The first volume of the two volume set, *Making Our Media* analyzes a collection of locally directed radio, video, and web-based news projects from around the world to assess how evolving tools, players, spaces, and methods are impacting media projects invested in participatory practices and social change. Sensitive to the realities of global inequalities the authors engage in timely discussions on the opportunities as well as the challenges of participatory media. The collection of essays comes out of a decade of ongoing exchanges between media producers, activists, academics, and policy advocates who are part of the transnational Our Media Network, which bridges theory with practice to inform and transform the practice of citizen media. Co-editors Dorothy Kidd and Clemencia Rodriguez explain, “Our Media provides a meeting space to exchange, support, and strengthen these more inclusive and participatory media and to collaborate on larger efforts to democratize national and global media systems” (p. 1). The collective expertise of the Our Media scholars is interwoven throughout the book. In addition to 13 case studies that appraise media projects from nine countries around the world, there are reflective introductions to each of the four sections of the volume. These introductions help frame the case studies with historical and theoretical context and draw on the experience of the practitioners and theorists involved in the Our Media Network. The result is that the volume reads like an organic but extremely well facilitated conversation appraising innovative grassroots media projects as well as the theories that frame these practices.

Kidd and Rodriguez introduce the volume by revisiting “watershed historical moments in the global mediascape of the last thirty years” (p. 2). In an era where “participatory” has become almost a catch all phrase for any media circulating on the Internet, the editors provide a useful definition, suggesting that projects are “based in collective design, decision making, creative interchange and governance, at all stages of the production and circulation of meaning and up to and including the ownership and self government of the media outlet” (p. 6). Nick Couldy in his introduction to the first section, “Pushing Theoretical Boundaries,” raises a series of provocative questions that frame many of the essays: “What do we call what we study? What aspects of this practice do we give the greatest priority to investigating? For example is it the processes that underlie these diverse media practices or how they impact audiences?” (p. 25). The three authors of this first section are media producers and researchers and their practical experience informs their theoretical frameworks.
In chapter One, “Making Culture Visible: The Mediated Construction of a Mapuche Nation in Chile,” filmmaker/scholar Juan Salazar draws on Nancy Fraser’s theoretical framework of “counter public spheres” to explore how Mapuche media makers in Chile and Argentina have used a range of media tools to mediate and in effect talk back to the state that has rendered their political participation invisible. In the spirit of advocacy research, Salazar offers concrete suggestions such as airtime quotas for indigenous content in order to move beyond exclusive information practices. In Chapter Two, “Analyzing Grassroots Journalism on the Web: Reporting and the Participatory Practice of Online News Gathering,” web journalist/scholar Chris Anderson uses Bourdieu’s field theory to understand three very different examples of grassroots journalism in the United States and the UK that could be framed as “participatory journalism” (p. 67). He explores the form of participation in each project and ends on a cautious note about the degree to which online participatory journalism will impact the field of journalism or the larger society. In Chapter Three, “Theorizing Citizens’ Media: A Rhizomatic Approach,” radio producer/theorist Tanja Bosch draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of rhizomatic structures to offer an ethnographic examination of a community station, Bush Radio in Cape Town, which she describes as a site of resistance in post-apartheid South Africa. Bosch explains, “[t]hrough the application of rhizomatic theory to community radio, we further see that Bush Radio is not so much an organization as it is a rhizomatic organism, held together by a complex set of interlinked networks of relationships and interactions, with the concept of community pulsating as its central life force” (p. 85). More than simply pushing forward theoretical concepts, each author demonstrates an investment in developing frameworks to enhance practices that amplify local or marginalized voices, strengthen networks, or advocate for change.

Co-editor Dorothy Kidd introduces the second section, “Communications for Social Change Projects,” and the three chapters that depict participation in rural media projects in Zimbabwe, India, and Columbia. Kidd emphasizes how the profiles provide more extensive models of participatory communication than the highly celebrated web-based social networks. For example, in Chapter Four, “Community Radio and Women: Forging Subaltern Counterpublics” authors Pavarala and Malik compare dimensions of women’s participation in radio projects in four rural villages in India. The authors claim that through involvement with media projects women develop the skills to make more informed decisions, to organize themselves, and take action. For them meaningful participation goes beyond speaking out and is most effective when the ownership, control, and management are in the hands of those producing the work. In Chapter Five, “Participatory Video as an Empowerment Tool for Social Change,” Matewa describes the practice of a women’s filmmaking collective in Zimbabwe over a ten-year period and how their methods evolved over time. Also interested in the far reaching impacts of the media project, Matewa concludes that participatory video production processes create public spaces for dialogue and collective self-reflection, allowing participants to shift their attention toward local resources, skills and competencies to solve their own problems. (p. 116)
Matewa also discusses how the distribution of the videos provided a critical forum for individuals victimized by armed violence and an opportunity for dialogue amongst rural communities.

In Chapter Six, “Knowledges in Dialogue: A Participatory Evaluation Study of Citizens’ Radio Stations in Magdalena Medio, Columbia,” Clemencia Rodriguez describes a participatory evaluation method that she co-facilitated with radio producers involved in a network of community stations in the conflicted region of Magdalena Medio, Columbia. She also lays out the principles framing her research, which emphasize the collective construction of knowledge, the importance of long-term commitments, and the usefulness of the research for the practitioners involved. Explaining how the radio stations function in the context of conflict she explains,

> The stations are not sending messages to the community about how to solve conflict in nonviolent ways. Instead the stations themselves are mediating conflicts; their communication competence is not being used to design messages about peaceful co-existence, but instead stations are constructing peaceful co-existence through communication. (p. 151)

Each of the authors in this section emphasize how the media projects are not simply about “messaging” but have developed methods to facilitate dialogue and develop skills that extend far beyond the actual media projects. This section also offers a timely analysis on the role that community media projects play in areas plagued by violence and conflict.

Ellie Rennie introduces the third section, “Examining Internal Structures, Dynamics, and Forms,” with yet another set of provocative questions, this time intended to unpack assumptions regarding alternative media: “Why does participation by ordinary folks necessarily lead to alternative, democratic communication? What obstacles do community media face” (p. 156)? Chapter Seven, “Making Spaces: Independent Media and the Formation of the Democratic Public Sphere in Australia” by Michael Meadows, Susan Forde, Jacqui Ewart, and Kerrie Foxwellis, is also framed by questions such as “Why do people get involved in community media? How does involvement impact content and audiences” (p. 177)? The chapter discusses the results from focus groups of community radio audiences in Australia. The authors conclude that “[c]ommunity media are thus resources for building multiple and complex media and cultural literacies through participation on a localized and personalized scale” (p. 178).

The three remaining chapters in this section discuss internal struggles and challenges within Indymedia centres throughout Canada, the US and the UK. Indymedia has been described as an innovative media movement in a networked world and the authors explore the challenges and tensions within this movement. Chapter Eight, “IndyMedia in Canada” by David Skinner, Scott Uzelman, Andrea Langlois, and Frédéric Dubois, examines how structures intended to promote access can inadvertently create their own hierarchies by visiting three Canadian centres. Chapter Nine, “Gender and Hierarchy” by Janet Jones and Martin Royston, looks into the tensions arising from gender discrimination and also how they are communicated and negotiated. Chapter Ten, “Crypto-hierarchy and its Discontents” by Lisa Brooten and Gabriele Hadl discusses how Indymedia coders wield more decision-making power than other members and explains, “Indymedia may be opposed to hierarchies, but the system to which it
owes its existence, the Internet, is largely dependent on them” (p. 226). Together the three chapters work to complicate utopic notions of participation, by making evident the larger social forces of power in play.

John Downing introduces the fourth section, “Our Media and the State,” which explores the potential for democratic communications in state-funded endeavours. Describing the impact that powerful institutions exercise on state power as a “relational dimension,” Downing suggests that this dimension can offer spaces to be seized by media activists (p. 245). In Chapter Eleven, “When Our Media Belong to the State,” Antoni Castells-Talens describes indigenous people’s radio stations in Mexico that are led by indigenous broadcasters but owned by the Mexican government. Acknowledging the unique role of the project in fostering self-expression and pride, the author explains how “the 25 radio stations promote grassroots participation, offer noncommercial programming and foster minority languages” (p. 240). At the same time the author describes how the negotiations between ownership and management are often tense and the “formulation and implementation of policy have created and still create conflict in the stations” (p. 250).

In Chapter Twelve, “Reclaiming the Public Sphere in Chile under Dictatorship and Neoliberal Democracy,” Rosalind Bresnaban examines the production of alternative media and its role in expanding a “critical expressive space” (p. 287) during the seventeen year dictatorship of Pinochet, as well as during the subsequent “transition to democracy” (p. 271). Chapter Thirteen, “Capture Wales Digital Storytelling: Community Media Meets the BBC” by Jenny Kidd, is an in-depth analysis of a collaborative media project initiated by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to highlight local stories. Kidd guides readers step-by-step through the storytelling workshop process, providing practical insights for those engaged in similar practices. Like the other authors in this section, she acknowledges the complexity of collaborating with state institutions, but also points out “these projects have often been the brainchildren of specific individuals, not simply the culture of the Corporation at a particular time” (p. 296). Each of these chapters describes in detail the negotiations between the state and citizen media projects and recognizes the simultaneous potential for identity expression as well as state cooptation.

This first volume of Making Our Media is a well-organized selection of exemplary projects that will be useful for educators, practitioners, or anyone invested in praxis, power, and media connected to social change. The volume offers thoughtful definitions and excellent examples of participatory media processes at a time when the term has been overused, especially with the explosion of Web 2.0 platforms. The case studies provide historical context, theoretical frameworks, and consider internal power struggles as well as global inequalities. What comes across in all of the chapters is the passionate implication of the authors in the media projects they describe. This engaged approach does not result in non-critical celebration but brings forth nuanced details and lived experiences that help raise critical questions about both the processes and the media produced. Nick Couldry’s query—“is it the processes that underlie these diverse media practices or how they impact audiences” (p. 25)—is essential given how little attention is given to the distribution and impact of community media projects.
This volume represents a significant new contribution to understanding how community radio, video, and Web projects are being circulated on traditional and newer platforms, how they are evaluated, and how they are reaching their target audiences. Even so this is an area within the field that demands even more attention.

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