CYBERACTIVISM

Online Activism in Theory and Practice

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Indymedia.org

A New Communications Commons

Dorothy Kidd

On September 11, 2001, I first heard about the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon from conversation with the early morning regulars at my local café in San Francisco, California. Returning home, I quickly turned to three other sources of information—network television, KPFA-FM radio, and the World Wide Web's indymedia.org, the site of the Independent Media Center (IMC).

I flipped around the TV and saw that all the major networks had canceled their regular advertising-driven programming to provide round-the-clock coverage of the attacks and their aftermath. For the following month, the networks provided more hard news about government, military, national, and especially international affairs than had been seen in decades. However, as the Project for Excellence in Journalism Report (CJR) confirms, the shift in news agenda was only in the subject in focus, and not the overall approach (2001, 1). The selection and emphasis of news content were still within the very tight framework that favors U.S. political and economic elites (Ryan, Carragee, and Meinhofer 2001; Smith et al. 2001). There was little criticism of the policies and actions of the U.S. military and the Bush

administration; little discussion of alternative political views, especially of peace movements; and little talk of the international political and economic context that might help explain this crisis (Solomon 2001).

My second source, Pacifica Radio, began immediately to explore that larger context, absent in the corporate media. The morning of September 11, Berkeley's KPFA-FM, interrupted their regular programming to run a live feed from New York's new program, "Democracy Now," broadcasting only blocks away from Ground Zero. The "special" team provided coverage of the impact on New York and Washington, as well as background interviews about the history of Afghanistan, and especially of U.S. relations in Afghanistan and the Middle East. For the next month, "Democracy Now" and KPFA continued the dual focus, covering stories from perspectives missing in network TV coverage: the peace protests in New York, San Francisco, and around the world, and the voices of victims' families who stood for peace; illegal immigrants lost in the Twin Towers; New Yorkers trying to reconstruct their lives amidst the environmental and fiscal devastation; individuals from the Arab and South Asian communities who were targets of discrimination, violence, and police detention in the United States; as well as journalists, activists, and scholars from around the world.

One might imagine that Pacifica would step up to provide this coverage. Started by pacifists after the Second World War, the first station, KPFA, was founded to counter the build-up of the U.S. military-industrial complex and to challenge the monopoly control and commercialization of the broadcast media. Since then, KPFA and the noncommercial listener-supported Pacifica Network it formed have modeled a communications resource that draws from "sources of news not commonly brought together" and on-air dialogue between people of widely differing political and philosophical views (Land 1999; Lasar 1999). Pacifica had been a leading independent media voice for several decades, covering the McCarthy era, the Vietnam War, and the civil rights movement, as well as the rise of the new social movements of African Americans, Native Americans, women, Latino Americans, lesbians, and gays.

However, in the 1990s, a series of disputes over the makeup of programming and leadership had precipitated a major crisis. Supporters

and staff were embroiled in lawsuits, workplace disputes, and public actions with the national management. By the fall of 2001, a series of firings, bans, and strikes led to a decline in news and other programming. Amy Goodman, host of "Democracy Now," was banned from the New York Pacifica station, WBAI, and she and her staff were working as independent contractors, sharing a studio with other media activists in a local community television center. While "Democracy Now" still provided cutting-edge commentary and dissent, a new generation of social movements, organized around anti–corporate globalization, had given rise to a new critical medium of independent news and commentary.

"Don't Hate the Media—Become the Media"[1]

My third choice was to browse IMC's Web site, which I have followed through meetings, conferences, collaborations, and interviews since its beginnings. Within the first few days following September 11, the site featured street-level descriptions of peace vigils and demonstrations in the United States and internationally. On the Israeli site, I also found a strong comment from a human rights activist, condemning the attack and countering the corporate media's attempt to link it to Palestinians. All served as important correctives to the barrage of support on TV for the U.S. government's military build-up.

Indymedia is made up of over sixty autonomously operated and linked Web sites in North America and Europe, with a smaller number in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The first IMC was started in Seattle in 1999, just before the encounter between the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the social movements opposed to its policies. Early on in the counter-WTO planning, several different groups had recognized the strategic importance of making an "end-run around the information gatekeepers" to produce their own autonomous media (Tarleton 2000, 53). They were well aware of the limitations of depending on the corporate media to provide coverage, especially the necessary analyses and context for the complex changes threatened by the WTO regime. In fact, before the event, only a handful of articles in the U.S. corporate media had discussed the implications of the WTO meetings.[2]

The IMC would not have been possible without the convergence of new levels of social movement organization and technology. In three

short months in the fall of 1999, and with only $30,000 in donations and borrowed equipment, Seattle organizers created a "multimedia peoples' newsroom," with a physical presence in a renovated downtown storefront and in cyberspace on the Web (Tarleton 2000, 53). The IMC enabled independent journalists and media producers of print, radio, video, and photos from around the world to produce and distribute stories from the perspectives of the growing anti-corporate globalization movement. The IMC was the child of a collaboration between local housing and media activists; journalists, independent media producers, and media and democracy activists from national and international arenas; and local, national, and international organizations active in the burgeoning anti-corporate globalization movement.

Second, the Seattle IMC drew from the technical expertise and resources of computer programmers, many of whom came from the open-source movement. While Bill Gates of Microsoft played a major role in bringing the WTO to Seattle, Rob Glaser, who made his millions at Microsoft, donated technical support and expertise, and in particular the latest streaming technologies, to the indymedia Web site. "From the standpoint of all these independent media, the WTO couldn't have picked a worse place to hold their meeting," according to local media activist Bob Siegel. "I mean it's Seattle—we've got all the techies you'll ever want. . . . It's perfect that the WTO came here. Perfect" (quoted in Paton 1999, 3). Indymedia.org allowed real-time distribution of video, audio, text, and photos, with the potential for real interactivity through "open publishing," in which anyone with access to the Internet could both receive and send information.

In just two years, the IMC network has become a critical resource for activists and audiences around the world, providing an extraordinary bounty of news reports and commentaries, first-person narratives, longer analyses, links to activist resources, and interactive discussion opportunities from around the world. In the beginning, they focused primarily on the anti-globalization mobilizations at the multilateral summits of neoliberal governance. At each of these meetings, they provided innovative international coverage, which often included collaborative initiatives with other media and social-movement activists. In the last year, and particularly since September 11, the network has added

several new member sites and widened the scope of its coverage to include local, national, and international campaigns concerning anti-corporate globalization.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the independent media centers are a new watershed in a historical continuum of radical activist media, in which media activists have continually created new communications resources and challenged the enclosure of the communications commons.[3]

> The Seattle IMC and the growing Independent Media Center Network represent a new and powerful emerging model that counters the trend toward the privatization of all public spaces by expanding our capacity to reclaim public airwaves and resources. (IMC Brochure 2001, 1)

The IMC constitutes a new commons regime, relatively autonomous from the direction of the corporate and state media, in which unpaid workers share cyber and real territories, labor time, and communications technologies, techniques, and techne.

Lessons from the Commons and Enclosures

The concepts of the commons and enclosures date back to a conflict in England five hundred years ago. However, the terms have recently been given new currency in the debate over globalization and development and global communication. There are broadly three sets of meanings in use, which correspond with the three sets of social actors involved in these debates—the capitalist market, the state, and social movements (Sénécal 1991). Neoliberal economists invoke the "tragedy of the commons," arguing, as did the first feudal landlords, that the resource should be enclosed under corporate control in order to stop its unregulated overuse and make it more efficient and that nonconforming practices should be criminalized (Travis 2000).[4] The second school describes the commons as a "public" resource, which should be managed by state or multilateral international institutions, or public-private partnership.

My own perspective derives from groups within the social move-

ments opposed to corporate globalization, specifically the activists grouped loosely around the International Forum against Globalization and the radical historians and political analysts of autonomist Marxism. Both of these two schools demonstrate important parallels between the first enclosures of the English feudal commons, which led to the grand transformation to capitalism and European imperialism and the continuing colonization and exploitation of shared resources throughout the world (Caffentzis 1995; Shiva 1993; Thompson 1968). They also show a historical line of succession from the creativity, resistance, and rebellion of the English commoners throughout the various colonies and diasporas of European colonialism to contemporary campaigns for local, democratic rule of shared resources (Dalla Costa 1995; Linebaugh and Rediker 2000; Shiva 2000).

The narrative of the English commons was one of protracted and often bloody struggle over land, a mode of production, a way of life, and over history itself. After the collapse of serfdom in the mid-fourteenth century, farm labor was in demand. A new class of small farmers, or yeomen, became responsible for much of the agricultural production, working the land under a complex system of open fields and common rights. They held customary right, or "copyhold," to a part of the feudal estate, as a sort of subtenancy. They also shared the use of untitled village land, marsh, and water holdings, in common with other small and medium-sized farmers and tenants (Travis 2000, 5). Some historians have called the fifteenth century a "golden age" of English labor, as many laborers were able to sustain themselves from their work on the land without needing to purchase additional commodities, while some were even able to accumulate wealth (Travis 2000, 5).

The English commons did not exist within a democratic society, but on the margins, or interstices, between state and private domains. Many rural families were poor and were subject to the domination of the feudal landlords via rents, levies, tributes, and taxes. However, there were many significant physical, social, cultural, and psychological times and spaces where the dominant classes and the commoners did not intersect. Open to all with a shared interest in their use, their value was derived from participation and was not a tradeable commodity (Shiva 1994). Not private, they were concerned more with continuing

sustenance, security, and habitat, not with producing, distributing, or circulating commodities for a growth-oriented market system (Ecologist 1993). Commons regimes were also not public resources administered by the state, but instead were a form of direct rule by individuals and groups drawn from civil society, for the most part outside the electoral franchise.

As a corrective to the mainstream history, which argued that the commons were inefficient and unorganized, E. P. Thompson (1991, 131) documented their orderly use through a "rich variety of institutions and community sanctions which . . . effected restraints and stints upon use." Obligations, bonds, and evolving customary rights were defined and regulated as people negotiated multiple uses and schedules of space, time, labor power, and technical resources (Humphries 1990; Johnson 1996; Neeson 1993; Thompson 1968, 1991). This required the development of sophisticated interpersonal and community communication, which, in part, helps explain the origin of the words "communication" and "democracy" during this period. "Communication" meant "to make common to many," and democracy originated in the sixteenth century, when it meant "the rule of the comminaltie," the popular power of the multitude, implying the suppression of rule by the rich (Williams 1976, 93).

The scope and pace of the enclosures picked up in the fifteenth century and were an integral part of the grand transformation to European global capitalism (Thompson 1968). The first stage of the enclosures involved the fencing of common lands and copy-hold properties in order to introduce capital-intensive exploitation of the land for wool production. A new class of commercial landlords brutally dispossessed the rural population from grazing, fishing, hunting, quarrying, fuel, building materials, and rights of way. Eventually the landed gentry who dominated Parliament instituted enclosure laws.[5] The restructuring of the land and the way of life was instigated through a variety of measures, including engineering and highway projects, surveillance, the imposition of new work disciplines, systems of thought and governance, as well as dispersal and criminalization of all those who resisted. The enclosures, first developed in England, were extended to Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and then overseas, in the expropriation and

exploitation of lands, waterways, and indigenous laborers throughout the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

However, the enclosures were not implemented without extraordinarily widespread and diverse resistance, a diversity of tactics that parallels those in use today. These ranged from moral and legal appeals, parliamentary petitions, and lobbying to fence breaking, arson and systematic trespass, and direct uprisings and riots. Some of the resisters articulated a radical communitarian philosophy. For instance, Gerard Winstanley of the Levellers argued that the common people should share equitably in the resources of the lands and waterways, negotiating their use among themselves without intervention by lords, military might, or parliamentary dictum.

The story of the commons provides insights into the different notions of democracy of the bourgeois and popular revolutionary traditions. Linebaugh and Rediker describe the saga of four hundred years of cross-Atlantic circulation of this heritage of commoners' creativity and revolt, tracing the ideas and experiments about popular rule and social justice of this motley crew to the French and American revolutions (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000). Vandana Shiva (2000) has described the legacy of women's direct action during the 1940s against the British Empire's privatization and extraction of rent from the land in contemporary Indian laws and democratic principles. Italian Marxist feminist Maria Rosa Dalla Costa links the Zapatista challenge to land enclosures brought about by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the current campaigns against corporate globalization. "The webs of relations, analyses and information interweaving" among indigenous movements, workers, ecological movement militants, women's groups, and human rights activists are bridged by the continuing struggles for the commons, whose public spaces and ecology provide the possibility of "life, of beauty and continual discovery" (Dalla Costa 1995, 13).

The Internet and the Grand Transformation

We are now at the center of another grand transformation, from an economy dominated by industrial production to one in which information and digital knowledge play a key role in production, distribution, and circulation. One of the principal technologies of this new

mode of production and social organization is the Internet. As the Internet has developed from a publicly funded network centered among universities, research institutions, and governments to one dominated by corporate commercial exchange, there has been a widespread debate over its ownership, governance, customary operation, model of communication, and relationship to democracy. There has also been a renewal of discussion and debate about the Internet as a new commons and new enclosure.

The Internet developed through both deliberate design and unintended consequence. An odd combination of social actors—U.S. military research, academic and corporate scientists, and grassroots social movements—used public resources and a high degree of creativity and collaboration to create this globally networked communications system.[6] The role of state and corporate players in the history of the Internet is of course much better known (Murphy, forthcoming). In response to the launch of the Russian *Sputnik* in 1957, the U.S. Department of Defense formed the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) to develop superior military technologies. They commissioned scientists in a number of different think tanks throughout the United States and western Europe. Working interdependently throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the scientists created the communications system that would become the Internet. They designed a decentralized system that allowed every node on the network to operate without centralized control centers, with the capacity to send and receive packets of digitally coded information.

This research work spawned a small number of research and development units in the 1970s near Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, which manufactured silicon chips (hence Silicon Valley) and personal computers. Silicon Valley provided the capacity for U.S., Japanese, and European corporations to "globalize" their production and distribution of goods and services. They developed an extensive network of computer-based Intranets, linked through the widely available and relatively cheap publicly regulated telephone lines. Foremost among these multinational corporations were the computer firms that moved their production to Asia, where strong U.S.-backed authoritarian regimes kept labor rates low.

During the 1990s, the dominant model of cyberspace shifted from publicly funded "information sharing" to a model of private commercial space (Menzies 2001, 219–220). The majority of users are no longer the .orgs and .govs who operated among decentralized communications networks of many to many. Much of the traffic is now dominated by the .coms and the broadcast model, in which a small number of dominant global media giants control the distribution pipelines into the Net, online traffic, and much of the content, exploiting this resource through fees, advertising, and subscriptions (Raphael 2001). However, this move to fence off or enclose the Net under corporate control has not been achieved without resistance. Among many tactics, Net users have lobbied and advocated with all levels of government and corporate actors, acted deliberately to break down barriers through sabotage or hacking, or refused to accept the privatization of common code and content through massive sharing of music and movie files (Dyer-Witheford 2002).

The New Commoners

The genesis of this resistance can be explored in the less celebrated history of the Internet and social movements, involving two principal sets of social movements (Murphy, forthcoming). The first group included the computer technicians who went on to develop many social communications uses for the Internet, to lobby for democratic policy, and/or develop hacking networks to fight the enclosure of cyberspace (Ludlow 2001). The next generation would become integral to the indymedia movement. The scientists and graduate students within the university research centers, and then the corporate factories of Silicon Valley, developed a communications system with the potential of allowing untold numbers of communicators to produce and distribute unlimited kinds and quantities of information with no central gatekeeping command. Operating with public money, they exchanged ideas to create software and hardware with open-source protocols that allow anyone to utilize and change the code. While some of these "geeks" or "techies" went on to become entrepreneurs, the development of the Internet, and especially the World Wide Web, owes much to this dispersed corps of individual techies, hackers, students, community-based

organizations, and policy activists (Witheford 1997). By the 1990s, hundreds of individuals and groups, loosely collected in the open-source movement, were distributing information for free, sharing new software and hardware, and challenging the operating protocols of intellectual property through regulatory and entrepreneurial means. Another group was demonstrating the limits of existing corporate and state software and operating systems by sharing hacked software or warez (Pahati 2002).

This new class of knowledge workers operates in centers all over the world with a concept of collective intelligence in which they share a "common code" that is antithetical to proprietary ideas of intellectual property (Bosma et al. 1999; Castells 2001). While few would describe themselves as commoners, some speak in terms of breaking the corporate domination of the Internet and others think of themselves as contributing to democracy (Pahati 2002). Their mantra is that "information is free," that technology is a means to liberate information; their role is to allow information to circulate freely without the gate-keepers of nation-state or corporate domain (Castells 2001, 33). Regardless of their self-definitions, the open-source movement, the hackers, and file-sharing "pirates" have had a profound impact on the global Net, challenging the new corporate enclosures and attempting to keep the open architecture and free flow of information (Dyer-Witheford, 2002; Pfaffenberger 1999).

Building Networks against Corporate Globalization

Another group of social movements also identified with the communitarian aims of the early commoners. In the 1970s, a number of community-based groups began to use the new information technologies for social justice and social development. Several projects, such as Berkeley Community Memory, started in the Bay Area around Silicon Valley with the aim of making the information networks and communication capacity of the Internet publicly available. Other community-based organizations across North America and Europe developed a wide variety of new computer software and hardware for the Internet, including the Chicago group that developed the bulletin board system (BBS) and the movement of community nets to provide public access

(Castells 2001; Gutstein 1999).[7] By the 1980s, a number of international non-government organizations had realized the potential of linked international networks.

During the late 1980s, a coalition of national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from the northern and southern hemispheres acted to develop their own linked computer networks—including Geonet, Worknet, Fidonet, Econet, Greenet, Labornet, and Peacenet—allowing social movements of labor, ecology, peace, and women to share text-based information. This network of networks "preceded and long remained parallel to the commercialized Internet" (Murphy 2001, 7). In 1990, the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) was formed to support this global network, providing the first of many services with low-cost access to extensive resources at a global reach and speed, dramatically transforming the possibilities for political organization and action (Eagleton-Pierce 2001; Smith 2001).

Many of the NGOs had been working with social movements of small farmers, women, indigenous peoples, grassroots trade unionists, and environmentalists. There had been nationalist and left-wing critiques of the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) for their role in U.S.-driven capitalist exploitation of the Third World (Cleaver 1999). During the 1980s, this critique gained power as environmentalists and indigenous rights groups disseminated information about the impact of World Bank–funded megadevelopment projects on their livelihoods and cultures. Many NGOs allied to protest the imposition of World Bank and IMF policies of free trade and structural adjustment, which had privatized public resources, depleted public services, and weakened indigenous industries and national controls (Caffentzis 1995; Cleaver 1999; Dalla Costa 1995).

Some began to draw on the discourse of the commons. Vandana Shiva (1993, 215) argued that the the dominant ideology of postwar development focused on the enclosures of the national commons. Shiva (1994) and other ecologists framed debates over the uses of seeds and genetic materials as common regimes of knowledge and resources versus a corporate logic of enclosing and exploiting intellectual property.[8] *The Ecologist* magazine documented the efforts of a wide array of groups, outside the institutions of both market and state, to create or "defend open democratic community institutions that ensure people's control over their own lives" (Ecologist 1993, 175). Autonomist Marxist George Caffentzis described the privatization of the land tenure system in Africa as a "new enclosure movement" (Caffentzis 1995, 27). Maria Rosa Dalla Costa described the Zapatista revolt against NAFTA and the enclosure of commons lands as a struggle for the commons. However, the struggle was no longer local, or even national, but international in scope.

This new international movement continued to mobilize during the 1990s, as many of the NGOs and social-movement groups met face to face in international conferences and events. Some were counterconferences to multilateral organizations and strategems, including UN-sponsored meetings on the environment, women's rights, and human rights; WB, IMF, WTO, and NAFTA; the Asia Pacific Economic Conferences (APEC); and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Others, such as the *encuentros* in Mexico and Spain initiated by the Zapatistas, convened activists for exchanges and planning meetings and led to the formation of the People's Global Action (Moynihan and Solnit 2002). Seattle was to have been just one more international mobilization. However, the spotlight of the U.S. corporate media gave the movement a new level of power; Seattle was the coming-out party.

Seattle Independent Media Center

> The timing was right, there was a space, the platform was created, the Internet was being used, we could bypass the corporate media, we were using open publishing, we were using multimedia platforms. So those hadn't been available, and then there was the beginning of the anti-globalization movement in the United States. I think it was all of those pieces together. (Herndon 2001)

The roots of the IMC derive from these struggles over control of the resources of the cyber and terrestrial commons. The Seattle IMC brought together four sets of commoners: the social movements that

were cooperating in "anti-globalization," local Seattle community activists, technicians from the open-source movement, and activist-media producers. While few would describe themselves as commoners, many used the discourse of commons and enclosures in their critiques of corporate privatization in general, and of the Internet and media gate-keeping in particular. They shared a vision of the IMC as an open, unbounded communications resource, whose "open publishing" innovation allows access to all. This new group of media workers are also like the early commoners, who operated their own copy-hold plot and shared the commons to sustain themselves without needing to buy commodities in the marketplace.

The indymedia commoners intend to be self-sufficient, volunteering their labor and supporting the local centers and the Net through a variety of grassroots efforts rather than depending on outside support. The Israeli site's banner, "You are your own journalist," and the Italian's "Don't Hate the Media—Become the Media," encapsulates the do-it-yourself approach. They see themselves as activists and journalists who produce their own firsthand accounts of campaigns in which they are involved and circulate the accounts of struggles from other sites all over the world.

The IMC in Seattle, and the international IMC movement, has also drawn on a legacy of organizational skills developed by earlier social movements (Herndon 2001). This process of sophisticated interpersonal and community communication is not unlike the earlier commons. One of the first things one will observe, on the Web sites and in face-to-face meetings, is the high level of democratic processing. The IMC network is based on a nonhierarchical structure that relies on highly complex processes of networked consensus. International meetings are held online. There are a wide array of listserv discussion groups that range from general discussions to finances to translation and technical issues. Meetings are conducted through highly complex processes of decision-making, using a consensus model drawn from the direct action wing of the anti-globalization movement.

Indymedia represents a new level of development of a communications commons. There had been earlier attempts among media activists to collaborate and share resources. Radical film documentarians in the 1960s and 1970s, the cable community-access movement of the 1970s and 1980s, Deep Dish TV and Free Speech TV via satellite TV, and micro-radio producers had all shared production and programming resources. Media-specific organizations of radio producers, video producers, and Web activists had been formed at the local, national, and international levels.[9] National and international conferences in San Francisco, New York, Amsterdam, Kuala Lumpur, and Delhi had convened activists interested in developing networks to promote media and democracy. However, many of these efforts had been stymied by the difficulties of sustaining long-term collaborations without stable financing, production facilities, or mechanisms for distribution; the craft separation into specific media technologies and practices; and rivalries for resources.

The Seattle IMC was able to surmount some of these barriers and move to a new level of social organization for a number of reasons. They carefully built a relationship with social-movement activists rather than distancing themselves from political organizing. They also consciously built on the experience of earlier networks, inviting many of the activists from the independent video, community radio, micro-radio, and open-source movements to participate very early on in the planning, fund-raising, and gathering of production equipment.[10] The storefront provided the personal and technological interface to bridge the rivalries between different media, different organizations, and different generations. More seasoned media activists worked together on production projects with newer producers and activists. The four-hundred-strong crew also used all the old and new media, from pens to laptops, and from inexpensive audio-tape and camcorders to the latest in digital recording technologies.

This high level of cooperation helped to break down, if not eliminate, some of the old craft and territorial divisions. Tom Poole, of Deep Dish TV, said: "In the early '90s, we all knew about each other but folks were more factionalized. Now you can see that there's a more collective effort" (quoted in Rinaldo 2000). During the WTO meetings in Doha, Qatar, in 2001, the IMC produced the "No New Rounds" radio Webcast offshore, together with Greenpeace; and in 2002, with "Democracy Now," the IMC broadcast from the protests against the World Economic

Forum in New York City and the World Social Forum events in Porte Alegre, Brazil. After the World Social Forum, a caravan of media activists from several different groups covered the crisis in Argentina, reporting directly from the mass meetings in the streets.

The success of the IMC was also due to the new array of available digital technologies. As a high-tech center, Seattle was also home to the original technical support crew, and the technical crew remains an indispensable part of the IMC. Most of the Centers still operate on the same donated ISP and use open-source software. The IMC also took advantage of the advancements in digital video. The new lightweight digital cameras are cheap, easy to work with, and edit and can broadcast instantaneously, allowing much more collaboration. Eric Galatas from Free Speech TV thinks that television will change dramatically as a result. "There are so many people now picking up DV [digital video] cameras, getting their hands on iMacs or G4s and editing great videos. . . . I think we're going to look back on this period as a launch pad for an entirely new way of making and distributing television" (quoted in Rinaldo 2000).

Most important, the IMC could overcome the limited space and the distribution problems inherent in the old media. The Internet and related technologies enabled a quantum leap in time and space for other kinds of content generation as the site could accept an unlimited amount of content, including text, photos, graphics, video, and audio. While debates over how to sustain the resource continue, there are none of the space limitations, and ensuing conflicts over sharing, that led to the crisis at Pacifica and constant tensions among other older independent media. Also, the reach is potentially so much further: During the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, the site had a million and a half hits, and the entire network is now estimated to receive about four-hundred thousand page views a day (Pavis 2002).

The IMC represents a major step forward in the tactical use of autonomous media. It has brought together activists and journalists from across the different media with movements that were able to circulate their messages on a scope and scale not realized before. In many ways, they have been able to surmount the limits on the resource that always faced the land-based commons and earlier media commons. The

expanded horizon for production and distribution has limited the battles over resources, but not eliminated them. The IMC is networked; highly consultative decision-making owes a lot to skills developed in the consensus-model training of the direct action wing of the anti-globalization movement. The negotiation of resources appears to operate with far fewer of the stand-offs that seemed inherent in the earlier activist media movements of which I was a part. However, in the long-term, some of the same old questions remain.

How can the IMCs sustain this resource? The decentralized network model helped share the labor and the fund-raising. However, the dependence on volunteers and the sharing of a limited number of resources will be hard to continue indefinitely. Already, those people who are able to volunteer tend to represent a small minority of young white North Americans and Europeans who can afford to share their time (Rinaldo 2000). The network is facing these problems in creative ways, sending the caravan to Argentina, sending volunteers with technical expertise to new sites in Latin America, providing constant technical and other kinds of support via the Internet itself, and circulating key personnel through the network. Nevertheless, very creative solutions are needed to overcome the huge inequality of access to media production and Internet technologies that exists among working-class communities of color in North America and Europe, and even more so in the southern hemisphere.

The success of the IMC network has not been without other challenges and costs. Its visibility has brought more attention from national and international security agencies. In Seattle, the IMC had been able to operate as witnesses, providing a thin skin of protection against greater police violence and a photographic and audio record for the legal teams fighting police actions. However, after the confrontation between demonstrators and police during the spring 2001 Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) meeting in Quebec City, the Seattle site was raided by the FBI, based upon information from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). During the 2001 Genoa Meeting of the G8 in Genoa, Italy, the Italian police attacked the IMC, beating and arresting everyone inside (Halleck 2002; Starhawk 2001). What are the risks of more security intervention in IMC offices and Web sites?

Among the monocultural enclosures of the .coms and media giants, indymedia is a vibrant commons. The IMC produces counterinformation to the media giants, and are able to do so using the same communication and information machinery that capital uses to ensure its own mobility (Witheford 1997, 205). The IMC has built a network from the heritage created by earlier media activists and, as importantly, has based itself within the social movements against corporate globalization, acting to make visible and circulate a multiplicity of social movements and actions.

Notes

1. A banner on the homepage of the Italian Independent Media Centre, September 2001.

2. The local daily and weekly Seattle newspapers presented a range of views about the impact of WTO free trade decisions on the environment, labor standards, and local democratic governance. However, the initial television coverage and national mainstream coverage focused on the few incidents of property damage; characterized the wide range of protesting groups as laughable and ill informed, and dismissed their critiques of the WTO and corporate globalization. One *New York Times* columnist summed up this trope about demonstrators: "a Noah's ark of flat-earth advocates, protectionist trade unions, and yuppies looking for their 1960s fix" (FAIR Media Advisory, December 7, 1999). A 2001 study in the *Columbia Journalism Review* shows how this framing leans "heavily towards the corporate side in major news organizations coverage of protests at the IMF meeting in Prague, the FTAA talks in Quebec City, the European Summit in Sweden, and the G-8 meeting in Genoa" (cited in Hyde 2002).

3. In Kidd 1998 I teased out the concept of the radio communications commons, based in the electrospace.

4. Hannibal Travis (2000) argues that enclosure includes the actual process of enclosure, and as importantly, a "recharacterization of existing entitlements as theft" (4).

5. The Houses of Parliament who enacted the Enclosure Laws were dominated by the landed gentry and noblemen in the top 1 percent income bracket (Travis 2000, 5).

6. There are many good histories of the Internet that show this complex development, propelled by very different social actors (Bosma et al. 1999; Castells 2001; Dyer-Witheford 1999; Murphy 2001).

7. This development of public use software and hardware continues throughout the world. Most recently, Indian and Brazilian computer designers have developed cheap personal computers for mass use and have adapted open-source software for operating systems.

8. In the plenary address to the counterconference against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne, Vandana Shiva compared the struggle for farmers' control of their seed to the campaign for free computer software (Shiva 2000, 9).

9. The Newsreel Organization built national and international links among radical film producers. International video producers had convened in conferences in the 1980s and 1990s under the loose direction of Videazimut. Grassroots radio producers formed an international organization called the World Community Radio Organization (AMARC), which also facilitated collaborations among feminist and indigenous producers. The Tactical Media Conferences in Amsterdam convened activists from old and new media (Bosma et al. 1999; Halleck 2002; Kidd 1998).

10. Collaborators included Deep Dish TV, Paper Tiger TV; Free Speech TV; Whispered Media; Changing America; NY Free Media Alliance; the micro-radio producers, including Free Radio Berkeley and Prometheus Media; as well as many others.

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