

Robert A Hackett and William K Carroll

*Remaking Media: The struggle to democratize public communication*

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Reviewed by Tanja Dreher

*Remaking Media* is a timely and thought-provoking contribution to debates on media activism, globalisation, democracy and social movements. In this book Robert Hackett and William Carroll develop an innovative framework for both research and practice around struggles to democratise media at the centre of global networks of power. While research during the 1990s was dominated by political economy critiques of the global media system, and recent years have seen a considerable upsurge of interest in alternative and community media, Hackett and Carroll offer a different and welcome angle. The book poses the question: does democratic media activism (DMA) constitute an emerging social movement; and what might its conditions of survival and success be?

This central question is addressed through case studies, material from extensive interviews with democratic media activists and others involved in social movements, and borrowing from a range of scholarly debates around media, democracy and social movements. The research focuses on the North Atlantic as “the heartland of global capitalism” and charts many similarities but also some significant differences between media reform and alternative media possibilities in the USA, the UK and Canada.

A wide range of media democratisation activities are analysed – from open publishing at Indymedia to watching the watchdogs at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), from AdBusters to Guerrilla Media and from lobbying policymakers to media training for marginalised voices to pirate radio. The authors draw on a consciously “eclectic” range of theories to develop the conceptual framework which underpins the analysis of the wide range of DMA strategies. Central to the analytical framework are Bourdieu’s theory of the “field” and Nick Couldry’s theorisation of “media power” and the “media frame”.

Drawing on these insights, Hackett and Carroll develop a convincing picture of media as a porous field, which explains the porous nature of media activism – media activism is both deeply influenced by other fields and also able to impact upon the fields of politics, the market and social movements. The book also presents a typology of positions within the field of democratic media activism. The central categories are the Habermasian distinction between system-oriented and life-world oriented

strategies, and the distinction between counter-hegemony and anti-hegemony drawn from social movement theory.

The organisation of the book leads to a degree of chopping and changing from theoretical reflection to empirical detail and back again. While *Remaking Media* is a well-written and lively read, the central argument is not tightly integrated, due in part to the flow of chapters and the eclectic theoretical borrowing. The opening chapters introduce the media's "democratic deficit" the extent to which media are themselves "becoming significant threats to sustainable democracy" (Chapter 1), theories of media power or influence, and particularly Curran and Couldry's discussion on power *of* and power *through* media (Chapter 2), media and social movements (Chapter 3) and media and democracy – highlighting both the dominance of the liberal democratic tradition, and the possibilities of radical democracy (Chapter 4). These theoretical chapters are followed by case studies of two long-running organisations - Media Alliance in the USA and Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom in the UK, sketching the challenges and possibilities for democratic media activism in historical perspective (Chapters 5 and 6). Next the authors step back to identify more general challenges (Chapter 7) and springboards (Chapter 8) for a media democratisation movement, followed by a fascinating overview of media activism in Vancouver (Chapters 9 and 10) and a concluding discussion (Chapter 11).

One of the most innovative and thought-provoking aspects of the book is the insistence on mapping a wide field which includes media reform projects, radical or independent media and more. Hackett and Carroll steadfastly refuse to give up on the project of reform, or to reject strategies for working with professional journalists or mainstream media. Even though media activists themselves are often highly dismissive of system-oriented strategies which aim to reform rather than to build alternatives (p.194), Hackett and Carroll analyse strategies aimed at improving regulation or journalism practice as necessary components of a complex and shifting "war of position". The authors argue strongly that both bridge-building (p.162) and confrontation with centres of media power (p.207) are required, and democratic media activism requires both life world and system oriented strategies. Coalitions are crucial to this multifaceted range of strategies, and Hackett and Carroll are particularly alert to both the possibilities and the considerable difficulties of developing coalitions, both between media activist organisations, and between media activism and social movements. The book overall is well aware of difficulties, challenges and ambiguities in working for media democratisation, and yet the authors remain determinedly hopeful. What emerges is almost a SWOT analysis – detailing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the massive and urgent task of remaking democratic media. Chapters 7 and 8 identify the central "obstacles" and "springboards".

In response to their central question, Hackett and Carroll make a strong case for the close connections between democratic media activism and social movements over time (Chapter 5), in the contemporary example of Vancouver (Chapters 9 and 10) and in their concluding discussion (Chapter 11). The case study of Vancouver is particularly rich in detail and in analysis, presenting both a network analysis of Vancouver as a "field of media activism" and an overview of the various ideologies and strategies at play. Democratic media activism in Vancouver emerges as deeply embedded, leading the authors to analyse DMA as a "nexus" or a point of articulation among various movements, rather than a social movement per se.

*Remaking Media* identifies a number of key challenges for democratic media activism in a globalising world. The multiple frames and divergent strategies employed across the field of DMA inhibit the building of alliances (p.79), and DMA needs to do more to follow the lead of social movements in framing their aims as crucial concerns for sustainable democracy. Hackett and Carroll identify a need for greater coordinating and strategising, and the vital challenge to overcome the naturalisation of the democratic deficit. The question of framing, though, resonates beyond the questions of strategy which are the focus of this book and points towards emerging research agendas. The conclusion identifies framing, identity and coherence as crucial challenges (p.192) and suggests a crucial contribution that DMA can make to social movements – an emphasis on communicative democracy and an ethics of listening (p.205). The task of developing a coherent and compelling vision of ethical communication and media that sustains deep democracy is a task for media scholars and students at least as much as for democratic media activists. This book provides a compelling reminder of the importance of the task and the many allies and inspirations to be found across the wide field of working to democratise media.

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