Eviction: My Space through a Webcam Flicker

On March 1st, 2007, the Danish authorities brought in the police to evict the inhabitants of the infamous youth squat “Ungdomshuset” situated in the Nørrebro area of Copenhagen. If you followed the story you also know that the house was quickly demolished, leaving no more opportunities to fight over that particular physical space. But the fight was taken further anyway, not the least through self-produced media. Unsurprisingly, a lot of this kind of self-produced activist media, traditionally disseminated through community media is now distributed through online networks. A recent search I performed on the popular videosharing site YouTube for “Ungeren”, the local nickname of Ungdomshuset, revealed a whole 172 pages full of videos. These videos were clearly showing that activists from whatever camp happily publish their videos on YouTube: there seems to be as many pro- as there are anti-statements on Ungdomshuset, and the story keeps updating itself by new contributions every day.

Activist and subcultural groups in this case seem to have adopted a pragmatic approach to the new Web 2.0 culture – you go where the rest of the people go and where it is possible to get your message across. A lot of the Ungeren videos can also be said to not fall easily into any categorization of for or against – they simply bask in the sensationalism of the event itself: the police violence at the demonstrations, the activists violence at the demonstration, the quick demolition of the house, the destruction of cars, trash cans and shop windows, the crying teenagers, the ensuing movement of sustained demonstrations and street parties… All of which on late Thursday nights and sunny Saturday afternoons even reach outside my own window at the other side of town.

It was on one of those late Thursday nights that a friend in Gothenburg called me up through the Internet phone service Skype, asking how the state of things were. The eviction and demolition of Ungdomshuset were getting a lot of media attention up there too. But how was it really like? Could I not show him what was going on? So I turned on my webcam and directed it at the action. I don’t know what he and his girlfriend could make out of the remote actions and sounds going on, filmed as they were through the dark from the third floor, some 50 metres away with a poor webcam to boot. But this was the real thing for them, self-produced media from somebody they knew. This was something they could relate to, my space through a webcam flicker.

Maybe it is time to realise that the “alternative” prefix might loose its relevance altogether as radical forms of media production become part of everyday consumer services on the Internet. I state this with some air of nostalgia because this is what seems to be the condition of so much media production today. But no matter how hard we try to rejuvenate collective and DIY modes of production, the business world simply loves the new “net-communists”. Should this be the reason for even more nostalgia, a nostalgia 2.0? Can this dilemma of alternative media today be resolved? Is it even an important question to resolve it or should we rather look upon this dilemma itself as being a productive moment?

1 Suggested in Atton. (2002)
2 “7 trenden du inte får missa” (“7 unmissable trends”) Veckans Affärer 51/06/7. Published 07:00 2007-01-02, accessed same day. This magazine is Sweden’s "Business Weekly" and the article states 7 trends for 2007 of which number one is:
"1. The capitalists loves the new net-communists”, a text which is accompanied by a photo of the white-bearded Marx, comfortably seated with his hand inside his jacket, Napoleon style, with the caption “NET ROLE MODEL. Collective production is the blueprint for 2007”. The photography is attributed to Scanpix.
See also Barbrook, Richard. “THE HOLY FOOLS - a critique of the avant-garde in the age of the Net” (2003), and his new book “Imaginary Futures” (2007).
There were also other self-organized media producers covering the events surrounding the eviction of Ungdomshuset in Copenhagen. One of them was the local-TV station tv-tv, situated in the very same area and run by a group of artists and young academics. I am one of them. For about one year I’ve carried out an informal kind of action-research within this group, taking directly part in the production as well as trying to think about new ways of producing and organizing. During the writing of this text it became clear to me that if I was to succeed in explaining what kind of production is possible within tv-tv, my own position in space and politics somehow had to be revealed and problematised.

The very same day as the eviction Ungdomshuset took place, I was going to produce and transmit a live interview with Barcelona based horitzo.tv – an activist net channel operating under the parole that “another television is possible”. At tv-tv we have a quite late transmission time, at 23 hours that day to be exact. The house where tv-tv resides, The People’s House, is also one of the main meeting points for young leftist radicals, so after the eviction of Ungeren, this was the natural place to gather – it simply became a central “info point” for the community of activists. As the police were issuing orders to arrest anyone out on the streets, “just in case”, I was increasingly nervous that night about venturing out to the tv-tv studio. After all, my bike had a flat tire and walking seemed too risky. I was going to produce a TV programme, not get caught up in street actions. There was always the bus nr 3A, which would take me straight from my doorstep to the one of my desired destination. But turning on the television proved to be the final blow to this option: the first image that greeted me was of that of the burned down bus station in front of The People’s House! I cancelled the show. Instead tv-tv transmitted a screen with a text that night, declaring that “You don’t have to be an autonomist to sympathise with Ungdomshuset!”. In hindsight, this could not have been more appropriate – a moment of involuntary self-reflection saying more that particular night about the relation between tv-tv and its surroundings than any programme on translocal networking in alternative media projects could ever have done.

Alternative media production has always been as much about context as content. As I mentioned previously the kind of content that today goes onto YouTube was previously situated in the field of Community Media. This field is known as “local-media” in Denmark and it is the field in which tv-tv sits. Somewhat uncomfortably I would say, because on the one hand it is a regular non-commercial local-TV channel transmitting through the airwaves and therefore subject to all the juridical baggage and regulations of the Danish state laws for local media and not the least the demands of a steady flow of production. And then on the other, it is run in a decentralised manner, by a network of producers with the explicit intent of creating an alternative voice through self-organizing, collective and DIY modes of production. This is a concept of artistic production as critical intervention with many historical precedents, not in the least of 60’s and 70’s film, video and TV activism but as we shall see tv-tv has its own particular history in this context. My intention in this text is to tell that story as well as to talk about the implications of a wider context: that of how networked digital media impacts on the modes of production at play in a project like tv-tv. Because of its particular story and “interstitial” position, tv-tv cannot simply be reduced to a retro-art-activism project and because of the converging media cultures of today we cannot think of it as outside of the new digital and networked contexts.

In order to reach a point of discussion of these claims I first need to delineate what used to be the terms of production of such alternative media projects. This will be demonstrated by a brief analytical history of community media in Denmark as a kind of “institutionalized dissent” existing in the tension of state-regulations and an oppositional public or counter-public sphere. Considering the present terms

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3 www.horitzo.tv
4 Atton, Chris. (2002)
5 See the tv-tv manifesto, quoted throughout the text and included as an appendix to this paper. Also available on http://www.tv-tv.dk (in Danish only)
6 Here I’m deeply indebted to the practice and theory of the Telestreet project in Italy. See for example Pasquinelli’s “Manifesto for Urban Televisions” where he speaks of how the horizontality of the net must meet the socializing power of television, published at http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors3/pasquinellitext.html and elsewhere. See also Svensk, Fredrik “TV som protes till Internet”, Paletten 2005 for a good analytical account of this movement and its influence on contemporary art practice. The idea of the net as a vanishing point for TV has also recently been further developed as an appropriation of Umberto Eco’s and Francesco Casetti’s concept of Neotelevisione, originally devised in the 80’s as a concept to describe the Berlusconi mediascape. See Pecchioli, Marcello (ed) Neo telezione -Elementi di un linguaggio catodico glocal/e, costa & Nolan, Milano 2005.
of production however, forms of self-organized and DIY media expressions become subject to quite different medial, economical and regulatory systems: those of neoliberal restructuring, regulation, deregulation, networked organizations and organized networks.\(^7\) It is the processes of transfer between these in the production of tv-tv that is the ultimate focus of this essay. In order to carry out such an analysis we need to stake out the positions between and through which such transformation takes place. That is why I move on to sketching out the history of institutionalized dissent in the field of community or “local” media in Denmark.

Before embarking it is important to note that I want to move beyond the conception of community media as being the media that predates the common conception today of an “active audience”. I hope to clearly state community and networked media as autonomous fields of production, escaping the way that critical media scholars “by collapsing the distinction between production and consumption legitimise a convenient fiction manufactured by the culture industries”.\(^8\) This is not an easy claim in a culture where the borders between production and consumption seems more blurred than ever. The idea that once passive audiences are now becoming active producers is often accompanied by the discussion on what kinds of “rights” should govern this production. Yet, this doesn’t seem to me to be the place to look for the new foundation of DIY and collective forms of production. A good example is the public debate in Sweden surrounding the bit-torrent server The Pirate Bay which through its political controversies with powerful commercial and political forces in the USA has become connected to citizens rights. But a scratch on the surface reveals another order - again the conflation of citizens rights with that of “consumer rights” – as in the right to download and distribute Hollywood blockbusters and American TV-series. Which seems to hint that the “rights” discussion is more about creating the foundation for a new kind of culture industries than to engage in any possibilities for other ways of imagining individual and collective production. Precisely because actual production of media is such a vital part of the age of user generated content, we need to ask what are the conditions and possibilities of this production-becoming-consumption?

Community Media: From Institutionalized to “Dissolutionized” Dissent

Community and alternative media production have often been connected to the development of consumer level technology. The earliest experiments in DIY public media workshops carried out by pioneers such as Dee Dee Halleck in the late sixties explored the possibilities of citizens media created with the Sony “Porta-pak”, one of the first consumer videocameras.\(^9\) And earlier in the late 50’s, the introduction of lightweight 16mm cameras and cheap film stock had revolutionised the work of independent documentary and experimental filmmakers. Without commercial forces pushing for the expansion of cable based TV-networks in the USA, the first experiments in Public Access Television might not have seen the light of day. In the 1970’s, laws were passed in the states that the new commercial cable networks had to provide a certain percentage of funding for the establishment of non-commercial public interest channels.\(^10\) A similar story applies for the European model of “Open Channels” which were started as an illegal activity by Dutch hackers who pirated the first cable-networks in Amsterdam in the mid-seventies. In other words the development of commercial and alternative DIY media have frequently been operating in tandem.

In Scandinavia the first challenges to the State media monopolies of both Sweden and Denmark came from pirate radio stations, transmitting the pop-culture sounds of the commercial music industry from ships in the surrounding oceans.\(^11\) The story of the first Danish “pirate ship” hosting the commercial Radio Mercur, shows how early media entrepreneurs were using activist methods for exploiting the nexus of local-global in media production:

“\textit{The ship is officially rented at the London-based BALTIC PANAMA SHIPPING COMPANY by the Zürich-lawyer dr. Jan Flachmann's Swiss INTERNATIONALE RADIO MERCUR ANSTALT, set-up}\)”

\(\text{\textsuperscript{7}}\) Harvey, David. Lovink & Rossiter.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{8}}\) Howley, p. 3. (2005)


\(\text{\textsuperscript{10}}\) Ellie. (2006) and Olson. (2002)

with the same purpose, and which equipped it with transmitter and transmission-pole, prior to when
the Danish RADIO MERCUR company rented it!" (Ahm, Leif, p. 154, 1960)

One of the very first Danish chroniclers of this story, Leif Ahm also reports on similar attempts going
on in television piracy, now taking to the airwaves quite literally: the Radio Mercur people planned to
have a plane rented in Germany, equip it with a television transmitter, and let it circle over Denmark!
Thus prior to the existence of the Internet, other nets where frequently mobilised by re-territorialising
media producers.

In Denmark this pirate activity softened the state radio's approach to popular culture and in the fifties
forced it to also include popular music. Later, in the sixties there was pressure to democratize also the
access to the actual production and distribution of media. This pressure came mainly from two
different directions; liberal forces wanted to break the monopoly in order open up media production to
the private market; while left-wing parties and grass-roots groups were interested in the possibility of
democratizing citizens and special interest groups access to media. The Danish state however was
reluctant to break the monopoly of the the Danish Broadcasting Company (DR). When an
experimental scheme for local-radio and TV was eventually tried out in the beginning of the seventies
it was modelled exclusively on the concept of creating mini versions of the DR stations around the
country. The initial inspiration came mainly from the Canadian and American experiments with cable-TV but due to the lack of sustainable models the original idea of strengthening democracy through
direct contact between citizens and local governments was not realized.12

The differences between the Danish and north American media landscapes are worth considering as
possible contributing factors to this initial failure. The Danish state was sceptical to liberalize the
access to media production and distribution meaning that there were no sponsors from the
commercial sector to support the project. This meant that it was up to the state alone to devise the
scheme, failing in sufficiently addressing the grassroots, instead adopting a top-down organisation
structure regarding the issuing of broadcasting licenses.

A second more successful scheme was devised by the social-democratic government at the end of
the 70's and put into action in the early eighties. The focus was still on non-commercial media but this
time around a more systemic subsidy system was built in as well as a consideration for the grass-
roots more in style of the European Open Channels – after all they had been initiated by the grass-
roots and commercial interests themselves and not the state. Consequently, wireless broadcasting
was also included in the licensing system and according to Jauert and Prehn, as many as 150
licenses were issued for local radio and television during the first years.13 The criteria for obtaining a
license was set by the ministry of culture and stressed the importance of “advocacy”-media, meaning
that local media should foster citizen’s involvement and promote debate in local democracies in stark
contrast to the national television’s orientation towards wider public interests. Different groups who
were active in establishing the first channels were organisations with roots in the worker's movement,
religious and immigrant communities.14

However, the goal of creating advocacy media catering to a kind of alternative political sphere was
quickly undermined by a number of factors. According to the veteran Danish radio activist Preben
Poulsen, politicians were early on waning in their support, fearing the outbreak of renegade
broadcasters who would influence the Danish public. A reason for this change in attitude could also be
attributed to the fact that the local-media scheme was planned by a social-democratic government but
actually implemented under conservative rule. But the biggest sinners were undoubtedly the grassroot
stations themselves who, fearing they would get too few listeners, also started broadcasting the pop
sounds of commercial music. This led in many cases to the complete erosion of the initial committed

12 For this section I rely on the extensive work of Per Jauert and Ole Prehn (1985, 1995, 2002, 2003) who are the
leading researchers on local-media in Denmark. I also build the story on a lecture by and discussion with Preben
Poulsen, a veteran activist of Danish local-radio who gave a practitioners view on the subject of the media
political development of non-commercial local-media from the beginning of the 80’s until today at a seminar of the
association SAML in Avedøre, Denmark October 20, 2006. Data are from my own notes and Thomen, Gitte
et al. 2006.
13 Jauert and Prehn (1995)
14 Poulsen, Preben. Lecture about the history of local-media politics in Denmark. Friday Oct. 20, 2006. Media-
political seminar in Avedøre organised by SAML. (see note above)
and advocacy media ideals and that many local-radios became professionalized competitors to DR's national and regional broadcasters. In 1983 some of these now very popular stations let political parties buy ad time for their upcoming elections. This meant that even if in theory the founding nature of Danish local-media was non-commercial, in practice it was now opened up for commercial exploitation as well. A consequence of this was increasing liberalization of the Danish media, culminating in the establishment of the first nation-wide commercial channel, TV2, in the mid-eighties. Ironically, it was the non-commercial and supposedly grass roots media themselves that had taken a significant step towards this change. This also led to concrete changes in the local-media policies which by the mid-nineties came to recognize both a commercial and non-commercial layer.15 This also lead to an increasing polarization, where the remaining non-commercial stations would be the ones to carry on the original ideology of advocacy-media, for example by forming the organisation SLRTV for promoting the rights of community media in Denmark.

Throughout the nineties the non-commercial local media were supported by the State through a subsidy pool covering production of programmes and administrative costs. As with public access television the criteria for support are often formulated according to ideas of alternative public spheres stressing such aspects of local media as citizens involvement in local democracies and giving a voice to minority or under-privileged and special interest groups. Associations for non-commercial local-media also like to stress the same ideals as the foundation for their existence.16

However, if local media succeeds in fulfilling such goals has been contested since its very start. The problems of Danish local-media can easily be likened to those discussed by community media scholars critically evaluating public access and open channel television. As Rennie notes, one common criticism against community media is that its utopian ideals never seem to materialise in the general culture and that it stays marginalized.17 For Rennie, this is an unfortunate consequence of how people tend to put too much emphasis on the alternative media aspects of community media, obscuring other aspects which have more to do with community media operators being part of civil society and enacting civility. Her study points in the direction where marginalization should not necessarily be seen as a failure since these media have more to do with empowering ordinary citizens within civil society debates and less with bringing about a radical new media order. A similar viewpoint is adopted by Howley who talks about community media as an independent sphere where different social actors articulate local concerns.

For Chris Atton however, who is a scholar of the production of alternative media, the limitations of state regulated local media, and community TV in particular lies in its particular form of “institutionalized dissent”. Since, as Atton shows, alternative media production has always been as much about the modes of production as about the content (content and context are seen as inseparable), community media in this form might never achieve its utopian goals. This is becoming clear in Denmark today, where the media landscape is undergoing a major re-structuring which also deeply affects the non-commercial local media. But in this landscape, new constellations of production have also appeared. In the context of alternative media, the net is obviously the most important example. Initially the net was seen as the natural inheritor to zines – a forum where individuals and groups could publish themselves outside of the control of the state. Yet new forces are inhabiting the net, forces which have to do with the neoliberal re-structuring of culture politics at large, which also should make us attentive to the hidden regularization of this sphere – what we may think of as a transformation from institutionalized to “dissolutionized” dissent.

In 2002, after the shift in Denmark to a new right-wing government, subsidies to the non-commercial local media was severely cut and local media associations were starting to talk about “Berlusconi”-times. After many complaints, a new support system with more subsidies was implemented in 2006, even though supports were significantly lower than recommended by a report commissioned by the ministry of culture itself. At the same time, new regulations also sprung into action that imposed new rules on the non-commercial local-stations, stating that they would have to explain more in depth than before how they were rooted in their local community, as a geographical entity. Some organisations raised concerns that this could be interpreted as a way to actually diminish the more opinionated radio and TV-stations catering not so much to geographically delimited localities as to special interest

16 See SAML or SLRTV in Denmark.
17 Rennie (2006) P.
groups within political subcultures and sexual minorities. It would also become increasingly evident that this was also a scheme to further erode the existence of the non-commercial branch of local-media in favour of commercial interests. The proposal for a new state media policy released in the summer of 2006 seemed to confirm these fears since, the non-commercial local media was now literally written out as an autonomous area. Gone was the paragraph specially catering to the non-commercial local-media, which instead was consistently grouped together with local media in general, including commercial licenses.18

This was a further sign of the new political agenda to cater to the liberalization of the media market, which has also been confirmed by the national TV-board and the cultural minister himself. The non-commercial sector can still obtain a special financial support but it will not enjoy the same privileging from the state when it comes to license issuing. This is a development which fits perfectly with the description from David Harvey of the politics of neoliberal restructuring.19 Under the mantle of decentralisation and democratic ideals, the Danish cultural ministry is carrying out de-regulations leading to market friendly deregulations such as: closing down all local-TV boards who previously issued the local licenses, reducing the support to almost nothing in order to be able to raise it marginally under paroles of “generosity” the following year, opening up the financial support to other actors than media broadcasters, bureaucratizing even more the conditions for obtaining a license and at the same directing the regulations surrounding the license issuing in favour of commercial actors.

In 2007 the Danish ministry of culture will also implement a new “media-license” fee which will replace the traditional radio- and television-license for ordinary citizens. The fee will now be expanded to include all PC’s, certain mobile phones as well as other new media devices based on the convergence of media. The argument behind this expanded media-license is that you can now access the content of the Danish public service stations not only by the traditional media such as television and radio but increasingly through net-based technologies.20

By implementing the new media-license fee system, the Danish state will actually be the first in the world to have introduced a taxation of the Internet. Maybe this new form of financing the state media would be a logical development if the Danish state was also implementing a progressive politics on the development of the new media frameworks such as the Internet. The closest we get to this in the new proposal for the media policy 2007-10 however is the talk about “digitalisation” which is almost solely concerned with radio and television and the closing down of the analogue net.21 Alarmingly, it seems like the state is lacking in any coherent visions for the new media. Of course, the Internet is a tricky area for any state and one suspect that the ministry of culture is more than happy to leave its development to the entrepreneurial culture already thriving there. The lack of regulative frameworks for media production in networked environments does not necessarily mean that the State is disinterested in implementing mechanisms for control in this area. The entrepreneurial democracy existing on the net is the perfect medium for a state that wishes to advocate neoliberal policies on media production. In principle everybody can make their voice heard on the Internet but it can easily also turn into a subcultural ghetto where it is the service providers rather than the users who are increasingly reaping the benefits. Who will these service providers be and what will be their terms of use concerning media production? This development is even more distressing when considering that several cases of Internet censorship in Denmark during the last couple of years now seems to be systemized.22 At the same time the net is more and more becoming a collection of gated communities where private service providers are allowed to set the rules of conduct. As an indication of the Danish state policy on this, it is enough to say that the Danish ministry of taxes is the first in the world to have

20 The license aims to be “neutral” towards technology. “Mediepolitisk aftale 2007-10” p.7
21 The one exception being a possible of opening of the radio and television archives to the public.
The discussions are about a general filter on children’s pornography and terrorism-related content respectively.
set up its office in Second Life, on the virtual island of “Denmark” where the terms of use are those of the Californian company Linden Lab.  

Summary: The institutionalized dissent of community media is giving way to a hidden re-regulation which in many ways is a more effective dissolution of dissent – at least of the ways in which dissent used to have its place of delivery through the non-commercial local-media. It’s in the middle of this discussion of autonomy and regulation within shifting media politics that I want to finish with considering the case of production at the artist-run local-TV station tv-tv in Copenhagen.

**don’t make tv, make tv-tv: Community New Media as Vanishing Point of TV**

tv-tv is self-organized tv, neither the state’s apparatus nor the market’s tv. tv-tv is a network of independent producers who are all longing to make tv. tv-tv wants to break the traditional monopoly of the means of production and the right to broadcast.

tv-tv is an artist-run local TV-channel operating from Folkets Hus (The People’s House) in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, a house originally squatted by local activists in the early seventies. The project consists of a decentralised network of independent producers, mostly artists, broadcasting on the local television channel Kanal København during two hours, three times a week. There are several editorial groups within tv-tv, all dealing with specific issues with names like “More People Mediate”, “Editorial for Experimental TV-Transmission”, “Democratic Innovation”, “Text-Tv” etc. In several ways tv-tv holds an in-between position to the discussion I wish to raise in this paper, which concerns the status of community media and what its aspirations to “alternative” modes of production mean in the age of networked communications. On the one hand it is a regular non-commercial local-TV channel transmitting through the airwaves and therefore subject to all the juridical baggage and regulations of the Danish state laws for local media. On the other hand it is run by producers with the explicit intent of creating an alternative voice within the Danish broadcast media and its associated extension into the Danish public sphere. This is a concept of artistic production as intervention which certainly has been tried out before the coming of networked digital media, but which I want to argue cannot today be thought of as outside of this context.

The history of tv-tv is associated with TV-Stop, the previous owners of both the physical studio space and the transmission license – a group of leftwing media activists whose efforts were very visible and influential in the Danish media during the beginning of the 90’s. The group that now runs tv-tv are not in the same way explicitly connected to a political agenda and can be said to represent a more general group coming from the creative workforce of the art world and academia.

The turnover of the broadcasting license from TV-Stop to tv-tv suggests in a concrete way the relationship between contemporary artist initiated TV-projects and the activist video and TV movements of the 1970-90’s. As an artistic practice tv-tv can be regarded in the more general context of the revitalization of “critical activism in contemporary art” which Okwui Enwezor writes about in his essay “The Artist as Producer in Times of Crisis”, characterising it as a transition from

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23 These terms of use can be read at: [http://www.secondlife.com/corporate/tos.php](http://www.secondlife.com/corporate/tos.php). This example is inspired by the recent essay of Linda Hilfling: “For any reason or no reason - on virtual (extra-)territoriality” posted to the nettime discussion list on May 29 2007. See [www.nettime.org](http://www.nettime.org) for archives.

24 tv-tv is not really a channel of its own but a local-TV license holder with a permission to broadcast 5 hours a week on Kanal Kbh – an open channel for people in and around Copenhagen. Hosting a number of other “stations” (license holders) both commercial and non-commercial. The station has no explicit connection to the well-known American video activist group TV-TV which operated in the 70’s. See [www.telestreet.it](http://www.telestreet.it) and Pasquinelli’s “Manifesto for Urban Televisions” where he speaks of how the horizontality of the net must meet the socializing power of television, published at [http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors3/pasquinelilitext.html](http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors3/pasquinelilitext.html) and elsewhere. See also Svensk, Fredrik “TV som protes till Internet”, Paletten 2005 for a good analytical account of this movement and its influence on contemporary art practice. The idea of the net as a vanishing point for TV has also recently been further developed as an appropriation of Umberto Eco’s and Francesco Casetti’s concept of Neotelevisione, originally devised in the 80’s as a concept to describe the Berlusconi mediascape. See Pecchioli, Marcello (ed) *Neo televisione -Elementi di un linguaggio catodico glocal/e*, costa & Nolan, Milano 2005.
collectively organized political activism and work that is not activism per se, but “driven by the spirit of activism”.

In the context of the critical re-appropriation by artistic means that collective and participatory modes of production have enjoyed for the past few years, it seems to me like we need rather to consider Walter Benjamin’s original plea for the author as producer from the opposite position to that of Enwezor. My argument here is partly inspired by a short essay by Boris Buden where he criticises the way that theorists today repeat Benjamin’s question of what the position of a work of art is in the relations of production of its time. However, this question is currently a dead end since for Buden, writing out of the post-communist East, “it is the general question of the material conditions of an artistic production that, under given ideological conditions, has lost its whole meaning.” The historically situated method of dialectic materialism is simply not an option today. At least not in the same way: there might not be any new answers to Benjamin’s old question but if it is correct as Buden claims that Benjamin already answered the question himself, might there be new ways of interpreting his answer in relation to current production?

Let’s reconsider Benjamin’s critique of art that is revolutionary only in its literary “tendency” and relate it to the return of collective and participatory ideals of production in recent artistic projects. It may seem like this kind of art practice fulfils Benjamin’s ideal model of the artist working from within the system as a kind of engineer that changes it through radical production. However, Benjamin’s argument is that any “correct” political tendency automatically includes its literary tendency – two layers that come together in his idea of “technique”, a concept that “gives us the dialectical starting point from which the sterile opposition between form and content can be overcome”, comprising both of an understanding of technology and the means of production. The question then is if, in celebrating collaboration, participation and collectivist DIY modes of production, has the politically committed art scene produced a fetishization of the modes of production over the literary qualities of the work as well as over its technical means? This seems to be the case when participation and collectivity is presented as the actual content of the artwork – the mode of production transformed into content as in Bourriaud’s highly formalistic concept of relational aesthetics. This is not to say that such art projects do not have any content, it is just that the privileging of the mode of production as content means that the demands posed to would-be revolutionary art by Benjamin are reversed. The artist today is already especially good at fulfilling Benjamin’s “single demand, the demand of thinking about his position in the process of production.” but this frequently seems to lead again and again to the question “What is to be done?”, in an endless celebration of the “spirit of activism” without any political agenda behind.

Returning to the specific case of artistic TV projects and tv-tv, I wish to discuss how this situation might be started to be overcome. It is my belief that there is some potential for innovation in the specific way that TV art projects remediate the forms of traditional community media into the culture of new media. This potentiality is hidden in the way that such projects constitute experimental labs for the processes of transfer I spoke about earlier of concepts like participation, collaboration, the local and the global between the representational forms of state regulated media and the logic of new networks.

We will refuse ratings based on generalizations of what people want, and rather investigate tv as a setting for communication. (…) tv-tv is critical tv. We do not aim to reflect society, and we will try to abolish the ‘viewer’ as a passive consumer. We will not just produce tv: we will produce tv-tv.

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28 Ibid. P. 3.
31 Benjamin, p. 7. (1934)
In experimental television projects artists have the opportunity to work with the quintessential 20th century mass medium, subverting its capitalist and hierarchical “team-work” mode of specialised collective production as well as its standardized semiotics of predefined formats. This kind of experimentation also has a historical precedent in the activist video and TV-collectives of the 70’s such as the American Videofreex, Paper Tiger and TV-TV. A renewed interest in political art and participatory and collective production thus seem to be logically followed by a re-treading of these methods, in the ideal medium of television.

On the surface then, tv-tv along with other recent art and television projects shares the same kind of fetishization of production modes as identified above. The lack of a unifying agenda which was present in many of the traditional community media projects used as points of reference, is evident also in the case of tv-tv where the most common problem is maintaining day-to-day activities. Its producers find less and less time to the common administrative tasks and daily care of transmissions. But just as tv-tv may be criticised for lacking the concrete political unifying agenda of its predecessors, the activist TV-Stop, so may TV-Stop in turn be criticised for not having realised their politics in the mode of production, which was as many other community media projects simply mimicking the hierarchical structure of traditional broadcast models.

However, TV-Stop, again like many other activist community media projects, started out in an ad-hoc de-centralized manner but found out that it had to adopt a more rigidly set production strategy if it was to become sustainable. Thus independently operating editorial groups were complemented by responsible “editors” and contracts for all workers, voluntary or not were instigated. Does this mean that history will teach a centralizing lesson to the collective art projects celebrating decentralisation today? Must the structurelessness of organization be resolved through the institutionalizing and centralizing ways of the 70’s-90’s activism?

I believe that the above conservative conclusion would be unfortunate since it is not any longer solely against the backdrop of hegemonic state media or representation through television as mediated public sphere that a project like tv-tv exists. To use the phrase of media historian Siegfried Zielinski, “the vanishing point” of television should be observed against the field of digital and networked media which television is converging into. Thus a project like tv-tv cannot be thought of as outside to this process. Artists reinventing the language of television are not simply repeating the concepts of community and alternative media movements of the past but, and maybe this is the area where the real potential for radical technique lies, their projects exist in a state of transformation between the representational models of traditional broadcast media and that of the new networked configurations demanding other organizational structures.

This transformational logic at work can be observed in the way that tv-tv handles incoming requests to cover different events and happenings. For example a political group wants tv-tv to cover a demonstration they organize. This approaching of tv-tv as a political news medium giving room to left wing groups and alternative culture stems from the fact that it is connected to the history of the activist channel TV-Stop. Dealing with this heritage is ambivalent for tv-tv. Some people at the station work under the conviction that there is an informal contract to continue catering to some of the target groups of TV-Stop. It is clear however that the way of producing TV have changed and therefore to some extent also the politics. Instead of working with heavy TV-camera set-ups in the studio, tv-tv has scaled down to small portable cameras and the same scaling down goes for editing and other equipment as well. The idea is also not to mimic the big broadcast players but to allow for flexibility and spontaneous production.

One question raised back from one member of tv-tv on the request to cover the demonstration went along the lines of, “ok, we can give coverage to this group, but what will they give back?”. Asking what

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32 CAC TV, GoodTV, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Telestreet etc.
33 The tv-tv mailinglist most recent discussions are specifically about “structurelessness” and debates go for and against centralizing or even stopping altogether. A cited reference point has been Jo Freeman’s 1970 text on the American women’s liberation movement The Tyranny of Structurelessness’ online at http://www.anarres.org.au/essays/amtos.htm
34 When I here talk about tv-tv and TV-Stop as if they were themselves subjects, I of course make the critical mistake of not seeing these projects through its individual practitioners with all their differences. This will be a challenge for further, more empirical research.
35 See for example entry on Tv-Stop in http://www.leksikon.org/art.php?n=2614.
the group approaching tv-tv will give back should not be seen as a selfish or arrogant act in this instance but as an invitation. If the slogan is “everybody can make tv” then why should not the group be able to produce the representation of their action themselves, using tv-tv as an infrastructure both on a technological as well as a critical conceptual level? This is a scenario of organizational downscaling through networking which is potential at tv-tv although not completely possible in the current models for production.36

A program that went to some extent in solving this dilemma between representation and organization was “Letters to Ungdomshuset” initiated by the editorial from the Copenhagen Free University project. During the eviction of Ungdomshuset, the squatted building serving as a subcultural youth house located in the same area as tv-tv, the tv-tv studio was opened up for activists who wished to send video messages to all their friends who had been jailed during the ensuing demonstrations. This was possible since the open channel which tv-tv transmits on also reaches the TV’s in the actual prisons. At a first glance this can be regarded as a classical community TV-project where local people are temporarily invited to present themselves in the professional TV-studio. But here we have to remember that the nature of this assembled group of activists was in itself temporary, consisting of a translocal network in which many had gathered specifically for the sake of defending Ungdomshuset. Instead of thinking of this group along the hip idea of the multitude, the old “community” might actually be more appropriate, dealing as we are with a relatively homogenous collection of young radicals. This community however might be thought of as “networked”, temporary in its organizational temporality and translocal in its geography. Further, the project actually led to a new editorial group being established at tv-tv by some of the activists who got involved through the first transmissions – now working consistently with the focus of prison-TV. In this way, an initially temporary media intervention into a more or less informal network was assimilated by parts of the intervened network and acquired a new status of sustained action.

Yet, is it enough to only consider this process of sustainability on a conceptual level? If artistic TV projects would like to be the alternative media of the networked age do they not also need to integrate into practice an understanding of the actual changing materialities of production in these different frameworks? As it turned out the supposed sustainability of the videoletters project also ultimately failed as the continuation of the project fell apart due to organizational problems in the new group. The new web 2.0 services like YouTube and countless others have a certain freshness to them. They do away with the bureaucracy surrounding citizens media and allow instant, distributed publishing. In bringing more spontaneous production methods to community media tv-tv mimics some aspects of the Web 2.0 culture but does not reach the same level of decentralisation and instantaneousness. Maybe it is no wonder that many community media projects following the traditional model are facing difficulties of surviving in Denmark, after all many of the more radical ones like TV-Stop have actually stopped.

New artistic TV-projects like tv-tv are based on a critical appropriation or “subversion” of the latest consumer technology and has its historical precedent in earlier media activism and alternative media movements. But is it still possible to look upon technology as only a tool for creating different kinds of representation? Hasn’t technology itself also become an important issue for what kinds of representations are possible? This is my interpretation of the demand posed by Matteo Pasquinelli recently to media workers (or what he refers to as the “cognitariat”) to mobilize out of the imagery.37 I hope that my examples have shown that this doesn’t mean that projects like tv-tv should simply stop. That would be to confirm the suicidal tendencies of a phobic artworld through “artistic critique”, as a self-disarming at the face of capital. Remember my initial discussion on the tendency today that we are moving towards a media economy that brands itself on those very same ideals that alternative movements traditionally have been advocating such as DIY production, participatory media, personal as well as collective expression. I’m not arguing that it’s these modes of production per se that should now be refuted due to their commercialisation. Instead I’m proposing that artists extend their tactical as well as strategic appropriations of these modes of production to also include the technological aspects which should already be implicated in the politics of these modes of production. Meaning that any alternative media project of today would have to take into account the more intense level of

36 There is as one member told it an ”informal centre” which gets increasingly more centralised as it needs to take care of all the administrative tasks of running a space, while all others get “independent” or drop off.
37 Pasquinelli. (2006)
incorporation and rethink the base for public access to technology as an expansion of alternative strategies of representation.\textsuperscript{38}

In the strategic alliances between artists and activists, with the attractive idea of establishing counter publics\textsuperscript{39} in mind, it seems to me that it is this socio-technological understanding of production that is often missing. tv-tv may combine forces with the so called precarity movement which in turn may connect to more traditional union movements – and as in the examples above, some fruitful representations and self-organizational projects may come out of this mediation. This is due to the regulative power of community media combined with a new networking logic that I wrote about in connection with tv-tv above. However this organizational network logic must also understand its own technics in order for it to be sustainable. This is where new connections need to be made.\textsuperscript{40} This development calls for more multi-dimensional approaches to the “alternative” by artists and culture producers engaged in the remediation of community media modes of production, with the possibility of creating sustainability through cross-fertilizing different methods and structural frameworks. By being set in the strategic world of regularized community media, while at the same time being guided by an outlook to the modes of instant and deregularised production of the new media, tv-tv exists in a virtual in-between space of these two worlds. It is when we think of the new community media as an in-between mediator or rather modulator of these worlds that something akin to the sought after integrated technique of Benjamin’s Author as Producer, and thereby the contours of a DIY production which is not D.O.A. but exists “on its own terms” might start to become visible.

tv-tv is everyone’s television. Today it has become easy to produce tv. Technical innovation has made it possible to produce television with your own equipment. We will use and misuse all possible tools to make tv. tv-tv is broadcast quality on our terms: everyone can make tv. (from the tv-tv manifesto, 2005, my emphasis)

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\textsuperscript{38} This might seem like an utopian project but that is part of the broader problem of the idea of an alternative media. In this paper I’m not concerned with the (–im)possibility of autonomy but rather in analysing the practice of media production which stakes out to be alternative to any position of the “mainstream”, commercial or state media, be it on the level of production, distribution or expression.


\textsuperscript{40} And here my following examples are deliberately very limited in scope since I’ve been talking about media production and not the myriad of other areas where critical art practices apply. However, might the delimitation of “media” become increasingly useless in societies where mediation become inseparable from reality itself? Zielinski intriguingly writes of how the 20\textsuperscript{th} century: “needed media like no other before. It was a century that spawned so many violent caesuras, so much destruction, and so many artificial, that is, humanmade, catastrophes. The twenty-first century will not have the same craving for media. As a matter of course they will be part of everyday life, like the railways in the nineteenth century or the introduction of electricity into private households in the twentieth.” Zielinski, Siegfried. \textit{Deep Time of the Media – Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means}. (2006) To this testimony one might put up all the recent areas enjoying renewed interest in experimental art practices, most notably that of systems of alternative education, an increasingly central question in the knowledge economy. See: http://summit.kein.org, http://www.edu-factory.org/, http://www.freefloatingfaculty.org/ http://www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/ to name but a few.
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