the question becomes how are community media embracing these digital mechanisms, while remaining true to their mandates of cablecasting?

Live television and democracy

The tensions between the legacy goals and platforms of PEG, and the new realities of digitalization also manifest at a conceptual level, where some question the role of place and linear television in an era of placelessness and digital media (see Calabrese, 2001; Castells, 1996; Lotz, 2007). More specifically, scholars have been concerned with the democratic potential of UGC and the implications of 'live television' (Dayan, 2009; Scannell, forthcoming; Turner, 2010). Television is based on scheduling, which 'organizes daily moments of collective attention, of simultaneous viewing,' (Dayan, 2009: 22). In contrast, UGC and even 24-hour cable news are based on a 'radical polyrhythmy', which operates along multiple temporalities and which disrupts the traditional flow of television (Dayan, 2009: 22). Dayan (2009), however, argues that television, like other 'old media' will find a way to adapt in an era of abundant media choice. One such way television continues to signal its uniqueness is through liveness (Scannell, forthcoming). Scannell emphasizes the live aspect of television, arguing that 'analog television' is based on predetermined schedules and, 'as such each newscast has a before and after – the programs that precede and succeed it – as well as being embedded in the time-of-day, the days of the week, the months and seasons of the year' (forthcoming: n.p.). Traditional broadcasting 'has a temporal care-structure that routinely connects the life and times of individuals all over the world to the life and times of the world in which they live' (Scannell, forthcoming: n.p). In an era of 'digital television' however, such scheduling has been usurped by what he calls the 'perpetual now'. The 24-hour newscast loses its ability for reflection, analysis and connection to the daily rhythm of life (Scannell, forthcoming: n.p.). This lack of scheduling and reflection reduces digital television to cacophony of programming on demand (Scannell, forthcoming: n.p.).

This inherent tension between the analog and digital in terms of scheduling is paralleled in the community/amateur media dichotomy previously discussed. Here programmers struggle with constantly changing schedules based on what is being produced and

submitted. The ability to broadcast a program live disrupts such polyrhythm as it necessitates pre-planning and scheduling; a designated time to cablecast from a designated place. Without this live aspect, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate the content or experiences of community television from those of YouTube, Flickr or CNN's iReport.

The concept of liveness, as used in this article, also transcends television scheduling, to encompass face-to-face interactions, such as those found in community media centers. As scholars of deliberative democracy have taught us, these interactions are a necessary component of a democratic public sphere (Dewey, 1927; Habermas, 1984, 1989). Dewey (1927), for instance, based his idea of the 'Great Community' on such interpersonal interactions. While it is true that electronic media have facilitated new modes of communication unimagined in Dewey's time, conversation and participation remain seminal components of the public sphere (Habermas, 1984, 1989). Howley has thus rightly positioned community media as a facilitator of deliberative democracy through participatory and communicatory media practices (2005: 38).

We can thus situate community media within an encompassing notion of place and 'liveness' to demonstrate that many of these tensions and characteristics are engendered within the quotidian practices of community media in their efforts to remain relevant as places of production, education, and community (see Ali, 2012). In this spirit, several research questions also arise. First, as a new entrant, how does PhillyCAM negotiate the tensions between television and digital media? Second, what is the role of physical location for PhillyCAM? Third, does PhillyCAM represent a new direction for community media or a further iteration of the community television paradigm? Fourth, what generalities about the future of community media can we draw from PhillyCAM's unique experience?

Method

To address these questions, a case study was conducted of PhillyCAM: Philadelphia Community Access Media. Two primary methods were employed: in-depth interviews and participant observation. Interviews were conducted with three of four staff members: Executive Director Gretjen Clausing; Programming Director Debbie Rudman; and Membership and Outreach Director Antoine Haywood.[2] Interviews lasted between one and two hours, with follow-up questions asked over email, phone and a subsequent field visit. The interviews followed an open-ended, 'flexible approach' thus 'allowing the discussion to flow in a way that seem[ed] natural' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 117). This relatively 'non-directive' approach allowed me to explore potentially useful-but-unanticipated avenues of insight and gain a breadth of knowledge not possible with a 'closed' interview protocol (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 110, 117).

Complementing the interviews, participant observation was conducted at three events: a volunteer orientation session; a networking event called 'speed-crewing'; and the Annual General Meeting. These lasted approximately two to three hours and facilitated the meeting of members involved in production work. Moreover, they permitted an opportunity to understand how PhillyCAM represents itself to its wider public. In my role as participant observer, I engaged in informal talk with participants, but always

made sure to introduce myself as a researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 82). This was particularly important at the 'speed-crewing' event, where, like its namesake, 'speed-dating', one is encouraged to interact with as many people as possible. This overt research allowed me not only to interact with participants in an honest and frank manner but also to discuss my research with participants.

From these ethnographic methods, the argument is made that PhillyCAM negotiates the tensions between television and digital media through an articulation of *place* and *liveness*. This argument engenders Dayan's observation that older media:

> learn to coexist with new media by redefining their role, by starting unexpected dialogues, and by practicing a division of labor. Thus, today's situation is perhaps less the story of a dethroned television faced with a new dominant medium than that of a gradual accommodation, a reluctant partnership, a multitiered public sphere. (2009: 20)

I suggest that two of these 'unexpected dialogues' are live television and the community media center itself. Two themes illustrate this argument: *place* – PhillyCAM as a community center; and *liveness* – PhillyCAM as a vehicle for physical gatherings, engendering the face-to-face 'communicative action' beloved by public sphere theorists (Habermas, 1984, 1989).

History of PhillyCAM[3]

The history of PhillyCAM begins on 28 December 1983, when the City of Philadelphia signed the first cable franchise agreement (PCAC [Philadelphia Community Access Corporation], n.d.). This 15-year agreement mandated cable franchisees to provide five channels (at that time all analog), and an initial capital grant of $2.9m (Clausing, personal communication, 14 September 2012). Additional funds would come from the franchise fee paid to the city by the cable providers (see Benson, 1999: B1). These grants would go towards a central facility and four satellite facilities. Additionally, the agreement directed the formation of a non-profit corporation to run the facilities. The 'Philadelphia Public Access Corporation', however, was never established (Slobodzian, 2002). Despite varied attempts, the issue would be sidelined for a decade. The Philadelphia Community Access Coalition (PCAC) was formed in 1997 to represent the dozens of grassroots organizations advocating for public access (PCAC, n.d.). In 1998, the franchise was renegotiated with the original public access requirements maintained from the 1983 agreement. Advocates saw this is a minor victory, as public access was not totally eliminated (Clausing, personal communication, 14 September 2012). Throughout the year, PCAC held numerous protests outside of City Hall and was engaged in meetings and hearings with City Council and the Mayor (PCAC, n.d.). In spite of these efforts, Philadelphia remained the largest city and media market in America without public access (Gelbart, 2007: B1).

Following a suit in a U.S. District Court by PCAC and a subsequent appeal, negotiations resumed in July 2003. The city required assurances that public access would not put a financial burden on Philadelphia, and that the channel would not be a bastion for hate groups and pornographers taking advantage of First Amendment protection (Parker, 2003: D1). On 27 September 2007, 24 years after the initial agreement was signed, the

city and Comcast came to an agreement to bring public access to Philadelphia. Under the amended franchise agreement, a Public Access Corporation was formed to manage the channels, and cable franchises would provide an initial grant of $1.8m for infrastructure development, and a subsequent $900,000 grant for renovations and equipment for one access center (rather than the five previously envisioned). Cable franchises also agreed to pay $500,000 per year for operating costs and provide one analog 'must carry' channel and up to four digital channels. While not part of the official agreement, the city also proposed the use of a decommissioned library in the north end as PhillyCAM's home (Clausing, personal communication, 14 September 2012).

PhillyCAM officially launched on 23 October 2009. Still without a home, however, the channel cablecasted prerecorded programming using a remote server at City Hall. Live programming was impossible at this juncture. Additionally, upon further inspection the library was deemed unsuitable due to extensive renovation requirements (Clausing, personal communication, 14 September 2012). After an exhaustive search, PhillyCAM settled on a temporary location in the warehouse annex of a local performing arts center. The organization moved into this location on 1 June 2010. Unfortunately, it remained unable to cablecast live, or able to hold more than a handful of production classes. A permanent home was chosen in 2010, and PhillyCAM relocated to this retrofitted photography studio in the summer of 2011. This new space, occupying 6000 square feet on two stories of a downtown building, positions the organization within walking distance of broadcasters CBS and Fox, and PBS-affiliate WHYY.[4] In addition to two live studios, the station features a green room, a media lab, an audio suite, an editing suite, and other spaces for educational classes and computer training. Complementing these will be non-technologically driven spaces for meetings, public convening, and a larger communal space. When it moved into this new space, PhillyCAM boasted over 218 members, with 16 certified producers, airing 39 locally produced series and 22 sponsored series.

Place: a community (media) center

The concept of 'place' is critical to the ongoing survival of PhillyCAM, and was a dominant theme of respondents and the scholarly literature, as we have seen. As its history attests, public access has struggled for a place within the Philadelphia media ecosystem – a place on the media dial and a place to call home. When launched, PhillyCAM was placeless, and remained so in the temporary location, unable to actualize many of the staff's aspirations until re-location. One seminal aspect of this new center is a semantic and physical transition from being a 'community television station' or 'public access station' to a 'community media center' – a necessary shift noted by many scholars and advocates (e.g. Breitbart et al., 2011; Fuentes-Bautista, 2009; Rennie, 2007).[5] Indeed, the organization hopes to become a 'community center' in the broadest sense, offering services beyond production training, and even beyond media. As Clausing noted:

> I just feel like we're trying to make it a space that our organizational members can have access to be able to have meetings, events, and other types of things, in addition to just coming in and shooting a TV show … it's trying to make it feel more like a community center. (personal communication, 16 February 2011).

Rudman added that one of their central functions is to bring members of the community together in a physical place:

> Just even bringing them together in the same room, because it just feels like sometimes the neighborhoods here are really separated. And that's the nice thing, I think about us being in Center City, when we're going to have our building. That it's not choosing one particular neighborhood, but an essential point where people can make it their own territory. (personal communication, 22 February 2011)

Location is critical in this endeavor, particularly being located in Center City (downtown) and having an inviting space for community residents to convene. For instance, to encourage pedestrians to come join, the street façade of the new building is lined windows, allowing passersby to watch live productions.

In addition to the notion of place as bringing people together for mediated and unmediated purposes, the new location allows for two other salient qualities: strategic partnerships and sustainability. In the first regard, respondents noted the importance of forming partnerships with other non-profit organizations in the city. This includes non-profit media organizations such as: Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), Temple University's Media Education Lab, and the Philadelphia Independent Film and Video Association (PIFVA). Importantly, it also extends to non-media enterprises, particularly those focused on social justice. These strategic partnerships manifest on several levels. For instance, the partnership could amount to nothing more than airing programming produced by an outside organization. Partnerships are also formed through media services, such as production training, as is the case with those from the literary magazine *Apriary*, or by producing and airing public service announcements (PSAs). The use of place has already allowed PhillyCAM to form important partnerships with incumbent non-profit media organizations, such as the Scribe Video Center and PIFVA. Through this collaboration, PhillyCAM hosted a 'speed-crewing' event, where community members could meet, trade business cards, and even join a production crew. It brought independent and non-commercial media practitioners together in a physical space for the purpose of networking. PhillyCAM hosted the event in its former warehouse location and hopes that with the new location it will be able to do the same, particularly by converting the largest studio in to a 'public convening space' (Clausing, personal communication, 16 February 2011).

These partnerships help PhillyCAM to form a network of like-minded, non-profit organizations to bolster visibility and to petition larger foundations (e.g. the William Penn Foundation) for funding. PhillyCAM recognizes the need to improve its visibility, and sees partnerships as a way to do this. Haywood, for instance, noted the importance of offering candidate forums during a municipal election in conjunction with the League of Women Voters (personal communication, 23 February 2011). These partnerships allow the organization to showcase its talents and form relationships with outside organizations.

In addition to the publicity derived from strategic partnerships, PhillyCAM is able to join a powerful network of non-profit organizations in Philadelphia. Clausing hopes to translate such relations into funding potential:

> It's all tied to these partnerships. Because I don't think us going to a foundation alone [for funding] is enough. I think that we need to show that there's a particular relationship that we

have with their grantees already, and then going to them for these larger projects and so starting to do that. (personal communication, 16 February 2011)

While finding this challenging, PhillyCAM has already begun to realize this potential, particularly in being invited to apply for a J-Lab grant to promote citizen journalism. Partnering with YESPhilly (an organization assisting young people achieve their general educational development [GED] tests) and Voice of Philadelphia (a non-profit news collaborative), PhillyCAM received funding for 'Pushouts', a citizen journalism project for high school youth. These relationships are thought to be central to the ongoing survival of PhillyCAM and are expected to proliferate in the new center.

These partnership networks also speak to the notion of sustainability, in the form of both financial and workplace sustainability (see Shuman, 1998).[6] In terms of financial sustainability, we have already seen how organizations can come together to petition larger institutions for funding. Collaborations between PEG organizations and community-based organizations have also been recognized as a best practice by a report from the Benton Foundation wherein it says: 'Often the most successful examples of community media emerge out of ongoing alliances and collaborations among local community media groups' (Benton, 2007: 14).

In concert with these strategic partnerships, Haywood envisions a PhillyCAM capable of supporting itself through diversified funding streams independent of cable franchise fees. It is not only strategic partnerships that come into play here, but, as Haywood noted, cultivating a 'culture of giving' among individual donors (personal communication, 23 February 2011). Members of PhillyCAM's staff eschew the complacency that comes with being 'on the drip' – that is to say, relying exclusively on one source of funding (Clausing, personal communication, 16 February 2011). Having diverse funding streams is crucial, particularly given the aforementioned trend of state-wide franchising (see Goldfarb, 2008). Clausing hopes that 'if we open a great center and show that people are using it' they might be able to see additional capital (personal communication, 16 February 2011). This is congruent with the notion of community media and community development, wherein Rennie argues:

> Within these programs the local is valorized as the site from which legitimate change must occur. In order to separate itself from the modernist past, these projects maintain that direct connection with the community concerned is necessary. Power is redistributed to the local level. (Rennie, 2006: 154; see also Shuman, 1998)

The new space then becomes vital not only as a physical place for meetings but as a symbolic place to showcase organizational growth.

Sustainability, of course, is 'not just a dollars thing' and speaks to the vision of PhillyCAM as a hub for community media infrastructure and, closer to home, referring to workplace practices (Haywood, personal communication, 23 February 2011). Put another way, this means making sure that the momentum is not lost (Clausing, personal communication, 16 February 2011). The new space brings with it new opportunities and challenges that may mitigate this possible burnout. As the next section demonstrates, one way PhillyCAM continues to carve out a space for itself in an over-saturated media

landscape, as well as drawing in new members, partners and fundraisers, and continuing to build momentum is by expanding its mandate beyond production and into the realms of live television, digital literacy and computer training.

Liveness: 'What are we new?'

The mission statement of PhillyCAM is to be 'a community media center that brings together the people of Philadelphia to make and share media that promotes creative expression, democratic values and civic participation' (Clausing, personal communication 14 September 2012). This was difficult to achieve given its former location and limited resources. Indeed, the organization was restricted to offering only two production classes and lacked the ability to cablecast live. According to respondents, the new location changes this outlook dramatically. This is illustrated by three interrelated attributes: live television, training, and differentiation from incumbent non-profit media organizations.

First and foremost is the ability to cablecast live – a 'powerful' quality, as described by respondents. This comes from the two new studios in the Center City location: a smaller studio suitable for one- or two-person live shows (e.g. call-in programs) and a larger, three-camera studio for full live productions (e.g. talk or variety shows). It is hoped that this studio will produce upwards of 50 hours a week of live television. As noted however, there is tension around the relevance of television in our digital age and this is not lost on respondents. Without television, for instance, this aspirant center would not exist. Its primary responsibility, according to its Operating Agreement with the city, is to operate as a television station. Yet, despite this tethering, public access centers are being repeatedly asked to assume the responsibility of operating as community media centers and to fill the gap in media and digital literacy training left by other institutions (Breitbart et al., 2011; Waldman, 2011). Clausing nevertheless worried about the new space, and its potential to reduce the reliance on and relevance of television production:

> And I have to confess to being sometimes, I go back and forth. I'm like 'Oh god, should we be building this center?' Is this what we should be doing? And then I feel like, 'Well, yeah, I think we should.' I think the fact that we'll be able to have two studios where people can do live television, I think is something that's incredibly powerful. And that will still remain powerful. And that's what we got the money to do. (personal communication, 16 February 2011)

Once again, the importance of *live* television is invoked. Live programs are not only thought to bring more timely information to viewers, but also provide a new option for potential volunteers who do not have the time or capacity to participate in long-term projects (Rudman, personal communication, 22 February 2011). Such ability certainly expands the relevance and resonance of the organization. Live programming also permits the possibility of remote cablecasting, allowing participants to go on location and cover live events. This is crucial, as many commercial media outlets have abandoned long-form coverage of local events (Waldman, 2011). While organizations such as New America (Breitbart et al., 2011) envision a multimedia mesh network for community media centers, suggesting that these organizations become foundational hubs in a community media infrastructure, Haywood argues that the importance of the live channel

should not be underestimated: 'we've got this valuable resource of a channel – a cable channel. And many people … don't really use it as much as they should be using it to market and promote themselves' (personal communication, 23 February 2011). The channel is what differentiates PhillyCAM from other non-profit and community-based media education organizations, and represents the foundation from which other endeavors can develop. Moreover, one should not be so quick to dismiss the role of television in an era of YouTube. While PhillyCAM fully intends to stream programming, Clausing notes the continued cultural resonance of being able to say 'I'm going to be on TV tonight' (personal communication, 16 February 2011).

Departing from this optimism, there is also an acknowledged need to go beyond television, and offer programs and services targeted at the informational, communicatory and participatory needs of the Philadelphia community. This need, moreover, is not specific to PhillyCAM, but rather exists for all PEG organizations (Breitbart et al., 2011). Michigan's Grand Rapids Community Media Center is generally considered the benchmark for a diversified and successful community media center, as it successfully incorporates television, radio, theater, digital technology and citizen journalism, with a constant eye towards the technological, informational and communicatory needs of the community (Breitbart et al., 2011: 22).

PhillyCAM's new center realizes much of this ambition through additional space and equipment for programs and classes not related to television production. This speaks to the centrality of liveness at a community media center. If it is true that community media can facilitate a local deliberative democracy, then face-to-face 'communicative action' through these learning opportunities is crucial (Howley, 2005: 38; see also Habermas, 1984). In addition to basic and advanced production classes, PhillyCAM hopes to offer classes for resumé construction, social media, basic computer skills, 3D animation, music and sound, apps for mobile devices, copyright, and media and digital literacy; in short classes that address the question, 'How can you improve your life through your digital literacy?' (Haywood, personal communication, 23 February 2011). According to Haywood, 'there's a really big opportunity for us to serve as an example of a new type of access center – a media access center. So that can put to rest some of these, the old, ideas, notions of access television, what we do, what we're here for' (personal communication, 23 February 2011).

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Resource management becomes essential here, as PhillyCAM, like all community media centers must accomplish these goals on a limited budget. Interestingly, despite this apparent tension, Rudman notes that YouTube may benefit community television rather than spell its obsolescence, as it sensitizes viewers to alternative forms of video production:

> They're not expecting that MTV fast-cut, super-slick, *Star Wars* level kind of effects…. With YouTube, they'll love to watch something that's really lo-fi or 'garagey'…. I'm hoping that people will become more and more open to accepting, accepting an aesthetic for community media. (personal communication, 22 February 2011)

This echoes Dayan's (2009) argument that old and new media will enter into unexpected dialogues, and aligns with Fuentes-Bautista's (2009) important proclamation of the compatibility of UGC and more formal community media practices. Nonetheless, it remains too early to evaluate whether a 'community media aesthetic' is or will be fostered by UGC.

While perhaps necessary, and certainly encouraged by outside organizations, gravitation away from television does pose challenges for PhillyCAM. Most notably, how it will differentiate itself from the incumbent non-profit media organizations that are providing similar programs. As Haywood asked, 'What are we new?' (personal communication, 23 February 2011). For instance, with their partnership with YESPhilly, PhillyCAM has entered into the realm of citizen journalism through its 'Pushouts' project. Yet, PBS-affiliate WHYY, has also launched its own citizen journalism website, NewsWorks, complete with participant training and significantly more resources. Clausing thus asks, 'with NewsWorks, where's our place to develop a whole kind of citizen-based journalism website?' (personal communication, 16 February 2011). There is an unacknowledged tension between public and community broadcasting (Howley, 2005: 36), but Clausing sees PhillyCAM's training as complementary to WHYY. For her, PhillyCAM's role is to foster alternative voices and train community members to perhaps contribute to NewsWorks. In her words, 'I'm hoping that that will be a way we can be mutually beneficial and not be seen as competitors' (personal communication, 16 February 2011). What is particularly interesting and generally unacknowledged in this tension between public *access* and public *broadcasting* is that both are struggling with relevance in the 21st-century American mediascape (Waldman, 2011). Indeed, just as community television has been working towards redefining itself as community media, recent years have seen public broadcasting reposition itself as *public media*, and even adopt many of the responsibilities traditionally held by public access (e.g. production training and citizen journalism) (Waldman, 2011).

There is also competition from other non-profit media education organizations. All non-profit media organizations, whether public- or community-based share the same basic concern: funding scarcity. Organizations compete not only for participants and members, but most importantly, for the membership dues to supplement funding. Here, funding by cable distributors may be advantageous for PhillyCAM, as it provides a (relatively) stable source of revenue. This sets PhillyCAM apart from the other non-profit media organizations that may depend entirely on fluctuating contributions by donors.

Haywood also sees resolving any potential competition between non-profit media organizations through strategic partnerships, or what he calls 'co-opetition':

> In Philly, there's a lot of independent media.... So, it's like, how do we distinguish ourselves from [independent, non-commercial] MIND-TV? How do we distinguish ourselves from the programs that are happening at the universities … for example? How do we distinguish ourselves from [W]HYY? But not in a competitive way, you know? In a 'co-opetition' way. Doing some cooperative competition. So that it helps improve the game for everybody. So it enriches the field for everybody. (personal communication, 23 February 2011)

While the aim is to avoid any sort of cannibalism in the non-profit media sector, PhillyCAM will have to strategically decide how to frame the new station and its potential given incumbent media organizations, the contractual centrality of television, and the growing communication needs of the community. Clausing pointed again to the importance of live television as a key differentiator: 'that's why I'm really focusing on the live channel, the live aspect, the streaming, stuff that we can do that no one else is doing' (personal communication, 16 February 2011). These various iterations of liveness may indeed prove to be the saving grace for PhillyCAM.

Conclusion

It is not insignificant that a respondent said that she sees PhillyCAM's new space as an opportunity to create 'a new American dream', one divorced from mainstream and commercial media (Rudman, personal communication, 22 February 2011). While the statement was meant as an exaggeration, it nonetheless nicely encapsulates the extent to which PhillyCAM's identity, enthusiasm, and many of the tensions between old and new media are negotiated and engendered within its new place. It also suggests that alternative media practices remain vital for a democratic media system – a local deliberative democracy – in an era dominated by commercial media and placeless digital content (Howley, 2005; Rodriguez, 2001). By framing itself as a hybrid media center, drawing from the practices of community television, and looking forward to the new practices of digital literacy, PhillyCAM attempts to carve out a niche for itself in Philadelphia's media ecosystem. It models a combination of traditional PEG station and community media center. This is not without its challenges, of course, most notably those of funding, competition and visibility (Ali, 2012).

These are also not problems unique to America. In her study of community television in 28 countries (from the UK to Benin), Cathy Edwards described two universal challenges: reliable funding and distribution (Timecsape, 2009). In Australia, for instance, a country with a relatively robust public and community television infrastructure, community stations are hampered by a lack of non-commercial funding, and regulatory neglect during the digital transition (Timescape, 2009; see also Rennie, 2006, 2007). Rennie (2006) also documented the struggle for visibility among Australian community broadcasters in a media system dominated by public and commercial sectors. Despite this, some, like Melbourne's SYN community radio, have found limited success by embracing diversified practices and distribution streams (Rennie, 2006, 2007; Timescape,

2009). PhillyCAM thus joins an emerging set of community broadcasters in the US and elsewhere in its incorporation of 'old' and 'new' media practices, and its constant drive to expand its networks and strategic partnerships.

With an emphasis on a 'sense of place', I have discussed the ways in which those at PhillyCAM articulate the role of television, digital media training and being a hub within the local media ecosystem of Philadelphia. I have argued that PhillyCAM articulates the negotiated position between old and new media, television and digital media, public access and community media, user-generated and community media, through the intersection of place and liveness. That is to say that some of the benefits of PhillyCAM's new location include its ability to act as a community center, produce and air live television, and embrace the opportunities of digital media. Television practices have had to adapt, and PhillyCAM sees the future for this medium in its ability to be 'live' in every sense of the word. Linear television and digital media are thus commensurate in this community media paradigm. This is best illustrated by the reference to a 'community media aesthetic' fostered in part, according to a respondent, by the expansion of YouTube and UGC. A focus on place also permits PhillyCAM to develop strategic partnerships and seek new funding opportunities and sustainable practices. It is apparent, then, that amateur media have not usurped the role of community media, but have rather forced them to adapt (Breitbart et al., 2011; Dayan, 2009). As Rennie reminds us, 'Community media is a multi-platform phenomenon that often finds innovative ways to reach its audience' (2006: 179).

This optimism, however, should not be taken as unproblematic since many, if not most, PEG organizations continue to struggle to reinvent themselves in light of UGC, the rise of alternative media education organizations, and the sudden interest of public broadcasting in the communicatory and informational needs of communities (Breitbart et. al., 2011; Fuentes-Bautista, 2009; Waldman, 2011). These are, in addition to the larger political-economic concerns of funding, state-wide franchising and a hostile regulatory climate. What makes this case study unique is that PhillyCAM had yet to take possession of its new location, making this is an opportune moment to interrogate the intersection between place and media within community media. It is furthermore unique because what has been expressed are visions or aspirations for what the new space would be.

PhillyCAM is not a traditional public access station; it has not had to reinvent itself in the wake of digital technology, but rather is working towards inventing itself for the first time. As such, it faces challenges and opportunities not experienced by incumbents. Through an emphasis on liveness and place predicated upon an incorporation of digital technology, PhillyCAM may serve as a model for emergent community media centers both in the US and in those countries with similar media systems as a corrective to the structural challenges in the community television paradigm. The concept of place occupies prime imaginary space in this discourse, as community media differentiate themselves from amateur media by offering participants a physical space to gather and share (see Ali, 2012). With its new center operational, PhillyCAM aspires to situate itself as a physical hub within the media ecosystem of Philadelphia, and hopes that, with more visibility, it will be able to better tell its story and the stories of others.

Funding

Notes

1. Research was conducted in February–March 2011, when PhillyCAM had not moved into its permanent location. This move was completed in October 2011.
2. The fourth member was not interviewed due to scheduling difficulties.
3. Some of the information in this section comes from a timeline provided by PhillyCAM ('A working timeline of public access in Philadelphia' – produced by PCAC), and from Gretjen Clausing.
4. According to Clausing, this proximity lends legitimacy to the organization (personal communication, 16 February 2011).
5. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the tensions within the discourses of 'community'. For more see Joseph (2008).
6. Shuman (1998: 31–50) argues for a re-focus on the local economy, stressing the need for community self-reliance and the importance of loyalty to a place.

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