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Rage Against the Machine: How Indymedia's Radical Project Is Working to Create the New Public Sphere

Richard E. Templin

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE:

HOW INDYMEDIA'S RADICAL PROJECT

IS WORKING TO CREATE THE NEW PUBLIC SPHERE

By

RICHARD E. TEMPLIN, III

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The members of the Committee approve the Dissertation of Richard E. Templin III

Defended on December 12, 2008.

_____
Andrew Opel
Professor Directing Dissertation

_____
Doug Schrock
Outside Committee Member

_____
Stephen C. McDowell
Committee Member

_____
Donna Marie Nudd
Committee Member

Approved:

_____
Stephen C. McDowell, Chair, Department of Communication

_____
John Mayo, Dean, College of Communication

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above named committee members.

IN MEMORIUM
Mary P. Priest – Beloved Mother – 1938-2009
O.D. Priest Jr. – Beloved Father – 1923-2007

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, my wife Grace Frances my daughter Aster Mary and all of my cherished friends.

This project would not been possible without the guidance, patience and inspiration of my teachers, mentors and friends Drs. Andy Opel, Donna Nudd, Steve McDowell, Marilyn Young, Harry Dahms, Gary Heald and James Young.

A very special thank you to my fellow IMCistas, both those who participated in this project and those who have given so much to create and nurture Indymedia around the world. Thanks to all radical media makers everywhere; keep up the fight—another world is possible.

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ABSTRACT

In 1998, a group of radical media makers and social justice activists opened the Independent Media Center in an abandoned storefront in downtown Seattle to provide street level news coverage of a large-scale mobilization protest against a meeting on the World Trade Organization, what later became known as the "Battle in Seattle." In the years following this event, Independent Media Centers have been established in over 150 locations around the world, creating a primarily online network of autonomous radical media outlets, linked by a commitment to radical democratic principles such a decentralization, open-publishing and complete transparency of process. This analysis advances the central argument that the Indymedia movement is more than just an alternative media outlet; it represents an attempt to harness the potential power of the globally networked Internet to create a new public sphere. It is a space not only for the production and dissemination of alternative content but a truly new public sphere where alternative methods of organizing that do not rely on traditional notions of hierarchical structure, leadership and decision making can be developed, not only intellectually but through direct practice. In order to advance this argument, this study employs a multi-method, multi-sited approach using a descriptive analysis of various Indymedia artifacts, an examination of the structures of the North American Indymedia network and an ethnographic as well as auto-ethnographic examination of a single IMC within the North American Network. The IMC is examined through the lenses of John D.H. Downing's theory of Radical Media, Chris Atton's theoretical framework of alternative media, the idealized Public Sphere and Theory of Communicative Action of Jürgen Habermas and various applications of Autonomous Marxism.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2001, members of the Tallahassee progressive community began looking for ways to better use their time, energy and resources to contribute to the broad movements for social, economic and environmental justice. In the few months prior, Tallahassee had been at the epicenter of a struggle that many believed marked the complete breakdown of the electoral process that is at the cornerstone of the liberal democratic institutions of the United States, the 2000 presidential election recount. Area activists had witnessed firsthand and up close what they felt was the final perversion of the democratic process in the U.S., a post-election criminal conspiracy perpetrated at the highest levels of both state and federal governments. At that time, two members of this activist community had been exposed to the Independent Media Center (IMC) movement during the World Trade Organization protests in 1998 in Seattle and again a year later at the Biodevastation Conference in Boston. Based on these experiences and lengthy online conversations with IMC activists, the two began to spread the word about Indymedia and took the first steps towards organizing an IMC for Tallahassee and the surrounding area.

My assistance was sought because I was fairly well known in the community for helping to organize several groups, including a progressive student political party, the FSU War Department (a radical student rights organization) and the Tallahassee Green Party. Specifically, I was asked to help develop the IMC's organizational structure and an outreach plan for the recruitment of new members, both of which I had helped implement for the above-mentioned groups with relative success. The IMC was described to me as a web based alternative news outlet, one that would bypass the single local daily newspaper (less than affectionately known to many as the Tallahassee Mullet Wrapper) and the local TV news operations. The media outlets had, in our opinions, demonstrated pro-establishment biases in covering matters of the state and had provided little if any coverage of the groups working against unjust state policies and practices. The IMC was to be something that would belong directly to the communities that had been marginalized and ignored outright by the mainstream media.

Most of those who had expressed an interest in the IMC were concerned with raising awareness about growing new pressures for widespread development of the region's vast, undeveloped areas owned by the St. Joe Paper Company, Florida's largest single private landowner. The company had recently sold all of its interests in tree farming and paper

production and had purchased the Arvida development and realty company, one of the state's biggest and most powerful development companies, one that had been demonized by the environmental community for its irresponsible growth practices and its role in paving over Southeast Florida. The company was already using its considerable resources in the legislature to weaken environmental standards in North Florida and was engaging in a major media effort to brand the region as "Florida's Great Northwest," and the area's media outlets were all too eager to play along.

I was certainly motivated by this issue but was also reacting to what I perceived as a media blackout of news about Florida's labor movement. I had just been employed as the Communications Director for the Florida AFL-CIO and in just a few weeks was already learning the hard way that the Tallahassee based Capitol Press Corps and the rest of Florida's mainstream media outlets had no interest in covering the labor movement in the state, unless of course those stories involved some sort of scandal or the continued decline of our membership and loss of political influence in Florida. Simply put, I was hoping that a new media outlet would make my job easier.

I found the web-based nature of the IMC movement both intimidating and intriguing. Intimidating in that while I was aware that the Internet was rapidly transforming grassroots organizing and political action, that basic awareness was as far as my experience went. I had no understanding of the role that computers, modems, email and the Internet could play in those efforts. Though I had limited experience with email and the Internet, I was certainly not, to use a term from Ryan and Gross's Diffusion of Innovations Theory, an early adopter. In fact, I was most certainly a technical laggard.

I was intrigued because, to put it bluntly, it was cheap.

At that point, I had just finished a third failed attempt to organize new independent print publications to replace a former independent daily, the *Florida Flambeau*. The *Flambeau* started as a student newspaper at Florida State University in 1915 but was evicted from its offices and lost all university funding in 1972 for its editorials against the Vietnam War and its news coverage of the anti-war and other protests that were commonplace on the campus that was known as the Berkeley of the South. The *Flambeau* spent the next 26 years reporting the news and views of the campus and the broader community as an independent publication and became well known for investigative journalism that worked to expose the inner workings of the

university administration as well as local and state governments. In the early nineties, after a series of articles critical of the Greek system at FSU, fraternity and sorority members joined FSU boosters and administrators to create the *FS View,* a twice-weekly publication that was light on hard news but heavy on sports stories and praise of the university administration. After six years of pressure on local businesses and Florida State's Student Government Association to drop their advertising with the *Flambeau* and shift those dollars to the new publication, the paper was forced to shut down. Six-months later, as a group of us were trying to revive the publication, the name and all of the archives were purchased by the *FS View*. (A truly laughable, revisionist history of these events can be found online at http://www.fsu.edu/~fsu150/partners/flambeau_history.html.)

These efforts had all failed primarily because the resource burden for a regular print publication was so high. We had found ways to raise funds for a couple of issues, but without a commitment from advertisers there was no way to sustain the effort. Advertisers were less than enthusiastic to sponsor a brand new publication, especially one that wanted to tell the stories we were interested in. The high cost coupled with the incredible amount of volunteer hours needed to produce the content on a daily, weekly, or even monthly basis made the prospect more than daunting. Based on what my comrades were telling me, a web based media outlet solved many of those problems. So more skeptical than hopeful, ignorant of Internet technology and only somewhat eager to learn, I headed to the first meeting of my fourth attempt to create an alternative media outlet in Tallahassee. That skepticism only lasted for the first fifteen minutes of the presentation, and within another half-hour, I was hooked.

The Independent Media Center movement was like nothing I had ever seen. It was simultaneously local and global in its scope. It overcame many of the resource problems inherent to media production and distribution and already had legions of enthusiastic supporters all over the world (my own local experiences had led me to believe that enthusiasm for progressive organizing was in serious decline). More importantly, the IMC project sought to create much more than another media outlet. Indymedia activists, or as many prefer to be called - IMCistas, had a broader more comprehensive goal. As I learned more about the project, it became clear that creating a new media outlet that bypassed the corporate press was only one element. The IMCistas were working not only to challenge the mainstream media but radically re-define all of the dominant assumptions about media, grassroots organizing, decision making

and collective action. I have now been an active member of the Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center collective for almost six years, and while participation in our local IMC has waxed and waned over the years (our center is currently non-operational based on a hacker incident I will discuss later), I have continued my involvement as a local organizer and cheerleader, discussant on several international email lists and now researcher.

I include this short personal narrative in this introduction to communicate to the reader my motivations and hopes for the current research project. My central argument is that Indymedia is more than just an alternative media outlet; it represents an attempt to harness the potential power of the globally networked Internet to create a new public sphere. It is a space not only for the production and dissemination of alternative content but a truly new public sphere where alternative methods of organizing that do not rely on traditional notions of hierarchical structure, leadership and decision making can be developed, not only intellectually but through direct practice. I further hope to illustrate that while there are continuous challenges to the creation of this new public sphere, tensions between its participants, and serious issues that have yet to be resolved, the project itself has made real progress in creating this space, challenging not only the dominant notions of media making and dissemination but of social organizing as well. In the most general of terms, the goals of this research project are three-fold. First, what does this new space look like? What are the structures, practices and processes of Indymedia that contribute to this new space, and more importantly, what do the various theoretical models of alternative media and social organizing tell us about these elements and their potential for creating a truly new public sphere? Second, what are the experiences of those working to build this space and what do those experiences tell us about the successes and/or failures of their efforts? Third, I hope to provide some grounded practical suggestions to the IMC community - based on careful examination and research - in an effort to help my fellow IMCistas navigate through some of the tensions and challenges that have arisen in the past few years, challenges that are to be expected in a movement as vibrant and comprehensive in scope as the IMC.

In order to advance my central argument and attempt to answer the questions posed above, I employ a multi-method, multi-sited approach using a descriptive analyses of various Indymedia artifacts, an examination of the structures of the North American Indymedia network and an ethnographic as well as auto-ethnographic examination of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC collective. I work to accomplish this through several stages, each one building on the next to

give the reader a clearer picture of Indymedia; how it operates, how it builds on our understanding of alternative media and how the IMCistas are working to create a truly new space for information sharing and social organizing in ways that challenge the dominant assumptions of both.

In Chapter One I provide a detailed history of the IMC including a discussion about a major pre-cursor to the IMC, the "Electronic Fabric of Struggle" envisioned by the Zapatistas in their struggle against the Mexican government and global neo-liberalism. I also describe the creation of the first Independent Media Center during the tumultuous days of the "Battle In Seattle" in 1999, how that first IMC has grown into a global network. This history provides both an introduction to the IMC phenomenon and gives the reader an understanding of the political, philosophical and practical motivations of those responsible for Indymedia.

In Chapter Two I look at the current media climate in the U.S. and the development of media policy in this country over the past twenty years that has given rise to this context. The goal here is to highlight the importance of alternative media projects like the IMC, contextualize the environment within which Indymedia is working and offer a better understanding of why the IMCistas are developing the structures and practices the ways in which they are. I also briefly examine the U.S. media reform movement that has developed in reaction to these mainstream media policies and practices, differentiating between this movement and radical alternative media.

In Chapter Three I examine two of the major theoretical frameworks and models of radical alternative media developed by John D.H. Downing and Chris Atton in an effort to define and explain these media as social phenomena as well as to explicate their potential to help instigate fundamental social change. In Chapter Four I apply these two frameworks and their ancillary components to some of the policies and practices of Indymedia, clearly placing it in the realm of alternative media and giving the reader a better understanding of what the IMCistas are working to accomplish. This analysis will focus on the Indymedia network's processes as articulated in several different artifacts including the IMC Principles of Unity, the policies for joining the global network, the global communications system they have established and other aspects of Indymedia's organizing tactics and strategies.

While some local Indymedia Centers have expanded into print, radio and community broadcast television, the IMC is still predominantly an Internet based effort. In Chapter Five I

examine what some theorists have articulated about the potential for the Internet to instigate real radical social change, specifically those theorists operating within Autonomist Marxism, a theoretical school within the pantheon of Neo-Marxist thought which I argue offers an excellent framework through which to understand the potential for Internet based projects like Indymedia to truly challenge both the national and global status-quo of neo-liberal globalization. The argument here is that capital's program periodically provides oppositional forces the tools necessary to mount a serious challenge to its dominance. I argue that Indymedia is using one of capital's greatest achievements, the Internet and the global communications infrastructure, as other innovations have in the past by oppositional groups, to bring about its downfall. I also discuss the Habermasian idealized notion of the alternative public sphere, a space constructed by various social structures and conditions where tired old notions of race, gender, ethnic and socioeconomic status and the hierarchies they have traditionally engendered are dismantled, replaced with commitments to equality, collectivism and a true commitment to rational discourse as a means of charting social action.

In Chapter Six I contrast these ideals with the "reality" of the IMC network in North America – the actual nuts and bolts of the new public sphere that the IMCistas are working to create. Here I describe a "census" of sorts of the IMC's in the United States and Canada. The census focuses on participation in the various collectives, the resources available to the collectives, outreach methods being employed, internal communication systems and access to the tools of the technology that is so critical to the IMC movement. This is then supplemented by interviews of members of select IMC collectives to asses their perceptions about how their particular IMC is working and the impact that their particular resource/organizational condition has on the work they are doing.

In Chapter Seven I focus on a single IMC to get a richer, more detailed look at how the IMC experiment to create radical alternative media and a new public sphere takes shape from its creation to its current state of inactivity. This ethnography of the Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center, augmented with reflections of my own experiences, is an attempt to examine the social elements of this public sphere in an effort to unpack the complexities of a project that is working to radically re-define not only the media but what it means to organize collectively. The ethnography is supplemented by a textual analysis of several important artifacts from the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC including the organization's mission statement,

bylaws, decision-making and editorial processes. This analysis further explains the public sphere that these IMCistas were working to create, one that can be reflected upon by its creators with the crystal clarity of hindsight.

In the final chapter by means of a conclusion, I reflect on what was learned throughout the current research project in order to provide some practical suggestions to the IMC community. As I will explain in more detail, this project, such as it is, belongs to the IMC community. These suggestions center on ways to improve the communication networks within each IMC collective to facilitate better volunteer recruitment, enhance aspects of decision making processes and the importance of technical training in an effort to expand the human resources available to do this critical work

CHAPTER 1
FROM THE JUNGLES OF CHIAPAS TO THE STREETS OF SEATTLE: THE RISE OF THE IMC

"We can exercise immense power over the current economic globalization systems, but only by means of a solidarity that crosses the boundaries of nations, political affiliations, identities and narrow interests. As this is true of our larger network of networks who are fighting for a more sane world, so is it true within Indymedia, one network of many. We are merely a microcosm of what is happening on the macro/global level." – ***Sheri Herndon, a founder of the IMC, 2003.***

What is the IMC? A Primer

Autonomy is a core principle of the Independent Media Center project, so much so that a commitment to autonomy is a central tenant of the first of ten "Principles of Unity" that guide most of those participating in the network. Since the IMC holds autonomous self-organization in such regard, the question "what is the IMC?" elicits as many different responses as individuals asked. The first IMC website, based in Seattle, that currently serves as the network's international central hub defines the IMC as "a collective of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage. Indymedia is a democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of truth" (indymedia.org). While this statement encapsulates the bulk of the IMC's activities, it only scratches the surface of what the IMC has become to the thousands of activists and users that make up the movement. The only way to define the IMC is to look at the myriad of uses and functions the network serves.

The IMC is a largely web-based, decentralized radical alternative media outlet driven by citizen journalists and an organizing resource for activists and an online archive to catalogue the details of protest activities and other events. It is a global communication network for activists and their allies and a laboratory for exploring the application of radical democratic principles to group decision making and the creation of new public spheres. Last, but certainly not least, it is a vehicle to help liberate the fast-developing internet and global communication technologies from their capital masters so as to make those technologies agents in their current master's downfall.

As an alternative/radical media outlet the IMC is a network of about 150 web sites, each site established and maintained by a different IMC local organization, usually referred to as the "collective." While many local collectives have expanded into other media forms such as video, print and radio, all still have a website as the cornerstone of their effort. Each website has a number of unique features but all have several in common. Each IMC homepage is divided into three sections. On the left hand column is a listing of contact information for that IMC, instructions about using the website, links to affinity organizations and projects, and some form of "info shop" that details the history of the individual centers and the rules governing both editorial and organizational decision making. Also included in the left hand column are links to all of the other IMCs connected to the global network, or "cities list." This list is one of the few conditions that local collectives must meet for inclusion in the larger network and ensures that all of the sites are easily accessed by anyone using the local site. The cities list is monitored and maintained by IMC Process, a largely online central body of volunteers that has been the subject of much discussion and controversy within the movement. Many IMCs also include a list of topics on the left-hand column to make it more convenient for uses to find articles of particular interest.

The right hand column is the "newswire," the open publishing heart of the IMC. The newswire allows users to post announcements, news and commentary in either text only or multi-media formats. Many of these newswires are divided into "local" and "elsewhere" sections. The software used by the IMCs allows readers to attach comments and ratings to each story, a feature that was pioneered by the open source techies of the IMC but which has now become a familiar user option on many blog websites (Uzelman, 2002). This provides an excellent opportunity for on-line discussion and direct feedback, an instantaneous feedback loop of "letter to the editor" and response to those letters.

The center column of an IMC site is the largest, and contains the "features" section. Each local IMC has an editorial group that monitors the newswire and selects articles for "promotion" to the features section. These editorial boards also work to create new content for the features section and monitor other sites in the network for articles to include. While this portion of the site is moderated, inclusion in the global network requires that the editorial process be transparent, and in most cases, membership on the editorial board is open to anyone willing to contribute. The editorial policies are designed to ensure that features are well researched, well

documented and written for the broadest understanding. Many of the software packages also allow for a "razor wire." This section of website appears at the top of the main page and is used to announce major breaking news or upcoming important events. Some of the websites also include some form of calendar such as the Radical Calendar (a separate resource developed to be used by IMCs and other websites) that allows groups to advertise their events to the community. In Tallahassee, this became an invaluable community service of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC, serving to help groups plan events that did not conflict with others previously scheduled. The overall look and functioning of each IMC site vary across the network, based on the open source software package being used and the aesthetic decisions made by the collectives, but all of the sites include these basic elements.

The IMC is also a resource for grassroots activists and organizers, above and beyond the calendar function, in the planning and promotion of both large-scale anti-globalization protest such as the mobilization against the Fair Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Ministerial meetings in Miami, Florida in 2003 and smaller local efforts such as turning out the public to county and city commission meetings or local labor organizing drives like the University of Miami strike and protest in March and April of this year. In Tallahassee, the IMC became a central online planning and promotion forum for a series of protests leading up to and following the outbreak of the War in Iraq in 2002 and 2003. The IMCs became communication hubs, on-line meeting places for the discussion of the political and philosophical underpinnings of social actions as well as the strategies and tactics to be employed.

IMCs exist to dismantle the current corporate controlled mass media. IMCistas are working to create an "entire new type of media system based on decentralized and democratic decision-making, transparency of process and unfettered access by the public to the communication media" (Opel & Templin, 2004). They are building a new communication space, what Kidd (2003a) has referred to as a communication commons, a public sphere that is committed to equality between participants, conversation as social action and consensus amongst all those involved. The IMC eliminates corporate third party interests and replaces them with direct, person-to-person communication in a liberatory effort to minimize what Habermas has called "strategic communication" and increase genuine understanding (Habermas, 1987), linking it to a long history of radical alternative media projects catalogued by many researchers such as Downing (2001) and Atton (2002), just to name couple of more recent projects.

Media liberation from the toxic influence of capital control is only part of the effort. The IMC uses its role as a radical alternative media project to create a social laboratory, one where individuals can experiment with new forms of democratic organizing and decision-making not only to radicalize media content and available information, but also to completely rework all aspects of the dominant models of media production and distribution and group organizing for social change. This laboratory provides a vehicle, a goal-oriented project that is being used to develop and refine anarchist principles like self-organizing, consensus based decision-making and autonomous empowerment in an effort to overcome traditional top-down hierarchical organization and communication patterns (Pickard, 2004). Indymedia activists are using this endeavor as a means to search for new ways of organizing people for social change, released from the material and social constructions rooted in classism, sexism, racism and the geographic inequities resulting from centuries of colonialism to create new public spheres for communication, relationship building and social action. Eliminating or at least reducing the impact of all these oppressive "isms" which have for so long served the power structures that have created and benefit from them, may sound naively utopian and in reality it may be as evidenced by many of the tensions the movement is facing, challenges that will be explored more fully later. Despite these challenges, the IMC is working (and I as I hope to illustrate here) succeeding in breaking down traditional notions of mass mediated communication - from organizational decision making to message production and delivery - in favor of something better, something more democratic, something more human.

This liberatory desire permeates every aspect of the IMC, including the ways in which the network is using the Internet and other global communications technologies. The rise and expansion of Indymedia can't be adequately understood without including its connections to the open source software movement and other recent developments that have placed the tools for media making and global communication in the hands of those who once were nothing more than consumers of capital's media products. The development of free software, capital's drive to link the globe with its technologies and, the globalization project's manipulation of the world markets to increase productivity while reducing costs (largely through egregiously underpaid labor) have all combined to provide those standing in the way of the multi-national corporations drive for world domination with the tools they need to bring about the downfall of Capital's

current globalization program. This seizure and democratization of technology works hand in hand with the radically democratic internal organizational structures and process of Indymedia.

Indymedia then is all of these; a radical alternative media project, a communications and organizing resource for activists, a vehicle for the creation of new liberated public spheres, and a way to harness new communications technologies for the anti-capital/anti-globalization movements. Morris (2004) writes,

> As Indymedia is cooperatively facilitated and based on liberated democratic technology (free-software and copyleft publishing of media), it is a realm of intensive democratic discourse, cooperative coordination and public ownership. Indymedia…is an example, in principle (if fallible in practice) of a holistic, direct democratic organization in its communications, economics and internal politics. At the same time, Indymedia is part of a larger set of movements, including but not limited to the global justice movement. In helping co-create a decentralized participatory politics, a new nonproprietary media economy of collective information goods, and a multifaceted network of cultures, Indymedia is helping inspire a new social future for humanity and model a new post capitalist set of social relations (page 249).

History of the Independent Media Center

Several researchers have provided fairly detailed accounts of the creation of the first Independent Media Center in 1999 in Seattle before and during the massive mobilization in protest of the World Trade Organization conclave, taking place in late November and early December of that year (Kidd, 2003a; Morris, 2004; Shumway, 2003). The protests surrounding these meetings have become known as the Battle of Seattle and are widely considered to be the "coming out party" for the current US anti-globalization/anti-capital movement (Halleck, 2003). The following historical sketch proceeds in three stages. First, I will examine some early alternative radical media and media reform projects that arose in the early 1990s and discuss the ways in which these endeavors served as precursors to the IMC. Second, I focus on the Battle of Seattle, describing the creation of the first Independent Media Center and the roles it served in the mobilization. Finally, I briefly track the expansion of the network from that first abandoned storefront in Seattle to over 150 Independent Media Centers scattered throughout the globe and on every continent.

The Electronic Fabric of Struggle begins in Chiapas

The IMC movement's radical alternative media roots run much further and deeper than the brief mention I provide here. Alternative oppositional media has existed and at times flourished in various media forms, always following closely on the heels of the advent of new media technologies. From printing presses to photo copiers, radio and television broadcasts to satellite transmissions, film to video to digital video, computers to the Internet, interests and groups in opposition to the powers that be whether they be state or economic (usually both), have appropriated the technology and used it for their own purposes. Several researchers have compiled impressive records of these efforts, including Downing (1984), Downing et al, (2001), Halleck (2002) and Rodriguez (2001). Many examples from their accounts inform this project and are peppered throughout. Here, I examine one of those, chosen because of its direct influence on the development of the IMC. An ironic case actually, in that the real inspiration for this globally linked, computer mediated network of the digital age came from the one of the poorest regions in Mexico, the jungles of Chiapas (Coleman, 2004; Hamm, 2005; Herndon, 2001, 2003; Kidd, 2003; Milberry, 2003; Montagner, 2001;).

On New Year's Eve in 1994, as politicians in Mexico City were celebrating the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement an army of indigenous ethnic Mayans came out of the Lacandón jungles and simultaneously seized control of the police stations and municipal offices of the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas and five towns in the surrounding Chiapas highlands. On that night, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) declared war claiming, "an inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government" (Downing, 2001). The roots of the Zapatista rebellion can be traced back over 500 years when the Spanish began forcing the indigenous people from the fertile area, taking control of the native farms for cattle ranches and coffee, cotton and sugar plantations. Over the past forty years as the hunger for fertile land to feed Mexico's growing agriculture industry and its foreign markets grew, the people were forced onto smaller and smaller enclaves and were largely ignored by the marginally successful poverty reduction programs of the Mexican government, leading the region to become one of the poorest in Mexico. As small-scale trade deals were pushed through in the late 80s, multi-national capital interests controlled more and more of the region's resources, leaving the already impoverished indigenous people with less than nothing. In 1992, to pave way for NAFTA, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari modified article 27 of the

constitution, ending Mexico's historic commitment to land reform. Article 27 was the legal foundation for distribution of community-owned lands called *ejidosto*. This change all but eliminated any chances for the people of Chiapas to one day be able to control their own land, thus opening the rest of the region to eventual complete control by the multi-national agribusiness and mining interests that had established a strong foothold. Open rebellion became the only option available.

The First Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle demanded freedom, democracy, justice, employment, land, housing, food, and peace for the indigenous communities of the region. In spite of the fact that within hours segments of Mexico's mainstream media began carrying news of the revolt, the struggle risked becoming nothing more than a historical footnote in Latin American history as the Mexican army readied what, by many accounts, was to be a swift, total and devastating response to the insurgency except for the fact "computer screens around the world sparked with news of the uprising" (Halleck, 1994, p.1). The Institutional Revolutionary Party (The PRI) had been in complete control of the country for decades, including Mexico's largest television network, Televisia. This media powerhouse, often referred to as the PRI Ministry of Culture, captured 90% of Mexican viewers and was the primary source of news across the country (Cockburn, 1994). This media establishment could have simply ignored the events unfolding in the South, allowing the army to crush the resistance before most in the country or the world knew anything about it, except for the fact that the first accounts of the declaration of war appearing in the Mexican weekly newspaper *La Journada* were posted on the Internet. "The uses of the net to present the stance of the Zapatistas during their first negotiations forced even Televisia, the government-controlled television network, to report the official demands of the guerrillas" (Halleck, 1994 p. 3).

However, while the EZLN's strategy of taking bold action that would garner mainstream media coverage that could then be disseminated by the Internet was a success, it was the Zapatistas' use of a variety of communication technologies, especially the Internet, to bypass the mainstream media altogether, that proved to be the most effective. This allowed them to communicate their demands and the story of their struggle to both the Mexican people and the world community that gave the movement its sustainability.

The Zapatistas inspired a flourishing, widespread, and varied network of radical media communication that afforded them the opportunity to communicate directly

> with civil society. As a result, civil society was motivated and able to respond directly to the requests of the EZLN for citizen participation in their project. The very existence of the Zapatistas depended on the web of interlocking, autonomously controlled and operated media. But of these media, the one most crucial to the Zapatista movement was the Internet" (Downing, 2001 p. 219).

This innovation, however, was not merely one of capitalizing on the new technology of the Internet. The Internet was just the tool that afforded the EZLN the opportunity to make manifest a broader philosophical objective, that being to show the world that their struggle was just one example of a larger global problem, one that people of all nations and all cultures would have to deal with - the corporate neoliberalism of the world economy.

The Zapatistas sought to use communication not merely as a means for "reporting" the status of their efforts but to engage the Mexican and larger world communities in a dialogue. It was not enough that their stories were told, they had to be the ones to tell them so that the world did not merely hear "about" them but hear "from" them. This was paramount to their goals of economic, political and cultural self-determination. As Kidd (2004) put it, "A central element of [their] new politics was controlling the production and circulation of their own images; representation was as important to their sovereignty as the rifle" (page 6).

It was also critical to have a conversation with the world. This conversation served as a way for subordinated social groups around the globe to use the powerful images of the uprising as a backdrop for conversations about their own conditions in the era of globalization. This was a way for them to begin to realize the connections between their own struggles and those taking place in the jungles of southern Mexico. Through this social and analytical process a new global solidarity could be created, one that would allow the people of the world to speak with a unified voice against the power structures working to subjugate the masses under an iron fist of corporate dominance. This dialogue needed a space within which it could take place, a new discursive realm where people could communicate directly with each other, free from the filters of mainstream media constructed by corporations and the state, a space that could only be created by the radical use of new communications technologies. The Zapatistas "challenged supporters throughout the globe to carve out spaces within their own countries, regions, and neighborhoods for the constructive analysis of issues affecting their lives. In other words, the

Zapatistas were less concerned with garnering a following for their specific cause than with inspiring others to engage in transformative dialogical praxis at local and national levels" (Downing, 2001 p. 220).

The Zapatistas realized the need to build a global community of resistance, one that could link not only the Mayan farmer in Chiapas to the service worker in Mexico City but also to the factory worker in Southeast Asia, to the student environmentalist in Seattle, to the fisherman in Portugal, to the young worker in Paris and to the laid off steelworker in Buffalo. "This process of community building through cross-cultural dialogical praxis was the EZLN's most powerful strategy of resistance, unification, and survival. Their greatest strength was their ability to engage in this constant, creative endeavor, not only in their own communities but also in another space, a virtual realm constructed through the radical use of the communication technologies worldwide" (Downing, 2001 p. 221). The Internet afforded the EZLN and its supporters world-wide the ability to report, distribute and discuss news and information coming out of Chiapas through a wide array of mailing lists, newsgroups and websites, free of the filters imposed by mainstream media. To the supporters of Zapatismo, the events in Chiapas were always newsworthy, and thanks to the Internet facilitated network they were always able to keep in touch. One website operated by Justin Paulson in Santa Cruz, California called Ya Basta! even allowed supporters to send messages directly to the people in Chiapas via email messages that were then hand delivered in print form (Downing, 2001).

An excellent example of the Zapatistas' commitment to building a dialogue with others around the globe was the *Consulta Nacionale e Internacional* organized by the EZLN in 1994. The Consulta was a questionnaire seeking input not only from the Mexican people but also from the international community. The questionnaire was translated and distributed around the world via email and in print along with a video taped message from EZLN spokesman Subcomandante Marcos (now Delegate Zero Marcos), pledging that the directions given by the respondents would guide the course of action of the Zapatistas. Over 1.3 million responses were collected from China, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, England and the United States (Downing, 2001). This exercise solidified that the Zapatistas were in this struggle with the rest of world, that the neoliberal globalization that had finally made the situation in Chiapas untenable would eventually touch the lives of everyone, with the same consequence, the loss of the power of self-determination.

The direct link between the Zapatistas and the movement that would become Indymedia came about in August of 1996 at the First Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism hosted by the EZLN in Chiapas. Over 4,000 participants from around the world attended, several of whom would later become involved with the IMC. At the Encuentro, Marcos issued the Second Declaration from La Realidad, which is often quoted by early IMC activists as one of the major inspirations for their work (Herndon, 2003; Perlstein, 2000). In it, he called for the creation of a global network, a way to link all struggles against neoliberalism so that each, while remaining autonomous, could support the others.

The declaration also stated a central principle that would guide the formation of the IMC movement, one that called to the earlier philosophies of many anarchists, that "this intercontinental network of resistance is not an organizing structure; it doesn't have a central head or decision maker; it has no central command or hierarchies. We are the network, all of us who resist" (Duncan and Ruggiero, 1997, p.48). The network was to be completely open to everyone, would have no recognized leadership or hierarchical structure and was designed to unite peoples from multiple cultures, languages and social and political struggles behind the common goal of defeating the threats of globalization. This was to be "an entity which is reminiscent of alternative counterinformation in being described as a network of communication, yet is neither newspaper nor radio programme, neither website nor email list. An entity which in its emphasis on horizontal, decentralized organizing evokes a social movement, but without demanding a unified revolutionary program. An entity, which, to the contrary, is focusing on the diversity of struggles all over the world." (Hamm, 2005, p.1). The meeting itself telegraphed what would become the structure of the IMC network as "including all those who respond to the invitation, spaces of exchange and communication without the pressing obligation to come up with unified results, unified declarations of intent – a public space, created by ongoing horizontal and decentralized exchange, open to participation to everybody" (Hamm, 2005, p.1). The First Encuentro solidified the vision that the Zapatistas and their sisters and brothers around the world had worked to create; a true "electronic fabric of struggle" (Castells, 2000; Cleaver, 1995, 1998; Kidd, 2003).

The Battle For Seattle

A great deal has been written about the precursors to and the effort it took to launch the first IMC in Seattle in the months leading up to the WTO ministerial meetings in 1999. A few of these include Herndon (2003), Hyde (2003), Shumway (2003), Halleck (2002), Coleman (2004) and Kidd (2003,2004). The following account draws from all of these as well as a series of interviews conducted by the WTO History Project, a joint effort by several departments at the University of Washington. This history is being presented not only for the sake of simple interest, but because it lays the groundwork for the analysis to follow, proving many of the critical elements that will be expanded later as we try to better understand the complexities of the IMC phenomenon.

If the seed of Indymedia was created by the work of the Zapatistas and their supporters (drawing of course on a rich history of radical alternative media efforts throughout history), that seed was planted at the Grassroots Media Alliance Conference in August of 1999 in Austin, Texas and was nurtured by a wide array of media reform and alternative media production organizations throughout the year. The first collaborative web-based alternative media and reporting project, cited as a precursor by many of the IMC founders, took place in August of 1996, shortly after and inspired by the First Encuentro in Chiapas at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago (Hamm, 2005; Shummway 2003). A group of independent journalists, community media activists and 'zine publishers teamed up with open source software techs and created a website called Counter Media to provide coverage of the convention. By then, party conventions had become nothing more than overly staged pep-rallies gift-wrapped for a media establishment eager to accept them with no questions asked. The goal of Counter Media was to try and peel back the façade, to provide reports of what was going on in the cheap seats and outside the hallowed convention halls at protests, teach-ins and other events. Independent journalists were invited to use the site to publish their accounts, but due to software and other technical problems the site crashed. A setback for sure, but in an age when the term "blog" had yet to be invented, the fact that the collaborative project got up and running at all was considered a major step forward.

Armed with the prophetic call for the creation of alternative media spaces around the world at the First Encuentro, the lessons learned during the Counter Media project and a healthy dose of indignation aimed at the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, independent

journalists, media reform activists and DIY media practitioners gathered in Austin for the Grassroots Media Alliance. During that conference, established groups like Free Speech TV, Paper Tiger, Deep Dish TV, Big Noise Films and Whispered Media connected with individual activists and media makers and began talking about providing alternative media coverage of the upcoming WTO ministerial meetings in Seattle (Herndon, 2003).

While the media folks where making the connections in Austin that would eventually produce the first IMC, an incredibly broad collection of labor unions, liberal non-profit advocacy organizations, NGOs and direct action groups were issuing calls across their volunteer networks to get people to the streets of Seattle for marches, teach-ins and planned acts of civil disobedience. In the months leading up to the ministerial meetings, the group Global Trade Watch circulated a letter of opposition, encouraging organizations to sign-on and voice their opposition to the WTO and support the idea of protest. In all, 1400 groups signed-on from around the globe, with many sending people to Seattle (WTO History Project). The protests are often heralded for the high level of cooperation that existed between the various groups, representing vastly different political ideologies, organizing strategies and protest tactics. It is important to note however, that according to my own conversations with advanced planners from the AFL-CIO, the Citizen's Trade Campaign and several other liberal (as opposed to anarchist and direct action) groups that much of this cooperation occurred at the last minute, often in the "heat of battle." In the months leading up to the mobilization, the "coalition" was tenuous at best. As different groups worked to maintain unity around the idea of a "diversity of tactics," competing interests, especially between those advocating permitted vs. non-permitted events, continued to disagree right up to and during the height of the mobilizations. (For a more complete discussion of these tensions both during the mobilization and beyond see *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization* edited by Eddie Yuen, George Katsiaficas, and Daniel Burton-Rose). This certainly describes my own experiences during the planning of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) mobilizations in Miami in 2003, which I was fortunate to work on for the Florida AFL-CIO.

The local population had been gearing up for the ministerial since the first of the year, but as outside planners and organizers began arriving in Seattle, "No WTO" fever intensified and began spreading like wildfire. Jeff Perlstein, a Seattle local widely credited as one of the core initial organizers of the IMC described those early days in an interview for the WTO History

Project. He describes how local groups began putting up flyers around the city for monthly meetings about the WTO. These were primarily educational in nature at first, designed to educate the people about the WTO, its policies and how the people of Seattle had a unique opportunity to speak out about this impending globalization behemoth. He also describes how the people in Seattle realized early on that an alternative media presence would be an absolute necessity.

> "As I went to those monthly meetings and started to hear more about the mobilizations that were happening and learn more about the policies of the WTO and became further and further concerned about their policies and the impact on communities locally, nationally, internationally, I'd also begun to see how many folks were coming to Seattle, get a sense of that, and see these meetings grow and grow and talk to people nationally, that they were all coming here. I began to recognize that someone who has done independent media projects and activist media projects, that we couldn't just let CNN and CBS be the ones to tell these stories, and so that we needed to develop our own alternatives and our alternative networks. That's where, really, the idea for the media center came from was just the necessity for communities to be controlling their own message, to really be saying for themselves their concerns, and that we needed an alternative opportunity to do that" (Perlstein, 2000).

As luck, or fate or the gods being on the side of the good guys for a change would have it, the relationships and email conversations generated at the Grass Roots Media Alliance meeting provided the people and the knowledge base to make that happen.

According to Perlstein, the bulk of the on-the-ground organizing work occurred in the eight weeks leading up to the mobilizations. In mid-October, the hunt for a physical location to house this new citizens' media project struck gold when organizers connected with the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), a local non-profit organization that worked to acquire buildings for formerly homeless people to occupy and self-manage. The group was intrigued by the project, an autonomous, self-managed media operation, so it agreed to loan the organizers a 2,700 square foot downtown abandoned storefront in exchange for some basic maintenance and renovations on the building. By then, the effort had about 40-50 local volunteers working on various aspects of the project, so volunteer labor was not a problem. Financial resources were. Organizers had set a goal of raising $40,000, but as October drew to a close they had only raised about $1,500. In an incredibly ironic turn, the group received a $10,000 check from an anonymous source in the second week of November. I say ironic because many believe that the

check came from someone connected to Social Venture Partners, a charitable organization made up of ex-Microsoft executives. Microsoft money was being used to fund an alternative media project employing open source code software (the existence of which was antithetical to the Microsoft corporate mission) and the Internet (which Microsoft was working to control) in an effort to expose the evils of domination by big corporations - corporations like Microsoft.

Later in the month, the progressive Tides Foundation donated another $10,000 and Deep Dish TV (who had been involved with Counter Media back in 1996) raised the money to gain satellite access to broadcast reports through community access satellite channels. Finally, to address concerns over a shortage of available server space, a local company Encoding.Com (now Loudeye Technologies) donated extra server space. It must be noted that the WTO's decision to base the first ministerial in Seattle was of particular benefit to the IMC organizers because of the city's thriving tech industry and the vast knowledge base it created, allowing these media rebels to turn that knowledge and infrastructure back on the corporations that helped create them. As one early organizer said, "I mean it's Seattle – we've got all the techies you'd ever want and all these companies specializing in everything they need to stream these stories all over the world" (quoted in Hyde, 2003, p. 4). The network of media activists was in place, the location was secured and funding was available and after several days of frenzied activity by volunteer techs to set up the phone and DSL lines, the first IMC website was launched on November 29th, one day before the WTO meetings were to begin.

In many ways, the creation of a website was an afterthought. According to Perlstein, the initial focus was on "older" more established media technologies like print, radio, video and television. The original plan was to use the Internet, email lists and satellite feeds to disseminate the reports compiled by citizen journalists, it wasn't until a chance encounter between an Australian open source software code writer and folks from Free Speech TV in Boulder, Colorado that the idea to use a website as a central collection and distribution point for these reports was hatched. Mathew Arinson was a code writer who, working in conjunction with the Catalyst tech collective in Sydney, had developed an open source code based software package for a web site called Active Sydney. The Active site, launched in January of 1999 was an online, centralized source used by area activists to promote protest actions, seminars, screenings and other events (Meikle, 2002). The original software was retooled five months later for the J18 global day of action to allow anyone with access to the Internet to upload text, photo, audio or

video reports. In the months leading up to the WTO mobilizations, Arinson met with Manse Jacobi and Brian Drolet who were in the process of coordinating the coverage for Free Speech TV and introduced them to the Active software, showing them how easy it would be to place a wide variety of media on a web site not only for distribution but to allow people all over the world to instantaneously comment on any of the reports. Jacobi seized the opportunity and began negotiating with his allies in Seattle for the necessary technology and server space. Arinson also worked with the early tech collective to refine the software, making it easier for anyone with Internet access in any part of the world to upload their own media. This addition of open source software was more than just a convenient tactical development for the Seattle mobilizations, it became a fundamental principle of the IMC movement, "the ideals and practicalities of the open source movement" became a key factor in Indymedia's explosive growth (Herndon, 2003).

Although the website became the central hub for the IMC, the older media forms were not abandoned. Organizers realized that the reach of the Internet was still limited. In addition to the fact that the vast majority of people, both in the U.S. and abroad, had no access to the Internet or had not yet familiarized themselves with the technology (a constant challenge for the IMC movement). Also, it was virtually impossible at the time for commuters on the morning trains, people at the coffee shops or for many of the protestors in the streets to access the net. The website remained the collection point, but, as had been the case with the Zapatista network, more traditional media would be used to expand distribution. Perlstein describes, "we set about to really do this somewhat innovative, what we're calling linking of high and low technologies, or old and new technologies" (Perlstein, 2000). Text, photos, audio and video files could be uploaded to the site, downloaded half-a-world away, and then distributed by whatever medium was available. The IMC built Studio X, a micro and Internet radio station that operated 24-hours a day throughout the mobilization, and Cuba's Radio Havana which had an Internet connection, downloaded audio files and broadcasted them on their FM channels so that its nine million listeners could hear them without the need for Internet access. The IMC also used the text reports from the website to produce a daily print publication, The Blind Spot, that could be distributed freely throughout the city. The IMC printed 2,000 copies each day and since there were no issues with copyright (another central principle of the IMC) other groups and individuals could reproduce them, increasing the distribution by many times. Thanks to the Internet, these

hard copies were distributed much farther than the Seattle city boundaries. "Activists in Brussels, for example, pulled down those files and printed out 8,000 copies to hand out in the streets of Brussels. So, again, that's 8,000 folks that didn't have to check out the Internet" (Perlstein, 2000). In the months following the mobilization, Indymedia produced a series of five documentaries that were up-linked to satellite, distributed throughout the United States and copied for mass distribution.

The WTO Ministerial opened on Tuesday, November 30th. By then hundreds of thousands of protesters had converged on the city (although the lowest estimates reported by the mainstream media pegged that number at about 40,000), and the first Independent Media Center was up and running. The IMC's central location made the center a hub of activity for media makers and activists alike (most IMCistas make no distinction between the two). Although both the physical and virtual spaces were open to everyone, the IMC organizers developed a loose set of expectations for how people would use the physical space and created their own version of a "press badge" for anyone who wanted them. Initially, 80 packets were produced, but these ran out within the first half-hour, and by the time the week was over more than 450 people had signed in as members of the IMC (Perlstein, 2000). Organizers estimate that well over 100 videographers came through the center along with many more print and audio citizen journalists. With so many IMCistas on the street, the mainstream media began to notice. "We heard from some network folks later in the week that they actually started looking for intersections where they saw people with the IMC passes. They were bright green, obnoxious bright green. Because if they saw enough of those people around, they knew something was happening at the intersection, so it was their way of identifying what was going on around town as they saw all these IMC people clustered around. It was like the information network, a communication network that they were using" (Perlstein, 2000, p. 14).

These first IMC journalists did not merely report on the news, they fully engaged with the people making the news, serving as conduits to allow the people on the street to tell their own stories. "What I think was so compelling during the week is that not only were we out in the streets talking to people, which is one thing that the mainstream media wasn't doing. They were talking about people; we were talking with people, and handing people the microphone and letting them talk for themselves" (Perlstein, 2000, p. 14). This too became a guiding principle of the IMC movement, obliterating the old lines between journalist and subject,

news and newsmaker, object and participant. The IMCistas also covered the spaces the mainstream media wouldn't, often foregoing the large-scale actions for the hundreds of smaller events happening simultaneously around the city. Forums, teach-ins and street theater gatherings were on par with the police-line standoffs providing anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection the chance to find out the real concerns and motivations of the protesters, above and certainly beyond the shallow caricatures being constructed by the mainstream. The Indymedia reporters also connected and participated with direct action groups, providing detailed accounts of both the peoples' actions and law enforcement's violent overreactions. Perlstein (2001) says there was a very graphic display of brutality that we were able to capture, on video, but then also in lots of articles and postings, and also able to really counter a lot of the misinformation that the police department and the officials were putting out. A really significant example is the denial that they were using rubber bullets. All the networks are carrying this denial just from the Police Chief, as if it's law; as if it's the word of God. But yet, we're posting numerous photos of people holding rubber bullets, huge welts all over their bodies from rubber bullets."

The IMC also became an online forum for protesters to discuss what was happening in the streets; a digital bulletin board, giving people the ability to post announcements from the field in real-time, providing almost instantaneous reports about changes in protest locations, police movements and reports of abuses by law enforcement. As the situation changed in the streets, the IMC allowed groups to modify their tactical organizing for maximum impact, all in direct view of anyone visiting the site, creating a transparency of process that had never before been possible (Jacobi, 2001).

As the week unfolded, and mainstream media accounts of the "violent protests" trickled out, (although it is now widely understood that the bulk of the violence originated not with the protesters but with law enforcement) people around the world hungered for more information about what was happening, and the IMC was there to satiate them. With no prior advertising (save what was distributed by the organizers via emails and newsgroups) the website that didn't exist until a day before the week of action logged over 1.5 million hits before the tear gas cleared. In fact, the Internet activity was so heavy and word was spreading so fast that by the second day of the protests the IMC was featured on Yahoo's home page. In a fortunate piece of foresight, the organizers had not abandoned all of the media tactics of old and put together a

mainstream media team to pitch story ideas based on reports gathered by the IMC. By the third day of the WTO meetings ABC, CNN, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor* all showed up on their door, looking to report on these new media upstarts and the work they were doing. An ABC report stated that the IMC "got out a worldwide message about the working poor, endangered species and the power of the World Trade Organization" and an article in the *Monitor* presciently declared that the IMC might just "serve as a role model for a new kind of democratic reporting made possible by new and emerging technologies" (Uzelman, 2002). The *Monitor* reporters had no idea just how right they were.

Building the Network

As the protesters returned home and news of the first IMC's unqualified success began to filter through activist communities, the Seattle IMC was flooded with requests for assistance in the creation of new Independent Media Centers. As the requests began coming, the Seattle organizers envisioned the Seattle IMC as a central hub coordinating the effort, with other community websites serving as the organization's satellites. This idea was quickly scrapped in favor of a much more decentralized approach, deciding that the informal, non-hierarchical structure that worked so well for the first organizing effort should continue (Herndon, 2001). Each new IMC would be autonomous with the ability to experiment both with the their own centers and with the software, the code of which was made freely available consistent with the open source movement. The original center would act as a single node in the larger network and the URL www.indymedia.org was converted into a global portal, including links to the various centers, resources for communities interested in creating new IMCs and feature articles pulled from the various centers around the globe. The early focus was on helping create new centers, helping being the operative word. This was not an all out organizing effort, however. An important early principle, one still embraced by the movement today, is a fundamental commitment to self-organizing. Rooted firmly in anarchist traditions and widely embraced by the anti-capital/anti-globalization movement, self-organizing allows communities to organize their own efforts in contribution to broader struggles, free from the mandates from above that have too often characterized social movements. This provides for a more organic, participatory effort that is a product of people's own experiences, sensibilities and circumstances. In spite of,

or perhaps because of, the lack of a central organizing effort, 35 Independent Media Centers were launched around the world by the end of the year (Hyde, 2003; Shumway, 2003).

Questions about the future trajectory of the IMC quickly developed, and the loosely defined, self-organizing model was ill equipped to answer them. Should any new center be included in the network, or for that matter what was the network? If a network was built, how would decisions about its functioning be made, and who should make them? When IMCs were organized to cover large-scale events like the Biotechnology Conference in Boston in 2000, what would become of those sites? Should they be integrated into the network and if so, how? Should there be any overall principles to guide the growth of the movement? If so, what should they be and who should decide them? These and other questions continued to surface, all the while new IMCs continued to come on-line. In the first three months of 2001, 15 more centers joined the effort.

In the first half of 2001, several proposals to address these and other questions were formulated and distributed throughout Indymedia's growing collection of email lists, many of these and the discussions they inspired are still available through Indymedia's archiving project at http://docs.indymedia.org. Central to these was the idea of adopting broad "Principles of Unity" to help shape the future of the network. These principles, included basic ideas like commitments to human equality, consensus-based and transparent decision making processes, open-publishing, open source software and a non-profit orientation for each center (Indymedia.org). The intent of these principles was not to develop a single political ideology but a unifying set of ideals found throughout a wide-range of philosophies and political conditions, "highlighting the common themes that bind the network together while also leaving room for cultural differences and experimentation" (Shumway, 2003. p.14). In April of 2001, 70 IMC volunteers gathered at the Press Freedom Conference in San Francisco to discuss the principles and other proposals. The group agreed to present the principles to each of the currently established IMCs, gather feedback, and make changes so that a document could be approved by consensus in six weeks time. This working group met in late July via IRC (Internet Relay Chat) and adopted the principles.

With the newly adopted Principles of Unity in hand, another working group began establishing a process through which new IMCs would be integrated into the broader network. The New IMC Working Group refined resources available to help new IMCs get started and

approved a checklist of sorts for the basic requirements that must be met for inclusion. These requirements were designed not to micro-manage the new centers but to ensure that they were committed to the principles and had taken the steps necessary to build a viable center. They included that the new IMC develop a mission statement, demonstrate support from people in the community, the establishment of a transparent editorial policy and local volunteers willing to help with the global network. New IMCs were admitted to the network through consensus, demonstrated by a lack of objection, from anyone on the IMC Process working group (I will discuss the IMC working groups and their communication processes later).

During the summer of 2001, five more IMCs were added to the network, 12 more during the fall and by the second birthday of the first IMC in Seattle, over 70 IMCs were operating all over the world and integrated into the network. In 2002, following the World Social Forum in Brazil, there was an explosion of activity as IMCs in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Chile were brought online, many with the assistance of IMCistas from the U.S. who traveled to Latin America in a caravan called the "Mobile I-Team" (Shumway, 2003, p. 16). By March of 2003, there were 110 autonomous, self-organizing local IMCs linked through the Principles of Unity and a virtual public sphere of websites and email lists. At the time of this writing, according the IMC "Cities List," the listing of hyperlinks for all of the IMCs that have officially been admitted to the network through the new IMC process which is a required element of all Indymedia websites, that number has reached 168 individual centers, five dealing with specific projects of the network (print, video, radio etc.), one site covering the specific topic of biotechnology and the Indymedia documentation project, an online archive of the movement. The geographic distribution is as follows: Africa, 5; Canada, 11; East Asia, 5; Europe, 48; Latin America, 17; Oceania, 13; South Asia, 2; U.S., 62; and 5 in West Asia. Two of these regions, the United States and Oceania, have created centralized sites that collect and display local feature stories from across the networks in their areas.

This brief historical sketch about the rise of the global IMC only scratches the surface of what has become a complex, multi-layered digital and social network, what I argue is a radical new public sphere. We will have the opportunity to zero in on some of the specific aspects of this network throughout the rest of this analysis as I work to unpack the structural, social and political elements of this new public sphere. For now, this sketch makes it clear that what began

as a single alternative media project based in an old storefront in downtown Seattle has become a bona-fide global movement.

As can be clearly seen through some of the comments of those involved with the creation of Indymedia, a major impetus for this project has been an effort combat a mainstream media climate that is seen by many to be merely a tool of the major economic and political powers of the status-quo, a climate dominated by too few voices who speak for the multi-national corporations who own them. In the next chapter, I trace the past twenty or so years of media policy and how that policy has given rise to what many have called an oligopoly because it is in this context that the IMCistas are struggling to give a voice to those they feel have been denied a seat at the table of social and political discourse. An understanding of the current media climate also greatly informs an understanding of why Indymedia has developed the policies and tactics they have.

Throughout this first section I have referred to the IMC as "alternative media" or "alternative radical media" without really explaining what that means. If Indymedia is to be understood as alternative media, it is also critical to understand the full scope of what that entails. In Chapter Three, I examine several different conceptualizations of alternative and radical media with an emphasis on the works of John Downing and Chris Atton. Their theoretical constructions and typologies have greatly informed my analysis of the IMC. I will also discuss the media reform movement, an ancillary but separate endeavor to the work of the IMCistas.

CHAPTER 2
THE INFORMATION OLIGOPOLY

"The global commercial media system is working to advance the cause of the global market and promote commercial values, while denigrating journalism and culture not conducive to the immediate bottom line or long-run corporate interests." – ***Robert W. McChesney***

Throughout the first chapter of this report I have referred to the IMC as "alternative media" or "alternative radical media" without providing any real conceptual or operational definition of those terms. Fortunately, there is a growing body of work seeking to explain alternative/radical media and its diversity of forms, its functions and the role it can play in the broader social experience. Before delving into that work, and seeing what it brings to an analysis of the IMC it is first necessary to understand both the media climate in which the IMC arose and the reform movement that is gaining momentum in response to that context.

As I will illustrate in this chapter, the mainstream media is in a period of rapid deregulation giving rise to unprecedented media mergers and, perhaps more importantly, the rise of massive media conglomerates; conglomerates controlled by the same multi-national corporations at the helm of the globalization program. This has led to the perception (a perception I argue rooted firmly in reality) that the various mainstream media outlets will refuse to cover the efforts of those opposed to this globalization or provide the general public with the diversity of information they need to make informed decisions about those efforts. To the IMCistas and the thousands, if not millions, of other alternative/radical media producers and users around the world the solution is clear - they must make their own media.

This same perception also drives the media reform movement. Media reformers, represented by groups like Free Press, Consumers Union, Common Cause and others are focused on changing regulatory institutions to make the mainstream media more diverse, more democratic and more geared towards serving the public. Creating their own alternative/radical media is an important tactic they employ but it is not their raison d'etre. As is clearly illustrated by the history of the IMC outlined in the first chapter, the creation of the early IMC network was in part a response to the tensions created by those same policies and institutions. While reforming those policies is not the primary goal of the IMC movement, it is an important

component of the IMCistas work and a critical part of their overall critique of the status quo. Many of the goals and certainly the strategies and tactics of the two differ but they are inexorably linked with an incredible amount of overlap – they are different but intertwined. To be sure, Indymedia is its own animal, a product of the widespread global uprising against the neoliberal globalization program. Its goals can only be defined by the myriad of people and movements that have created it, sustain it and use it. Reforming the mainstream media is secondary to the drive to create new and radical models for media making and communication. This distinction will be discussed at greater length later in this analysis but it should be clear here that developing a cursory understanding of the current media climate, the policies that have shaped that climate and the movement to reform it is a necessary step in understanding Indymedia.

In this Chapter I will discuss some of the major policy changes in media regulations over the past ten years, the effects of those changes on media ownership, the impact of those ownership changes on the current media climate and what the media reform movement is doing about it. In the next chapter I discuss several of the major formulations and models of alternative/radical media, what those models can tell us about Indymedia and describe specific the differences between the IMCistas and media reformers.

The Media Oligopoly

In recent years, the term "corporate media" has joined the lexicon of a wide range of political communities. Liberals, progressives, radicals, anarchists and social libertarians alike have added the problem of corporate ownership and control of the media to their rapidly growing list of issues they are addressing in one form or another. "Corporate" or "mainstream" media have become politically loaded terms, speaking volumes to members of these communities. They conjure images of massive corporate monopolies - controlled by men in suits - whose goals are to maximize profit regardless of the common good. These corporations are seen as supporting the neo-liberal economic machines of globalization by controlling the flow of information and devising increasingly insidious entertainment vehicles designed to encourage consumerism and discourage dissent of the current political and economic systems. Hold up a sign reading "No to Corporate Media" in a public protest, and most members of these communities will have an intuitive sense of what you are talking about. In many ways, these images are not too far from the truth.

Media ownership and regulation has been a topic of public debate for years and has captured the attention of many communication scholars, media critics and independent journalists including Robert McChesney (1999, 2002, 2004), Ben Bagdikian (1992, 2000, 2004), Croteau and Hoynes (2001), Noam Chomskey (1997), Jeff Cohen (1993), Amy and John Goodman (2004, 2006) and John Nichols (2002) just to name a few. The various media industries have always had monopolistic tendencies. The movie, recording, television, radio and print media industries have typically been dominated by a few players since their inception, but the rise of the current mega-media players, those that hold a dominant position within and across these media forms, what many have called the "media oligopoly," has taken time. Miller (2002, p.1) characterizes this process as a "grand convergence of the previous disparate U.S. culture industries – many of them vertically monopolized already – into one global super-industry providing most of our imaginary content."

Most media industry watchers agree that the tensions between those who favor federal regulation of the media, which they claim is the best way to serve both consumers and the marketplace, and those who support a more laissez-faire approach, which they also claim is the best way to serve the public and the market, have existed since the very beginning. Over the past twenty-five years, marked most notably by the earliest days of the Reagan administration, those endorsing a lax or non-existent regulatory environment have been winning the fight. In 1982, media scholar Ben Bagdikian wrote in his 1st edition of *The Media Monopoly* (currently in its 7th edition) that less than 50 corporations controlled 90% of the mass media. Ten years later in his fourth edition that number had fallen to 24, and he was called an alarmist when he predicted that this number would eventually fall to about a half-dozen. In his 6th edition published eight years later that number had indeed fallen to 6. Those early days, which were marked by a comparatively slow crawl of media deregulation policies, gave way to a rapid rush of deregulation just over a decade ago with the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The passage of that bill is a moment that most agree was a seminal one in the story of the United States media, one that provided the impetus for the first sparks of what would become a widespread movement for media reform; so it is there that I begin this discussion of the media oligopoly in the US.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996

Understanding the 1996 Telecom Act is a critical part in telling the story of the contemporary movement for media reform for two reasons. First, the ways in which this major policy change was crafted and subsequently adopted speaks volumes about the current, potentially dangerous relationships between the modern media industry and our nation's policy makers. Second, the aftermath of the Act provides an excellent case study that media reformers can point to, one they argue proves the truth of their dire warnings about the future of media in this country and around the world should the quest for total media deregulation be permitted to continue.

The 1996 Act was the first major overhaul of the nation's media regulations since the landmark passage of the Communications Act of 1934, which created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The 1934 legislation ended a major reform push by concerned policy makers who saw the rapid commercialization of the powerful new medium of radio as problematic. The commercial radio lobby dominated the debate and the Communications Act was passed as a measure to protect the profit making potential of radio as much as a way to regulate this rapidly growing medium. In fact, for profit interests dominated the debate over media regulation up until the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, at which time they conceded that there could be a place in the broadcast spectrum for publicly funded, not-for-profit enterprises. In return for the government's protection of businesses' ability to make a profit, the industry agreed to some basic standards and regulations such as the mandate that broadcast licenses be held up for periodic review to ensure that the conditions necessary for an informed public be met. Over the decades, this peace held with periods of give and take between broadcasters and regulators that produced the conditions necessary for some amazing moments in US broadcasting - that is until 1996.

The seeds of this major "reform" were planted with the 1994 "Republican Revolution" when voters tossed the 40-year Democratic majority from the House of Representatives in favor of Republicans who promised a roll back of cumbersome federal bureaucracies and regulations which they claimed stymied innovation and individual entrepreneurship. Within hours of capturing the House, the new leadership, under the guidance of House Speaker Newt Gingrich and using his affiliated think tank the Progress and Freedom Foundation's "Magna Charta for the Information Age," began drafting the legislation (Boehlert, 2001). *The New York Times* reported

in early 1995 that broadcast, "Lobbyists have seldom met more receptive lawmakers. Committee Republicans have held numerous meetings with industry executives since January, at which they implored companies to offer suggestions about the ways that Congress could help them." FCC chairman Reed Hundt said years later that, "losing the House in '94 was without question a seminal moment in the political history of the media"(Boehlert, 2001). Those lobbyists included News Corporation's Rupert Murdoch, ABC, CBS, NBC and the whole of the powerful National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). The Democratic controlled 103rd Congress had passed a telecommunications bill in 1994 but that legislation had no provisions relating to significant changes in ownership that would increase media concentration. After the passage of the 1996 Act, *Congressional Quarterly* reported "There are numerous provisions that the Democratic-controlled 103rd Congress never would have countenanced, such as the ones lifting price controls on cable television systems and allowing radio broadcasters to own an unlimited number of radio stations across the country" (Wexler, 2005).

Supporters of the early versions of the Act in 1995 talked up the provisions relating to the interests of the "Baby Bells" getting into the long-distance phone market, the installation of V-chips in televisions for parents, regulations on the burgeoning Internet pornography market and the deregulation of cable rates. Tucked away in the 200-page legislation was language dealing with media ownership, specifically removing long-time restrictions on how much and what types of media a single company could own (McChesney, 1999). As problematic as the media reformers found the final version of the bill that passed in 1996 it could have been much worse.

The original House version drawn up in 1995 all but eliminated the most important and long standing ownership caps. The legislation would have eliminated the ban on newspapers owning television stations in the same local markets, lifted price regulations for cable systems with fewer than 600,000 subscribers and permit a single company to own two TV stations and an unlimited number of radio stations in the same market. Taken together, these changes would have enabled a single company to own the local newspaper, television and radio stations in a given community. In 1996, facing a threat from then President Clinton, the legislation was amended and many of the provisions regarding TV and newspaper ownership were repealed, but the lifting of limits on radio station ownership – the least debated portion of the bill – remained.

Clinton signed the legislation at a carefully scripted ceremony backed by Congressional leaders from both parties and industry executives in the Rotunda of the Library of Congress.

Clinton stated that the "landmark legislation fulfills my administration's promise to reform our telecommunications laws in a manner that leads to competition and private investment, promotes universal service and provides for flexible government regulation" (Boehlert, 2001, p. 1). At no time during the parade of speakers at that ceremony were the changes in radio ownership or other "small print" modifications, modifications that have had an incredible impact on the media landscape, ever mentioned.

In May of 2005, the Common Cause Education Fund, a separately chartered (501) (c) (3) organization established by Common Cause, a governmental reform non-profit, produced a comprehensive report about the Telecom Act and the impact is has had on the media landscape. The report, titled "The Fallout from the Telecommunications Act of 1996: Unintended Consequences and Lesson Learned," outlines the major changes in media policy contained in the act. First, the Act eliminated the national ownership cap for commercial radio stations. The cap had been set at 40 stations. It also increased the number of stations that a company could own in a single market from four to eight in the nation's largest markets. Second, the law lifted the 12 TV station ownership limit for a single company and expanded the national audience reach for any one TV company from 25% to 35% of all US households. Third, the Act deregulated cable rates, a return to a policy that had been enacted in the mid-1980's but was repealed in 1992 following a skyrocketing of cable rates for consumers. Fourth, the Act ceded broad new powers to the FCC to ease cable-broadcast ownership rules. Those rules had been enacted by the Congress to ensure that cable served as an important competitive check on broadcasters. Fifth, the Act gave broadcasters free access to the digital spectrum, access that was worth about $70 billion at the time according to FCC estimates (Wexler, 2005). Finally, the 1996 Act extended the term of broadcast licenses from five to eight years, further limiting the opportunities for the public to weigh-in with comments during the re-licensing period and changing the rules governing the process making it more difficult for the public to challenge those licenses when being renewed. The Act also enabled local phone carriers to enter into the long distance market outside their service areas and provided a process through which they could offer long distance within their service area providing they could guarantee it would not stifle competition. Supporters of the 1996 Telecom Act promised that its passage and implementation would save consumers billions of dollars, encourage competition and innovation, and increase the diversity of programming. None of these outcomes were ever realized.

The passage of the 1996 Act heralded the beginning of what would become the strongest media deregulation push in history, and the veiled manner in which this legislation was crafted and passed was prophetic. It perfectly forecasted the type of relationships that would develop between the media industry, regulators and the political leadership - relationships based on clandestine negotiations, copious amounts of campaign cash and near unlimited access by industry lobbyists. The future was clear, industry would have a seat at the bargaining table; and the public would not.

The majority of the deliberations were held behind closed doors between congressional staffers and industry lobbyists. Committee hearings were never covered in any meaningful way by the press, the Federal Communications Commission was not consulted, and at no time was there a hearing called in any forum to illicit comments from the public (Wexler, 2005). Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) a media watchdog and reform reported that the passage of the 1996 Telecom Act was the most underreported important news story of the year (McChesney, 2000). When the issue was covered in the media, it was done on the back pages of business sections and in trade journals, certainly not in any way as to inform the public about the major implications it would have on them as consumers of the media. Communication scholar and media reformer Robert McChesney wrote, "The Telecommunications Act was covered as a business story, not a public policy story" (McChesney, 1997). He quoted Charles Bien, a telecom lobbyist, as saying at the time, "I have never seen anything like the Telecommunications Bill. The silence of public debate is deafening. A bill with such astonishing impact on all of us is not being discussed" (McChesney, 1997 p. 44).

Merger Mania

The impact of the Act was dramatic and swift. Supporters promised that it would create a more competitive marketplace, opening new spaces for diverse viewpoints. They said it would bring about new opportunities for innovation enabling the rise of new enterprises that would create thousands of jobs and bring consumers more choices for lower prices. The exact opposite happened in all of these areas. The public got increased media concentration, a homogenization of content and ideas, a loss of thousands of jobs in the industry and exponential increases in prices across the communication spectrum (Wexler, 2005).

The provisions regarding radio station ownership were the least discussed and reported but had the greatest and most immediate impact on the media industry and the public at large. Eric Boehlert, reporting for Salon.com in 2001 about the changes in radio ownership included in the Act wrote that, "Suddenly, without the FCC's input or any public hearings, the kind of sweeping deregulation that most broadcasters hadn't even fantasized about two years earlier was ushered in overnight" (Boehlert, 2001, p. 2). The total elimination of the 40 station ownership cap and increased number of stations a single company could own in a local market opened the door to massive mergers and buyouts, leading to the single biggest increases in radio concentration since the earliest days of the medium. During the first week after the Act was signed into law, there were $700 million worth of buying and selling, leading one trade publication to publish a story entitled "Let the Deals Begin!" on its front page (Bednarski, 2003). To say that this activity did not produce the promised effect of increased competition would be an understatement.

In 1996 there were 5,100 licensed radio station owners; by 2003 that number had decreased by about 25% to 3,800, and FCC reporting showed that the average number of stations per local market dropped from 13 to less than 10 (Wexler, 2005). A 2002 study by the media reform group Future of Music Coalition found that 10 companies dominated over two-thirds of the national radio audience, with just two of those, Clear Channel and Viacom's Infinity Broadcasting, controlling access to 42% of the listeners and 45% of total national radio revenues (Thomson and DiCola, 2002). The study also found that virtually every single geographic market was dominated by four companies with 70% or greater of the market share. This was even more pronounced in smaller local markets in which the largest four firms controlled 90% or more of the market share, and that more often than not these were regional or national station groups not local owners (Thomson and DiCola, 2002). In New York for example, four companies controlled almost 80% of the total market; three of these four companies owned about 60% of the market in Chicago; and in Milwaukee four companies owned 86% of the market (Feingold, 2003).

The Case of Clear Channel. One company, Clear Channel, became the poster child for this rapid rise in radio ownership concentration. Within six years of the Telecom Act's passage, Clear Channel went from 39 stations to 1,240 stations, over 30 times what previous regulations would allow (Thomson and DiCola, 2002). Its nearest competitor, mega-media conglomerate

Viacom's Infinity Broadcasting, owns almost one-quarter of that, and together the two companies control one-third of all radio advertising revenue nationwide. In some markets that figure climbs to almost 90% (Boehlert, 2001). Clear Channel has also used its incredible radio power and increase in capital to branch out into other related enterprises, illustrating another problem with the dramatic increase in radio ownership.

Clear Channel currently owns over 700,000 billboards across the US and also owns the nation's largest concert venue owner and promotion company, New York's SFX Productions. SFX Productions has an exclusive arrangement with Ticket Master, the country's biggest ticket handler. Numerous reports have surfaced about the ways in which Clear Channel is using these three different platforms in what industry analysts refer to as "cross-ownership synergy" to eliminate competition. In many markets, Clear Channel is the only game in town for conducting live performances. They control the radio station that plays the music and promotes the event, the billboards that help advertise it, the production company producing the show and in essence the only outlet to purchase tickets. This has led to a dramatic increase in ticket prices and serves to keep performers not allied with SFX and Ticket Master out of that particular market. Media critics argue that this is just one of many problems arising out of Clear Channel's new monopolistic power in the radio industry, including: the black-out of local and independent music artists and record labels; potentially illegal pay-for-play relationships between clear channel stations and the industries' largest labels; the loss of thousands of jobs by local radio employees; and overly formulaic play lists generated by corporate offices at the national level rather than local program directors. This final point is the crux of the problem with this incredible new level of concentration in radio and other communication mediums; the homogenization of content and the lack of a diversity of ideas, especially the squelching of viewpoints contrary to the mainstream or the status quo (For more information on Clear Channel's impact on local radio and the music industry see the reporting of Eric Boehlert for Salon.com, Media Matters and Rolling Stone magazine).

Popular country music artists, "The Dixie Chicks" had a run-in with Clear Channel that provides an excellent example of the potential dangers of this company's newfound power. In March of 2003, Dixie Chicks' front woman Natalie Maines stated at a concert in London that, "Just so you know, we're ashamed that the president of the United States is from Texas" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.1). The comment unleashed a firestorm of controversy as groups all over the

country condemned the comments as being unpatriotic and harmful to the soldiers serving in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Within a week, Clear Channel executives ordered that the Dixie Chicks be removed from the play lists on hundreds of their stations in markets across the U.S. In some markets like Jacksonville, Florida where Clear Channel owns the two largest country music stations, the Dixie Chicks were essentially blacklisted from the airwaves (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.1). Clear Channel's public relations directors have claimed that this is not true and that there is no censoring of content for local stations (http://www.clearchannel.com/Corporate/PressRelease.aspx? PressReleaseID=1167&p=hidden) but numerous news outlets including CNN, the *New York Times* and others have widely reported that this is not the case. The Dixie Chicks also saw tour dates cancelled at SFX venues across the country, and CD sales plummeted, costing one of country music's most successful acts millions of dollars. On March 29th, 2003, the unabashedly leftist publication *People's Weekly World*, citing other mainstream sources and free speech organizations published a list of other artists who had seen one or more of their songs "unofficially" pulled from Clear Channel's play lists for anti-war or other "questionable content." The list included artists such as: The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Wings, Jimi Hendrix, John Mellencamp, Billy Joel, Elvis, Elton John, Van Halen, Talking Heads, Herman's Hermits, Bobby Darin, Buddy Holly, Don McLean, Cat Stevens, Simon and Garfunkel, Santana, Jerry Lee Lewis, Peter Paul and Mary, Frank Sinatra, The Gap Band, Louis Armstrong, Neil Diamond, Lenny Kravitz, Bruce Springsteen, Phil Collins, Ricky Nelson, and James Taylor. (For more information about the conflict between the Dixie Chicks and Clear Channel see the 2006 documentary, *Shut Up and Sing*, co-directed and produced by Barbara Kopple.)

Clear Channel's reaction didn't stop there. Over the next few weeks, Clear Channel began sponsoring "Rallies for America" at many of its stations. According to a February 27th press release announcing the rallies and reported in the *Chicago Tribune* on March 19th, 2003, the rallies were the brainchild of Clear Channel syndicated conservative talk show host Glenn Beck (currently also appearing nightly on CNN Headline News). *The Tribune* reported Beck as saying, "I want them [the troops] to hear from us, whether we agree or disagree with war, we stand behind them . . . These rallies are intended as a venue for reasonable, thoughtful and prayerful people who want the opportunity to express their support for our troops." Following the Maines comment, the rallies also became Dixie Chicks bashing sessions with orchestrated

CD burnings, and in Louisiana, participants watched a 33,000 pound tractor rolled-over Chicks' CD's and other paraphernalia (Krugman, 2003). Non-Clear Channels organized many of these rallies but the majority were sponsored, promoted and staged by Clear Channel stations and the powerful events promotion system described above.

For many media critics, these activities confirmed their worse fears about the places this new push for deregulation could take us. As *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman wrote on March 25th of 2003, these events spoke volumes about the new found power of consolidated media and the ways in which the State could use that power for its own ends. Krugman's piece and those of many others have carefully tracked the cozy relationships between George W. Bush himself and the Clear Channel management hierarchy. These relationships many argue, have helped turn this media mega-power into a direct agent of the administration, one that will work to promote the government line and squash dissent. This situation will only increase in both frequency and intensity should rampant consolidation continue of the media be permitted to continue. Krugman wrote, "There's something happening here, what it is ain't exactly clear, but a good guess is that we're now seeing the next stage in the evolution of a new American oligarchy."

The dramatic increase of radio ownership concentration has been one of the easiest impacts of the 1996 Telecom Act to examine and critique. In 2004, FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein, a frequent critic of increased deregulation of the media, referred to radio as a "very sick canary in the coal mine" and warned that "By ignoring this history, we may be destined to repeat it" if calls for deregulation across other media were embraced by the Commission and the Congress (Wexler, 2005). Radio owners were the big winners but they were not alone. Television broadcasters also gained significant ownership deregulation provisions in the Act that have had negative impacts on the public and the marketplace of ideas. The provisions of the Telecom Act that increased the number of households a single company could reach from 25% to 35%, the removal of the 12 station ownership cap for a single company and elimination of the ban on broadcast companies owning cable systems led to rush of merger activity similar to that seen in radio.

In reality, anticipation of the Act's passage was enough to stimulate an unprecedented number of mergers in broadcast television. As Congress was considering the major re-write, Viacom purchased Paramount Communications, Westinghouse bought CBS and Rupert

Murdoch's News Corporation added Twentieth Century Fox to its ranks as well as HarperCollins publishing and TV Guide (Wexler, 2005). While President Clinton was signing the Act at the ceremony in the Library of Congress, Disney's acquisition of ABC was getting its final approval by the FCC (Wexler, 2005). Following the passage of the Act, merger activity increased exponentially. In a report prepared by the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the media watchdog organization tracked merger activity in the first 12 months of the Act's implementation. The Westinghouse organization purchased Infinity Broadcasting. Eighteen months later Westinghouse would sell CBS and Infinity to Viacom in a $36 billion merger. Time Warner merged with Turner broadcasting, creating the single largest media company in the world at that time. Later, in 2001, the mega-company merged with internet powerhouse America Online. Rupert Murdoch and News Corporation purchased the remaining holdings of New World Communications group, expanding its direct ownership of local broadcast stations to twenty-two. The newspaper giant Tribune Company bought Renaissance Communications, adding 16 local broadcast stations to its newspaper enterprise. A.H. Belo holdings purchased the Providence Journal Company giving it control of 16 broadcast stations, the Food Network, the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Providence Journal*.

The Case of Sinclair Broadcasting. The repeal of the ownership and broadcast caps also gave rise to Sinclair Broadcasting, a company that has reached the status of the largest, non-network owner of Television stations in the country. Before the 1996 Telecom Act, Sinclair owned 12 broadcast stations. Now the company owns 58 stations in 36 local markets (http://www.sbgi.net/about/profile.shtml). The case of Sinclair is informative of the problem, especially in the manner in which it has changed the news operations at many of its local stations. The Sinclair model has been to eliminate its local news gathering organizations in favor of centralized, pre-packaged news content. Currently, 31 stations in 27 markets carry this content. In Charleston, South Carolina, Sinclair news dominates over 60% of the viewing market (http://www.sbgi.net/business/news.shtml). Like Clear Channel, Sinclair has also found itself in the midst of controversy relating to its perceived role as a politically and ideologically driven enterprise that all too often puts the viewpoints of its owners above any objective standard for news gathering and information sharing.

In the final weeks of the 2004 presidential elections, an independent production company produced a documentary film entitled "Stolen Honor: Wounds that Never Heal" about

Democratic Presidential Candidate John Kerry's anti-Vietnam war activities following his return the US after active service in the conflict. The film featured many of the same veterans who had participated in the now infamous "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth" campaign ads that challenged Kerry's war record and the various decorations he received for his service. The documentary claimed that Kerry betrayed Vietnam prisoners of war and the United States, many of the same claims as the Swift Boat ads - claims that had been de-bunked by the mainstream media. The film was derided by both the Democratic Party and many non-partisan media groups as being an obvious campaign advertisement, one designed to influence the election using questionable evidence that could not stand up to objective scrutiny. Sinclair Broadcasting, whose owners had documented financial connections to the Bush re-election campaign, ordered its affiliates to pre-empt their normal programming to air the film during prime-time viewing (Farhi, 2004). A report by the nonprofit Center for Public Integrity found that ninety-five percent of Sinclair's $335,000 in campaign contributions since 1998 have gone to Republicans -- "a lopsided record of giving unmatched by other major television broadcasters" (Klinenberg, 2005).

Sinclair had already drawn the ire of media analysts for their inclusion of one-minute, overtly conservative commentaries sandwiched within their pre-packaged news segments aired on local stations. These segments, titled "The Point," featured Sinclair Broadcasting Vice-President Mark Hyman, and in 2004 they carefully tracked the issues being raised in the presidential campaign, slanted in such a way as to support the President's position. These segments were, and still are, required content for any Sinclair station using the pre-packed news content, and each night, Hyman is heard around the country espousing his ideas about the "angry left," the "clueless academia," the "cheese eating surrender monkeys" in France and "wack job" activists opposed to the war in Iraq (Klinenberg, 2005). All of this *required* content that must be aired by the local stations, tucked neatly in the nightly news broadcast. Also, in April of 2004, Sinclair had ordered all of its stations to preempt the broadcast of ABC's Nightline when producers elected to air the names and photos of all of the soldiers killed in Iraq up to that point. Sinclair CEO David Smith, who was a strong supporter of the Bush re-election effort said in a statement that, "Our decision was based on a desire to stop the misuse of their sacrifice to support an anti-war position with which most, if not all, of these soldiers would not have agreed" (http://www.cnn.com/2004/SHOWBIZ/TV/05/01/abc.nightline/).

Sinclair's decision to require its affiliates to broadcast "Stolen Honor" served as the final straw and set off a firestorm in many grass-roots progressive communities like Move-On.org, left leaning blogs like Daily Kos and MyDD, media reform organizations like Media Matters for America and various enclaves of Democratic Party loyalists. These communities launched a full-scale grass roots, largely web based protest. The Democratic National Committee emailed millions of its members, and several web sites were established to help activists put the pressure on Sinclair to rescind the order. Some of those websites like StopSinclair.org, Sinclairaction.com and Sinclairwatch.com are still active and serve as constant watchdogs of Sinclair's behavior. Local activists organized boycotts of Sinclair and its local advertisers, orchestrated public protests in front of Sinclair owned stations and flooded the corporate offices of the company's biggest national advertising sponsors with thousands of letters

There was dissention from within as well. Jon Lieberman, who served as the lead political reporter for Sinclair's centralized news operation, publicly criticized the move, arguing in an October 19th, 2004 article in the *Washington Post* that the film was "biased political propaganda, with clear intentions to sway this election. For me, it's not about right or left -- it's about what's right or wrong in news coverage this close to an election" and that he spoke out because "I feel so strongly that our credibility is at issue here - I feel our company is trying to sway this election" (Kurtz, 2004). The next day he was fired. Mainstream news operations reported widely on the plan and the protests against it.

The mobilization hit Sinclair squarely in its pockets. Some of the country's biggest unions used their substantial holdings in pension funds to pressure fund managers to dump Sinclair stock, causing many Wall Street money managers, investment advisors and big individual investors to pressure Sinclair to drop the broadcast. Sinclair's stock price dropped 17%, and New York State Comptroller Alan Hevesi, the sole trustee for the New York State Common Retirement Fund which owned about 250,000 shares of Sinclair stock, criticized the move and its impact on Sinclair's stock price. A group led by a New York hospital employees pension fund filed suit against Sinclair for the price drop and potential insider trading before the stock price dropped (Gegax, 2004 http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6293163/site/newsweek/). Twenty Democratic members of the Senate demanded that the FCC investigate the issue. In the end, the pressure caused Sinclair to make significant changes in the documentary but it still aired, the core of its message intact. The editing of the film was heralded as a major win for the

grass-roots activists who protested it, and it has become an often cited example of the sea change they argue is happening in regards to media policy and the behavior of its most powerful players – the people are beginning to pay attention. Sinclair never conceded defeat, however. In fact, Sinclair celebrated the controversy and the millions in free advertising it produced. Sinclair chief David Smith said following the backlash "I'd do one of those 'Stolen Honor' specials every month if we could. The lesson learned was very straightforward: that we can do this kind of content, pre-empt the networks and make more money" (Kurtz, 2004, P.6). In the immediate context of the "Stolen Honor" incident the statement was largely spin, but in the broader context of providing an invaluable service to an administration and political party controlling the future of deregulation and the billions of dollars in increased profits it could represent, the statement was absolutely true. (For a relatively comprehensive analysis of Sinclair, its connections to the Bush administration and how those connections have influenced its news coverage, see Klinenburg's reporting in the Feb. 2005 edition of *Rolling Stone* and Jason Leopold's reporting for Common Dreams.Org)

Deregulation Continues

The 1996 Telecommunications Act and the unprecedented mergers it enabled only wetted the beaks of industry giants who immediately began a new push in the courts, the FCC and the Congress to both weaken the compromises they had made to get the Act passed and repeal the remaining vestiges of regulation left in place. The industry and its powerful lobbying arm, the National Association of Broadcasters, hit the ground running before the ink on Clinton's signature had a chance to dry. For example, as mentioned earlier, a provision in the Act awarded broadcasters licenses for the new digital portion of the spectrum at no cost. The FCC had estimated that had those licenses been auctioned off they could have commanded amounts in excess of $70 billion for the public purse. Broadcasters argued that they needed access to this spectrum to keep free television viable for the future and that with it they could help close the already existing "digital divide." In a letter to President Clinton, broadcasters wrote, "Without digital capability, our country's free over-the-air system will be permanently relegated to a form of technical and competitive inferiority that would undermine greatly the vitality and viability of free television" (Wexler, 2005, p. 14). They also argued that, "At a time when we as a country are legitimately concerned about creating information haves and have nots, it makes no sense to

deprive the public of the opportunity to receive for free the high quality picture and sound that would otherwise be available only on a subscription basis" (Wexler, 2005, p.15). In addition to all of the social benefits of wide-spread digital television, the broadcasters also agreed to give back sizable portions of the analog spectrum that would be used for low power community broadcasting and public safety purposes. That give-back has yet to happen. Within the first year of the Act, broadcasters convinced Congressional supporters to tuck a provision into a massive budget bill that eliminated the FCC's ability to demand the return of those portions of the spectrum and granted them the ability to keep it until a minimum of 85% of viewers in their markets could receive digital signals (Wexler, 2005). This instance provides an excellent example of what was to come. The rapidly growing media giants had gained a great deal at the public's expense in the 1996 Act, but they wanted more and have been doling out the cash to get it.

The years since 1996 have seen an incredible increase in the amount of political contributions and lobbying expenditures on behalf of the biggest players in the Telecom world. Since 1997, the eleven largest interests in Telecom have made almost $45 million in soft money and political action committee contributions, which does not include contributions made directly to candidates for federal office (Wexler, 2005). The actual figure was undoubtedly larger, but tracking these has become far more difficult thanks to the campaign finance reforms outlined in McCain-Feingold, which put soft money contributions underground through so-called "527's" and issue based organizations. Phone service providers have given the most, but AOL/Time Warner has contributed over $5.6 million, General Electric (NBC) has given $4.8 million, Walt Disney (ABC) has provided $3.9 million, News Corp. $2.2 million and Viacom almost $1.5 million (Wexler, 2005). These do not include those nebulous "contributions" inherent in some of the media content and other activities such as those undertaken by Clear Channel and Sinclair outlined earlier. The real money has been in lobbying. In 2003, the same media interests listed above spent over $64 million on lobbying, approximately a 12% increase from the amount spent only five years earlier. Broadcasters led the way of all the other telecom interests, contributing almost half of the total amount.

The appointment of Michael Powell, son of then Secretary of State Colin Powell, to chair the Federal Communications commission in January of 2001 was a godsend for the industry. Powell came into the job with a resume which included a military career, a clerk for U.S Court of

Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, a private attorney and lobbyist in D.C. and a long list of powerful, right-leaning Washington insiders as his supporters. Of the high level appointments of the newly established Bush administration, Powell was considered one of the most politically powerful, well-connected and most knowledgeable (Boehlert, 2001). He had long expressed a libertarian philosophy, held a strong belief in the inherent good of free markets and disdained government regulation over any form of private enterprise. He had referred to FCC regulations of the media as "the oppressor" and shown a blatant indifference to the concept of the media's role as a service to the public interest. The nature of his tenure at the FCC was made clear during his first press conference on February 6th when he was asked how he would define the public interest. "I have no idea," he quipped, but then went on to define this critical concept as "an empty vessel in which people pour in whatever their preconceived views and biases are" (Miller, 2002). At that same press conference he compared owning a computer to owning a luxury car when he spoke about the rapidly growing digital divide. He said, "I think there is a Mercedes divide," he said. "I would like to have one, but I can't afford one" (Clewley, 2001, p.1 http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,43349-0.html). The 1996 Telecom Act had ceded broad new powers to the FCC to determine media ownership regulations and Powell quickly made it clear that he would use those new powers to eliminate the final vestiges of government regulation still in place to the widest extent permitted by law.

In his first three months as chairman Powell began re-defining the role of the FCC in setting federal policy for media ownership. Powell repeatedly stated that his role as chairman was to "validate or eliminate" existing rules, an assertion which many members of Congress felt blurred the lines between the roles of the FCC and Congress. In July of 2001, Senator Fritz Hollings, a South Carolina Democrat and newly installed chair of the Senate Commerce Committee (the chamber had just shifted back to Democratic control following the switch of Senator Jim Jeffords from Republican to Independent caucusing with the Democrats) held a series of hearings on the media ownership issue with Powell as the guest of honor. Hollings disagreed with Powell's notion of "validate or eliminate." At the July hearing he said, "That, my friends, is not the law and that is why we are having this hearing to set the record straight" (Boehlert, 2001). He used the hearings to make clear that the Congress in 1996 intended that the burden of proof for raising ownership caps should rest on the shoulders of those seeking the change, not the other way around. He argued that the government's position should not be to

begin from a compromise position - the FCC was to be the defender of the public interest not cheerleaders for the desires of the industry. Holling's hearings and his statements were dramatic but the impact was not and the FCC continued to move forward with its program to further deregulate the U.S. media.

On October 29th, 2001, the FCC held the first roundtable discussion aimed at building the support necessary for the removal of two of the major regulations regarding media ownership that had been left in place following the 1996 Act. The first was the 25 year old prohibition against a single firm owning a local television station and newspaper in the same market. The second was the remaining limitations on the number of broadcast TV stations and cable television systems a single company could own. The final removal of these restrictions would have produced exponential increases in media concentration and consolidation. These changes could have been accomplished with relative ease as in 1996, but the industry had overplayed its hand and was asking for far too much. This bold move to eliminate the remaining ownership restrictions coupled with Powell's overt hostility to the regulatory function of his own commission gave long-time critics the ammunition they needed – providing the spark of what would become a blazing grass-roots media reform movement, one working to push back the veil and bring these issues into the sunshine.

By early 2002 academics, media watchdogs and consumer advocacy organizations began issuing calls for a broad push-back against the continued de-regulation of the media. One of these, which clearly illustrates the days' sentiments, was issued in an article by Robert W. McChesney, a media scholar from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and John Nichols, a political writer for *The Nation* magazine. The article, entitled "The Making of a Movement" appeared in the January 7th edition of *The Nation* and laid out the case for a movement with "similarities to the civil rights movement or the women's movement" one that will "stand outside political parties and encourage all of them to take up the mantle of democratic media reform" (McChesney and Nichols, 2002, p. 5). This article laid out many of the same central arguments and themes that many other individuals and organizations were simultaneously describing and which would become the guiding framework for the current media reform movement. The problem, the authors argued, went far beyond biased or under-resourced news gathering but extended into our basic culture (an argument reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer's formulation of the "Culture Industry" at the Frankfurt School in the 1940's). They argued that

the de-regulation efforts of the past decade had put for-profit corporations in control of too much of the nation's mediated content, contributing to a "hypocommerical, corporate-directed culture" (McChesney and Nichols, 2002, p. 1). The authors urged the creation of a coalition beginning with the broadest range of progressive organizations whether their current work involved environmental issues, civil rights, animal rights or economic justice because "media reform can no longer be dismissed as a dependent variable that will fall into place once the more important struggles have been won…unless we make headway with the media, the more important struggles will never be won" (McChesney and Nichols, 2002, p. 2).

"The Making of a Movement" also acknowledged the presence of a growing alternative media movement and culture that was creating and disseminating novel media content free from the influence of the corporate mainstream. McChesney and Nichols discussed the important work of many alternative media practitioners, including Indymedia and the rise of other DIY efforts made possible by the Internet. However, they argued that these independent voices and their focus on producing alternative content was not sufficient, defining the differences in focus between them and the media reform movement they were calling for. They wrote, "Yet, as important as this work is, there are inherent limits to what can be done with independent media, even with access to the Internet. Too often the alternative media remain on the margins, seeming to confirm that the dominant structures are the natural domain of the massive media conglomerates that supposedly give the people what they want" (McChesney and Nichols, 2002, p. 3). The problem, they argued, was that the government, with its power to subsidize private companies through the granting of free access to the spectrum and the creation of policies that created monopolistic power, was eliminating any chance for there to be an equal playing field. As long as those policies were in place, alternative voices would never have a chance. McChesney, Nichols and the other reformers wanted to beat the corporations at this game, not simply ignore it in favor of another. They wanted to reclaim the regulatory apparatus of the government for the broader public. "We must not accept such massive subsidies for wealthy corporations, nor should we content ourselves with the freedom to forge an alternative that occupies the margins. Our task is to return informed consent to media policy-making and generate a diverse media system that serves our democratic needs" (McChesney and Nichols, 2002, p.3). As Powell and the FCC moved forward with the de-regulation agenda, people began to heed the call.

As the FCC continued its rule-making exercise to further relax its regulations, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia at the urging of the NAB and other media interests nullified two long standing regulations that the FCC was already considering relaxing. The restriction keeping a single company from owning the bulk of broadcast stations and cable systems in the same market and limits on the number of TV stations a single company could own were handed back to the FCC for further review (McChesney and Nichols, 2002). The ruling raised the stakes considerably for the FCC's already contentious rulemaking exercise. Organizations like the Consumer Federation of America and the Center for Digital Democracy began preparing for what would prove to be a long and difficult process of holding back what seemed to be an inevitable roll-back by the FCC. In a brief submitted by the two organizations in February of 2002, the groups outlined several arguments, authored by media scholars McChesney and Mark Crispin Miller from NYU (McChesney and Miller, 2002). First, the brief argued that there was no grounds in either history or the law that the media should be considered a free-market. Second, that the public and the Congress must be involved at a much greater level before the FCC made any decisions. Third, that the FCC must ensure that corporate spending and lobbying would not unduly influence any decisions. Fourth, that the presumption should not be based on corporate profitability but on the public interest and fifth, that the burden of proof for any rule changes must be on the media companies. Sixth, that the impact of deregulation on radio following the 1996 offered ample evidence that there would be a negative on the public and the fairness of the market. Seventh, that the media conglomerates had a proven track record of hiding their ultimate aims. Eighth, that Internet access, which was being used as proof that diversity would continue in spite of ownership rule changes, was also in jeopardy if increased media concentration were allowed to continue and finally, that there was ample evidence that media consolidation had had a negative impact on the diversity of contact across media forms. These arguments became the basis for much of the discussion from the media reformers as their opposition continued to grow. By the end of 2002, the number of groups organizing against the FCC's proposed changes had grown exponentially and the group Free Press had been formed to help coordinate the effort.

As the opposition became better organized and more unified on message, hundreds of thousands of people began to join the effort pressuring their elected officials through a coordinated campaign involving emails, phone calls and letters. Between early 2002 and the

Summer of 2003, over 1 million people had contacted their elected officials and the FCC urging them to stop any attempts to further weaken the ownership restrictions (Nichols and McChesney, 2003). This prompted many powerful Republicans in the House and Senate, who had largely sat out the debate in apparent deference to the Bush administration, to voice their own opposition to the changes and the lack of widespread hearings and public input. On March 19th, Republican Senators Wayne Allard (CO), Susan Collins (ME) and Olympia Snowe (ME) drafted a letter to Chairman Powell calling for a broader public debate in the FCC's media ownership review. Two weeks later, a bi-partisan group of eleven lawmakers drafted another letter urging Powell to release the FCC's proposal by June 2nd, the original date specified by the Commission, and on June 2nd, with only a single official public hearing, the new rules were released.

The FCC's ruling reversed the cross-ownership rule limiting a single company's ability to own a newspaper and broadcast station in the same market. The FCC also revised the radio-television cross-ownership rule, which prohibited a company from owning more than eight radio and television stations in the same community. In markets with nine or more television stations, no cross-ownership restrictions would apply. In markets with three or fewer television stations, no cross-ownership would be permitted among television, radio and newspapers. In markets with four to eight television stations, some kinds of cross-ownership would be permitted on a case-by-case basis. The new rules permitted a single company to own up to three stations in the largest markets, but a station already owning a station in the top four in ratings could not purchase another. The Commission also increased the reach of a single broadcast company from 35% of the national viewing audience to 45%; however an exception for UHF stations actually increased that figure up to 90%. The new rules retained the radio ownership limit in place after the 1996 Act but changed the formula for defining markets which critics contend weaken the existing rules. Within weeks, the media reform movement would begin to see their efforts bear fruit…the new rules would not take effect.

The public outcry generated prompted Congress to act. On July 23, 2003 the House voted overwhelmingly to approve a spending bill that included a provision to block the national viewer increase to 45%. On September 3rd, the Senate passed a "resolution of disapproval" to nullify the new FCC rules by a margin of 55-40 and on September 4th, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed a spending bill that contained a provision that would effectively block all of the ownership rule changes. The House blocked these provisions, but in a compromise with the

Senate, the 45% change was reduced to 39%, just enough to allow Viacom and News Corporation to keep all of its stations. Congressional wrangling continued into 2004, and on February 11th, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals took up a challenge to the rule changes filed by a coalition led by Prometheus Radio Project, a grass-roots organization promoting community-based low power FM radio stations. A stay was granted, blocking the implementation of the new rules and just over five months later, on June 24th, the Court ruled in favor of Prometheus and sent the majority of the rule changes back to the FCC for further review.

On January 21st, 2005 Michael Powell resigned from the FCC. Commissioner Kevin Martin, who had already served a five-year term as commissioner and was a long-time ally and campaign organizer for President Bush, was appointed as the new chairman. Martin had frequently clashed with Powell, most notably when he joined Democratic Commissioners Copps and Adelstein in voting against regulations regarding telephone rate increases in 2004. In June of 2006, Martin announced a new round of rule making procedures to address the Third Circuit's ruling and other media ownership issues. Martin, now armed with a full panel of commissioners for the first time in several years, is expected to move quickly on the rule changes.

This rule making exercise is important in that the original 1934 Act and the 1996 Act do not adequately address the myriad of new issues raised by the rise of new technology that will allow video, audio, Internet and phone communication to be delivered in a single platform. Also at question is the concept of Net Neutrality, the idea that all information available on the Internet is treated equally by service providers keeping these media companies from creating a multiple tier system for information passing through their portals. Some companies have requested the ability to charge a premium to content providers for fast track access to their digital lines, relegating others to a much slower portion of the line. This is of particular importance to the IMC movement and other alternative/radical media producers who have flourished thanks to the Internet. Without Net Neutrality, they could easily see their content shifted into the lower bandwidth, increasing the chances that their information could fall through the digital cracks. New rules are required but it is critical that the decision making process be open to the public and that the new regulations be designed to serve the public interest, first and foremost. To that end, a broad coalition of organizations including Free Press, Common Cause, the AFL-CIO, the Public Interest Research Group, Media Access Project, Center for Digital Democracy and hundreds of other smaller organizations representing millions of individuals are currently

working to pressure the FCC to hold multiple public hearings across the country, holding their own public meetings to educate the public on the issues and working to pressure the Congress to take a more active role in protecting the public interest.

If the past ten years of media policy and politics is any indication, this will be an incredibly difficult fight. One that, if lost, could see the complete domination of all media forms, old and new, by an even smaller media oligopoly connected through a wide array of conglomerates to the world's most powerful corporations and in turn the governments that all too often serve their interests at the expense of those of the people. The world's media environment is already dominated by eight major corporations that rule over an intricate web of conglomerates and media holding companies. In many cases, these companies are vertically integrated, meaning they now control the entire process of media making and distribution from the earliest stages of production to final distribution and all of the various related product marketing. These eight companies are General Electric, Time Warner, the News Corporation, Walt Disney, Vivendi Universal, Bertelsman AG, Viacom and CBS. If the industry's push for greater deregulation is successful, this number could shrink dramatically. However, unlike in 1996 or 2001, the industry insiders, political opportunists and corporate yes men, will have a different kind of battle on their hands. One waged not only by academics, think tanks and policy wonks, but by millions of ordinary people newly engaged by an organized and growing media reform movement. In the final section of this chapter I outline the major goals of this movement as articulated by some of its most vocal advocates and a brief look at the major organizations working to make those goals a reality.

The Movement for Media Reform

Over the past decade, many organizations have joined the fray to fight the continued concentration and monopolization of the media and the growing influence of private, for-profit corporations over the regulatory process. There is a wide variety of groups that claim to be a part of the movement for media reform, each with different areas of emphasis and each employing slightly different tactics. However, the overall goals of this movement remain relatively consistent across each of these, and there are several ongoing coalitions between these groups linking their efforts, thus creating a bona-fide movement. Jeffery Chester, a long-time journalist and media reformer and the founder of the Center for Digital Democracy has

frequently written about the steps that must be taken to strengthen media democracy. In 2002 and 2006, Chester authored pieces for *The Nation* outlining what he argues should be the goals included on any group's agenda for media reform (Chester and Larson, 2002; Chester, 2006). An examination of the goals and mission statements of the biggest players in the movement for media reform indicates that these have been widely included (in many cases independently), so the list provides an excellent, concise account of what the movement is all about.

Topping Chester's list (which included twelve items in 2002 and was condensed to ten in 2006) at numbers one and two are issues of media concentration including media ownership and media mergers. Chester argues that the continuing efforts to roll back media regulations limiting media ownership should be opposed and that many of the limits already repealed should be reinstated. He also calls for a comprehensive review process of all media mergers and the aggressive application of the nation's anti-trust laws to ensure competition and diversity on the mediascape. Third, Chester argues for the protection of the democratic structure of the Internet, which guarantees that all content is treated as equal. This could be accomplished through the passage of Net Neutrality legislation that would keep the major phone and cable companies from transforming the Net into "a toll road with fast lanes for corporate media and a digital dirt road for everyone else" (Chester, 2006, p. 1). Rapidly growing digital technologies play a prominent role in Chester's list as will many other media reform organizations. Coming in at number four is spectrum management that is accountable to the public, including rigorous public auctions of the spectrum with a portion of the proceeds going to fund public interest communication endeavors and an increase in the spectrum available for community wireless Internet service. Closely related, at number five, is the need for community owned and operated broadband service and the organizing of grass-roots opposition to laws trying to curtail its availability. Number six is the need for greater regulations protecting the public's privacy as new interactive digital technologies come on line that can collect people's personal information. Number seven is the need to enact copyright laws that reflect reality of networked computers and other digital media devices. Chester and many other media reformers are arguing for an overhaul of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, passed in 1998, which granted broad control of an incredible amount of content to its original owners arguably at the expense of the principle of fair use. Included in this idea is the need for the greater production of content that is explicitly for fair use as well as the development of open source software and operating systems for digital devices.

Eight is the closing of the oft mentioned digital divide through universal digital service and the creation of new online civic centers for "Dot Commons." Nine, is the need to diversify content through increasing alternative media production capabilities and delivery systems to make that content broadly accessible. Finally, Chester and many other media reformers are calling for a program designed with the explicit goal of increasing media ownership by minority communities and a greater involvement by traditional civil rights organizations in opposition to the growing media monopolies. To be clear, this is just a list compiled by one major actor in the media reform movement and has not in any way that I could find been "officially" adopted by any single or unitary movement. However, as will be seen in the final section of this chapter, many of the major players in the movement are advocating portions of this list in their own work.

Organizations for Media Reform

Perhaps the best way to understand the current media reform movement is too look at some of the organizations who comprise it. The following is a very brief listing of some of the groups fighting for media reform and groups who have participated in one or more of the current coalitions working on the issues. In no way should this list be considered exhaustive in that more non-profits are routinely coming online to join the effort but the list does include the groups whose work have informed this chapter. This listing focuses on those groups that are directly participating in grass-roots organizing and advocacy and does not include many of the academic institutions and think-tanks, many of which are directly affiliated with universities, which have been working for years on exploring the relationships between media, society and the government.

Free Press. Free Press began in 2002 as a project of the Media Education Foundation. Founded by academic and media critic, Professor Robert McChesney, the group became an independently incorporated non-profit organization in 2003. In many ways, Free Press has become one of the principle organizers of the media reform movement, having worked to facilitate broad coalitions that have brought many long-time media activist groups together. Free Press's primary mission is to organize people and communities to fight corporate control of the media in all forms. The group operates a website that contains numerous training resources to educate people about the various issues involved, online tools to facilitate the efforts of individual activists and downloadable kits to spread word about the movement. Free Press is

currently working on 19 projects, including: protecting media ownership regulations, identifying and stopping the use of government or corporate video news releases, greater independence for public broadcasting, promoting and defending low-power FM radio for communities, exposing media bias on Fox News, protecting public ownership of the electromagnetic spectrum and strengthening pay-for-play restrictions in radio just to name a few. Free Press also produces original radio stories on the media issues through its "Media Minutes" program. One of Free Press's most notable projects is the National Conference for Media Reform, a large-scale conference involving many other media reform groups and thousands of individuals. The conference drew 1700 to Madison, Wisconsin in 2003; over 2000 to St. Louis in 2005 and is expected to draw over 3,000 to Memphis in early 2007. The goal of the conference is to provide a forum for media reformers to find out about media reform projects happening all over the country, give interested activists a chance to learn more about the complex issues involved, enable media reformers to find ways to work together in coalitions and energize movement supporters. More information on Free Press can be found at www.freepress.net.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. FAIR has been serving as a media watchdog organization since 1986, making it one of the oldest organizations currently fighting for media reform. FAIR was founded by Jeff Cohen, a media insider turned activist and author who has become one of the leading voices for media reform, one who has been able to break into the mainstream media with columns frequently appearing in some of the nation's biggest newspapers and numerous guest appearances on the major cable news networks including a stint as co-host on CNN's *Crossfire* (although he has now left cable news and related to me in a personal conversation that he just could not get fair treatment and will refuse further interviews). In the organization's own words FAIR works to "invigorate the First Amendment by advocating for greater diversity in the press and by scrutinizing media practices that marginalize public interest, minority and dissenting viewpoints. As an anti-censorship organization, we expose neglected news stories and defend working journalists when they are muzzled. As a progressive group, FAIR believes that structural reform is ultimately needed to break up the dominant media conglomerates, establish independent public broadcasting and promote strong non-profit sources of information" (http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=100). The group publishes a magazine titled "Extra!" and produces the weekly radio program *Counterspin*. FAIR also operates a listserv that provides users with frequent updates on media policy, trends in journalism and

documented cases of alleged bias in the news. FAIR's website includes many online tools to educate and mobilize media activists. More information about FAIR can be found online at www.fair.org.

Center for Digital Democracy. CDD was founded in 2001 by Jeffery Chester, an academic who co-founded the media policy think tank Center for Media Education in 1992. Chester was a major voice arguing against many of the provisions of the 1996 Telecom Act and is widely credited for his efforts to make media policy a mainstream issue throughout the 1990's. CDD is focused primarily on ensuring that as new media policy is developed for the digital age, the needs of the public interest are placed forefront. The Center's own mission statement reads in part, "The Center for Digital Democracy is committed to preserving the openness and diversity of the Internet in the broadband era, and to realizing the full potential of digital communications through the development and encouragement of noncommercial, public interest programming." The CDD maintains a website that includes an archive of media accounts, policy papers and educational tools for activists. The CDD also operates an Internet activist network that enables users to participate in media advocacy campaigns. The Center for Digital Democracy's website can be found at www.democraticmedia.org.

The Prometheus Radio Project. The Prometheus Radio Project is a clear example of how the lines between the alternative/radical media and media movements are inherently blurry. Prometheus Radio is a non-profit group working to challenge the status quo through the production and dissemination of community centered, not-for-profit alternative media content, namely low power FM radio. Prometheus works all over the world to help communities create and maintain their own community radio stations because "a free, diverse, and democratic media is critical to the political and cultural health of our nation" (http://prometheusradio.org/about_us/). Prometheus views the continued concentration and homogenization of media content as a major threat to democracy and the maintenance of a free society. However, in order to make their vision of widespread alternative media outlets a reality, the group has had to join the media reformers in stopping the further consolidation and deregulation of the media while simultaneously pushing for media policies that open up the spectrum and the licensing system for community radio. Prometheus Radio was the principle plaintiff in the court case mentioned above that stayed the FCC's 2001 policy revisions and has become a key group in promoting media activism at the local and national levels.

Media Matters for America. Media Matters was founded in 2004 in part by David Brock, a writer and media consultant who primarily worked for conservative interests until 2002 when he published *Blinded by the Right: The Conscience of an Ex-Conservative*, a personal memoir that exposed many of the media tactics employed by right-leaning interests. Media Matters is a web-based, non-profit organization that conducts detailed analyses of print, broadcast, cable, radio and Internet media content with the goal of identifying, analyzing and correcting "conservative misinformation" (http://mediamatters.org/about_us/). Media Matters produces many of their analyses in real-time as quick responses the media content being studied as well as longer more detailed reports. Many of the writers and fellows of Media Matters are some of the most prominent names in the media reform community including Eric Boehlert, Max Blumenthal and Professor Eric Alterman from The New School. As with most of the organizations included in this listing, Media Matters offers visitors to their website many online tools for media activism including links to other media reform organizations.

Columbia Journalism Review. The Columbia Journalism Review is a project of the Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. CJR's website states "The *Columbia Journalism Review* is recognized throughout the world as America's premier media monitor—a watchdog of the press in all its forms, from newspapers and magazines to radio, television, and cable to the wire services and the Web. Founded in 1961 under the auspices of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, *CJR* examines not only day-to-day press performance but also the many forces—political, economic, technological, social, legal, and more—that affect that performance for better or worse. The magazine, which is edited by a dedicated staff of professional journalists and published six times a year, offers a mix of reporting, analysis, criticism, and commentary, always aimed at its basic goal: the continuing improvement of journalism in the service of a free society" (http://www.cjr.org/contact/). CJR publishes a bi-monthly magazine, produces numerous special reports and tracks media ownership. CJR's website offers numerous online tools for students and media watchers and links to a broad range of journalism and media organizations. Although primarily a research institution rather than an activist organization, CJR is one of the most common academic sources cited by many media reform groups in their publications and analyses.

AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations) is the national federation of over 11 million union members across the country.

The AFL-CIO has recently joined the media reform movement and has brought its formidable political, lobbying and grass-roots mobilization programs to the effort. Similar to the other organizations cited above, the AFL-CIO credits its involvement to concerns by its membership that continued consolidation and concentration of the media "places the public's right to receive information from diverse sources in serious jeopardy" and "threatens the fundamental right of our citizenry to access the information they need to be a part of a democratic society" (http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaflcio/publications/magazine/0503_media.cfm). Additionally, more media deregulation and consolidation threatens the jobs and benefits of thousands of affiliated union members. Unions in the AFL-CIO like the Newspaper Guild/Communications Workers of America (CWA) and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists represent workers who have the seen the number of jobs decline rapidly over the last ten years. Just since 2000, 70,000 media workers have lost their jobs thanks in large part to company mergers and the downsizing of news operations. So far, the AFL-CIO's role has been lobbying the Congress, mobilizing their members for forums and public hearings and providing grass-roots assistance to local media reform groups.

This listing represents just a few of the literally hundreds of organizations working for media reform in the U.S. Some of the other major players include Future of Music Coalition (www.futureofmusic.org), Common Cause (www.commoncause.org), the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (www.uspirg.org), Public Citizen, Media Action Fund, Media Access Project, Media Alliance, and Democracy Now (www.democracynow.org), one of the most successful alternative media outlets in the country. This brief examination of these organizations and the work they are doing illustrates that the further monopolization of our media by powerful multi-national interests will not go unchallenged and that there is a vibrant and growing movement to use the structures and policies of the state to protect the public's interest. As I will illustrate in the next chapter, the central concerns of these media reformers are shared by many in the alternative/radical media community and there is a great deal of overlap in the work they are doing.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have provided a fairly detailed account of the last ten years of media policy in the U.S. and the impact those policies have had on our media environment. A basic

understanding of these issues is critical in understanding the rise of the Independent Media Center movement in that it contextualizes the phenomena. The growing influence of for-profit interests over media policy and the rampant deregulation and consolidation that influence has helped create is a major factor in the growth of Indymedia and other projects within the alternative/radical media and DIY movements. It also illustrates what these movements are up against in their efforts to crack through the corporate blockade on the free exchange of information in order to implement the ideas necessary for a democratic society. As the forces of capital continue to create new enclosures within our communication spaces, it is critical that new, free and open spaces are created especially as capital expands its reach beyond national borders into the global arena.

I have also provided a cursory look at the movement for media reform. Media reformers are working to use the tools of our liberal democratic institutions to ensure that policies exist to encourage the creation of those spaces. Alternative/radical media producers including the IMCistas are working to make sure those spaces are filled. While I will argue that the alternative/radical media movement holds more real long-term promise for the ultimate liberation of the people of the world from the growing dominance of the multi-national corporate machine, it is important in the short term not to simply give corporate media a pass. U.S. liberal democracy has "granted" certain rights to its citizens. The people still own the air and companies wishing to use that air to make a profit by transmitting media across the various waves of the electromagnetic spectrum are still required by law to show that they are providing a public service. The fact that the spirit of the law has been compromised does not change that. We must not simply cede those rights without a fight. By holding the corporate media accountable we are helping to soften the ground so to speak for the more comprehensive and libratory projects that must follow. Imagine how much easier the struggle for true social, economic and environmental justice would be if the voices all sides were granted equal access, if the battles fought within governmental institution were waged on a level playing field, if the public was served by a media that was diversified and more equitable. John Downing, who literally wrote the book on radical media, wrote of the tension between the movement for media reform and the alternative/radical media movement and the importance of both. He wrote, "I, too, find myself in the strange position personally of being on the extreme right…of the extreme left. On some levels, I resonate with, in their varying emphases, de Certeau and Scott and

Gramsci and the situationists and am most at ease in straightforward opposition and in the search of temporary autonomous zones and prefigurative politics. On others, I find it hard to discount the importance of trying to make a dent in media and communication policies that are otherwise the happy hunting ground of corporate leaders who draft legislation for our supposed political representatives" (Downing, 2001, p. 394).

So far I have been using the terms alternative and radical media fairly freely without really delving into exactly what those terms entail. In the following chapter I will outline two of the major theoretical models of alternative or radical media in an attempt to clarify the types of social undertakings they entail. In Chapter 4 I superimpose those models over the IMC movement in an effort to provide a better understanding of the scope of the project and its potential to be an agent of global social and political change.

CHAPTER 3
RADICAL ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

"We're not only saying that we'll change the world with the way we cover stories, provide information that uncovers the lies of globalization and putting our bodies in the streets. We're going to emulate a new way of being – something the powers that be ought to look at and maybe embrace." - ***Celia Alario, media strategist for environmental, labor and activist groups, 2001***

Thus far, I have examined the historical rise of the Independent Media Center Movement, discussed the media-regulatory-political context in which Indymedia has developed and is attempting to operate and explored the media reform movement, which has developed largely in response to the conditions of that context. In this chapter I shift my focus away from the movement for media reform to what I consider its more punk-rock counterpart, the radical alternative media movement, through which the IMC project is best understood.

To reiterate, these two efforts are independent but interrelated, unified by common enemies but separated by tactics and overall goals. As described earlier, the movement for media reform is working through government entities and the regulatory apparatuses to break apart corporate media monopolies, keep new ones from forming, increase the diversity of ideas expressed in media content, improve access to media channels by traditionally disaffected groups and ensure that for-profit media enterprises make good on their responsibilities to the public interest. Much of the alternative radical media are concerned with the same so there is a great deal of overlap between media reformers and their radical alternative counterparts (many media reformers are also alternative radical media practitioners).

Indymedia is a good example of this overlap. Inherent to the creation of the IMC network is the idea that for-profit interests exert an undue influence over the functioning and content of mainstream media outlets contributed to by government polices, which many IMCistas feel themselves are the product of overt corporate influence. The broadest statement describing the IMC effort reflects this concept: "The Independent Media Center is a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth. We work out of a love and inspiration for people who continue to work for a better world, despite corporate media's distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to free humanity"

(http://www.indymedia.org/en/static/about.shtml). A quick search through the archives of just about any individual IMC in the U.S. yields many accounts of the media reform struggle whether it be updates on court cases, information on media boycotts or local struggles against the loss of local control of media outlets through consolidation. As discussed in the previous chapter, issues of media ownership, regulation and reform are rarely covered by the mainstream media in any meaningful way, so many IMCs have made covering these issues an important part of their work.

However, there are inherent differences between many focused on media reform and those working in Indymedia and other radical alternative media projects. These differences have given rise to many areas of tension between the two and these provide an excellent window through which to view the radical alternative media movement and how Indymedia plays a role. In order to illustrate some of those tensions and begin a discussion about radical alternative media, I start this chapter with a personal account of what can happen when media reformers and alternative radical media producers are brought together.

When I attended the 2nd National Conference for Media Reform in 2005 in St. Louis, Missouri, there were a large number of IMCistas from all over the U.S. in attendance. There were impromptu (and some officially scheduled) Indymedia panels and forums convened to talk about Indymedia and other radical alternative media projects. In fact, a group of IMC activists actually set-up a temporary Indymedia site to cover the proceedings – but cheerleading the conference and media reform was not their primary motivation.

In the months leading up to the Free Press sponsored conference, St. Louis had been rocked by repeated instances of alleged police brutality perpetrated on members of the city's African-American community. Several grass-roots groups had called for the creation of a citizen's panel to investigate the problem and provide for the continued monitoring of the police department. These requests were repeatedly rebuffed by government officials, so a form of soft boycott of the city's hotels and conference centers had been called, aimed primarily at "progressive" organizations looking to host events in the city. According to the group CAPCaR (Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression), they had communicated with Free Press and asked that a letter be sent to the city government declaring that the 2,000 person conference would re-locate unless the city took steps to meet CAPCaR's demands. Members of the group whom I spoke with said that Free Press had declined, arguing that this was not a media reform issue and was thus outside their focus. In true grass roots fashion, CAPCaR activists showed up

and passed out literature to conference attendees telling them of the situation and of Free Press's refusal to help out. Within twelve hours, many at the conference joined the effort and were themselves pressing Free Press organizers to do something to recognize the issue and assist CAPCaR. They called on conference organizers to give representatives of the group and the community a spot on the agenda in the main conference hall to discuss the problem in an effort to give them much needed exposure in both the mainstream local press and the alternative media outlets covering the event. Again, citing the fact that this was not a media reform issue, Free Press declined.

Many of the IMCistas were already unhappy with the conference in terms of its sole focus on media reform and a program that did not adequately include alternative/radical media projects and practitioners. For many, Free Press's refusal to honor CAPCaR's boycott or give them a spot on the agenda turned that frustration into anger. In the minds of many I spoke with, this situation proved that Free Press just didn't get it, so some IMCistas decided to educate them. Members of the local Indymedia Center, CAPCaR activists and other local independent journalists joined with members of IMC collectives from the around the country and together they did what the IMC does best; they created a temporary Indymedia online site to protest (my word not theirs) the National Conference for Media Reform.

An online page was established within the St. Louis IMC website as well as a separate web log called "Be the Media Blog: Grassroots Thoughts and Responses to Media Reform." Tables (provided by Free Press conference organizers) were set up with networked laptops using the hotel high-speed Internet access (again, thanks to Free Press) right outside the main conference hall. Volunteers were on hand to demonstrate the IMC software and encourage passers by to provide their feedback both on the conference and the CAPCaR situation. Reports, critiques and discussion were uploaded so that Indymedia sites throughout the network could link to the content. The IMCistas I spoke with outside the conference hall (I also pitched in and volunteered at the tables) were appreciative of Free Press's efforts but were critical of the conference's sole focus on reforming what they viewed as a fundamentally corrupt media system, one they felt no manner of government tweaking could fix but must be completely re-made. They also critiqued the format of the conference, which placed an emphasis on speeches given by high profile academics, writers and progressive "celebrities" over free-form discussions and workshops between regular people who were working in the trenches. They saw the

conference as a forum for educated people with power to preach from on high about the importance of working within the institutions of the liberal democracy to make incremental changes to the regulations governing the for-profit media establishment. Many also perceived the conference as largely ignoring the work of the grass roots – the unwashed masses that were working to create completely new media spaces independent of the old corrupt systems. In their view, the conference was a top down exercise with elites telling the people what they needed to do within a government and electoral system many didn't understand, ignoring those who were already "doing" in a bottom-up fashion within their own communities.

Stephen Dunifer, a writer for self-professed radical independent newspaper the *St. Louis Confluence,* characterized this approach as "putting lipstick on a pig" and referred to "the folly of media reform" as "a discussion about making the jail cell more comfortable" (http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2005/05/317465.shtml). Another writer argued that the conference was "about reformist politics, academic speech, and money" and that it represented "reformist posturing" not the "radical action" that was needed (http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2005/05/317554.shtml). These attendees and others viewed the conference (as representative of the media reform movement) as being all about providing band-aid solutions to alleviate the symptoms of a disease while doing nothing to truly cure the patient. The conference structure and Free Press's refusal to honor CAPCaR's requests (thus ignoring the needs of the people in the very place the conference was taking place) was indicative of the broader problems with the reformist view. To the IMCistas I spoke with, there was no distinction between issues of corporate media and the police misconduct in St. Louis; all were products of the same corrupt system with the source of that corruption being capital's domination. Many in the IMC movement see their job, and that of alternative/radical media in general, to challenge that system by providing a completely separate media, one that provides "the people," especially the most marginalized like those represented by CAPCaR, with their own forum. Free Press's refusal to include CAPCaR was for many I spoke with proof positive that the media reform movement, as embodied by the conference, lacked the potential for any real change and thus could not be a truly meaningful part of the broader movement to bring about the liberation of the people from the powerful.

Within hours, the IMCistas were able to marshal the resources necessary to cut through all of the pomp and circumstance of this grand bourgeois affair and provide everyone the chance

to add their own voices, increasing the diversity of ideas and providing a much needed critical voice in a situation that could have easily turned into nothing but a laudatory love-fest complete with preachers and choir in complete agreement. Almost everyone I spoke with who was not involved with the IMC applauded their efforts, even those who did not necessarily agree with their radical premises. At times, all of the laptops were occupied, and hundreds of comments and several significantly longer pieces were posted before the conference closed.

I remember thinking at the time that this was an absolutely beautiful development - one that illustrated the revolutionary spirit of the IMC. My initial impression of the conference attendees as a whole was that these were people like me - overwhelmingly white, educated and with the material circumstances that provide the time, energy and resources to contact their representatives, sign petitions and engage in all of the trappings of armchair activism that have become the hallmarks of the mainstream left in the U.S. I also remember thinking that efforts for media reform involving such tactics are important and should be encouraged, but that without the presence of an uncompromising alternative/radical media, like the IMCistas in St. Louis, our efforts would never lead to lasting revolutionary change. (For a compilation of the posts submitted in St. Louis see the New York City IMC at http://nyc.indymedia.org/feature/display/150236/index.php)

This account provides a brief glimpse into the tensions between the movement for media reform and many of the radical alternative media projects, which as I will argue later could easily be considered a movement in their own right. The nature of those tensions provide an excellent window through which to view the latter. It also provides a good starting point for the discussion about the nature of radical/alternative media itself. Many researchers (Atton 2002, 2003; Bennett 2003; Couldry 2003; Downing, 2001, 2003; Kidd 2003; Rodriguez 2001) have labored to create conceptual and operational definitions for alternative or radical or citizens' media. In this chapter, I will explicate two of the major conceptualizations of the phenomena, namely those of John D. H. Downing and Chris Atton, who literally wrote the books on the subject - namely Downing's *Radical Media* and Atton's *Alternative Media.* Later, I will use those conceptual frameworks to analyze the Independent Media Center movement.

The Radical Media of John D. H. Downing

What is radical or alternative media? Is it simply media that is different than the mainstream? Pursuing an answer on that tack then begs the question…what is the mainstream media? Downing dispels this simplistic dichotomy completely and quickly arguing that, "to speak of alternative media is almost oxymoronic. Everything, at some point, is alternative to something else" (Downing, 2001 p. ix). This simple, semantic reality is one reason why Downing prefers the nomenclature radical alternative media to simply alternative media. At its most basic, Downing's analysis of radical media is based largely on three areas: the interactions between those media and the larger social order; the processes which guide the media creation and collective actions of both its creators and audiences; and what those processes say about the overarching ideologies and goals of their media.

Downing's analysis centers on ten major propositions. First, radical media can't be understood as simply "alternative." There are, Downing argues, many smaller media forms that do not neatly fit into a classification as mainstream yet do not, either through their focus, content or processes of production, rise to the level of radical alternative media. Second, radical media may represent negative or constructive forces depending on the vantage point of the observer. Some radical media forms are produced with the goal of moving the society back to earlier conditions in a regressive rather than progressive manner. Third, the producers of radical media may not have the intention of producing media that is radical at all. There can be unintended consequences of media content that makes it radical in nature regardless of the intentions of the producers. Downing argues that, "Context and consequences must be our primary guides to what are or are not definable as radical alternative media - the edges are almost always blurred. Every technology used by radical media activists is and has always been used mostly for mainstream purposes, not theirs" (Downing, 2001, p. x). Fourth, the level of radicalism of these media can be situated across a broad spectrum. Some are completely oppositional to the dominant values and norms of the status quo while others employ some of the features of the dominant social order. Fifth, radical media, when forced underground in particularly oppressive contexts or ruling regimes can take on rigid binary qualities. State oppression can dramatically reduce the range of ideas or analyses represented, creating false dichotomies akin to "you're either with us or against us."

Sixth, radical alternative media can be found in an incredible variety of media forms and are as diverse in formats as they are in ideas. As new communication technologies develop, radical alternative media producers have typically quickly adapted and sought to incorporate those technologies for their own uses. Seventh, radical alternative media all have an oppositional quality although the nature of the opposition and the strength of that opposition vary greatly. Radical media produced with a regressive intent (judged of course by the observer) is just as oppositional as those seeking progressive change. For example, there are media that seek to increase the degree of Christian religious ideologies and practices in public life, produced with the belief that the U.S. needs to "return to its Christian roots." Also, this opposition is not just towards the perceived norms and values of the dominant culture but also to the ways in which media is made and disseminated. Downing writes, "radical alternative media have one thing in common, it is that they break somebody's rules, although rarely all of them in every respect" (Downing, 2001 p. xi). Eighth, radical alternative media are generally small-scale, poorly funded and often unnoticed by the mainstream. Ninth, radical alternative media can be defined based on their oppositional purpose. In some cases, that opposition may be vertical from subordinate groups to the dominant power structure. In others, the opposition may be communicated laterally and designed to build support networks for a particular struggle. Finally, radical alternative media are generally organized in a less hierarchical and more democratic fashion although this organization also varies greatly amongst projects. In the remainder of this section, I will examine how Downing builds on this basic framework in preparation for applying his ideas towards the understanding of the Independent Media Center movement.

Mass, Popular and Oppositional Culture

In examining the relationships between radical alternative media and mass culture, Downing draws heavily on the works of the Frankfurt School, especially on the ideas surrounding the concept of the "Culture Industry." The Frankfurt School refers to a group of theorists affiliated with the Institute for Social Research founded in the 1930s' at the University of Frankfurt. The Institute, under the direction of Max Horkheimer, brought together social theorists in an attempt to understand what they viewed as the fundamental failures of Marxist theory, failures evidenced by the carnage of two world wars, the rise of fascism and the lack of any lasting worker revolutions in Europe that did not devolve into totalitarian regimes. One of

the goals of the project was to identify the elements of Marxist theory that still had relevance in a developing social order that they argued Marx never experienced nor predicted to occur. The Frankfurt School is best known for its formulation of its Critical Theory, which combined elements of Marxist thought with earlier formulations by Hegel and others. The Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School became a driving force in Neo-Marxist thought and led to many later theoretical projects by its members including the Theory of Communicative Action by Jurgen Habermas which will be discussed later.

One work of the Frankfurt School, which informs Downing's understanding of culture and the interplay of radical alternative media, is the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* published in 1944 by Horkheimer and his colleague Theodore Adorno. In one essay included in the book, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that one reason for the failure of Marx's theory to adequately explain the current situation was its inability to predict the strength of what they referred to as the Culture Industry. Adorno and Horkheimer posited that mass culture was created in part by the consumption of cultural products produced by the dominant forces of capital. Artifacts of art and entertainment including books, theater, movies and music (they focused almost exclusively on cinema and radio) were created and distributed by capital just like any other product. These cultural products were a modern form of bread and circus, designed to create an illusion of happiness and material fulfillment, diverting attention away from more meaningful forms of fulfillment namely liberation from the oppression of the capitalist system. They acknowledged the potential for art and entertainment to spur creative thought, a necessary element of any exercise in social liberation, but argued that the culture industry did not concern itself with such lofty goals. Rather, they focused on what is easiest understood as "low brow" entertainment forms, those produced exclusively for mass appeal (a distinction that has drawn considerable criticism) that "demonstrates the regression of enlightenment to ideology" which "expends itself in the idolization of given existence and of the power which controls technology" of its distribution (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947, p. xvi).

Later, in response to critics who argued that this formulation did not adequately address popular expression separate from those that could be attributed to the culture industry, Adorno (1975) argued that there was a distinction between mass culture and popular culture - the latter including those forms that could be seen as genuinely coming from the people such as folk art. Downing explains, "Adorno urged critics to appreciate the distinction he and Horkheimer had

tried to maintain between mass culture and popular culture. They had unequivocally rejected mass culture, the product of the commercial industries of advertising, broadcasting, cinema and print media, as a spurious and implicitly even fascistic rendition of the public's needs, asphyxiating the questioning spirit. Popular culture, by contrast, was an authentic expression of the public's visions and aspirations, as in folk music and folk art, and had an inherent oppositional potential" (Downing, 2001, p. 4). This distinction is hard to hold, however, as mass culture, always looking to expand its reach of marketable products, often appropriates its popular counterparts. That, coupled with the fact that popular culture often contains elements reflective of dominant power structures including negative stereotypes of disaffected groups (sexism, classism, racism etc.) leads Downing to argue that when trying to understand the presence of radical media one must also include a third cultural base, oppositional culture. Just as mass culture appropriates and infuses popular culture, so does oppositional culture interact with the other two. Oppositional culture challenges the dominant notions of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and all of the other human characteristics that are used, sometimes subtlety sometimes not, to elevate one group at the expense of another. It is at the intersection of popular and oppositional culture that Downing places radical alternative media. In order for this positioning to translate into anything tangible, it is necessary to understand the nature of the opposition itself, requiring a further explanation of Downing's ideas of power and how those inform his model of radical alternative media.

In analyzing power and the roles that radical alternative media play in both defining and challenging power, Downing has consistently looked towards the socialist anarchist conceptualization of a multiplicity of powers (just one of several aspects of this framework he employs) and Antonio Gramsci's ideas of cultural hegemony. First, Downing argues that in order to fully understand the nature, scope and potential promise of radical alternative media, one must embrace the notion that there are multiple power bases in every society leading to multiple forms of oppression. Traditional Marxist thinking that reduces all oppression to the interplay of private property and the state is overly simplistic, and does not capture the full range of humankind's impressive ability to find a seemingly infinite number of ways to create hierarchies that places one group in a subordinate position to another. Socialist anarchism, which Downing refers to as "historically Marxism's chief antagonist on the left," has always held as a central tenet that the political economy is only one of many forms of subjugation (Downing, 2001, p.

14). Anarchism recognizes that, as David Wiek has argued "any theory that finds the secret of human liberation in something as specific as the politics of property, neglects that interdependence of the many liberations" (Wiek, 1974, p. 143). Males over females, whites over people of color, straights over people of other sexual orientations are all forms of oppression that do not directly fit the traditional Marxist frame (although economic oppression and classism almost always rears it ugly head in these other "isms"). Radical alternative media has the ability to make the linkages between and across the various oppressions and their resultant oppositions. As Downing argues, "Sharing perceptively the gamut of issues plaguing social life, as experienced from various vantage points, and sharing their possible solutions, and sharing in hilarity at their daily idiocies, too, fit the potential of media far more than any other counter-hegemonic institutions such as a party, a union or a council. Resistance, in other words, is resistance to multiple sources of oppression, but in turn, it requires dialogue across the varying sectors – by gender; by race, ethnicity and nationality; by age; by occupational grouping – to take effective shape. Radical alternative media are central to that process" (Downing, 2001, p. 19).

Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony

In a similar vein to both the anarchist notions of multiple sources of oppression beyond the strictly economic and Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry, Downing also draws on the work of social theorist Antonio Gramsci and his concept of hegemony. Like the Frankfurt School, Gramsci was interested in finding an explanation for the failure of any widespread workers' rebellion in Europe and the inabilities of Marxist theory to predict such a failure. "It was Gramsci who, in the late twenties and thirties, with the rise of fascism and the failure of the Western European working-class movements, began to consider why the working class was not necessarily revolutionary, why it could, in fact, yield to fascism" (Gitlin, 1994, p. 516). Gramsci rejected the economic determinism dimension of Marxist thought, arguing that it was the lack of revolutionary ideas, not the required economic crises that were to blame. Clearly, the material economic conditions described by Marx as the sufficient pre-cursors for the revolution were in abundance, what was missing according to Gramsci, were the thoughts and ideas that were needed to spark it. Gramsci gave much more primacy to human agency prompting revolutionary change than did Marx. Gramsci argued that the presence of the necessary material conditions

were not enough - the people had to want revolution. The lack of revolutionary ideas (or the presence of strong countervailing ideas) in the public discourse was as much a factor in revolution as the economic conditions described by Marx. Gramsci's theory argued that oppressed groups actually accepted the norms, values and leadership of the dominant powers not through any direct physical or mental subordination (although those pressures certainly existed in various forms) but because they had reasons to accept them, reasons that were their own and were often misunderstood by groups organizing for revolution. Where Adorno and Horkheimer saw a culture industry that "manufactured consent" (to coin a term made popular by Chomsky), Gramsci saw something much more subtle, if not more powerful. Economic domination was an important precondition for revolution, but of equal importance was the moral and intellectual character, as embodied by the thoughts expressed in the public discourse of the culture. To explain the power of the culture to influence the masses, and discourage revolution, Gramsci formulated the concept of cultural hegemony.

Simply stated, hegemony is the process through which one class in a given society persuades, subtly and over time, other classes to accept its own mores, norms and values that serve to justify the current political and economic conditions. Dominic Strinati describes hegemony as the process through which "dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups" (Strinati, 1995, p. 165). This spontaneous consent is not generated through any single coordinated campaign by the ruling class. Rather, it is a slow, constantly evolving process involving the whole universe of social institutions and cultural products. Hegemony, the slow and voluntary assimilation of the worldview of the dominant class, is the vehicle for consensus as opposed to coercive control. The agents of hegemony are all of the social institutions and undertakings that reinforce the dominant world view and make up what the people consider to be "common sense." Hegemony is built and reinforced by schools, churches, literature, theater, movies, advertising – all of the features that make up daily life in a given culture. Viewpoints that maintain the status-quo are continuously being reinforced and simultaneously reshaped to acknowledge subtle changes in the social order while maintaining the dominant themes to keep those changes minimal.

Gramsci's notion of hegemony is important, not only for its usefulness in understanding the reasons why labor refuses the revolution when the economic conditions clearly warrant it, but also for its value for explaining a strategy to encourage revolution and the liberation of subordinate groups. Hegemony, according to Gramsci, exists primarily outside the State (although the State can and usually does have a hand in it) and is not the sole purview of the ruling class. Subordinate groups can also develop their own hegemonic influences as a counter control on the power of the State and/or the ruling elite. In order to do that, subordinate groups must find ways to unite their individual struggles behind common values that encourage change to the status quo. This is not to say that this unification should be based on a universal adherence to a monolithic ideology or commitment to identical strategies or tactics, however. Rather, these linkages must be made in ways that keep the individual struggles autonomous; to ensure that the needs of the people involved in each individual group or struggle remain at the forefront. So, in order to build a class based revolution, the working class must unite multiple democratic struggles together behind common value based ideas and allow each individual group to engage their own constituency in their own way. Then, Gramsci argued, there could be working class hegemony which in turn could be harnessed as an instrument of the revolution. The bottom line for Gramsci is that the people could not be forced to want change, they had to accept the need for revolutionary change over time and through appeals that were tied directly to their own desires and life experiences. Cultural hegemony negates the presence of any single universal formula for revolution; there can be no cookie cutter approach. These features of the hegemonic process; its slow but consuming character, its incredibly broad range of possible agents and the liberation potential inherent in harnessing the mechanisms for social change all factor heavily in Downing's conceptualizations of the interplay between radical alterative media, culture and power.

Radical alternative media then can be understood in terms of the various roles it can play in this process of hegemony from below. The most obvious of which is radical alternative media's role of counter information agent. The process of ruling class hegemony relies on the acceptance and transmission of the information and ideas that perpetuate the status quo. As was explained in Chapter 2, the mainstream media with its direct connections to capital (they are in fact one and the same) and its successes in manipulating media policy have become capital's first line of defense against popular counterhegemonic forces. Decisions made by the mainstream

news and other media in terms of what and how they report about events and the stories they tell in mass entertainment are all designed to maintain the world views associated with the status-quo. They neglect news stories that provide evidence of problems with the current order and institutions while serving up a smorgasbord of entertainment with the clear message that all is well and as it should be - just keep working, keep shopping and bask in the glow of a golden age in the human experience. Radical alternative media are the outlets where alternative views and analyses are presented and give the public the information they need to challenge their own assumptions about their own experiences and the world around them. Without this alternative information and viewpoints, the world view that benefits the current power structures can't be challenged. Information sharing is just one aspect, however, there is another more subtle role for radical alternative media in this process than simply bringing new, previously ignored or suppressed information to the masses.

Hegemony is a culture building process; challenging the culture created by ruling class hegemony needs more than just counterinformation. A new culture must be created and radical alternative media is a vehicle through which that can happen. Downing argues that these media forms provide spaces within which new cultures with all of the subtleties and nuances of the full range of the human experience can be formed and shaped over time. Gramsci's notions of hegemony indicate that many different types of resistance are necessary for revolutionary social change. Direct resistance, whether in the form of violent direct action, civil disobedience or work stoppages, is no more important than indirect resistance that challenge capital's dominance of culture. Those challenges must come with alternatives, new and different visions at the mass level of how societies can organize themselves (laissez faire capitalism vs. socialism) or at the more micro level, how individuals can live their lives in different modes not in line with those of the dominant class (mass consumption vs. green living). Radical alternative media provide the spaces, outside the enclosures erected by the dominant interests, where those new forms of social organization and ways of living can be explored. These spaces provide the people with a place to investigate a wide range of potentialities.

Global issues can be explored, critiqued and discussed - such as socialism vs. capitalism but so can more mundane issues of daily life. Like the World Social Forum, which has been gathering in Porte Alegre, Brazil for the past several years with the slogan, "Another World is Possible," radical alternative media and the communities they often represent can serve as

tangible proof that the old ways are not the only ways of living. As Downing argues, "Radical media…have a mission not only to provide facts to a public denied them but to explore fresh ways of developing a questioning perspective on the hegemonic process and increasing the public's sense of confidence in its power to engineer constructive change" (Downing, 2001, p. 16).

Through this examination of radical alternative media and its relationships to culture and ways in which it can challenge existing power structures, Downing illustrates three major facets of his definition of these media forms. First, radical alternative media is a facet of popular culture but one that exists in opposition to the mass culture created and nurtured by the forces of the capitalist status quo. Second, radical alternative media, through its myriad of forms, is particularly suited to the task of building linkages between the struggles against the various forms of oppression inherent in contemporary life. Individual radical alternative media projects often work in concert with others (sometimes intentionally, often not) to create a larger, broader movement for change that incorporates all of the individual indignities of the human condition, illustrating that the differences between groups working for social change are less important than their commonalities - making the point that we are all in this together. His third point is that radical alternative media is the primary vehicle for building new world views that challenge those promoted by the current power structures. Radical alternative media can serve as the counterhegemonic forces that Gramsci envisioned, providing sounding boards for new ideas and forums where individuals can explore new ways of thinking and living while giving tangible examples that change is not only preferable but also possible. This hegemony from below helps to instill the desire in individuals for social change, a critical element that must exist before any revolution is possible, regardless of the existing conditions of the political economy.

The interplay between radical alternative media, the culture in which it occurs and the existing power structures is only one area of Downing's analysis. He also looks at radical media in terms of the ways in which it is used by its audiences and producers, including the ways in which they are generated or adopted by specific communities, the networks these media help create and facilitate and, perhaps most importantly for Downing's analysis, their relationship to social movements. The common theme running through all of these resistances. Radical alternative media is, according to Downing, all about resistance. It is a part of the oppositional culture that serves as a countervailing force to mass culture and a tool of counterhegemony.

Obviously, the mere presence of these media is not sufficient to achieve these lofty goals. In order to understand how these media function we must look at the ways in which they are used.

Communities and Social Movements

Central to Downing's definition of radical media is a rejection of the weak media effects model in favor of the primacy of active audiences. In the section above, I described Downing's notion of radical media existing at the intersection of popular and oppositional cultures. This does not mean, however, that the intent of the media producers must be oppositional in nature for it to be considered radical. That designation more directly connects to the ways in which the audiences respond to and use the media in question. He writes, "…such media are part of popular culture and of the overall societal mesh and are not tidily segregated into a radical political reservation. They are endemically, therefore, a mixed phenomenon, quite often free and radical in certain respects and not in others" (Downing, 2001, p. 8). A folk song for example may be produced and disseminated outside of the culture industry and thus be separate from mass culture but may have not been written or performed with the intention of being oppositional. However, if audiences embrace that song and use the story it tells as part of a campaign or social movement that challenges the existing order, it becomes oppositional and perhaps radical. The audience dimension then is critical to understanding the full impact of this song, Downing argues that the same holds true for radical alternative media. When examining these media forms, audiences must be redefined such that they are no longer mere consumers of media content but active participants, the primary source for both the meanings attributed to their content and the functions they serve.

Furthermore, Downing also argues that radical media can't be understood or labeled as such based on the meanings ascribed by individuals. Rather, it is only through the use of these media by groups that they take on a truly radical quality since social change is not made by individuals but by groups of people organizing for change, a fact that many historical accounts taught in our schools conveniently forget to mention. For example, most students know of Rosa Parks who famously refused to give up her seat at the front of the bus to accommodate a white rider as the law required, an act that has given her the title "mother of the civil rights movement." The way the story is usually told and the lofty title she has been given belies the fact that the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which captivated much of the country and helped make a broader

civil rights movement more viable, was the result of a carefully organized and implemented group effort. Attributing this seminal event to the actions of a single individual encourages the thinking that change happens randomly and devalues the importance of deliberate grass roots organizing for lasting social change. Downing's focus then is on the ways these media create or support the communities and/or social movements that call for change and work to make that change happen.

In an extension of this basic idea, Downing believes that in order to understand radical alternative media, it is critical to understand the roles that they play in building, supporting and mobilizing communities. Many producers of media and researchers often use the term "community media" or "democratic media" to describe the media forms which Downing characterizes as radical. Downing argues that these are useless designations and seeks to unpack these media from such non-specific glittering generalities by looking at the ways radical media actually serve to empower communities and increase democratic participation by the people that make up these communities. First, Downing argues that the term community as it is used by many as a verbal shortcut to describe groups that have been dispossessed in one way or another is such an inexact term that is has little descriptive value. There are "black communities," "gay communities," "feminist communities" and many others that are unified by their lack of access to various components of the dominant social or economic institutions. Rather than simply referring to these groups as communities it is more useful to explain the tensions that exist between them and the mainstream and the way in which they use their own media to increase their own access - their own power. Community media can be a newspaper that relates news and events of a specific group in an effort to target these groups and use more efficient marketing strategies for good and services. Radical media, on the other hand, is much more than niche media; it is media designed to empower that community and provide it with a myriad of useful tools in their struggles for equality. In order to talk of radical media as an agent for community empowerment it is necessary to examine how Downing defines power itself.

Downing draws on the work of C.B. Macpherson (1973) and his analysis of power as a basis for democratic movements. Macpherson differentiates between two types of power, developmental and extractive. Developmental power gives people the opportunity to fulfill the promise inherent in cooperative social life. It frees people to fully explore different ways to organize societies that do not include the subjugation of one group by another – to unlock the

potential for more egalitarian ways of being. It is based on the assumption that the capacity for people to "create viable societal arrangements are infinitely more capacious than cynics and elitists will allow" (Downing, 2001, p. 43). The ability for people to realize this potential is "widely shackled" and "the shackles may include, most obviously, malnutrition, homelessness and illiteracy, but also lack of access to the means of production as a result of the division of power between capital and labor" (Downing, 2001, p. 44). Conversely, extractive power denotes the more traditional notions of power and is understood as the ability for one group to impose its will on another. Democracy in the broadest sense can be seen as the cultural, economic and political conditions that allow developmental power to flourish. Radical alternative media serves as agents of developmental power, acting as counterhegemonic forces that both create new spaces for communities to explore and act on their own developmental power and liberatory urges and serve as megaphones to communicate their needs and their intentions to be free to the broader public.

These media serve this function in several ways. First, radical media broaden the range of information available to the public and provide new spaces for discourse separate from the enclosures of the mainstream media. Second, radical media are designed to be more responsive to the communities they serve and offer people within a community or social movement a space to communicate their ideas and aspirations which the mainstream ignores or ridicules. Third, since radical media are not owned by the same corporate powers as those in the mainstream, there is no need for them to engage in the same self-censorship to appease the powers that be. Fourth, as I will examine in more detail later, radical alternative media tend to be organized much more democratically than their mainstream counterparts. They are free to explore a myriad of ways of organizing based on more radically democratic principles. This internal organization allows the media to be more responsive to and inclusive of a wider range of ideas and viewpoints. Finally, these media provide a space for the development of artistic and intellectual projects separate from more formal institutions, enabling groups to further articulate and expand their own cultures, regardless of the profit potential. Voting blocks and economic boycotts are a form of power that many disaffected communities have used successfully from time to time as are violent uprisings. The gains made this way tend to be aimed at institutions and are short lived in that the powers that created them adapt and reassert their dominance. For example, in looking at the civil rights movement mentioned above, African-Americans increased

their ability to vote but in the past few years that right has been diminished due to the behind-the-scenes manipulation of the voting process itself. Rigid new identification requirements, laws denying ex-felons the right to vote and the denial of voting technologies and resources in black communities have all served to suppress the ability for African-Americans to exercise their right to vote. Developmental power, if properly harnessed can lead to change that is more resistant to manipulation by those forces that stand in opposition to that change by altering the social fabric itself at a more fundamental level.

This argument, the need to redefine notions of community to understand radical alternative media leads to another critical conclusion, namely that it is through the actual social movements organized by these communities to implement change that radical alternative media can best be understood. Downing argues that the ability of radical media to tap into the developmental power of people can't be understood in a vacuum but must be examined in relation to the social movements that use them. In fact, it is the relationship between radical media and social movements that are at the heart of Downing's analysis. He places a much greater emphasis on the role of social movements in the development and use of radical alternative media than does Atton whose theoretical model is examined in the next section.

It is important to note the more expansive description of social movements that Downing employs in comparison to other definitions. Downing describes three major classifications of social movements that have informed much of the research on the subject. First is the riot or mob characterized by violent eruptions of social energy in response to gross repression by the state and/or economic institutions. Second is the rational actor model that describes movements based on carefully organized groups employing strategies or tactics aimed at the creative employment of state features to institute economic or social change. This model focuses on organized actions like strikes, sit-ins, boycotts and demonstrations as tactics to force political institutions to implement change. Third is the New Social Movement model which examines movements in terms of broader cultural changes in a given society. The focus here is not on calculated material outcomes that can be implemented by the state but on building relationships between individual members of an oppressed group, thus creating subcultures that can explore alternate ways of living free from the constraints of the status quo. Downing's examples include many of those movements often associated with the notion of identity politics such as the consciousness raising tactics of the feminist movement in the 1960's and 1970's.

He argues that all three of these oft-cited models are deficient in explaining the full range of social activities and organizing that have existed at different times and in different contexts. The riot or mob model does not adequately address the social organizing that often precedes violent outbursts for social change. The notion of rational actors only explains one dimension of many movements and does not address the underlying social or cultural aspects of these movements which often engage in culture building that is separate from the specific state centered goals articulated. Behind most organized marches, boycotts or electoral advocacy is the alternate culture formation as described earlier, the building of counterhegemonic forces. Conversely, Downing argues that the new social movement models are too exclusionary and do not address the concrete outcomes from governmental sources that are often features of their raison d'etre. Many movements may employ identity building as a tactic to implement governmental change such as feminist groups that have employed consciousness raising as a tactic to change the law for things such as increased funding for child care facilities, protections for equal pay or improved divorce laws to make them fairer for women. Each model is on its own deficient but each offers descriptive power for understanding social movements.

Unfortunately, Downing's critique of these models does not include a fully explicated alternative, but he does hint at one that holds promise for gaining a better understanding of social movements and the critical connections between them and radical alternative media through a discussion of the concept of the public sphere – namely the concept of public sphere originally articulated by German social thinker and critical theorist Jurgen Habermas. Habermas' notion of the public sphere and the numerous formulations that have been added to it over the years both by adherents and critics alike is a central component of my analysis of the Independent Media Center movement and is more fully explained in a subsequent chapter but a brief explanation here helps explain how this theoretical formulation posits a possible explanation of the connections between radical alternative media and social movements.

This concept of the public sphere was originally articulated in one of Habermas' earliest works, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, published in 1962. This work was a part of Habermas' post-graduate academic work and remained largely unnoticed until 27 years later when a new English translation was published by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Since that time it has become one of the most critically acclaimed and derided of Habermas' projects and has been employed by

researchers investigating problems of civil society, democratic theory and the impact of the media. *Structural Transformation* seeks to examine when and under what conditions the arguments of mixed companies can become authoritative bases for political action. His analysis seeks to define the social conditions (both structural and cultural) necessary for rational-critical debate where the status of the participants is ignored in the processes of opinion formation and decision-making (Calhoun, 1992).

Structural Transformation is both historiography and social critique focusing on the economic, social and political conditions that existed in Europe in the seventeenth century that gave rise to a new category of bourgeois society. It transcended earlier notions of public and private life, artistic and political discussion and social norms for human discourse. Through a complicated series of social structural changes initiated by the rise of capitalism and the creation of bourgeois society, Habermas tracks the development of a new public sphere where people could come together and discuss social problems in ways that had not been possible under earlier conditions. Arising from the bourgeois arts society, circles of literary and theatre criticism began to expand the scope of the conversations and began to tackle problems of the state and economy. Habermas defines the public sphere as follows: "the bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people, coming together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of the political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent; people's public use of their reason" (Habermas, 1989, p.27). This new public sphere mediated between society and the state and provided the public with a vehicle to organize themselves as the "official" bearers of public opinion. It established public discourse as a mode of social integration separate from the state and political economy. Habermas argues that this new social construction helped create new infrastructures of social communication including an independent press, new publishing ventures and new public institutions for discourse like coffee shops and public houses (Calhoun, 1992).

This new public sphere possessed several qualities that were critical to Habermas' critique and which later became the cornerstones of much of his later work including his theoretical frameworks of human discourse and social action: *Discourse Ethics*, *Universal Pragmatics* and the *Theory of Communicative Action*. First, Habermas argues that this new

public reshaped discourse itself in a way that negated the social status of the participants. Second, since status had been bracketed, rational argument became the sole consideration. Individuals and more importantly, their positions on issues, were judged by the quality of their arguments. Third, this new public sphere opened new areas for discussion. Matters that had been previously monopolized by the state were now available for discussion. All matters in the interest of the common good were now open for deliberation. Fourth, this new public sphere was open to anyone who had access to the cultural products of the society. Habermas writes, "However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it is always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who – insofar as they were propertied and educated – as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion" (Habermas, 1989, p. 37). This final point has been one of the major criticisms of Habermas' critique and explanation. His formulation did not account for a plebian public sphere and has been widely criticized on that front (Benhabib, 1992; Eley, 1992; Fraser, 1989, 1992). His contention that the demise of this unique public sphere as a source of the current domination of capital and the state then becomes suspect since many argue that it never existed to begin with.

I will more fully examine Habermas' formulations and criticisms of it later, but for now suffice it to say that I argue as have many others that the value of Habermas' work on the public sphere lies not in its historical accuracy but in the ideal which he describes, a notion which Downing seems to share with qualifications for the criticisms he holds as valid. If it is possible to create such spaces, where individual status and all of the social conditions that make up that status (gender, education, class etc.) can be suspended in conversation and decision making and the primacy placed on argument and discourse, couldn't that have a transformative effect on the broader social order? If "hierarchy free" zones could be established, couldn't those spaces become islands from which coordinated attacks on the status quo and all of its various qualities of subordination be launched? Downing does not discuss a single alternative public sphere but multiple public spheres based on various ethnicities, ideologies and motivations holding to his emphasis on the socialist anarchist approach described earlier. He argues that the idea of multiple alternative public spheres, ones that approach Habermas' ideal, is a productive lens through which to understand social movements in that it is through these movements that the

potentiality for such spaces exists. Furthermore, it is radical alternative media that both facilitate the creation of these spaces and communicates the products of those spaces/movements both to the broader public and to other social movements allowing them to find the linkages between their struggles. "Radical alternative media are of considerable, if varying significance because it is they that typically first articulate and diffuse the issues, the analyses, and the challenges of the movements. They typically owe their primary allegiance to and experience their principle fascination with the movements" (Downing, 2001, p.30). He does qualify that it is not a requirement for media to be examined as radical alternative for it to be connected to a particular social movement or connected network of movements. He writes, "We should not let the social movement dimension, important as it is, overly frame our definition of radical alternative media. We should beware of squashing all such media into this rather effervescent model" (Downing, 2001, p. 31). However, while he does provide this caveat, the bulk of his work around radical alternative media centers on those media forms that are tied either directly or indirectly to one or more social movements both in historical and contemporary contexts.

Radical Media Organization

Downing describes two overarching types of internal organization, the Leninist Model and the Self Management Model (Downing, 2001). It is in this part of his examination that he acknowledges that radical alternative media is not inherently positive or liberatory but that it may, largely as a function of its organization, serve as a force of repression. This portion of Downing's analysis is of particular interest here since the bulk of my own study reported here focuses on the organization of the Independent Media Centers, both in terms of the way the network of individual IMCs is currently structured and the internal processes that guide the growth and functioning of the movement.

The Leninist Model. Downing characterizes the Leninist Model as the "transmission-belt model" in that this type of organization, which he argues dominates the radical alternative media endeavors through much of the 20th Century, is geared primarily to the simple transmission of the perspectives and priorities of the ruling elites of a more formalized party structure (Downing, 2001). He employs the term Leninist because the roots of this type of organization is best understood by the rise of media projects that challenged tsarist repression during the early stages of the Russian Revolution and was then maintained by the various

communist parties of the subsequent Soviet expansion. These media are structured to respond to periods of crisis and are geared for a two-stage tactical and strategic effort namely, *agitation*, the short-term need to bring the nature of state abuses to the broader public and *propaganda*, a longer term communications strategy to build a broad and lasting coherence to the ideals of revolution and inoculate the public to counter-revolutionary ideas and messages. A primary requirement for both of these to be successful is the strict adherence to the message orthodoxy developed by the revolutionary leaders and party elites. The current public relations axiom of "staying on message" is critical here, both in terms of developing a strict and coherent analysis of the problem and a religious-like adherence to the solution as prescribed by the given movement's intellectual framers. For most, especially those who were forced to exist in totalitarian communist regimes, there is an almost instantaneous knee-jerk negative reaction to this type of endeavor and for good reason. In the Soviet case, for example, as the revolution seized and consolidated state control and then expanded beyond the Russian borders, it was an adherence to this type of thinking that led to the suppression of any alternative speech or ideas that challenged the orthodoxy of the Communist Party, even as the party became its own force for corrupt, absolute control.

While acknowledging its tragic past over the past century, Downing argues that the agitprop strategy and the Leninist Model of organization that often rises to implement it does have value for understanding many contemporary radical media endeavors, especially those that come about during periods of intense crisis. He writes, "It is important to try and see past the huge and systematic corruption of this approach over the decades of the Soviet era and to realize that the original basic insight has validity for crisis situations, moments in which an either-situation is widely acknowledged as inescapable" (Downing, 2001, p.68). He seems to assert an overly simplistic view, however, arguing a false dichotomy between radical media that is scattered and without an overarching strategy and the carefully scripted and controlled media of the Leninist Model. He writes, "It does make every sense, however, for radical media to be organized within at least a provisional overall strategy and not to be purely and simply the product of instantaneous emotion. In that carefully restricted sense of agitation and propaganda, it is worth rescuing the categories, if not the words themselves, to guide our thinking concerning roles for radical alternative media" (Downing, 2001, p.69). I would argue that many of the radical media parishioners and projects I have worked with, including the IMC movement would

say that they are engaging in a more careful, strategically based manner that is much more than "purely and simply the product and instantaneous emotion" without relying on the "top-down" structure of the Leninist Model. The difference is not one of strategic vs. non-strategic but the source of that strategy and the messages which drive it. As I will illustrate in more detail later, the Leninist Model with its reliance on organized parties and intellectual elites is not a requirement for agitprop or any other type of strategic undertaking for radical social change, even in times of crisis. The driving force can (and to be successful should) come from below, from the public, the people who are the most impacted by the status-quo. The Leninist Model is certainly quicker and more efficient, but if the history of movement media has taught us anything, it is much more open to corruption and, in the long run, doomed to fail. In light of the rest of Downing's assertions about the nature of radical media, it is also unclear why he even includes this type of organization as radical alternative media since it is so likely over time to become the new establishment media.

The Self-Management Model. Standing in stark contrast the Leninist Model of organization for radical media is the Self-Management model. In this type of organization, the media project runs itself and is not controlled by any political party, element of the state, church or other type of other established organization. This is not to say that these media fully embrace true democratic principles or true collective decision making, and they vary widely in terms of their own internal policies and the extent to which those working to produce the media are able to participate in the decision making and day-to-day operations. Thus, the Self-Management model is not a panacea for inspiring democratic decision-making or the empowerment of the media makers or the communities being served. In fact, as Jakubowicz (1993) points out, self-managed media projects only guarantee that the viewpoints of those managing the project are expressed, not necessarily those of the public at large. Numerous other researchers whose work I will discuss later have also noted that the broad range of internal decision-making processes across radical alternative media efforts that could be considered self-managed do not necessarily lead to truly democratic media.

In a theme consistent with Downing's entire formulation of radical alternative media, Downing looks at the Self-Management model through a socialist anarchist lens. As discussed earlier, the social anarchist tradition has always been dubious of Marxism and viewed it as something of an ideological trap that can capture popular uprisings or social movements and

create a new elite. Former workers become governors of the people adhering to a rigid Marxist frame, refusing change that might be needed to meet new exigencies, thus leading to new forms of oppression. Certainly, this process can be seen in the aforementioned Leninist Model, but Downing also argues that the same can happen in self-managed media. He describes how new hierarchies can develop in even the most collectively run self-managed media unless all levels of the organization remain vigilant. Differences between class, age, education and gender all too often rear their ugly heads, polluting the effort with traditional divisions leading groups to form within a given collective that believe it is their right or that they are uniquely positioned to rule. However, Downing acknowledges that self-managed radical alternative media provide spaces within which participants can practice prefigurative politics, organizing themselves through socialist principles in an effort to transcend, at least internally, the hierarchies imposed by the larger social order. These spaces, as described earlier, have value in that their very existence challenges the dominant order, illustrating not only that another way is possible but giving participants the opportunity to explore the best way to create it. Unfortunately, Downing's critique of the self-managed model, while important, does not explicitly give enough credit to its potential even though he obviously sees it as evidenced by his overall analysis. In his chapter on the differences between these two models he seems to be arguing that the Leninist Model, has value with the potential for real problems while the Self-Managed model conversely is rife with problems with only some potential. This indicates a tension present in his entire volume, a tension between pragmatism and idealism, one that he acknowledges repeatedly. My own research and experience has led me to believe that there is very little value in the Leninist Model because anything that can be accomplished through that mode of organization can also be accomplished through a self-managed effort as the organizers strive to incorporate truly radical democratic processes into their effort – the former being more efficient but less suited to a true long-term liberation of the people.

Repressive Radical Media?

Thus far, Downing's model has examined radical alternative media as being tools of radical change and/or agents of liberation, but he is careful to point out that the same forces that benefit from the status-quo or would benefit from a return to prior social conditions can also create, maintain and use media that share many of the same qualities as the media he has

described as radical. Probably the most obvious similarity between the two is a fundamental distrust of the mainstream media. While the Left views the mainstream media as little more than shills for the growing multi-national corporate establishment, empowered by a government beholden to the same masters (with ample evidence as described in Chapter 2), the extreme Right ironically views mainstream media as an instrument of the Left. The "liberal media" has become a powerful label in the contemporary political lexicon of the U.S. and speaks volumes to those who identify themselves as "conservatives," even amongst those whose views are somewhat more moderate than their more extreme allies. Among the views held in common by many who consider themselves "conservative" is that the mainstream media are a powerful agent of "liberal Hollywood values" and a major factor in their perceived downfall of "traditional American values." To the American Right, the mainstream media communicates political correctness, moral relativism and espouses socialistic, big government solutions to problems they feel are best solved by individuals and markets. This incredibly powerful formulation also contributes greatly to the notion, held by many on the right, that they are in fact an oppressed minority. Religious conservatives especially have cultivated a frame though which they are the group under attack by a secular majority determined to inject itself into their religious lives, diminishing their right to practice their versions of spirituality in public. The media, as a constant and pervasive mode for transmitting mass culture into their homes and lives is viewed as a primary weapon in this attack. So, just as the Left has found ways around the mainstream media to create new modes for the formulation and transmission of their ideas to the broader public so has the Right - and just as the Left has used its own media to create a "freedom fighter" mentality defining themselves so has the right.

Are these media truly radical? Can they be best understood through the basic framework he has articulated or are they something else? Downing, describes two major differences between the radical media of the Right and the Left. The primary difference goes back to the concept of developmental power. Recall that developmental power is the ability for a people to fully realize all of the freedoms associated with a truly cooperative life – the creation of a social context which allows both a public and individuals the opportunity to fulfill their liberatory potential. The radical media of the Left is dedicated to creating that developmental power, giving individuals and groups the tools they need to win their own liberation. The radical media of the Right does not share this focus; rather, it seeks to either maintain the status-quo by

creating fear and mistrust of change or return the public to earlier conditions when dominant groups had more power, and individual freedoms for all people were diminished. This difference is primary, according to Downing, which begs the question: based on his own theoretical formulations thus far, could this media of the Right be truly considered radical? Perhaps, especially when judged against the backdrop of the current media oligopoly described in Chapter 2 which holds as its primary mission the commodification of more and more aspects of social life, thus maintaining the power of their parent corporations - if the moral sensibilities of those of the social Right are challenged, so be it.

The second major difference Downing articulates involves the connection of the Right's media to established powerful institutions while the Left tends not to have such connections. On the Right, the pro-life and anti-gay movements are connected to religious institutions; the movement against firearm regulations is connected to the firearms industry and its National Rifle Association. Even some of the most virulent racist movements claim some connections to various religious sects. These connections are nowhere near as plentiful on the left. While some alternative media are the projects of established non-profits, NGOs or private foundations, many more actually shun these types of connections. The IMC movement provides an excellent example of this and has actually turned down generous grant offers from non-profit groups like the Ford Foundation and prohibits any product advertising to avoid such connections.

Finally, the internal organization of the alternative media of the Left and the Right are also very different. The alternative media endeavors of the Left that Downing analyzed (Downing, 1998, 2001) tend to follow the self-management model of organization and are more likely to try and incorporate various radical democratic principles in their fundamental structures than are media on the Right. The media on the Right tend to be organized with much more hierarchal structures, favoring a strict adherence to message orthodoxy. The projects Downing has examined were more likely to employ more manipulative tactics and demagoguery than their counterparts on the Left although he does acknowledge that this is a largely subjective difference. It is here that Downing issues a cautionary warning to radical media practitioners (one that he restates throughout much of his work), namely, that they must remain vigilant to ensure that their own structures and practices do not slide into the organizational tactics of their right-wing counterparts because it is here that their message and purpose can also slide –

pointing to the fact that throughout history, the most powerful fascist movements began as populist uprisings, often with socialistic tendencies.

Conclusions

Downing's *Radical Media* includes 8 chapters of specific examples of various media forms that he uses to help flesh out his theoretical template including public speech, music, theater, newspapers, radio, film, video and the Internet. He also includes five extended case studies of specific media projects over the course of the past 50 years. While there is not the time or space to go into those here, it is important to note that he uses these specific areas of analysis, guided by the basic theoretical principles outlined here, to draw several conclusions which he incorporates into a loose hexagon, not necessarily a proper model but six final points about the vast social phenomena and products that are radical alternative media. First, radical alternative media, free from the homogenizing effects of the profit driven market are free to explore a wide range of aesthetic sensibilities, creating an artistic flair that has at many points throughout time helped propel challenging notions and ideas to the forefront of popular culture thus making fundamental change a possibility. Second, radical alternative media greatly enhance the memory of people in a given culture helping to provide both short-term sparks or "mind bombs" to bring issues to the people's awareness and a more long-term presence, constantly nudging a given population towards new institutional and social conditions – the two being inexorably linked and equally as important.

Third, radical media have very different pragmatic realities from their mainstream cousins – mainly constraints on their long-term viability. Radical media must work to maintain energy levels both amongst volunteers and their audiences. They must navigate the many challenges inherent in operating under direct democracies and constantly retool their efforts so that their internal organization works with those of broader social movements. The media endeavors must also work to survive in repressive conditions created both by the state and powerful mainstream media institutions which are all too willing to use their power and influence to ensure their failure. Downing argues that these pragmatic differences often lead researchers to erroneously write off radical media projects as failures largely because they judge them based on indicators of success commonly associated with their mainstream counterparts, indicators which often do not reflect the goals of the radical media practitioners themselves. He

argues, "There is a tendency to mount a festival of righteous cynical amusement at the marketing ignorance and accountancy follies of these radical media projects and sagely pronounce them doomed to death and inanition because of these flaws. Atton (1999) brings a sensibly cautious perspective to the discussion of this issue, underscoring that many of these media never set themselves the goals for success that their critics seem instinctively to presume are universal; longevity, profitability, stability, news chain sales" (Downing, 2001, p. 390).

The fourth point on Downing's final hexagon is of paramount importance and infuses the whole of his overall analysis; it is the interconnectedness of radical alternative media and social movements. He writes, "Social moments local and global – among Mexican-U.S. border communities fighting corporate pollution, trans-Atlantic African communities struggling to end slavery, women demanding good, affordable and nearby child care, international human rights campaigns – are the lifeblood of these media, and they are the movement's oxygen" (Downing, 2001, p.391). He notes that this incredibly important relationship exists both in the alternative media of both the Right and Left, those seeking progressive change and those seeking to maintain the current order or a return to earlier conditions. These media fuel social movements on the Left by increasing developmental power, creating spaces for prefigurative politics, building counterhegemonic pressures and helping to coordinate movement activists. On the Right they serve to create and maintain populist tensions against change, capitalize on fear of the future unknown, provide tangible examples of what life could be like as long we return to the good old days and coordinate the efforts of activists.

Fifth, timeframe is an important consideration in analyzing and understanding radical media. He argues that radical alternative media is not connected to any one timeframe but that its presence is an "historical constant albeit ever in flux" (Downing, 2001, p.391). Too many consider radical media only in terms of the 1960's counterculture and the period's aftermath, and this time bound assumption has led many researchers to examine radical media endeavors in a manner that is too tied up with particular temporal contexts. It is often during periods of intense conflict or crisis when radical media projects are forged such as the Battle for Seattle in 1999 when the first Independent Media Center was born. Understandably, it is during these periods of high energy that many confine their analysis. According to Downing, this focus belies the slow moving, long term impact that these media often have. As discussed above, the process of creating counterhegemonic spaces takes time, and the only way to understand these processes

and the roles that these media play in them is to look beyond periods of intense interest by audiences and focus on the long term efforts of the media practitioners and the often diminished audiences who participate over the long haul.

The final point on Downing's hexagon is that of the established power structure. He argues that radical media must be examined in terms of its (dis)connections to the powers of the state, religious institutions, political parties, dominant racial and ethnic groups, the patriarchy and the growing power of transnational capitalism. He writes, "These are the obstacles and the targets of radical media" (Downing, 2001, p. 393). This falls in line with his primary focus on these media forms and the social movements which arise in opposition (or in some cases in support) of these power nodes. He cautions, however, against the fetishising of the power structure per se, thus negating all of the other, less formalized mechanisms of repression. Radical media does often focus on formal power, but it also provides spaces to examine and challenge an infinitely broad range of elements making up the human social condition that serve to subjugate one group under the domination of others. This includes the ability for radical media to challenge the culture itself, above and beyond the formal vehicles of power.

In closing this discussion of Downing's theoretical framework, it is important to make one final point which connects back to my discussion of the current media climate and the movement for media reform in Chapter 2 and my description of the tensions between media reformers and radical media makers at the beginning of this chapter. While the bulk of his work clearly centers on the effort to create media that is truly independent of the dominate modes of the mainstream, as free as possible from the strategies and tactics that have come to characterize media as business, he indicates in several places that the public should not simply give corporate media a pass. The work of media reformers and their strategy of using the various elements of state regulatory apparatuses to force the creation of media spaces which are more open the public has merit and should not be discounted. Downing writes, " I, too, (a reference to a personally known Italian journalist) find myself in the strange position personally of being on the extreme Right of the extreme Left. On some levels, I resonate with, in their varying emphases, de Certeau and Scott and Gramsci and the situationists and am most at ease in straightforward opposition and in search of temporary autonomous zones and prefigurative politics. On others, I find it hard to discount the importance of trying to make a dent in media and communication policies that otherwise are the happy hunting ground of corporate leaders who draft legislation

for our supposed political representatives" (Downing, 2001, p.394). He argues that the media reformers and those making radical media should work in concert and that activism (a dirty word to many of the socialist anarchists he holds dear) is an important endeavor. He writes, "It seems to me that the communication issues posed by the global corporate scenario are such that only dual activity by radical media makers and radical policy activists has the prospect of letting the public construct for themselves any kind of zone worth inhabiting" (Downing, 2001, p.395).

The Alternative Media of Chris Atton

In his book *Alternative Media* (2002), as well as numerous other publications, Chris Atton works to establish a theory and methodology for the examination of alternative media that draws heavily on Downing's ideas explained above as well as on the work of Dickinson (1997), Duncombe (1997) and Traber (1995) while expanding on their ideas to include media that are not directly concerned with political or social change but also about arts, culture and features of daily life for their own sake. Similar to Downing's treatment, Atton is concerned as much with the processes underlying radical alternative media making as with the content of such media. He argues that when analyzing alternative media, content is only one element of a broader alternative media culture and that the processes of production and distribution and the relationships formed are equally as important. He writes, "I define alternative media as much by their capacity to generate non-standard, often infractory, methods of creation, production and distribution as I do by their content" (Atton, 2002, p.4). The bulk of Atton's experience with researching alternative media centers on "zines," small scale amateur print publications using very inexpensive print technologies, localized distributions and that are produced by very small groups or a single individual. Zine subject matter covers an almost limitless range of topics from literature to music, community news to night-life, politics to sport. Consequently, his theoretical formulations expand this process focus, placing a special emphasis on the social relations and how they are transformed through alternative media making and in turn transform the media itself and perhaps the social context in which it exists. The individual and the role of the individual is of paramount concern. In this final section, I will examine the major tenets of Atton's own theory and the model he has developed for analyzing alternative media.

The section on Downing's theory of radical alternative media began by looking at Downing's arguments for using the nomenclature *radical alternative media* instead of simply

alternative media. Atton prefers to ditch the radical label in favor of the more commonly applied term *alternative media*. He argues that the term *alternative* (in addition to being the most commonly accepted term in the current literature) is more instructive for the phenomena, and while less ridged, it is more specific than simply using "non-mainstream." First, the term alternative media allows for media projects that do not hold profound social change as their primary goal, although he does argue that all of the media he considers alternative does have the potential for contributing to social change through their employment of vastly different processes of production and distribution than their mainstream counterparts and the ways they are used by audiences. Second, dropping the term radical, and the political connotations is carries, the efforts of individual media makers not directly or even indirectly involved with broader social movements can also be included without being relegated to a second-class status as mere curiosities for the attention of researchers. In fact, Atton seems to place a greater emphasis on analyzing what he considers "the transformative impact on individuals" engaged in media making and consumption outside of the mainstream than Downing and others whose work has informed his own analysis (Atton, 2002, p.11). It is the *relationships* between media producers and media recipients and the blurring of the roles between the two in alternative media that lie at heart of his analysis.

Atton argues that many classical social theories offer spaces through which to examine alternative media. Whether it be classical Marxism which sees alternative media as challenging the status-quo of capital control through both dissident content and a reconfiguring of dominant modes of production, or the Gramscian notions of counter-hegemony, or the neo-Marxist ideas of the Frankfurt school, social theorists concerned with the liberation of the powerless from the powerful have carved out spaces for examining the roles played by alternative media in the broader social context. Atton argues that while these past attempts are certainly illustrative and have in fact greatly influenced his own work, they cast a lens that does not adequately capture the full picture of alternative media because they do not adequately include media created for artistic or literary purposes and do not place enough focus on the ways in which these media rely on transforming readers into writers and observers into actors (Atton, 2002). Also, these analyses place content at the fore while Atton's main concern is to "examine theories of alternative media that privilege process by which people are empowered through their direct involvement in alternative media production" (Atton, 2002, p. 18). As mentioned earlier, Atton

draws from the works of several media theorists who have wrestled with the question, "What is alternative media?" specifically drawing from them those elements relating to process, production and individual roles as opposed to content.

He draws on O'Sullivan (1994), who characterized alternative media as possessing democratic/collectivist processes of production, a commitment to innovation and experimentation in form and/or content and as being primarily driven by a majority of those involved rather than the traditional elites. He also draws on Traber's (1985) analysis in which he argued that while the mainstream media marginalizes daily life and the experiences of the majority of people in favor of the experiences of the rich, powerful and glamorous, alternative media places the daily lives of the masses at the forefront. Traber also made a distinction crucial to Atton's work—a distinction between "advocacy media" and "grass roots media." Advocacy media works to bring the stories of marginalized groups to the public's attention and inject dissident information into public discussion. While the content of these media challenge the status quo, the methods of production and the power of elite editors and decision makers mirrors its mainstream counterparts. Grass roots media on the other hand is actually made by actors from the marginalized groups and utilizes processes that empower them to do so. These media, according to both Atton and Traber are more relevant to those groups because they more directly reflect their own experiences. He also cites Duncombe (1997), who argued that it is "the position of the work with respect to the relations of production that gives it its power, the involvement of the people themselves in the making, that is as important if not more so than the content delivered (Atton, 2002, p. 18). Again, it is the transformational potential for individuals that draws Atton's attention because he argues the personal act of starting or contributing to an alternative media enterprise, regardless of how widely it is distributed is a process of social transformation and "if the personal may be political, so the personal may be of social consequence" (Atton, 2002, p.20). Here again is Atton's contention that any theory of alternative media must not simply focus on those which are directly political or tied to social movements but must also include analytical space for media that focuses on the arts, entertainment and aspects of daily life. He also employs Gramsci's notion of alternative as a counter-hegemonic force. He writes, "We might consider the entire range of alternative media as representing challenges to hegemony whether on an explicitly political platform, or employing the kinds of indirect challenges through experimentation and transforming existing roles,

routines, emblems and signs that lie at the heart of counterhegemonic subcultural style" (Atton, 2002, p. 19).

Atton's focus on the efforts of media makers not directly concerned with challenging elements of the dominant political or economic system touches on a question long debated on the Left, and I suspect on the Right. Is the act of living an alternative lifestyle, such as moving to a commune and "checking out" of the mainstream truly oppositional? Does simply being different really do anything to challenge the status-quo, or must those efforts be coupled with some form of organized movement of resistance? Atton and his focus on Zines and the "DIY culture" and the individual transformations that can occur would seem to argue that all of these efforts are in their own way oppositional. While Atton's analysis closely mirrors that of Downing discussed above, it is on this point that he argues a major difference lies.

In 1984, the time of Downing's original *Radical Media*, he focused almost exclusively on the media of social movements, arguing that it was a necessary feature of radical media. While Atton acknowledges that Downing did expand his focus and incorporate ideas such as the presence of an alternative public sphere, alternative media serving as a counterhegemonic and resistant force regardless of its content and the transformative impact it could have on audiences and producers alike, he argues that Downing is still overly attached to the notion of oppositional social movements. He argues, "As we have seen, Downing is now open to a far wider range of media than he was in the 1984 edition, yet his model remains limited by his emphasis on social movements" (Atton, 2002, p. 21). For Atton, while Downing's work departs greatly from a position of binarism between radical and mainstream media, his attempts at a more hybridized view of alternative media are still hampered by a focus on social movements. He writes, "Hybridity and purity as problematics of alternative media are certainly accessible through an examination of new social movement media, but they can also be approached through media that accommodate themselves rather more cozily with mass media and mass consumption where a celebration of the banal and the mundane replace political consciousness raising" (Atton, p. 21). After carefully looking at both approaches, I find Atton's distinction between the two to be much weaker than he argues. While Atton has certainly focused more on media that is "non-political" than Downing, it is clear here that the major analytical components of each approach are very similar and share the same focus of looking beyond sole social agents.

To buttress his claims that these seemingly non-political media forms should be included in any discussion of alternative media (which Downing most certainly argues with as evidenced above) he examines Duncombe's (1996) analysis of Zines. Duncombe argued that while the content of Zines is very often not politically or socially transformative in its own right, the simple act of producing, distributing and even reading Zines is. Duncombe found three characteristics of Zines illustrative. First, the producers are almost always amateurs indicating an empowerment of readers to become writers. Second, Zines are cheaply produced and distributed for no profit, indicating an abandonment of the dominant media for profit model. Third, as Zines are distributed the distinction between media producer and media consumer are blurred. Again, I find the difference here to be one of chosen examples and can find nothing in Downing's work that would negate the inclusion of these media forms as occupying spaces deemed alternative or even radical media. The question here is one of effectiveness. Are Zines on music or night-life effective agents of social change simply because of how they are produced or distributed? That is a complex question. Atton's model argues that they are, and as we saw in Downing's analysis I argue he would as well, although he clearly believes that more overtly political endeavors are more effective. Do both Downing's and Atton's approaches provide a conceptual framework through which this question can be studied? I would say that both in fact do.

In the remainder of this section I will briefly look at the three dominant themes of Atton's analysis, each of these he explores using examples from anarchist leaning environmental publications from the U.K. While there is not space to look at each of these examples, it is important to note that Atton's analysis is firmly grounded in alternative media projects that actually existed at the time of his writing and with which he seems to have at least some direct contact and experience. These examples add greatly to his overall work. The first theme involves the economics of production and distribution and the ways in which alternative media are reworking the dominant assumptions of the mainstream media and thus the social conditions that lie at the heart of those assumptions. Second is the ways in which alternative media blurs the lines between producers and consumers of media. It is this element, the power of alternative media to empower individuals to become producers and for members of marginalized groups to speak with their own voices both to each other and broader publics that is of paramount importance to understanding alternative media according to Atton. Third, he discusses the role

of alternative media in social movements. He contends, as does Downing above, that these media do much more than serve as mere mouthpieces for these movements but are instrumental in building, sustaining and ensuring that they remain connected to the groups they purport to serve. These three themes closely mirror the work of Raymond Williams (1980) that there are three aspects to communication that is truly democratic, opening new meaningful lines of communication to people who are normally excluded: Decapitalization, (the breaking down of traditional modes of production that emphasizes profit over communication) Deprofessionalism, (opening access to groups of people typically excluded) and Deisntitutionalization, (building horizontal channels of communication as opposed to the traditional top-down vertical communication of the mainstream media).

New Modes of Production

Atton points out that many researchers have criticized alternative for failing to adopt the financial models as their mainstream counterparts, such as when Comedia (1984) argued that alternative media was doomed to "an existence so marginal as to be irrelevant," never breaking out of an "alternative ghetto." The argument here is that since alternative media generally (not always, to avoid the binarism discussed earlier) adopts financial policies for political reasons and based on ideological concerns rather than to be financially viable enough to break into broader markets. This argument relies on the faulty assumption that alternative media makers *want* to break out of this "alternative ghetto." This argument is based on the narrow view that alternative media is in competition with its mainstream counterparts, equally as concerned with market penetration. "Yet far from being in competition, the alternative press actively rejects the economic conditions of the mainstream, even to the extent of developing innovative forms of distribution" (Atton, 2002, p. 50). If, as Downing and Atton both assert, alternative media is working to build and exist within and alternative sphere, then breaking into the mainstream is not a priority at all. The true goal of most of these media is to provide more voices, not more copies of the same voice. Atton cites the Oxford Institute for Social Disengineering which argues that "One hundred publications with a circulation of one thousand are one hundred times better than one publication with a circulation of one hundred thousand" (Atton, 2002, p.40). This concept is fairly straightforward. As has been argued earlier, the current corporate media climate has become so constrained through rampant mergers and the building of massive, vertically

integrated conglomerates that fewer and fewer ideas and viewpoints are being presented. Alternative media makers are working to create spaces that allow voices to be heard that have at best been ignored or at worst actively suppressed in this context. Additionally, they are striving to make these spaces open for horizontal communication, not to create more gatekeepers but to eliminate the traditional notions of gatekeepers altogether. Atton contends that the rejection of the traditional models of for profit media and all of its trappings like working toward the broadest distribution possible, is actually one of the cornerstones of alternative media's relevancy. Based on his analysis, there are several production features shared by most alternative media that are most notable.

First, alternative media are increasingly operating under anti-copyright principles. Eliminating the ownership of ideas enables for the widest possible dissemination of unorthodox, dissident and revolutionary ideas to new audiences, requiring smaller resources. Second, alternative media do not operate under traditional avenues of distribution. The selling of these media through portals deemed appropriate restricts the flow of ideas and diminishes the ability for these media to reach the people it is intended to serve. The point here is not just to increase distribution in the traditional sense or for the same reasons as their mainstream counterparts, but to increase the number of avenues available for the public to participate in a meaningful way. As was discussed earlier, the focus of much of these media is on prefigurative politics, increasing the channels available for "communication from below" and the opportunities for people to explore new ways of organizing and living. This also includes an increased ability for the media truly to reflect the life experiences of those in the communities they are working to serve. He contends, "Rather than prefigurative politics methods of economics and organization being barriers to the development of the alternative press, we might consider them essential components of media that seek to integrate themselves with the movements and communities they are supporting, reporting and indeed, developing" (Atton, 2002, p.50).

Third, these media operate under principles that encourage or require collective decision-making. The reason here is to increase the abilities of these media directly to involve typically disenfranchised or disaffected groups. Here again is the focus on building new channels for horizontal communication. "The overarching economic conditions in which the grassroots alternative press chooses to place itself are emphatically anti-commercial, more concerned with the creation of a 'black and green' economy than with direct competition with the mainstream

press, whether in terms of markets or of production economics. Such a commitment brings with it a commitment to the decentralization and sharing of resources as well as to the educational and empowering potential of the methods employed to construct alternative media, in order to increase participation in their activities" (Atton, 2002, p.51). Involving these traditionally ignored publics in more and more aspects of the media production and distribution enables them to better reflect the real experiences, the daily lives, of those typically ignored by the mainstream. This is of great importance. Atton writes, "Alternative media are, or should be, interactive, concerned with everyday life and the ordinary needs of the people. Not simply with the economy and economic determinism. Collective organization then takes on a different aspect and becomes an attempt to include the readership in decision making" (Atton, 2002 p. 50). This is where Atton places his primary focus, the potential promise of alternative media, through the involvement of more actors, not fewer, to bring about real social change, both at the micro and macro levels. He concludes, "The vertical, top-down communication that is typical of most media is simply inappropriate here; horizontal communication between writers and readers (some people will be both of course) and between different manifestations of alternative media will be crucial in furthering the primary aim of social change. Through Traber and Downing we can argue that such methods of communication and alternative forms of production and distribution are far from mere ideological fixities; instead they spring naturally from the nature of alternative media conceived as methods of achieving social and political change." (Atton, 2002, p.52).

Transforming the Roles

Atton begins his discussion about the transformative power of alternative media by pointing out that resistance media, in all of its various forms can encourage readers in two different ways. The first is best embodied by the media surrounding the rise of communism in Russia and then the expansion of the U.S.S.R. Here, intellectual elites spoke from above in an effort to engage the masses and build unwavering loyalty to the dictates of the Party. The media were extremely hierarchical and the communication was vertical with the elites handing ideas down to the masses with no opportunity for communication from below and no access to the processes of editing or production. Censorship and selective editing was applied to any messages outside the party orthodoxy and these editorial processes had no transparency. The

second way is to enable the different public to participate directly in a process that is transparent and open to scrutiny and suggestions for change. "If the true aims of such publications is revolution or liberation, we cannot imagine them as liberating forces unless they are open to lateral communication between social beings, with their multiple experiences and concerns" (Downing, 1984, p. 104).

To understand the ways in which these media can provide this second type of encouragement, Atton draws on the work of Eyerman and Jamison (1991) and their typology of "knowledge production." Knowledge production in this context refers to the process whereby social movements create identity and meaning for themselves and their members. Atton cites Eyerman and Jamison, "The movements themselves are the producers of knowledge and knowledge is the product of a series of social encounters. Knowledge production can thus encompass the debates at meetings, demonstrations, slogans, signs, and other activities" (Atton, 2002, p.105). Within these movements and their processes, Eyerman and Jamison have identified several types of knowledge producers, but where they used these terms to apply to broad groups within movements and even movements themselves, Atton has modified their usage to apply to individuals. The first is the "movement intellectual" who Atton classifies as the professional writers and thinkers, the academics and traditional intellectuals who often serve as the ideological wellsprings from which flow the ideas that many movements draw upon for inspiration and political analysis. Alternative media more often favors the "nonestablished intellectuals" which Eyerman and Jamison have identified as the "counter experts," "grassroots engineers," and the "public educator" (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991). The counter experts are the professional activists whose role is to provide the information needed for public pressure and electoral campaigns. The public educator seeks to write for the masses, taking complex issues and breaking them down into more manageable smaller parts so that broader groups can understand them. While this often leads to a desire for action, that is not the direct goal. The grassroots engineers are those who educate others how to throw monkey wrenches in the system through the rejection of the dominant norms, mores and values to live alternative lifestyles. These categories are in no way discrete in alternative media, where the shifting of roles and responsibilities inherent in much of these media grants the potential for all actors to play these roles. This is the key point, the elevating of everyday activists so that they may play pivotal roles in the media they are building, and it is this that serves as the base for knowledge

production. The collective forms of organization enables unestablished intellectuals into the same media spaces as the more traditional intellectuals, thus giving them equal access to that process of knowledge production. "Such a strategy not only introduces new forms of knowledge from a much wider writing base, it also introduces many more social actors, and offers them empowerment as it offers the intellectual: an equal platform for their ideas (whether their ideas are equal or not is another matter). In this way the hierarchy of access normally found in the media – where an elite of experts and pundits tends to have easier and more substantial access to a platform for their ideas than dissidents or protesters – is subverted, even inverted" (Atton, 2002, p.111). This enables activists and others to present their views *as themselves*, their expertise being a function of their work in the streets, their actions in the community and the living of their lives.

This raises a critical and enlightening point in Atton's approach, the difference between "colonial media" and "native reporting" (Atton, 2002). Atton argues that the contributions of these newly empowered writers, transformed through the alternative media, should not be marginalized as mere eyewitness accounts shared by amateurs. Rather, these contributions represent true radical reporting, what he refers to as native reporting. The value of these native reporters "lies not in their role as message creators for a passive audience, but as members of a community whose work enables the entire community to come together, to analyze one's historical situation, which transforms consciousness, and leads to the will to change a situation" (Atton, 2002, p.113). The importance of native reporting is further evidenced when compared to what Atton has termed colonized or colonial media. "Local communities under colonialism found themselves unable to participate in the media that ostensibly reported on matters of concern to them; they were alienated from the methods of production as well as from the nature of the reporting. They were not involved in the media, either as creators of stories or as actors within them" (Atton, 2002. p113). Journalists wrote from a position either above these communities or even within these communities but still apart from them. "By contrast, native reporters are at the center of things as participants, and their work is precisely to feed discussion and debate from the perspective of the colonized and, crucially, to provide 'information for action'" (Atton, 2002, p.113). The presence of native reporters can serve to de-colonize the public, giving them increased self-respect and strength through self-representation, taking power away from the mainstream media. This enables alternative media to give voice to those who

have been marginalized, presenting stories where they are the primary actors, the authorities on the issues. In keeping with his theme that alternative media need not only be political, Atton argues that native reporting also applies to those tellings of basic community news, local histories and cultural. The impact however is most certainly "political" in that the transformative power can have real consequences on the power dynamics between those with power and those without.

The central importance of the transformative potential of these media is made even more apparent when looking at their policies, which usually reflect a heavy skepticism of the traditional movement intellectuals. Much of the content in these media is presented by anonymous sources or those using pseudonyms, devaluing the power of personality and reputation. The focus is on the experiences of those involved and giving primacy to those who act over those who merely watch and think. Atton cites *Squall*, an anarchist publication dedicated to squatters' rights that he researched as declaring that it is "written and produced by people who live the issues, not observers looking for a commission" (Atton, 2002, p. 121). This focus on moving away from professionals to activist does not mean that all notions of traditional professionalism have been rejected. Native reporters are heavily scrutinized by their audiences enabled by open and transparent policies. Sources are required, but direct experience is still considered the best source.

New Social Movements

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the importance of this blurring of the lines between roles and the transformation of readers into writers is to examine the place that alternative media have in social movements. Downing's analysis described above provides an excellent discussion of the ways in which alternative media interact with broader movements, and Atton draws heavily from his work. He does add some important perspectives, however. First, through his research and experiences with the anarchist environmental publications he uses as the backdrop for his analysis, Atton argues that these movements are situated within the context of what many have called "New Protest" (Atton, 2002). New Protest describes a myriad of groups and movements that have turned to direct action tactics to further their various causes. These groups very often have no formal memberships, little hierarchy and no formalized leaders. They are organized around radical democratic principles of consensus decision making (if formal

decisions are ever made), self-organizing and independence. They reject organized political parties and electoral action and embrace the concept of "diversity of tactics," the idea that no single tactic should be sacrosanct and that as long as the goals are the same, all should be accepted. He sums up the ideas of the New Protest, "These forms of organization are characterized by loose internal structures and by autonomy of the groups thus organized. Loose structures are most commonly realized in social movements by the absence (or at least, the reduction) of hierarchy and by an anti-authoritarian ethos. Job rotation is common, as is the sharing of jobs and skills. Membership is fluid: often there are few if any criteria for membership, save active involvement in the group. Consensus and collective decision-making are preferred over voting. The extent to which the alternative media of new social movements have adopted such forms of organization, to what ends and with what success is the subject of this chapter" (Atton, 2002, p.83). Alternative media help promote and amplify these principles through their own organizational decisions. "Here we see the alternative media of new social movements reflecting the organizational and social structures of the direct-action movements they document. They exhibit the primary characteristics of the New Protest: direct participation and local, grassroots decision-making where resources are diffused and shared within and between groups" (Atton, 2002, p.102).

Alternative Media and New Technologies

One final area that needs mention before closing out this discussion about Atton's theory of alternative media is Atton's assertion that alternative media is uniquely placed to capitalize on new communication technologies but that the application of many of the dominant ideas about alternative media face challenges when applied in these contexts. Like Downing, Atton looks to the Zapatistas and their creation of the "electronic fabric of struggle" as one of the first and best examples of the ways in which new social movements are using these technologies to strengthen their efforts (Downing, 2001). He quotes Castells (1997), who called the Zapatistas' use of the Internet, email and message boards the "first informational guerilla movement." "It is as this electronic complex of informational and communicational possibilities which is itself linked with other complexes of previously existing technologies (face-to-face communication, print, music, political demonstrations and marches) that the Internet holds such potential for oppositional groups" (Atton, 2002, p.233). As we saw with the development and rise of Indymedia in the first

chapter, alternative media, with its commitment to decentralization, collective decision- making, rejection of hierarchy, loose organization, radical democracy and open publishing is uniquely situated to take advantage of the complex webs of connections with relatively open access that the Internet provides. While Downing and others have praised the rise of these new technologies and the promise they hold for alternative media and oppositional social movements, Atton's analysis is far less laudatory.

Atton draws heavily on anarchist critiques of the Internet which he divides into two broad categories: "boom" and "doom" (Atton, 2002). The boom viewpoints hold that the development and diffusion of the Internet and other new communication technologies hold great potential to serve as an equalizer, possessed of an openness which holds prefigurative potential for new social structures based on many anarchist principles. The Internet, through its diffuse nature and lack of any truly formalized gatekeepers is impossible to control, difficult to govern and set up to provide an almost limitless number of spaces for prefigurative politics. He considers this view naïve, and of course if reduced to this overly simplistic view, he would be right. The doom views, on the other hand, argues that these new technologies simply continue and in many ways amplify the same old patterns of unequal power distribution and is in fact a product of that dynamic. He writes, "They view the democratic potential of the Internet pessimistically, citing the problems of access to the required technology for the disenfranchised, the poor and, in some cases, the entire populations of countries that lack the necessary communications infrastructure" (Atton, 2002, p.135). This critique is widespread and lies at the heart of debate raging about "the digital divide" - the space between the digital haves and have-nots. The major danger for those in the doom camp is the rise of an information elite, who by their increased access to what appears to be free and open, can mask the real nature of the medium. Here in the U.S. we have seen some movement in this direction with the increased control over the Internet by the old-school communications corporations who are increasingly using their control over the "pipes" that carry the Internet signal to carve greater and greater portions of the medium for themselves, working to create new monopolies with commerce and profit as their primary aim. There is another, more subtle argument held by the adherents the doom critique. That is, as the technology continues to grow and diffuse into more and more aspects of the human experience, the division between "real life" and the "virtual life" stored in computer boxes around the world is eroded. Many see this as a threat to the notion of communities and personal independence.

The boom vs. doom debate is a fascinating one, which has generated great volumes of scholarship and discussion, so there is not space to go into all of those issues here. However, it is an important consideration to keep when looking at Atton's very cautious optimism for the future of alternative media in the growing digital world.

Atton concedes that new communication technologies and the Internet hold great promise for some aspects of alternative media. The constraints of low capital leading to lower distributions (as discussed earlier these are not necessarily constraints in many ways) can be overcome and enable more targeted outreach to the communities the media reflects. Additionally, just as more traditional forms of alternative derive great strength and power through the roles shifting of those involved, the Internet and other new technologies blur these roles even further. The Internet for example all but eliminates the notions of hubs or centers; the idea of ownership is also greatly weakened as well as editorial control and the opportunities for real horizontal communication are stronger than ever. The Internet and computer technologies have also greatly expanded the scope of what these media can do. No longer are they relegated to Zines and newsletters. With computers and the Internet, they are able to be publishers, distributors, archivists, nodes for cross-communication, virtual meeting places and online forums – taking activities that in the past were limited by the number of volunteers and geographical considerations and making them possible everywhere, thus expanding the opportunities for more direct involvement between readers, writers, native reporters and the communities they are working to serve. "The complex of relations initiated in cyberspace – intellectual, social, cultural, political, economic – is overlaid and interpenetrated by a further complex in the lived world" (Atton, 2002, p.141).

Alternative media is not content to merely exist in this virtual world; rather, as we saw in chapter two, alternative media makers are using the full range of communication technologies to try and carve out new and freer spaces with which to operate. Low power FM, local cable community access channels, non-licensed pirate radio and others are also being re-colonized by native journalists. However, these other technologies are still shackled by many of the practices of the mainstream and through regulatory conditions imposed by the State designed to hinder their efforts and give the corporate media clear advantages. For example, TV still requires a tremendous amount of resources and is often out of reach of the alternative media, almost always requiring public or foundation funds which almost always come with strings attached in terms of

both process and content. Low-power FM radio is also problematic. It is still heavily regulated by the FCC, and these regulations limit the types of groups that can have access, the content that can be broadcast, and the internal organization processes to which they must adhere to. Dissent then can be institutionalized, operating under an illusion of freedom of expression. Atton writes, "Such initiatives are thus shackled to the prevailing models of local commercial broadcasting, in part due to the need to attract sponsorship and advertisers, in part due to government restrictions. Leading to a deradicalization of community media" (Atton, 2002, p.144). The Internet alleviates these challenges. Again, Atton couches this discussion with a note of caution. If all of the promise of mass distribution, open publishing for anyone with a computer and a connection and the easy back and forth communication between readers, and editors is fully realized, is there any point in talking about media that is alternative. "Does it make any sense to talk of alternative media in cyberspace? Where the processes of production are available to anyone, where the horizontal, networked flows of information and communication are inbuilt, where anyone can become their own publisher, their own polemicist, does a specific set of media termed alternative, have any identity? The experimental nature of much alternative print publishing is called into question: either it is no longer a meaningful practice (the small print run) or it has become absorbed into a dominant space of web publishing that ordinarily entails transformed roles and social relations that were once the province of alternative media production (anyone can be a writer or a publisher). The exclusiveness of alternative media as a communication process is also eroded" (Atton, 2002, p15).

I would argue that the Atton's concerns here have proven to be unjustified, as evidenced by Downing's earlier discussion of the Zapatistas and others, and in the ways in which Indymedia is operating which will be discussed in the following chapter. Alternative media is flourishing on the Internet. The ability for increased public exposure to these media has only served to encourage the creation of more alternative media. As one alternative media project gains notoriety in the cyber world (whatever form that may take) others quickly arise to question and/or critique that notoriety in a useful, although often silly exercise of proving "we are more radical than you." This encourages new voices to join the debate, often with reactionary beginnings but quickly leading to new alternative media projects that continue to push the envelope in their own right. Also, the continued adoption of these new technologies have given rise to powerful new platforms for alternative media to do all of things which Atton holds in such

high regard. Readers can instantly become writers through comment pages. Editorial processes and priorities can be placed on display for anyone with a computer to see and often critique and contribute. New, direct linkages between groups using different tactics to reach the same goals can now be made. Perhaps most importantly, the division between media makers and media consumers are not just being blurred; they are being wiped out in a radical reformulation of all aspects of media making, distribution and use. Atton, whose focus has been up to 2002 primarily on Zines and other print publication seems to be operating more out a sense of nostalgic loss for days gone than by direct observation. As I shall illustrate in following chapters, the Internet, which still serves as the base for Indymedia, has served to make the prospects for alternative media that are about dissent, liberation and revolutionary change much stronger.

Conclusions

Atton's stated goal has been to develop a theoretical and methodological framework through which to analyze the incredibly diverse phenomena that is alternative media. This model places the primary emphasis on the processes developed by these media and how those processes serve to engage those actors who have been routinely marginalized, disconnected and disempowered by the mainstream media as both a function and symptom of their disconnectedness from the powers of the status-quo. Based on his analysis, he has developed a six point typology through which alternative media can be examined and understood. This typology is reprinted on the next page (Atton, 2002, p27).

In the typology, items 1-3 represent the products of these media including their dissident content (political or otherwise), elements of form that challenge the traditional practices of their mainstream counterparts and the ways in which these media develop technical innovations to produce their work in ways that require little capital and can be accomplished with a limited number of volunteers. Items 4-6 represent innovations of process including distribution methods, collective decision making principles, self-organization strategies, the transformation of roles both within and without these undertakings and the development of new communication networks. "The broad division and processes does not imply independence, however. The social processes will activate and inform the development of the products to the extent that each

position in a communications circuit…will be amenable to radicalization in terms of products and processes, resources and relations."

Table 1: A Typology of Alternative and Radical Media

1. Content (politically radical, socially/culturally radical); news values
2. Form - graphics, visual language; varieties of presentation and binding; aesthetics
3. Reprographic innovations/adaptations - use of mimeographs, IBM typesetting, offset litho, photocopiers
4. 'Distributive use' (Atton, 1999b) - alternatives sites for distribution, clandestine/invisible distribution networks, anti-copyright
5. Transformed social relations, roles and responsibilities - reader-writers, collective organisation, de-professionalisation of e.g., journalism, printing, publishing
6. Transformed communication processes - horizontal linkages, networks

If there were to be a single word to sum up Atton's feelings about the potential power of alternative media as agents of liberation on either the social or the individual level it would have to be "empowerment." Alternative media empowers media consumers to become producers, disenfranchised communities to demand their relevance, activists to have their voices heard alongside professional thinkers and for individuals to realize that have power even within the current historical context where powerful multi-national corporations and their government partners appear to be in complete control. Atton argues that the alternative represent the potential of Paulo Freire's (1972) "critical pedagogy." The Brazilian activist and educator was seeking the tools with which to educate the oppressed and disenfranchised through dialogue as a form of study, "horizontal communication that privileges empathy, hope, trust and criticism (Atton, 2002. p154). The idea would be for this dialogue to be rooted in everyday language and the daily realities of the students with the goal of providing them the tools needed to critique the oppressive social forces around them while ensuring that they do not reproduce them in their own efforts. Atton writes, "The characteristics of many of the alternative media practices I have

examined in this book – horizontal and dialogic forms of communication, an emphasis on self-reflexivity, the employment of everyday language, critical approaches to the media and its objects, mobilizing power and the significance of prefigurative politics – all suggest educational and transformational possibilities that might constitute an autonomous project of critical pedagogy." (Atton, 2002, p.154).

One final note on both Downing's and Atton's theoretical framework that must be mentioned is the importance of alternative media (or radical alternative media to Downing) to building and sustaining an alternate public sphere. A wide social space in which critical analysis, honest discourse and equal access for all supplant the current guiding principle of the "Gold Rule" (he who has the gold makes the rules). This involves an ethos that Ben Agger (1990) has called "intellectual democracy" and mirrors closely the idealized public sphere first articulated by Habermas. "The alternative media, in offering their pages to activists and readers, enable the members of an alternative public sphere to function as Habermas argues they must if they are to be a public body: 'to confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their own opinions" Atton, 2002, p. 155). These media are the vanguard, the first nooks and crannies of a new public sphere, an advance copy of what could be.

In the next chapter, I dig deeper into the policies and practices of the Indymedia network in order to provide a detailed example of the concepts articulated by both Downing and Atton. This analysis takes the next step from generality to specificity and highlights how the IMCistas are working to create media that is truly radical, not only in content but in the social organizing of the network and to more clearly describe how Indymedia is creating those spaces where prefigurative politics, counter hegemonic ideas and a new public sphere can be explored.

CHAPTER 4
INDYMEDIA'S RADICAL NATURE:
POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF THE GLOBAL NETWORK

"If we can do it here, with open media, then surely we can do it in other spheres of life. We can do it for education, healthcare, housing, we can take it all back and make it ours" – **Garcon DuMonde, IMCista**

In chapter one I looked at the creation of the Network of Independent Media Centers (NIMC), highlighting the creation of the first Indymedia Center during the "Battle of Seattle" to provide some background of the guiding philosophies, principles and organizing strategies of the network. In chapter two, I carefully outlined the past twenty years of media policy in this country and the impacts of those policies, describing the creation of the current "media oligopoly", where the vast majority of power over the news we get, the music we hear and the books we read have been consolidated into the hands of six vertically integrated multi-national corporations. As discussed earlier, understanding this media context is critical to understanding the Indymedia phenomenon because it speaks volumes about the need for radical media projects like the IMC and why this project and others like it have been organized the way that they have. The goal being to both challenge these dominant media power bases while laboring not to internally recreate or mimic the practices of these mainstream media spaces. I also discussed the media reform movement that has grown to challenge this oligopoly, taking pains to clarify that while many of the efforts of the IMCistas are geared to challenging the current system, their goal is not mere reform but the creation of completely new media spaces. Shumway (2003) has called this a true "counter information" exercise where both the content and the processes of producing and delivering that content are a direct challenge to the media status-quo.

In the previous chapter, I analyzed two of the more dominant theories of alternative media, focusing specifically on what they tell us about the tactics and policies employed by these media and the potential they hold for fundamental change, not just in media but in the larger social order. In this chapter, I more specifically zero in on some of the specific practices of the IMC to flesh out some of concepts described in the prior chapter, illustrating the full scope the IMC project, arguing that the IMCistas are not simply creating new media, but completely new

spaces, what Kidd (2003) has called new "communications commons." These new commons challenge not only the content of their mainstream counterparts but the entire process of media making and social organizing.

It is important to note that much of the discussion about the policies and practices of the IMC here represents a mere snapshot in time, an examination of the network during its initial creation and early development, updated wherever practical. Chronologically, this period of time runs from early 2001, when I first became personally involved with the NIMC through a collective effort to build an IMC for the our own community, and through 2005-2006 when much of the data used for this research project was collected. Marcos Moulitsas Zuniga, the founder of the popular blogging community Daily KOS, spoke at a small meeting I attended of political activists and operatives using the Internet, comparing the goal of trying to fully capture the scope of online organizing and activism to following a single grain of sand on a beach. The medium and the ways in which it used is constantly shifting as old technologies and tactics are made obsolete by new developments and as users find new and innovative ways to use it. The snapshot look I provide here is still relevant for understanding Indymedia even now as most of the individual IMCs in the network came online during this time period. More importantly, since the focus here is not so much on Indymedia as a feature of the Internet but as an example of radical alternative media, this snapshot, is still relevant, just as Downing's examination of alternative media in post-revolutionary Russia and Europe and Atton's focus on Zines of the early 1990's still offer incredible insight into the ways in which groups create and re-create their own media to challenge the status-quo.

Downing and Atton placed the policies and practices of radical alternative media at the fore of their own analyses; similarly my focus here is not on the content of the NIMC but on its policies and organizing strategies, although some discussion of content will undoubtedly creep into my discussion where applicable. In this chapter I will focus specifically on several specific artifacts of the NIMC policies and practices. First, I will discuss the network's general decision-making processes and communications systems. These show a strong commitment to decentralization, openness, transparency, a blurring of roles and an empowerment of those involved. Second, I will examine the IMC "Ten Principles of Unity," an attempt by the early framers of the NIMC to establish a philosophical base for the network while protecting the basic autonomy of each individual IMC. Third, I will briefly look at the list of requirements developed

by both the IMC Global Process and New IMC working groups to both guide new collectives looking to build their own IMC and to set forth basic criteria for these new IMC groups to become a part of the broader global network. The goal here is to provide a concrete example of many of the principles outlined by Downing and Atton. Whether or not Indymedia has lived up to their lofty characterizations is up for debate. Peppered throughout I look at some of the tensions present within the Indymedia community, between those looking for more pragmatic ways of creating and disseminating alternative media content efficiently and those looking to create those spaces for prefigurative politics, regardless of the impact on efficiency and greater distribution.

General Process and Global Communication

Webs and Wikis

Perhaps the most difficult part of the NIMC for the uninitiated to fully comprehend is its overall decision-making and administrative processes. While those of most individual IMCs are readily available and can be found on their own websites, a clear accounting of those for the network as a whole are much harder to identify. As discussed earlier, in the two-three years following the creation of the first IMC during the Battle for Seattle, there was an incredible period of expansion as news of the success of that first project spread throughout activist communities across the globe. As more and more individual IMCs came online, a concerted effort was undertaken to develop a framework of basic processes and guidelines for integrating these projects into a true network. During a period of approximately 18 months through 2000 and the early part of 2001, a list serve was established to elicit ideas for several guiding documents, the primary one being an articulation of the overall philosophies and principles of the NIMC. This document, which later became known as the "Principles of Unity," was discussed and debated by over 70 members of various IMC collectives at the Press Freedom Conference in San Francisco on April 27-29, 2001 (Morris, 2004). That meeting yielded a document that was then made electronically available for interested parties across the network and beyond with the goal of officially "ratifying" it by July of that year. This official ratification never took place because as more voices were added to the debate, serious questions and criticisms were raised. Did an *official* "Principles of Unity" infringe on the basic autonomy of the individual collectives? Did the adoption of an official guiding document by those currently involved

alienate the new voices that would come later? Was a global network even necessary or should the focus remain on local efforts and local communities? Did the establishment of a global network, with "governing" documents violate the basic anarchist principles of decentralization and local self-organization held by many of those who participated in the initial start-up? Was the newly established global "IMC Process" group exerting too much power, representing a backslide to the more dominant modes of organizing and decision-making of the mainstream media? Did an established global network leave the overall project too open for state or other counter-oppositional repression? These tensions, which still very much exist today in the NIMC, have been well documented by Uzelman (2001), Halleck (2003), Shumway (2003), Morris (2004), Pickard (2004), DuMonde (2005) and others. The "principles" document as well as another that established a checklist of criteria for new IMCs to be included in the network were considered drafts, and while never fully ratified, were employed by the overwhelming majority of the individual IMCs (DuMonde, 2005). In 2005, members of the Indymedia UK collective offered a proposal to have the 10 principles officially ratified by the network, but again, due to the tensions mentioned above and others, that has yet to have happened.

The voices of the self-proclaimed pragmatists like Comedia (1984) who criticize radical alternative media for being too disorganized to have mainstream impact will undoubtedly claim that this represents a failure. I argue that the models articulated by both Downing and Atton in many ways predict this exact outcome and that neither would consider it as such. Downing (2001) argued that radical media serve as new spaces where prefigurative politics can be fully explored, not simply discussed but actually employed. The fact that an "official" decision on these matters has yet to be reached is less important than the mere act of working towards that decision. The success lies in that fact that the discussions are taking place in a forum where anyone with access to the forum (i.e. a computer and Internet connection) can participate in the debate. It also highlights the self-management model he describes where the power to make decisions lies not in a small cadre of individuals but in all of those contributing to the effort. Similarly, Atton's model posits that the practical act of making a firm decision and solidifying the primacy of these documents is less important than the act of working to create them in the first place. If, as Atton argues, the real power of alternative media is its ability to transform the roles and relationships of its participants, the ongoing debate over these policies and practices is an end unto itself because through these discussions about what the fundamental nature of the

IMC will be, the IMCistas are transformed not only from readers to writers, but to media "executives," "CEOs" and "managers," although most involved with Indymedia would loath the use of those terms.

Certainly it would be more efficient if a small group would come forward and simply declare the documents to be official, either by decree or even a majority vote. Then the IMC could set about the task of making media - but as has been stated many times, that is not the only goal. For both Downing and Atton, the fact that the debate is ongoing and the field of issues up for discussion continues to grow is not a sign of failure; rather it is simply the project living up to its potential. Garcon Dumonde (2005), a long time member of the IMC Process working group, writes that without a formalized process, "the appearance of Indymedia work can often be chaotic, crisis-driven rather than calm and measured as occurs with the planning of media convergences, production of radio programs, maintenance of the servers running the website – but both are in operation, and it is this flexibility that the Indymedia network draws strength" (p.3). He also points out that, "The Independent Media Center Network is not just a radical news service but also an organic and evolving project in alternative organizing" (Dumonde, 2005, p.4). The debates, discussions, disagreements and process of working towards consensus is just as much the point as is the media product itself.

This is not to say that there has not been progress, however. There has been plenty for the pragmatists to hold onto as well. The network continues to work and grow, albeit the rate of growth has slowed from the rapid expansion of the first few years. Fourteen new IMCs were added to the network in 2005, four in 2006, twelve in 2007 and another was added by February of 2008 (http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/NewImcApprovedIMCs). These new local collectives have been created in locations and cultures as diverse Kenya, Africa; Jakarta , Indonesia; Patras, Greece; Torun, Poland; Piter, Russia; Calabria, Italy; and Omaha, Nebraska.

In addition to these new local collectives, the IMCistas have also continued to build on the network itself. They have created a series of online webs for a plethora of working groups, each tackling a different aspect of moving the NIMC forward. The central hub for these online webs is http://docs.indymedia.org. These online webs cover a broad range of issues including the internal processes and practices of the network, editorial policies, technical aspects and refinement of various open-source software packages, conflict resolution, language translation, ways to fully empower women and minorities in the project, geographical differences, public

outreach and many others. As one IMCista I spoke with in 2006 said, "While people within the network that are interested in figuring out what our process will be continue to do the important work of grappling with those issues, the rest of us keep working in other areas, challenging the powers that be, making media that we hope matters to people, getting the job done while those on the outside scratch their heads and wonder how we pull it all off." However, simply counting the number of new sites or marveling at the intricate online structures (possibly too intricate for many that have tried to navigate them) that have been created is of less importance for this analysis than the *ways* in which they are being created, maintained and used by the IMC community.

The online webs mentioned above consist of interconnected, multi-lingual "wikis" (taken from the Hawaiian *wiki wiki* which means quick), web pages that can be instantly edited by users who complete a simple and open registration process. The edits made on each page do not replace the content already there, rather they exist side-by-side. Newcomers to each page are able to see not only the current content but the ghosts of the debate and discussion behind it, in essence the social processes behind its creation. Pickard (2004) has refereed to these web pages as "collective blackboards" and argues that they represent a "radical egalitarianism, where everyone can collaborate on content at any time" (p. 16). This enables new users to clearly see the development of each page, catch up with the debate and once registering, participate in the discussion. So these pages then not only represent a work product, but also a social space, grounded in the principles of openness, transparency and a lack of hierarchy that both Downing and Atton have argued is central to characterizing alternative radical media. These wiki pages are also augmented with transcripts of Internet Relay Chat (IRC) sessions, real-time internet discussions about the various issues being grappled with by each working group. Again, these transcripts provide a crucial archive of the discussions and decision-making, giving newcomers the background they need to quickly join the process, expanding the knowledge base of the network and minimizing the power of the knowledge haves over the have-nots. Additionally, many of these pages also feature resources generated outside the network such as articles on consensus decision-making, conflict resolution, community organizing and other topics. These are presented as tools for the IMCistas- to use or not - with both the pragmatic goal of moving the network forward but, perhaps more importantly, to give everyone the tools they need to participate in a meaningful way, empowering them to come to the table as equals.

Like everything with the NIMC, there is some disagreement over whether or not these webs and wikis have been successful. Dumonde (2005, p. 1) writes,

> There have been cries about a global-elite, discussion on the personalities and the power accumulated with knowledge. Elite groupings imply dominance over others, a hegemonic relationship whereby those in-the-know are empowered to make decisions; this has certainly happened within the Indymedia network, for it is nigh on impossible to avoid discrimination in some form based on the best of intentions. These are often found in subtle ways; activists with better Internet access, for example, or those who have more free time to dedicate to the project.

Pickard (2004) also argues that while the IMC techies who have helped develop and adapt these new technologies for use within the IMC believe that these are easy and user-friendly advancements, many have reported feeling alienated by these new technologies. I for one found the process of learning the process quite cumbersome. This again raises the notion of the existence of a "tech hierarchy;" those with a great amount of experience are quickly able to adapt, while those with little experience have a harder time. However, it should be clear that the very nature of these technologies shows at least a *commitment* to creating a system where a real participatory democracy can flourish. Again, I would argue that the inability to qualify or quantify "success" in building a network or process with no hierarchical elements is not as important as the process of working toward that goal. If, as Downing and Atton have both asserted, a primary goal of radical alternative media is the creation of new spaces where people can explore new ways of organizing, working and being, then the NIMC is fulfilling its purpose. The end of the story is not as important as the telling - the road that gets us there - and even that final chapter is up for interpretation.

While anyone with the necessary technology has access to the majority of these online pages and webs, there are some exceptions. For example, the IMC Process working group was originally conceived as a body of representatives of and appointed by each IMC collective and still operates largely as such. Anyone can participate in the discussions within this group, but the actual decision-making is still basically restricted to those appointed representatives. There is no voting; the IMC Process group operates under a form of consensus. Proposals are not voted up or down by a majority. Once made they are considered enacted until a member of the group

raises a "blocking concern" at which point the proposal is scrapped and the discussion continues with the aim of retooling the idea. This can be maddening to the pragmatists whose primary concern is often "is it official yet?" To many of the IMCistas it doesn't really matter; as long as the discussions stay open and the work is being done, the notion of "being official" is irrelevant.

The mere presence of the IMC Process group has created a fair bit of consternation across the network from those who favor as little formalized structure as possible. This question, structure or not, is a constant and consistent debate within the network, similar to Atton's discussion of the general tension between "purity" and "hybridity" that characterizes much of the alternative radical media. Many members of the IMC have criticized the primacy that has been placed on IMC Process and other aspects of any global decision making process, arguing that the focus should remain at the local level. Mathew Arinson, for example, a founding member of the first Indymedia in Seattle has consistently warned against creating a network that has too much emphasis on any type of central decision-making. He writes, "Fair global decisions are slow and take a lot of work to organize. If they are taken too far I feel they will lead to suppression of diversity and grim power struggles; after all, it is the global corporate and government monopolies on power and culture that are at the heart of the globalization debate that Indymedia thrives on" (Arinson, 2001, p.2). He, like others, has pragmatic concerns as well, "I'm not sure how many decisions we need to make globally. The problem with trying to do too much on a network level is that it just concentrates and bottlenecks things and creates big potential problems with conflicts of interest and editorial control" (Arinson, 2001, p.6). However, while these concerns are widespread, they do not seem to have created any real burden on the project. Local IMCs continue to come online, the network itself continues to question and retool, and, although often in fits and starts, the work keeps getting done. If anything, these concerns over central vs. local vs. hybrid keep the network from being stagnant and keep the project from becoming merely an alternative media source rather than a laboratory for experimenting with new ways of organizing for social change.

This discussion of the IMC webs, wikis and working groups speaks volumes about the general processes of the IMC. Working groups are constantly being created, abandoned and then picked up again. Proposals are often offered and discussed with no formal resolution. Activists participate and then leave the scene, sometimes to return, often not. If this all seems chaotic, that's because it is. But running through the entire chaotic mess are several basic traits that the

overwhelming majority of the IMCistas share that in the end keep it all together, "a combination of free speech and non-hierarchal working methods; a desire to see an open media, free to access by all" (Dumonde, 2005, p.6). Additionally, there is a commitment to building new spaces with a radically different social reality than the inequitable one built and maintained by the current dominant forces of state, capital, sexism, racism and all of the other features that divide us. The goal is to expand those spaces and ideas to all aspects of social life. "If we can do it here, with open media, then surely we can do it in other spheres of life. We can do it for education, healthcare, housing, we can take it all back and make it ours" (DuMonde, 2005 p. 10).

Global Communication

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Network of Independent Media Centers is spread across six continents and 35 nations; and represents the collective effort of thousands of volunteers, all with equal power (or at least the potential for equal power) to produce content and weigh in on the decision making process. In order to facilitate communication between individual IMCs, the communities they serve and across this sprawling network, Indymedia activists have developed a public, subscription based email list system.

The "Indymedia Lists" system is housed on various servers throughout the network and is accessed by a central Website at http://lists.indymedia.org. The lists cover different operating areas of the network, allowing volunteers to participate in whichever aspect(s) of the overall project that most interest them. There are lists dealing with decision making processes, open source software development and technical issues, editorial policies, legal issues, public outreach, fundraising etc. There are also lists dealing with the various projects of the IMC such as print, radio or film and video as well as resource lists to assist new IMCs interested in joining the network. Temporary lists are also created to help coordinate the efforts of IMCistas as they organize short-term IMCs to cover large-scale mobilizations such as the FTAA Ministerial protests in Miami or the annual World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Anyone can submit a request for the creation of a new list, and new ones are routinely coming on-line. Many local IMCs are also using this same centralized list system for their own local business and communications because all messages processed through the system are archived, providing a constantly updated record of the network's growth and problem solving, both at the global and local levels. Each time a new list is created, the list administrator is able to set the parameters by

which users are able to send messages and the list members are able to set guidelines for how they receive posts.

There has been some cursory examination of this list system in the literature highlighting several advantages and disadvantages. Opel and Templin (2005) utilized the IMC list system to gather data regarding the amount of traffic across the network during a specific period of time, to assess if common tools for monitoring website activity could yield meaningful data for IMC activists. Through their experiences with the list system and subsequent conversations with several IMCistas, they found several general advantages to this communications system. First, the list automatically archives and organizes all messages sent through it, which they argued had several inherent advantages. It enables new users to review the history of ongoing discussions so that they may fully participate while also providing a treasure trove of information for those looking to establish new Indymedia centers. These archives also greatly enhance the ability for movement activists to self-reflect, looking at strategies and tactics that worked and those that were less successful. Herndon (2003), one of the first organizers of the IMC in Seattle and later the NIMC, has argued that a process of self-reflection is critical to the survival of the project as it continues to grow and change, both for logistical reasons, to see what is working and what is not, and more importantly, to ensure that the new spaces created do not fall back into the dominant patterns of the mainstream.

Second, the lists system provides local collectives with less technical experience, the ability to easily and conveniently set-up a communications network for their own projects in a way that provides an automatic, electronic archive of their efforts. This also frees them from using email groups and lists provided by many for-profit Internet Service Providers and online email providers such as Yahoo, AOL and Google. While the majority of these corporate Internet companies provide these services for free, they are paid for through advertising. Users are forced to not only view the on-line ads but also send them along with their own communications. The IMC list system is provided for free, without the presence of these advertisements. Third, the lists allow IMC volunteers to subscribe to areas or projects within the NIMC in which they have the greatest interest. Currently, there are over 800 lists in the system, the ability for users to subscribe to only those that cover areas of the network they are interested in. Without this feature, IMCistas would have to wade through thousands of emails just to keep up. Fourth, the centralized lists page provides a place for new IMC volunteers to get a sense of

the full scope of the project while keeping the information manageable (although, as a subscriber to several of these lists, I have found that the information can still be at times overwhelming). New activists can begin participating right away and the lists provide them access to veteran volunteers for help and guidance. Fifth, the lists page provides electronic forums where activists can share and debate ideas in a secure setting, ensuring that their personal emails are not compromised and the amount of unwanted email can be kept to a minimum. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the centralized list system provides instantaneous links between IMC activists from all over the world, making the NIMC much more than a simple linked network but a bona-fide global communications forum where geographic boundaries cease to exist, linking local efforts to a true global movement.

It is here in the linkages that the list system provides, the creation of a space where a true global community can exist, that the list system offers it greatest contribution to the NIMC as truly radical alternative media. Downing (2004) discussed the vital role that radical media can perform through the creation of counterhegemonic spaces where disaffected communities and groups can communicate with each other, not merely to share information ignored or actively blocked by the mainstream, but a space to formulate, share and critique ideas, creating a the type of spaces Gramsci argued were necessary to spark true revolution. Again, these spaces transcend the products of Indymedia, the actual media content, and put the processes of producing and disseminating that content at the fore.

These lists, and the online communities they support also create a forum where that "developmental power" described by Downing can be realized. Hamm (2005) has described this as the "back office" of Indymedia, a virtual space where a new public sphere is created that transcends the "work" of media making and enters the realm of community building. Kidd (2003a) has also discussed the importance of this essentially social portion of the network and the ways in which the technical work of media making exists side by side with the building of social connections and argues that it is through these connections that the IMC project has the potential for bon-fide social change. These lists also help enable the transformational process of "readers into writers" that lies at the core of Atton's model of alternative media. It is here, in these open online forums where Indymedia activists work through the problems of both creating and maintaining both local media projects and the connecting of those projects to a global network. Embedded within these lists and their archives are the stories of real people working to

become media makers. They contain vital information both about the pragmatics of media making and the trials and tribulations of doing so in ways free from the formalized hierarchies, gatekeepers and "professional" journalists that characterize the mainstream. They are, in effect, online classrooms of prefigurative politics where the lessons are not just about media production and dissemination but also about organizing collective action in new ways, developing new strategies and tactics that are applicable not only to media work but to the restructuring of all of our social institutions.

If the above picture of this communication system and its potential appears too rosy, it probably is. Numerous researchers who have examined Indymedia have found that in many cases the same patterns of domination based on class, race, gender and socioeconomic status creep into the network and are reflected in the conversations on these lists. For example, Brooten (2004) examined both the discussion lists and content on several Indymedia sites regarding opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. She argues that while the network strives to free itself from traditional patriarchal patterns, these patterns emerge in the language and interactions of the IMCistas. She writes, "The IMCs attempts to create independence or autonomy from the media reality created by the mainstream corporate media mirror feminist strategies of empowerment that have focused on women's independence from a male-created reality in order to find the space to develop their own voices and directly address the sexism, racism, and militarization within their communities. Nevertheless, the use of gender discourse as a means of defining and attacking those with convergent opinions, as well as the experiences of many within the IMC network, suggest that there remains much work to do to promote alternative conceptions of gender" (Brooten, 2004, p.2). She cites Kidd (2003) and others who have argued that the required technical skills coupled with the amount of volunteer time to meaningfully participate has limited the bulk of IMC activists to young, white males from North America and Europe. Those with more time and skills dominated the conversations and used their status as those with experience over those without to exert an informal power consistent with male dominated patterns of communication. Numerous others have also noted that the technical nature of Indymedia, still largely an Internet based medium, has given rise to discrepancies between the tech "haves" and "have-nots" (Uzelman, 2001; Atton, 2002; Shumway, 2003; Kidd, 2003; Milberry, 2003; Dumonde, 2005, Jones & Martin, 2007)). However, all have acknowledged that Indymedia, through its principles and commitment to

introspection are working to minimize these inequities both within the local collectives and across the network.

Throughout this discussion of the IMC's general process, its network of webs and its global communications system I have hinted at the "10 Principles of Unity." If there is a single, guiding document that best articulates the general mission and philosophy of the IMC, this is it. These principles spell out not only the practices through which Indymedia will operate but also the character of the spaces for prefigurative politics they are working to create. As has been stated several times, both Downing and Atton's models give equal or even greater weight to these spaces as the lens through which to best understand radical alternative media than the media products themselves. Many of the characteristics of the "principles" have already been discussed, but in the next section, I briefly examine each of these and discuss how they have been implemented and interpreted across the network.

10 Principles of Unity and Membership Criteria

The 10 Principles

As discussed earlier, the 10 Principles of Unity, although never officially ratified, have operated as the "de-facto" constitution for both the global IMC network and the bulk of the local IMC collectives since first articulated by the IMC Process group and others in 2001. These principles can be accessed online at http://archives.lists.indymedia.org/new-imc/2001-May/000159.html. For purposes of this discussion, the principles are listed and grouped topically, not in numerical order.

Principle 1 - The Independent Media Center Network (IMCN) is based upon principles of equality, decentralization and local autonomy. The IMCN is not derived from a centralized bureaucratic process, but from the self-organization of autonomous collectives that recognize the importance in developing a union of networks.

This first principle is reflected in virtually every aspect of Indymedia that has already been discussed. As evidenced in my discussion of Atton and Downing in Chapter 3, the core values of the network expressed here, equality, decentralization, autonomy and self-organizing, are central to the models of radical alternative media articulated by both. As with everything in Indymedia, there have been some tensions as to the role of the global network. As discussed earlier, the IMC Process group, the working group formed to "disaffiliate" IMCs and others have

received a fair amount of criticism for acting too much like a central power base. In addition to drafting these principles and the list of requirements for local collectives to be included in the network, the central network has also charged itself with deciding whether or not a new collective meets those criteria. The primary expression of "belonging" is for the new IMC to be added to the "cities list," a list of links to the local websites which appears on the left-hand of each website. This has led from time to time to a great deal of criticism, and for a time in 2000 the growth of the cities list was suspended (Morris, 2004). However, in late 2001, with the "un-official" adoption of the 10 Principles and membership criteria that process has been reinstated. For the most part, however, and certainly in the case of the Tallahassee Red-Hills IMC I helped organize, the central network has maintained its commitment to the autonomy of local collectives and serves as more of a resource than any type of type of centralized power base.

Principle 2 - All IMCs consider open exchange of and access to information a prerequisite to the building of a more free and just society.

Principle 4 - All IMCs, based upon the trust of their contributors and readers, shall utilize open web based publishing allowing individuals, groups and organizations to express their views, anonymously if desired.

While the bulk of my discussion thus far has been on the process of the IMC, open publishing and a transparent editorial process is the heart of the IMC's actual media product – it is also by far the biggest source of hand wringing and conflict amongst Indymedia activists. In 2008, the idea of "open publishing" is commonplace. The large number of web services that allow anyone to create their own blog, social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace and the increasingly popularity of You Tube has made open publishing synonymous with the Internet. In 1999 and 2000, however, when the first IMC sites began coming online it was truly radical concept. The *Active* software, which powered those first websites, was by all measures an amazing innovation. For the first time, anyone with access to the Internet could compose a news report or piece of commentary and instantaneously see that work posted on a public website. As more and more collectives were formed and built their own sites and Indymedia became more popular, Indymedia's greatest innovation became its greatest challenge.

Indymedia sites were deluged with content, posts that appeared on the open publishing newswire (the right hand column of most IMC websites) would often only be visible for hours or even minutes as new posts were added bumping the older posts "below the fold" and off the first

main page. Innovative advertisers also began to post stories that amounted to ads for various products and services, which most, if not all, IMCs have prohibited. Even more challenging was that individuals and organizations, which espoused more right-wing political and social views, found Indymedia and began to use the sites to convey their own messages. In the most extreme examples, posts clearly attributable to racist, homophobic, xenophobic and other organized "hate" groups began to flood the sites with their own content. Additionally, some groups began posting calls for illegal direct action opening up a plethora of legal issues surrounding liability and whether or not these posts represented a legal conspiracy to commit criminal activities. It became clear to some that the idea of true open publishing was just not feasible, a process had be to put in place to filter posts, both for pragmatic and political reasons. In order to help individuals "become the media" (the IMC mantra), it was clear that there must be a process for some of them to "become the editors." As individual IMCs and the global network began to investigate ways to address the issues, many immediately responded with cries of censorship, declaring that the "ideal of open publishing for everyone is dead" (Uzelman, 2001, p.14).

To answer this challenge, the early IMC Process and New IMC working groups added a requirement that all new IMCs "Establish and publish an editorial policy which is developed and functions through democratic process, and with full transparency" (http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/MembershipCriteria). The question of editing vs. censorship then was side-stepped by the global network, adhering to the principle of local autonomy and has been left up the local collectives to wrestle with. While the intention was to give IMCs a basic tool to help them manage the high volumes of postings, deal with advertisers and protect from the dissemination of "hate speech" or calls for illegal action, issues over how this requirement should be interpreted and carried out created an entire new area of consternation. As Whitney (2005) noted, "In many IMC Collectives, the editing vs. free speech dichotomy is argued as hotly as abortion is debated by members of congregations and Congress."

There is broad range of editorial policies across the network, some tightly drawn and more specific while others are much broader and hold more closely to the open-publishing ideal. Some researchers such as Downing (2003, 2003a), Kidd (2003), Shumway (2002) and others have applauded many of the editorial policies they encountered while researching Indymedia. Others have found that the process of editing, hiding, and removing posts has given rise to new, informal hierarchies that lean much more towards censorship. For example, in 2007, Jones and

Martin published an article that has been hotly contested by many in the IMC community (a controversy I will discuss in a subsequent chapter) found the commitment to a lack of formal hierarchy actually served to create a concealed "crypto-hierarchy." In their investigations of Indymedia U.K. (a central hub for several individual collectives in the United Kingdom) they found that a select few, long-time members of the collective had come to dominate the entire process for this site, most notably the editing process. They offered several examples where decisions made to "block" posts where not transparent at all and seemed to have been made by a secret cadre of individuals, who through their length of service, technical abilities including access to pass codes and other features of the web sites and servers had become what King (2004) has referred to as "super-nodes" within the organization. He argues that the these powerful decision makers are a natural by-product of organizations, especially those using complex technologies like the Internet, who have disavowed formal centralized decision making bodies. With no formalized process, an informal process develops that actually conceals those making the decisions. He clarifies that there is often no malicious intent or deliberate effort by those making the decisions to become these supernodes. Rather, the power is gained slowly, over time through their commitment to the project, years of service and the "insider" knowledge that comes with that commitment. Atton and Wickenden (2003) have also found cases in alternative media where this has been the case. They have argued that a "counter-elite" is often created in media projects due to "low capitol funding, poorly paid or voluntary staff and organizational pressures" which create structural situations that, in essence, force these media projects to informally impart more power to those who have been there longer and have shown a willingness to do the work. This impedes on the goal of reaching that ideal alternative to the mainstream press. They write, "To ignore these limits and outcomes is to idealize alternative media as free spaces, mysteriously liberated from the everyday, structural considerations of the practice of journalism" (Atton & Wickenden, 2003, p.351). Robert McChesney, discussed earlier as an intellectual "leader" of the media reform movement, has argued that transparency can minimize these problems. "Indymedia needs to make tough editorial decision, and that's not something to be despondent about. The problem is not that you have to make decisions. The important thing is that you make them on principles that are transparent" (quoted in Beckerman, 2003). In my final chapter, I discuss how one IMC wrestled with these issues and the decisions they made to ensure transparency and minimize the rise of these supernodes or a counter elite.

Principle 3 - All IMCs respect the rights of activists who choose not to be photographed or filmed.

A great deal of the news coverage found on most IMCs involves the organization and carrying out of protest actions aimed at governments at all levels, private corporations and other powerful organizations. As has been widely reported both here and abroad, police actions aimed at suppressing these activities have increased and the tactics employed by law enforcement have become increasingly clandestine, leading many activists to invoke the memory of the Counter Intelligence Programs (COINTELPRO) of the U.S. government between 1956 and 1971. Harsher tactics aimed at suppressing dissent are also being reported all over the world. In the age of the PATRIOT Act and at a time when the U.S. Government has included groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) as bona-fide domestic terrorist organizations, the desire for some activists to keep a low profile should be evident. Additionally, as I will discuss in more detail later, IMCs themselves have been the victims of severe reprisals both here and abroad for their work.

Principle 6 - All IMCs recognize the importance of process to social change and are committed to the development of non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian relationships, from interpersonal relationships to group dynamics. Therefore, they shall organize themselves collectively and be committed to the principle of consensus decision-making and the development of a direct participatory democratic process that is transparent to its membership.

The tensions between open-publishing and editing described above also apply here where the commitment to non-hierarchical decision making can have the unintended consequence of establishing hierarchies that are less apparent and thus less accountable to the broader group than if they existed formally. This is a tension that the political left (and perhaps the right) has dealt with for years, what Jo Freeman termed in her seminal article by the same name *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* (Freeman, 1970). Freeman, writing about her experiences with women's liberation organization of the 1960's argued that the commitment to create organizations that reject the hierarchies of the dominant society can and often does lead to informal hierarchies that in many ways exert more power over the organization due to their informal nature. Additionally, she argued that absent these informal hierarchies, the work of the organization often isn't done. She wrote that, "if the movement is to grow beyond its initial elementary stages of development, it will have to disabuse itself of some of the prejudices about organization and structure, to reject

them out of hand is to deny ourselves the necessary tools to further development" (Freeman, 1970, p.8). In examining these conflicts within Indymedia, Morris (2004) has invoked Michel's (1911) axiom of the "Iron Law of Oligarchy" where movement organizations over time, through a desire to become more effective, may develop new elite decision making groups within the movement.

Poletta (2002) and Pickard (2004) have argued that groups like Indymedia are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their endeavors to avoid falling victims to Michel's dire prediction. The lack of a formalized process does not mean *no* process. Pickard (2004) who examined the consensus process of one Indymedia found it to be a very structured, step-by-step process where everyone participating could clearly see the flow of the discussion, see who was making and supporting proposals and had the right to interject at any time. In fact, Pickard and Poletta both argue that there has been a "fetishizing" of the process, leading to extremely long meetings, delayed decision making and the frustration of some activists who feel as is they have been "processed to death" (Pickard, 2004, p.24). Many have critiqued this position, arguing that while organizing in ways that reject the dominant notions of leadership and hierarchy is much more difficult, it is not necessary to simply give-up. As many anarchist writers have argued, the process of wrestling with these problems is in and of itself an exercise in liberation. Falling back on traditional notions of organization as a means to achieve a noble end diminishes the nobility of that end. As discussed above, Indymedia has been wrestling with this basic issue since its early inception. This commitment to process and the safeguards many IMCs are putting in place to protect them from the "Iron Law" will be more fully discussed later in my account of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC.

Principle 7 - All IMCs recognize that a prerequisite for participation in the decision-making process of each local group is the contribution of an individual's labor to the group.

In order to maintain the "managed chaos" that characterizes many IMCs and their decision-making processes, they have established a very loose membership criteria so that newcomers can't simply walk in and take over. Anyone who contributes to the effort is considered a "member" and has an equal say in decision-making. The level of work required to attain this membership status is left up to each individual collective, but the websites themselves remain open to everyone. I will examine this principle more closely when discussing the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC.

Principle 8 – All IMCs are committed to caring for one another and our respective communities both collectively and as individuals and will promote the sharing of resources including knowledge, skills and equipment.

A quick search around the IMC network clearly indicates that most local IMCs are deeply rooted in their own communities, with the bulk of the feature stories concerning local issues and events. Additionally, many Indymedia Centers which have been able to procure physical spaces (Austin IMC, Champaign-Urbana IMC, St. Louis IMC to name a few) have worked to open those up to the community with free use of computers with Internet access, workshops on how to use the computers, the IMC software packages and other applications. The Indymedia community has long recognized that there is still a vast digital divide, both globally and here in the U.S. and has taken steps whenever possible to bridge that gap. Many IMCistas have worked collectively to provide hardware and training to areas in the global South as well as technical assistance in helping them set up their own operations.

Principle 9 - All IMCs shall be committed to the use of free source code, whenever possible, in order to develop the digital infrastructure, and to increase the independence of the network by not relying on proprietary software.

Principle 5 -The IMC Network and all local IMC collectives shall be not-for-profit.

These principles are fairly straightforward and the concepts they embody have been articulated earlier. It is important to remember my discussion of the rise of Indymedia in Chapter 1 and its intimate connection to the open-source software movement. The IMCs commitment to using this software helps ensure its independence from those forces attempting to build new enclosures on the Internet. The purchase of formerly independent projects such as Facebook, Myspace and YouTube by much bigger corporations make abundantly clear that for-profit interests will gravitate towards any successful Internet project, regardless of its content and background, if there is an opportunity to generate a profit. As has been seen with Google's purchase of YouTube, the independent, open publishing format has been greatly diminished. For example, an October, 2006 article in the New York Times titled "A Slippery Slope of Censorship at YouTube" spoke of the site's attempts to take "a scrub bucket to some questionable political graffiti on its servers" in an effort to "spit shine its image" for potential buyers. There have also been numerous press accounts of YouTube videos being taken offline because they have incorporated content that has been copyrighted or has been critical of major corporations dealing

with Google since it purchased the project. The Internet space itself is not the only place where these pressures can be exerted; if a project like Indymedia were to begin using proprietary software, the owners of that software could conceivably place similar restriction in its licensure and use. Additionally, the open source software packages that have been developed by and for the use of the IMCs is constantly being updated and re-worked by volunteer techies, creating a new space for radical democratic participation.

The interpretation of not-for-profit has been another source of tension within the network between the purists and those who favor a more pragmatic approach. For example, in 2002, the global network, desperate for funds to maintain equipment and help local collectives afford their own physical spaces, was awarded a $50,000 grant from the Ford Foundation based on an independent request from individual volunteers. With no formal process for accepting or distributing the money since *passive consensus* (the lack of a blocking concern, was unable to address such an issue.

> Suddenly, the democracy so treasured by the network – now grown to at least 5,000 volunteers – became its greatest handicap. A number of IMCs outside the United States, including Brazil, Italy, and Argentina, were opposed to taking from the corporate world. Although many of the American volunteers thought the collective should take the money as long as no strings were attached, the bitter arguments became too much for the network to bear. In the end, the grant had to be returned because no consensus could be reached and the debate threatened, as a volunteer at the Urbana-Champagne IMC put it, to create fissures in the network that would take years to fix"(Beckerman, 2003, p. 4).

Although some still argue that the loss of these funds represented a failure of Indymedia, an unacceptable rigidity that does not bode well for the future of the network, others argue that the process in this case worked just fine. The presence of widespread opposition to the Ford Foundation grant would have created serious rifts within the network, and it is not as if the critics didn't have a point in refusing what is essentially

corporate money. The bottom line is that, six years later, the network is sill surviving albeit $50,000 poorer than it would have been. However, with a project like Indymedia, what is more valuable, the funds that would have undoubtedly helped the network

produce and disseminate its media content or the people who would have been lost if the funds had been accepted? As a member of the IMC movement (although not directly involved with the discussions about the grant) I have come down on the side of the cash, but I can also see the concerns raised. What would have been done with the money? How would it have been distributed? What precedent would it have set for the future? I have seen my share of truly radical organizing projects prosper without money, only to fold once funds are available due to the increased infighting over their allocation.

Principle 10 - All IMCs shall be committed to the principle of human equality, and shall not discriminate including discrimination based upon race, gender, age, class, sexual orientation or physical ability. Recognizing the vast cultural traditions within the network, we are committed to building diversity within our localities.

This final principle simply affirms that all IMC collectives must be open to all. This non-discrimination statement exemplifies the ideal that Indymedia is striving for, but whether or not they have succeeded in practice is up for debate. Many researchers (Brooten, 2004; Castells, 2003; Kidd, 2003 and others) have examined Indymedia over the years and found that many features, especially its heavy reliance on ever changing web technology, have led many IMCs collectives to still be made up of predominantly white, college educated males from North American and European backgrounds. My "census" of the network in Chapter 6 seeks to asses just how successful IMCs in North America have been in reaching out to and actually involving women, people of color and people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Criteria for New IMCs

The purpose of this discussion of the 10 Key Principles has been to both highlight the features of the network that contribute to its radical alternative nature as well as examine some of the tensions the movement has faced in attempting to live up to these ideals. The following is the listing of the criteria that all new IMCs must agree to and demonstrate before being included in the global network and on the "cities list." These criteria are the product of the New IMC working group, which can be accessed through the Indymedia webs at http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/NewImc. As with the Principles document; these criteria have never been "officially" ratified by the entire network but their use has not received a "block" by anyone in the working group so are currently being used to evaluate new IMCs for

membership into the network. These requirements represent perhaps the most “heavy handed” part of the relationship between the global network and the local collectives and indicate that the need for a more unified consistent network has won out over total local autonomy. Each IMC and Global Working Group is expected to:

1. Agree in spirit to the NIMC Mission Statement and Principles of Unity.
2. Have a committed membership substantial enough to sustain a functional IMC.
3. Have open and public meetings so that no one group can have exclusionary "ownership" of an IMC.
4. Work toward developing a local Mission Statement or Statement of Purpose. The current Network Mission Statement may be adopted or used on an interim basis.
5. Agree to the use of Open Publishing as described in the NIMC Editorial Policy. (The editorial working group has added that the term "Open Publishing" was one that is still being defined by the Global Network and that this requirement would be revisited once that decision is made)
6. Adopt a decision-making policy that is in alignment with consensus principles which include open, transparent and egalitarian processes.
7. Have a spokesperson(s) willing and capable of participating in the global decision-making process and meetings as a rotating liaison/representative, with a clear understanding of the responsibilities that come with this role.
8. Participate in the key IMC Network Communication Methods that pertain to the health and vitality of the Network and that contribute to the work of the IMC. Assure that at least one person from your local IMC participates at any given time on the IMC-Communication list.
9. IMCs shall in no way engage in commercial for-profit enterprises. (The online draft of this criteria states that “the IMCN is committed to the decommercialization of information and will disassociate from any local IMC that decides to become a for profit media corporation.”)
10. Display a local version (customized) of the IMC “i” logo on your website and literature.
11. Include the IMC Network current “Cities List” on your site, preferably on the front page.

One final requirement that has yet to have been finalized sates that each IMC collective shall "Have no official affiliation with any political party, state or candidate for office." However, comments on this requirement add that "individual producers have freedom to do whatever they like and local IMCs can "feature" stories about various political parties and initiatives." These criteria have been adopted to build a modicum of unity and consistency across the network while enabling local collectives the flexibility to respond to the desires of their local collectives and adapt to the needs of the communities they are trying to serve.

The preceding discussion has focused on some of the basic principles and practices of Indymedia that offer tangible examples of the theories of radical alternative media articulated by both Downing and Atton described in Chapter 3. There are two elements of their own analyses and those of others that are conspicuously absent from this discussion.

First, since Indymedia is still predominantly an Internet mediated project, does the Internet posses any specific qualities that add to its radical nature or increase its liberatory potential - both Downing and Atton have argued that is does. Second, many researchers have articulated that radical alternative media in general and Indymedia specifically can also be understood as comprising an "alternate public sphere" drawing on the ideal first articulated by Jurgen Habermas and built on by others who have worked to develop the field of public sphere studies. In the following chapter I delve into these two ideas. First, I briefly describe how the Autonomist Marxists have described the liberatory potential of the Internet and other new technologies and how movements like Indymedia are engaging in an age-old exercise of seizing Capital's innovations and using them for their own liberation. Second, I look more closely at the Habermasian notion of an alternate public sphere, both the ideal he originally articulated and some of the work that has built on his early formulation. In the final two chapters, I look more closely at the features of the public sphere created by Indymedia. First, through a census of the global network, focusing on its structural elements and how they both contribute to and detract from this idealized public sphere. Second, I perform an analysis of my own IMC collective through a short ethnography of the people involved in its creation and operation in an effort to gauge whether or not they felt an alternate public sphere was created and if so, their thoughts on its basic qualities as well as what worked for them and what didn't.

CHAPTER 5
COFFEE SHOPS TO CYBERSPACE: THE INTERNET AND PUBLIC SPHERE

"Indeed many "techies" continue to work in the corporate world for software and information technology companies. Stories abound of IMC volunteers "stealing time" from employers to work on the code generating the websites. As one IMCer told me, hey, all code looks the same on the monitor screen. My boss can't tell the difference between work and IMC Code." – ***Scott Uzelamn, 2002***

"We were a group of relative strangers, shipping expensive equipment across the country with no guarantees other than a level of trust between us that was build over weeks of online debating and disagreeing and eventually coming to an agreement about what needed to be done. Those debates allowed a whole bunch of very different people, most of us having never met face-to-face, to come together as a pretty tight group." ***– Eric, an IMC volunteer speaking about the building of an IMC to cover the FTAA Ministerial meetings in Miami in 2003***

As stated in the introduction, the central argument running throughout this report is that the Independent Media Center project is much more than a simple exercise in creating and disseminating oppositional media content. While creating media that challenges the mainstream with stories and viewpoints that are at best ignored by the mainstream media or at worst distorted by the corporate press is certainly an important aspect of the project, the product itself is only one small part of the endeavor. I have argued throughout that the real scope of the IMC can only be fully grasped by looking at the *processes* the IMCistas have developed for making this alternative content. A close examination of those processes and the structures and policies that enable it indicate that the IMC activists are working to create a new public sphere, attempting to create a space that exists outside of the various mainstream venues and forums for public discussion, discourse and decision making. This space attempts to create the conditions necessary to reject the inequities and hierarchies that have been created in mainstream spaces of

discourse by classism, sexism, racism and all of the other features of the current social order that advantage a powerful minority while disadvantaging the more powerless majority. As stated earlier, the goal here is to provide a detailed look at these practices and policies to provide the reader a sense of what this new space looks like, how those involved operate within it and whether or not it holds any promise for the liberation of those groups that have been disadvantaged, alienated and marginalized by the status quo.

Thus far I have provided several necessary components to make this argument and describe this new communications commons - this new public sphere. Here is a brief recap of the steps taken thus far. I have provided a detailed history of the IMC project in order to provide background and insight into the goals and aspirations of the IMCistas. I have described the current media climate in the U.S. and how the forces of global capital have created that climate through its greatest weapon for building and maintaining power – the institutions and regulatory apparatuses of the state. This critical component provides an essential window on the forces the IMC and its network of local collectives is up against and speaks volumes about their motivations for organizing in ways radically different from their mainstream media counterparts. I have outlined two of the major theoretical formulations of radical alternative media, both of which privilege process over product and describe these media as spaces for exploring the ideas and principles necessary for radical social change. In the last chapter I provided a detailed look at some of the processes, policies and practices of the global IMC network in an effort to both provide a concrete example of the theoretical frameworks described earlier and illustrate some of the tensions and challenges faced by the IMCistas as they endeavor to realize the full potential of radical alternative media – not as merely media product but a fundamentally *social* exercise.

There are two vital pieces to my central argument I have yet to address. The first involves the potential power of the Internet to facilitate true social change. The IMCistas have hung their hats on the notion that the Internet holds real promise for creating a true global network of groups and individuals, linking the voices of those oppressed by capital's program of neo-liberal globalization and empowering them to have a meaningful seat at the table in the discussions and decision making about what this new globalized world will look like. Creating a network that becomes the "Electronic Fabric of Struggle" envisioned by Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas that takes seemingly isolated and unrelated local efforts to control police brutality, preserve low-income housing, shut down military recruiting efforts in public schools,

preserve land rights for indigenous peoples, etc. and links them together into a unified global voice for economic, social and environmental justice. Thus far I have articulated examples of where this seems to be happening but have not yet provided an overall theoretical program articulating its true possibility. Second, I have cited several researchers and have myself stated throughout that Indymedia is in fact working to create a new public sphere, but what do we really know about the potential for an alternative commons? What are the arguments for and against the possibility of creating new spaces where equality is the norm and the power to influence is based on the strength of the argument rather than the race, gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status of the participants? In this chapter I articulate these final two pieces of the puzzle, describing some of the theoretical underpinnings of the power of the Internet to create social change and the idea of an alternate public sphere, both what it would like and the socio-structural components necessary for its existence.

The Power of the Internet?

Volumes about the socially transformative power of the Internet have been written. Some extol the virtues of the Net and related communications technologies with an almost utopian glee, arguing that finally a vehicle exists for the unification of the planet, viewing the technology through a rose-colored digital haze filled with the promise of better things to come. Others have been much more skeptical, arguing that the rise of this new technology is just like any other and that it will be appropriated by those currently holding power over those without. Some fear the Internet represents the final stage of technocratic control over the people. Others are wary of the invasive nature of the Internet, fearing that its ability to flood homes with advertisements increases consumptive patterns that are socially and environmentally unsustainable. Still others fear the rise of new vehicles for the creation of a "surveillance nation" where more and more data about our personal lives are available for scrutiny by others, whether it be the nosy neighbor down the street, a private corporation or elements of the state itself. There are also those who see the Internet as just another technological gizmo for the fortunate haves, citing the now axiomatic "digital divide" where those fortunate enough to have the resources, infrastructure and educational opportunities benefit while those without do not. These various positions have merit and are worthy of the many ongoing debates in both the academic world and beyond, but I will not try to tackle all of these thorny issues here. My own position

lies somewhere in the middle; while I share some of the same concerns as the skeptics, my own experiences lead me to lean, perhaps naively so, towards the more rosy interpretation.

Autonomist Marxism

It is difficult to work within Indymedia and examine the body of research on the subject without coming away with a real sense that there is something truly unique about the Internet, not so much the computers, modems and its other technological gadgets -those are just the tools. It is what the people are doing with those tools, using them for organizing, communicating and mobilizing that shows real promise for this new technological marvel (or terror, depending on one's vantage point) to bring about radical global change. It is the *use* of the Internet, the human factor itself, that has been the focus of many of those who have discussed the critical role it plays in giving Indymedia real potential as a radical alternative media project to both challenge the mainstream media and the dominant global social order as a whole, both on its own and as an example for future projects. Many who have discussed the vital role of the Internet in the development of Indymedia have looked to the Autonomist Marxists to provide a framework for their assertions about the inherent transformative power of the Internet because within this frame lies an anti-determinist view of technology with a focus on the ability of subordinated groups to creatively use it to both resist and counter capitalist control (Dyer-Whitford, 2001;Uzelman, 2002; Hamm, 2003; Millberry, 2003; Cleaver, 2004; Downing, 2004; Kidd, 2004) In this section, I provide a brief sketch of the Autonomist Marxist framework and how it can be applied to Internet mediated projects like the IMC.

Autonomist Marxism first appeared in Italy in the early 1960's surrounding the critical theoretical work of Antonio Negri and Mario Tronti. Autonomist Marxism is derived from the term Autonome, which is based on the Greek "auto-nomos" which referred to someone living by her/his own rule. In this sense, "auto-nomos" or autonomy does not equate independence. On the contrary, it refers to living as part of a community but in such a way as to ensure that the individual maintains self-rule while co-existing with others. In the most general of terms, Autonomist Marxism differs from other schools of Marxist thought in that the focus is on the working class and its ability to force change on the dominant capitalist order independently of organized political parties, trade unions or other formalized groups. The theory posits that revolution will come from the bottom up rather than from well-meaning intelligentsia utilizing

the apparatus of a formalized party. The focus is on self-organizing, direct action and resistance. Like other Marxists, the Autonomists view the struggle between the working class and capital control as a central issue, but unlike most, they have broadened the definition of the working class to include not only the waged workers (both white and blue collar workers) who were protected by unions and elements of the state, but also unwaged workers (homemakers, students and the unemployed) who enjoyed no such protections. This latter group was traditionally not represented by any type of organization operating within the political realm; if revolution was to happen, these workers would have to self-organize and create new and innovative ways to force change on the dominant system. The Autonomists then see their role as developing theoretical tools based on real, daily working class struggles and through those tools, the path through which all workers could find liberation through their own direct action.

A central work that outlines the base of the Autonomist Marxist program is Antonio Negri's *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, a collection of lectures given by Negri in Paris in 1978, translated and published in 1984. These lectures offered a radical re-interpretation of Marx's *Grundrisse*, a collection of draft essays and rough notes originally published in 1858. In *Grundrisse*, Marx outlines many of the economic themes that would characterize later works such as capital's social construction of money as an oppressive force over labor, the ideas of "surplus labor/value," "productive force" and the "original accumulation of capital." In *Marx Beyond Marx*, Negri argues that earlier readings of *Grundrisse* are too deterministic and have been used to justify an overly reactionary political program, dooming the working class to the status of mere observers, carried along on currents generated and steered by the forces of capital. Instead, Negri argues, *Grundrisse* articulates that labor has always been and will continue to be an antagonistic counter-force to capital in its own right. As Cleaver (1984) writes in one of the three introductions to the collection, "Over the years Marxism has been all but sterilized by being reduced to a critique of capitalist hegemony and its laws of motion. The fascination of Marxists with the capitalist's mechanisms of despotism in the factory, of cultural domination and of the instrumentalization of working-class struggle has blinded them to the presence of a truly antagonistic subject" (p. 2). Negri argues that the development of capitalistic society has always involved the simultaneous development of a separate, antagonistic working class that continuously forces capital to adapt and that Marx's own analysis indicates that this inherent power can force capital into periods of crisis. If the

working class has the power to create states of capital crisis, than it also has the power to destroy it. "It is this analysis of working class subjectivity that infuses Negri's work with immediate relevance to those in struggle. In this period, when capital is trying to wield fiscal and monetary policy as weapons against the working class, Negri's analysis helps us see that capitalist crisis is always a crisis in its ability to control the working class" (Cleaver, 1984, p.3). Negri covers each section of *Grundrisse*, reading more politically than economically, illustrating that the central role played by workers in shaping history was there all along and that traditional Marxist notions of attributing too much power to the economic materialism of capital are fatally flawed. "Every time capital responds to workers' demands by expanding fixed capital and reorganizing the labor process, the working class politically recomposes itself in a new cycle of struggle" (Cleaver, 1984, p.5). For example, as capital has increasingly placed a new emphasis on first automation and then the outright transfer of work to other developing countries, it faces the growing problem of finding new ways to exploit surplus labor and value and thus the mechanisms through which to control workers socially.

Negri's interpretation of Marx's *Grundrisse* can be viewed as an empowering theoretical tool, with worker as subject rather than mere object. This new reading of Marx's various conceptualizations of the labor/capital struggle (or as Negri would argue the correct reading) that places the inherent power of workers at the fore is especially attractive now to those seeking to challenge capital's latest and perhaps greatest endeavor, a neo-liberalized global marketplace. "Negri argues that the analysis reaches its highest development in Marx at the level of the world market, where capitalist imperialism, fleeing the obstacles created by the class struggle at home, spreads its class antagonisms across the globe" (Cleaver, 1984, p.6). Globalization can be viewed through a completely different context. It no longer appears as a mere product of capital's desire to expand its power and profit but as a *reaction* to a crisis created by the working class.

There is a bit of a contradiction in this example, however. In the U.S. for example, as workers have demanded better wages, working conditions and basic rights, capital has to readjust by moving its operations to countries where workers have yet to have organized to demand those rights. The contradiction in this example is that the demands of labor in the U.S. have been facilitated by trade unions and other groups putting pressure on institutions of the state, which is indicative of a more classical Marxist analysis. Negri argued that the ultimate expression of the

working class as an independent subject breaking capital's control is the refusal of work, but at some level hasn't that been labor's ultimate threat all along? The Autonomists would argue that unions and other organized groups have actually slowed this process of crisis creation. If power had been vested more with individuals rather than organizations, the crisis would have come much sooner and would have already been more widespread giving capital fewer havens to exert its dominance. While there is not space to fully debate the paradox of my example here, it does illustrate two critical points. First, Negri's analysis provides activists a new and empowering way to view the relationship between capital and labor where workers are active subjects rather than mere victims of capital's program. Second, it illustrates the primacy that the Autonomists place on individual empowerment and self-organizing leading to direct action. These two points have proven very attractive to many who have attempted to study the current anti-capital/anti-globalization/social justice movements from which, as discussed in Chapter One, the Independent Media Center movement first sprung. It also provides a theoretical vehicle through which one can understand the potential power of the Internet to instigate real social change.

Turning the Tables

If workers are viewed as active subjects, constantly nipping at the heels of capital, forcing it to change its tactics, can this take the form of workers usurping the tools developed by capital for their own purposes? The Autonomists would argue absolutely yes and that the Internet, which could be capital's ultimate innovation, could also be the ultimate weapon to be employed in its downfall. Nick Dyer-Withford argues exactly that in *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits in High Technology Capitalism*. His central argument is that:

> "the information age, far from transcending the historic conflict between capital and its laboring subjects, constitutes the latest battleground in their encounter; how the new high technologies – computers, telecommunications and genetic engineering – are shaped and deployed as instruments of an unprecedented, worldwide order of general commodification; and how, paradoxically, arising out of this process appear forces that could produce a different future based on the common sharing of wealth – a twenty-first century communism" (Dyer-Withford, 1999, p.2).

Marx argued that there were two technological advancements that would mark an era of "general intellect" 1) the automation of factories and 2) the development of global networks for transportation and communication that could tie together a true global market. Obviously these have both come to fruition and with these developments Dyer-Withford writes, "Capital will appear to attain an unassailable pinnacle of technoscientific power. However… inside this bourgeois dream lie the seeds of a bourgeois nightmare. For by setting in motion the powers of scientific knowledge and social cooperation, capital undermines the basis of its own rule" (Dyer-Withford, 1999, p.4).

Dyer-Withford describes three basic Marxist positions as to the role that technology can play in the traditional capital/worker relationship. The first is Scientific Socialism, which views technological developments as a central force in the dialectical struggle between the two that will inevitably exacerbate existing inequities and lead to capital's downfall. The second is Neo-Luddism, which views all technology as an instrument for the continued domination of the working class (worker as object) subjecting it to continual struggle. The third is Post-Fordism, which sees technological advancements as a means to create a reconciliation between labor and capital. Dyer-Withford argues that running through all of these approaches is a tension between the machine as a tool of domination and technology as "the basis for the freedom of want and the social intercourse that are the prerequisites for a communist society" (Dyer-Withford, 1999, p. 42). There are significant problems with all three.

The Scientific Socialists still see history as driven by predictable events, laws of motion, driven by the economic and material conditions created by capital with the working class playing only a reactionary role. "If socialism is seen as a byproduct of the advance of science and technology, rather than as a result of people's rebellion and self-organization, the revolutionary task easily becomes defined as the speeding of technoscientific advance at all costs – including the suppression of any resistance or alternative offered by the very workers in whose name the revolution is undertaken" (Dyer-Withford, 1999, p.47). The Neo-Luddists with their focus on the almost absolute power of technology as a tool of domination does not provide for any critique, technology is forever packed within capital's project and is therefore not available as a tool for liberation. Post-Fordism, with its overly rosy view of the benefits of technology for all, plays right into the hands of those touting the "information age" as conceived by capital. Technology may produce benefits for the working class ranging from better health care methods

to big-screen televisions - but the technology remains commodity, controlled by capital and released as needed to maintain social control. Dyer-Withford argues that Autonomist Marxism with its emphasis on the working class as active subject avoids these traps.

He quotes Mario Tronti, a contemporary of Negri, 'We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning and that beginning is the class struggle of the working class' (Dyer-Withford, 1999, p.66). As stated earlier, this opens up a radical new line of social critique. Capital needs the "social factory" the social connections and networks for its very survival. As new technologies have increased the scope of these networks, creating new linkages between different cultures and communities, they in turn provide new points where capital's operations can be thwarted, new places where monkey wrenches can be thrown into the machine. This has enabled organizing against capital at a level never before possible. Diverse movements are finding common ground so that, "the revolts of a collective laboring subject that is no longer a homogeneous and concentrated proletariat, but rather heterogeneous and connective, linking those performing innumerable social activities necessary to maintain the flow of production within capital's increasingly complex and extended technosystems" (Dyer-Withford, 1999, p. 99). The working class is now making connections never before possible, creating coalitions with student groups, anti-poverty organizations, consumer rights groups and those fighting for environmental justice. Capital's new mega-network, designed to build a single global market place under its control, facilitated by the state has allowed its enemies to finally be within range of a true global collective effort. Links can be made between a broad range of people from many different backgrounds, giving them the chance to finally work together and discover that the goals of their various movements has but one main impediment, capital control.

In addition to building these new linkages from which capital can be disrupted, the new technologies of the digital age also open up a new area from which revolutionary energies and projects can flow, the creation of "invention power" within the working class. As new technologies have come on-line, capital has been forced to provide entirely new skill sets for the workers to use them. The fact that capital has been forced to teach workers the inner workings of their own machines coupled with the greater efficiency these machines provide, giving the working class more time to learn to use them for their own ends allows that "labor can subvert

the instruments of information and reverse the cycle of information into a collective organization of knowledge and language" (Dyer-Withford, 1999, p. 71). As the information and communications technologies of the Internet continue to diffuse across the globe and capital is forced to educate more members of the working class as to the workings of its ultimate machine, it is planting the seeds of its own destruction.

Numerous discussions of the Internet and how the growing number of groups aligning themselves with the loosely based emerging social movement against globalization have used this line of reasoning as the cornerstones for their own argument. Harry Cleaver, whose introduction to *Marx Beyond Marx* is cited above and who operates the Texas Archives of Autonomous Marxism, has written extensively on the subject. He argues that "the most serious challenge to the basic institutional structures of modern society flow from the emergence of computer-linked global social movements that are, increasingly, challenging both national and supranational policy-making decisions" (Cleaver, 1999, p.1). He has analyzed several instances where organizations scattered across the globe, previously operating independently in their own nations, have been able to utilize the Internet to form new world-wide alliances to successfully apply mass pressure on multi-national groups. Examples like the Zapatista uprising, demonstrations against the International Monetary Fund in South Korea and mass demonstrations against the World Trade Organization provide evidence that the use of the Net has exponentially increased the power of these previously marginal efforts. "The power to provoke invitations to dialogue with supranational capitalist institutions was not always there. Before, social movements demonstrated their ability to organize an embarrassing amount of public pressure, they were ignored." The linking of groups through the Internet allowed them to work collectively, organize globally "in ways that bypassed all the layers of mediation that previously protected these institutions" (Cleaver, 1999, p.7). Computer networking has allowed local to connect to local, thus becoming global.

> These new global conflicts have involved cross-fertilization and the combination of energies generated by local roots. In general we can say that local conflicts between citizen groups and governments have expanded into global efforts in response to two things: first, to a spreading uniformity of policies and international agreements among governments to implement world-wide sets of rules and second, to the resultant

> perception of common interests in challenging not only those rules but any set of uniform mandates unrelated to local situations (Cleaver, 1999, p. 9).

Computers and the Internet have permitted for the first time the creation of a true, world-wide "civil society." This new social creation is not always civil however. The Net has enabled these groups and movements to adapt more traditional strategies of civil disobedience to create even more disruption with smaller numbers and less risk. "Hactivists" have successfully targeted the computer mainframes of major financial institutions, military computers, and mainstream corporate news outlets.

Kidd (2004) has applied the ideas of the Autonomous Marxists to Indymedia directly. In discussing the first IMC during the Battle of Seattle, Kidd finds the same phenomena described by Cleaver above. Groups organized in opposition to the expanding power of the WTO used the Internet to first link up and combine their efforts and then to bypass capital's media to tell the story. She writes,

> There were trade unionists whose waged livelihoods were threatened by corporate restructuring involving run-away jobs; social movements concerned about the erosion of the social safety net for themselves and their living environments; and high tech information workers and DIY no longer content, or even needing to allow corporate news media to dominate the public airwaves and technologies. For while the neoliberal project fosters the extension of capital and the logic of accumulation world-wide, it also creates conditions of radical possibility. Corporate globalization contributes to extending the technical and social networks of information and interpersonal communications technologies around the world, including similar systems of representation and communications.

The IMCistas seized this ultimate expression of capital's technological innovation and turned it against itself. The technology employed by capital to expand its power and reach had become creatively used to subvert their own structures of domination.

Thus far, the discussion of the liberatory power of the Internet has largely focused on pragmatic considerations. While this relatively new marvel has been used to foster communication across the globe, organize mass protest and as a vehicle for direct civil

disobedience, I argue that it has also served another function, one more difficult to identify, the creation of an alternate public sphere or as Kidd (2002, 2004) and others have called it a new "communications commons" where social actors can engage in that most human of characteristics, their ability to communicate openly and honestly and find a path towards consensus about the problems facing all of us in an increasingly globalized world. In the next section, I unpack the final piece necessary to support my overall argument and examine the very possibility of an alternate public sphere, both the idealized one originally articulated by Habermas and later formulations that can point the way, free from the contradictory historical and structural determinants that played such an important part in Habermas' early work.

Radical Media = Radical Public?

The Habermasian Public Sphere

An Overview. German social theorist Jürgen Habermas is arguably one of the most prolific writers of critical theory of the contemporary era, so much so that those working to translate his works into English are finding it difficult to keep up. While Habermas' work on critical theory spans a wide range of social conditions and institutions, a major theme running through all of his endeavors is an attempt to find the mechanisms necessary for people to harness what he argues is an innate (although not automatically present) ability to use reason, rational-critical debate and increased discourse for their own emancipation from the dominant institutions and social conditions present in late capitalist society. This theme is present in most of his major works including *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (1992) and the massive, two volume *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), considered by many to be one of the most meaningful contributions to contemporary critical theory in decades (Scott, 1995). The foundations for the idea that increased, non-constrained discourse and the use of reason serving a liberatory function can be found in his earliest major project, one of his most celebrated and simultaneously derided works, the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* originally published in 1962. This work was to be his *Habilitationsschift* or post-doctoral thesis for the Frankfurt School. Initially rejected by Adorno and Horkheimer, this work remained largely unnoticed until 27 years later when a new English translation was published by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Since that time it has become one of his

most heavily studied and critiqued works and a cornerstone of many researchers' efforts to understand the phenomena of the public sphere, the formation of public opinion and the role of rational-critical debate in the press and the political process of both late-capitalist societies and less frequently, developing nation states.

In a nutshell, *Structural Transformation* seeks to examine when and under what conditions the arguments of mixed companies can become authoritative bases for public opinion and then political action. His analysis examines the rise and fall of what he argues was the first truly public sphere existing outside the realm of the state. He explains this new sphere of social life as a function of the growth of early capitalism and the resultant creation of the bourgeois class and seeks to define the structural and social conditions necessary for this realm to engage in rational-critical debate where the status of the participants is ignored in the processes of opinion formation and decision-making (Calhoun, 1992). *Structural Transformation* is both historiography and social critique focusing on the economic, social and political conditions that existed in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that gave rise to this new category of bourgeois society and how the conditions necessary for early capitalist economic exchange allowed for the transformation of civil society, as first defined by Hegel, into a much broader sphere of public life. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, it examines how shifting social and economic conditions led to its eventual dissolution.

The Bourgeois Public Sphere was a new social space that became an arena for public opinion formation and political action against the dominance of the crown, royal courts or parliamentary state. The power of this new inherently social space was derived from three of its basic qualities. First, the medium of social exchange in this new space was the rational-critical debate of its actors. Second, this new space ignored the social status of the participants, placing their ability to put forward a cogent argument to the fore. Third, this discursive space, by virtue of its basic socio-structural make-up, granted universal access of participation to those who comprised it, namely educated property owners. According to Habermas, as capitalism continued to develop, this new public arena was transformed and appropriated by first the bourgeois constitutional state and later the welfare state. This appropriation transformed it such that true rational-critical debate as the basis of public opinion and decision-making was replaced by a type of communicative exchange characterized by the manipulation of that opinion (what he later called Strategic Communication) by competing interest groups, political parties and the

major institutions of the state itself. The early public sphere was lost to a new faux publicity that still exists today and has become a tool of manufacturing consent (tip of the hat to Chomsky) for the legitimization of state power.

In this section, I provide a brief sketch of Habermas' formulation of the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere, but while much of it includes his historical formulations (which have been critiqued by many for their accuracy), the real focus here is on the *qualities* of this discursive space and the examination of its downfall because it is the *ideal* of the public sphere and how that ideal was dismantled that is important for my examination of Indymedia. As Craig Calhoun writes in his introduction to *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, a collection of essays on *Structural Transformation*, "(Habermas) attempts to recover the enduringly valuable ideal of the bourgeois public sphere from its historically contradictory and partial realization" (p.4) and that it is this ideal that has value for those interested in the notion of human emancipation from state and capital domination.

In many ways, Habermas' exploration was an attempt to find a way out of the conceptual box Adorno and Horkheimer found themselves in at the Frankfurt School. If, as they asserted, the culture industry was as powerful and intertwined with mass society as they posited, there was little hope for any real emancipation of the people from capital (or state) control because mass society was inexorably polluted by its influence and no longer capable of marshalling the necessary will for their own emancipation. One of Habermas' goals, both here and in his later works, was to find a way out of this box, a social process that could counteract if not subsume the machinations of the culture industry. It was this desire that led him to the ideals embodied in the early bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth century – most specifically the ability for private individuals to form a new type of publicity, with rational-critical discourse at its base, that could challenge the power of the state. "The importance of the public sphere lies in its potential as a mode of social integration. Public discourse [and what Habermas later and more generally calls communicative action] is a possible mode of coordination of human life, as are state power and market economies. But money and power are nondiscursive modes of coordination, as Habermas' later theory stresses; they offer no intrinsic openings to the identification of reason and will, and they suffer from tendencies toward domination and reification" (Calhoun, 1992, p.6). It is the commitments he saw in the bourgeois public sphere (flawed and contradictory as it was) to empowering people to use their reason, to open

participation and to the rejection of social status that holds real potential for creating new spaces for a dominated people to explore and hopefully reject that domination. Reason and open communication themselves become the tools of liberation rather than the violence of revolution. *Structural Transformation* also helps explain what these new spaces (if in fact truly viable) are up against - namely a faux public sphere, that through its dominant institutions like the corporate media and its main product, the culture industry, has created the illusions of freedom and an empowered publicity that has legitimized state and corporate control. It is this analysis (and its extension in the Theory of Communicative Action) that I argue holds great promise for helping to understand the rise of radical media projects like Indymedia and that helps to explain why their internal processes and commitment to radical democratic principles (while messy and inefficient) are, on balance, positive in nature and provide a tangible example of the types of activity that could hold the potential for fundamental social change.

Rise of the Public Sphere. According to Habermas, during the Middle Ages publicity was purely representative in that power was embodied in the king or feudal lord who stood *before* the public and through decree decided all of the issues of state. This was the public realm, and all other aspects of social life including the family and economic exchange between families not directly connected to the royal courts resided in the private realm. In the seventeenth century, as capitalism began to develop more complex structures and relationships across Europe, such as long distance trade and the commodification of goods and services to be traded in a market setting, there was a blending of the activities formerly segregated between the public and private realms. The conjugal family, which had long served as the chief socializing structure for the vast majority of people and comprised the bulk of their economic activity, began to take on more and more qualities of a public through the cooperative necessities of trade and commodity market capitalism. Economic activity was still firmly planted in the private realm (with the state or public realm only intervening in select areas such as the levying of taxes), but more and more of that activity took place in a marketplace outside the conjugal family. This new area of economic activity, while still fundamentally private and free of state control, comprised what Hegel termed Civil society in his *Philosophy of Right* (1821). Civil society was the sphere of production and exchange, a sphere that incorporated the formerly purely private interests and activities of the conjugal family and the growing public nature of trade and commodity exchange. Over time, as more and more social activity took place in Civil Society, social

interactions between formerly "private" individuals (private insomuch as their decision making and exercise of power existed solely in the conjugal family) began to take on a more public quality. Those operating within Civil Society, namely those with property to exchange and the education necessary for those exchanges to take place on an equal footing, began to address the issues they faced for the continued growth and success of their economic endeavors. It was from these early discussions and decision-making structures, necessitated by the needs of the growing marketplace, that the new public sphere began to emerge.

As time went on and capitalistic economic activity increased, Civil society began directly to involve itself with matters that had traditionally been firmly planted in the public realm but which had a direct impact on Civil Society. This, coupled with the growth of national and territorial power states to protect economic activity, necessitated the creation of a new sphere, one that was private (family/economy) but which had to address matters of the public (state). Simultaneously, as the geographic distances of trade and other economic activities increased, so did the exchange of information regarding both internal matters of the state and those in geographically remote areas that influenced trade and the commodity marketplace. Thus the printed word became infinitely more important as did literacy for survival and success in Civil Society. As more and more participants in trade and the other aspects of the new bourgeois economy increased, so did the need for this information to be shared on a broader scale – information about the private took on a more public function. The importance of this information meant the commodification of news and as this new commodity was shared across a broader and broader spectrum, Civil society itself began to discuss and debate the impact of state actions on their activities.

This was the first time, according to Habermas, that the private began to involve itself in those matters that had traditionally been firmly planted in the realm of the public. "It became possible to recognize society in the relationships and organizations created for sustaining life and to bring these into public relevance by bringing them forward as interests for public discussion and/or actions of the state. In this way a certain educated elite came to think of itself as constituting the public and thereby transformed the abstract notion of the *publicum* as counterpart to public authority into a much more concrete set of practices" (Calhoun, 1992, p.9). Simply put, private individuals began to see themselves as constituting their own public, not mere objects of state actions but as potential active participants in the actions and interests of the

state. The tools of this newly emerging public were the use of its own reason and capacity to criticize the policies and practices of the state. As Habermas writes, "Because, on the one hand, the society now confronting the state clearly separated a private domain from public authority and because, on the other hand, it turned the reproduction of life into something transcending the confines of private domestic authority and becoming a subject of public interest, that zone of continuous administrative contact became 'critical' also in the sense that it provoked the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason" (Habermas, 1989 p. 24).

The point here is not merely that Civil society discovered that it had collective interests that may be in opposition to those of the state, but that they were developing the tools through which to engage in rational-critical discourse on state matters. It was this practice, the use of reason to critique and formulate alternatives to state control, that came to be the primary feature of this new bourgeois public sphere. "The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their own reason" (Habermas, 1989, p.27). The new public sphere was bourgeois not simply because of the class of the members who comprised it (educated, property owners) but because society itself had become bourgeois and educated property owners were the only social actors with the independence and relative freedom to meaningfully engage in it (Calhoun, 1992).

The Literary Public Sphere. This early public sphere was a *social* space, but one created by the exchange of commodities and social labor, existing often in confrontation with the existing power structures, their medium being the use of their reason. They still were not a ruling body nor did they have any formalized publicity – that would come later. As the commodification of information increased and the reading public began to grow so did the types of written materials available for topics of discussion for this debating public. Plays, literary journals and novels began to increase in scope and subject matter and the bourgeoning public sphere began to embrace these works in surprisingly formalized ways. By the mid-18th century a new and vibrant literary public sphere arose. Centered in coffee houses and salons, which were growing in popularity, the literary public sphere debated journals, periodicals, plays and other

written works. It was here that the distinctively modern notion of culture as an autonomous realm developed and through this newly liberated realm of discursive action the full realization of the bourgeois public sphere as a political force developed. "Inasmuch as culture became a commodity and thus finally evolved into 'culture' in the specific sense [as something that pretends to exist merely for its own sake], it was claimed as the ready topic of a discussion through which an audience-oriented subjectivity communicated with itself" (Habermas, 1989, p.29). The literary public sphere contributed to the rise of a truly politicized public sphere in several ways. First, the literary public sphere developed the institutional bases from which the public sphere could become the political sphere; the coffee houses, salons and literary clubs established a social infrastructure through which political ideas and issues of the day could be debated. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the idea of "critical reading" was established where the reader was not merely a well wherein ideas could be deposited but an active participant in the meaning making of literary works. The debates and discussions of these literary works created the conceptual frameworks and discursive skills that could easily be employed in discussion of the issues of state. "The process in which the state-governed public sphere was appropriated by the public of private people making use of their reason and was established as a sphere of criticism of public authority was one of functionally converting the public sphere in the world of letters (the literary public sphere) already equipped with institutions of the public and with forums for discussion" (Habermas, 1989, p.51).

This new literary public sphere and its connected institutions all shared four basic characteristics that remained in place as it became more politicized, characteristics that form the backbone of Habermas' idealized, now non-existent public sphere. First, the status of the participants in the discussions was ignored. As Habermas writes there was the creation of "a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether" (Habermas, 1989, p. 36). This is easy to understand not as a function of the generosity of this new public sphere or any tangible rules governing its operation but because the class interests of those participating were extremely similar if not the same. "The notion of common interest in truth or right policy thus undergirded the bracketing of status differences" (Calhoun, 1992, p.13). Second, since issues of status were ignored, the power of the argument being advanced and the reason behind it became tantamount; the power of critical-rational argument itself became the sole basis for making decisions and guiding the discourse. Third, the

issues available for discussion became limitless for the first time. Concerns that were once under the sole purview of the state or the church could now be discussed outside of those institutional confines. This new discursive realm saw all matters of common concern as up for discussion. Finally, anyone with access to the cultural products being discussed had access to the sphere of debate. While this group was still relatively small, it could not close itself off from new entrants who became literate and owned property, thus freeing them from the direct intellectual domination of the king, lord or other ruling state interest. "However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who – insofar as they were propertied and educated – as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion" (Habermas, 1989, p. 37). As this new literary sphere became more and more institutionalized across European bourgeois societies, the topic they discussed turned more and more to the fundamental relationships between governing bodies and the governed – the legitimacy of the state to rule. Thus the literary public sphere began to transform into a bona-fide political force.

The Political Public Sphere. As the bourgeois public sphere, grounded in its institutions of literary criticism (coffee houses, salons, etc.), began to expand the scope of issues up for discussion to include the very nature of the rule of law and the question of the state's moral authority to serve as the source of those laws, a gap developed between the traditional representative publicity and the newly developed public sphere. The bourgeois public sphere still had no direct power; it could not impose laws, but it envisioned itself more and more as the logical and moral source from which those laws should flow. In time the bourgeois public sphere began to assert itself as a check on the absolute authority of the state, and the state was forced to respond. It was this pressure on the state, a form of crisis Habermas argues, that led to the rise of the bourgeois constitutional state, which existed to placate the public sphere with laws designed to protect the basic rights of its participants. These changes maintained the basic private/public separation between Civil society and the state, but they also, for the first time, saw the state positioning itself as a bridge between what was formerly public (state) and what had been private (Civil Society). This relationship enabled the state to give the impression that the public sphere was in fact a meaningful participant in the process of governing and that the

rational-critical debate of its actors was the source law and by extension, state power itself. Laws then could be justified as the product of reason (public sphere) that had to be coupled with the will to enforce those laws with that power being vested in the state.

By linking itself to the rational-critical debate of the public sphere, the state could claim that is was not a dominating force but a product of popular reason so over time the public sphere, which had existed as a check on state power, became the primary claim for the legitimacy of that power. Remember, according to Habermas, it was the inherent independence of Civil Society, free from state control, that gave the bourgeois class the freedom to participate. He writes, "The social precondition for this developed bourgeois public sphere was a market that, tending to be liberalized, made affairs in the sphere of social reproduction as much as possible a matter of private people left to themselves and so finally completed the privatization of Civil Society" (Habermas, 1989, p.74). As the state responded to the new political demands of the public sphere it blurred that division and thus, through a series of complex socio-structural changes, sowed the seeds for its eventual downfall. The political public sphere was doomed to disintegrate.

The Transformation of the Public Sphere. In essence, the breakdown of the public sphere started as a function of its own growth. As more and more people engaged in debate about the basic nature and legitimacy of the state, thus prompting the state to respond by involving itself in the affairs of Civil society to legitimize its own power, the distinction between public and private was lost and with it the base from which the public sphere arose. The state for the first time began to assume formative functions through programs to address poverty and actively build a larger middle class. State (public) and institutions of Civil society (private) merged into a much larger and more complicated social complex. The conjugal family (more specifically the male heads of those families) lost power as contributors to the public sphere as the state took on increasing roles in general socialization. Additionally, labor and the family was separated from one another and the rational-critical debate of formerly independent actors gave way to those individuals becoming mere consumers of ideas and culture. "As private organizations began increasingly to assume public power on the one hand, while the state penetrated the private realm on the other. State and society, once distinct, became interlocked" and "the blurring of relations between private and public involved centrally the loss of the notion

that private life (family, economy) created autonomous relatively equal persons who in public discourse might address the public or general interest" (Calhoun, 1992, p.21).

Habermas identifies two direct effects of this transformation. First, the inherent contradiction of a public sphere based on open participation but which was closed to all members of the public not included in the bourgeoisie became the dominant issue of discussion. The inequities present in Civil Society, which had now been identified by the state as fundamental social problems, became divisive issues. Also, with the rise of larger economic bodies such as the formation of corporations that further segregated work and family, these class divisions became more pronounced. Second, as these class divisions became more apparent the idea of a consensus on a singular general interest gave way to the idea of reaching a compromise between competing separate interests. This in turn led to the conceptualization of a strong state to remedy these conflicts between competing interests, and the bourgeois welfare state was born. Civil society itself was now transformed as the world of work was removed from the private realm and entered into the public realm, reducing the private sphere to that of merely the family. Civil society, the private world of economic activity, was all but eliminated and with it the base of the bourgeois public sphere.

This shift dramatically impacted the communicative world of the social order as rational-critical debate became fetishized as mere community involvement with leisure becoming the principle social outlet for the actors of the private realm. "The key tendency was to replace the shared, critical activity of public discourse by a more passive culture consumption on the one hand and an apolitical sociability on the other" (Calhoun, 1992, p. 23). Culture then ceased being a group creation through the process of critical reading and debate and became merely another product, created and marketed by both economic groups that were forming larger and larger institutions (corporations) and the institutions of the state itself, for the mere consumption of a mass audience. So then, the culture industry as envisioned by the Frankfurt School began to assert its dominance.

Mass communication, characterized by its one-way flow of information and ideas to a waiting and consumptive public increased, replacing the formerly intimate communication that characterized the public sphere and the rational-critical discourse it helped to create.

The increasingly commodified mass media became the dominant shaper of ideas, and since this new communicative realm answered to the rules of market, the quality of its content

shifted away from providing the educated public the information it needed to critically debate the issues of the day towards leisure products geared for a mass audience. More importantly, this new mass mediated communication shifted towards the manipulation of public opinion to further legitimize the interests of the state and the growing institutions (both public and private) that began to assert their dominance. Isolated public intellectuals were replaced by well-paid cultural functionaries and the avant garde itself was institutionalized. This allowed the educated public to split into competing interests, each trying to maximize its position within the welfare state and the tools of reason and critical-debate were appropriated to become the primary vehicles to advance the needs of these competing interests rather than the finding of consensus to advance a more general common interest. Thus the public sphere became an impossibility, and the critical publicity that could serve as a check on state power became a manipulative publicity designed to justify it. This new mediatized public became nothing more than a rubber stamp for the ideas already established within the institutions of state and corporate power, called on only when needed for public acclimation while being fundamentally exercised from the real power of building societal consensus.

The public still gathered in settings that were social and inherently public, but the *nature* of those gatherings fundamentally changed. "Individual satisfaction of needs might be achieved in a public fashion, namely in the company of many others; but a public sphere itself did not emerge from such a situation…rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, and the web of public communication unraveled of individual reception, however uniform in mode" (Habermas, 1989, p161). The public sphere became a distorted reflection of its former self and the social activity of reasoned debate gave way to leisure and the consumption of products from these larger institutions and the state itself. "In the course of our century, the bourgeois forms of sociability have found substitutes that have one tendency in common despite their regional and national diversity; abstinence from literary and political debate. On the new model the convivial discussion among individuals gave way to more or less noncommittal group activities" (Habermas, 1989, p.163). In contemporary terms, the public houses of old were replaced by the sports bars of today, filled with television sets beaming their apolitical staged social events and messages of consumption to uncritical eyes whose discourse is tied to the carefully crafted spectacle before them.

This complex process of state intervention into those spaces that had formerly existed in the private realm (Civil Society) and thus completely transforming the public sphere was termed "Refuedalization" (Habermas, 1989). Publicity had essentially become manipulative in nature. Interest groups looking to gain an advantage from the institutions of the welfare state, and the state itself, had taken over the debate and the power to talk over others though increased access by those with the money and power to influence the mass media subsumed the rational-critical debate of the bourgeois public sphere. Consensus was eliminated in favor of forced compromise and the ability for private persons gathering together as a public no longer was a foundation from which to challenge institutional dominance. All that remained was an enforced compromise between competing interests. Publicity once again became purely representative. The kings and lords of the past had been replaced but in name only and afforded even greater power through the new legitimacy of the illusion of public input and a public opinion that had been manufactured rather than developed by a critical public.

Political Transformation and Public Opinion. This social transformation of the bourgeois public sphere has had dramatic negative consequences for the political order in late capitalist societies. Habermas argues that the prime example of this degeneration of the public's role in the political process can be seen in the transformation of the both the quality and role of the contemporary press. The press, which had become known as the "Fourth Estate" in eighteenth century Britain for its ability and willingness to transmit the ideas of the bourgeois public sphere critical of both the power of the Crown and of Parliament, has shifted in both form and function. The press, now itself a competing interest in the welfare state, no longer simply *transmits* the ideas of a critical public but have become the *generator* of ideas that align with its own interests and those of both its advertisers and the representative state, which provides both the guarantees of its right to operate and the regulations as to how it will function.

Additionally, as the press has become more commercialized with advertising as its primary source of revenue, the methods of advertising *products* have become the same as promoting the *ideas* of both the competing private interests and the state itself. Publicity, which under the public sphere meant the exposing of political domination by the state through the rational-critical debate of individuals in small groups, has become a mass publicity, simply consuming ideas through the well coordinated faux public realm of the mass media. Individuals realize their connections to the public not through discussion or debate but through consuming

the ideas marketed to them by the press. The state itself treats the public as consumers; marketing *to* them the preconfigured ideas that align with the interests of both the major economic institutions and the state. This consumption gives people the illusion that they are active participants in deciding the issues of the day – publicity now means "reading the paper" replacing an active role in debating those issues. As Habermas writes, "The world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only" (Habermas, 1989, P. 171).

The prominence of advertising in the mass media also contributed to the disintegration of the public sphere because it represented a blurring of the public and private spheres with the primacy placed on the private (economy) over the public (state). This dominance of the private over the public is also manifested in that the state, as mentioned above, has appropriated the tools and tactics of the private to manage popular opinion regarding state matters. The insidious and pervasive nature of these tactics has led to a public that no longer has the spaces nor the skills to serve as a critical check on state power and domination. Compromise and consensus have moved from private individuals operating together as a public to the major institutions, trade associations and political pressure groups that, whenever needed, bombard the public with carefully crafted messages designed to gain adherence on a particular issue or ideology. Rational-critical debate over complex affairs has been reduced to false dichotomies leaving individuals to believe that have made a choice and contributed to the public good where no choice really existed. "The awakened readiness of the consumers involves the false consciousness that as critically reflecting private people they contribute responsibly to public opinion" (Habermas, 1989, p.194).

A well paid intellectual elite has been created to help further this illusion. The public can participate vicariously through these choreographed exchanges of the punditry and align themselves with one-side or the other, believing that they themselves had participated in the process of opinion formation and decision-making. These "professional brains" offer ideas as mere intellectual products to be bought or not, leaving the public out of the active process of creating them, thus freeing them to engage in all the other leisure products offered by the mass media and the culture industry. "The sounding board of an educated stratum tutored in the public use of reason has been shattered: the public is split apart into minorities of specialists [e.g., lawyers, academics] who put their reason to use nonpublicly and the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical" (Habermas, 1989, p.175). "The public

sphere becomes a setting for states and corporate actors to develop legitimacy not by responding appropriately to an independent and critical public but by seeking to instill in social actors motivations that conform to the needs of the overall system dominated by those states and corporate actors" (Calhoun, 1992, p. 26). The public becomes lost in this process, replaced by competing interests who dominate the discussion, leaving little room for real participation for anyone but the professional punditry class. "Direct mutual contact between the members of the public was lost in the degree that the parties, having become integral parts of a system of special interest associations under public law, had to transmit and represent at any given time the interests of several such organizations that grew out of the private sphere into the public sphere" (Habermas, 1989, p.204). Those who seek to become the members of this refeudalized representative publicity also have taken on the strategies of advertising. Politicians market themselves in empty sound bytes designed to manipulate the public into believing that they are "nice people" who are "just like them," their personal qualities taking the place of solid positions on complex matters.

This illusion of publicity has been further buttressed by the fact that the rise of a mass distributed media full of information about the affairs of state and economy coupled with a growing literate public has seemed to address the bourgeois public sphere's greatest contradiction. The bourgeois public sphere was characterized by open access to all who had the freedom afforded by being a member of the bourgeoisie, owning property and having an education. However, the bulk of the public, the proletariat, was closed off from this discursive space. The rise of a mass media (coupled with liberal changes in the welfare state such as increased voting and representative democracy) enabled those who had been formerly denied access to this critical discursive space to have a seat at the table for the first time. The questions over what that table looks like and how it relates to the passage of laws and other state mechanisms are ignored. Also, Habermas agues, simply opening the realm of discussion and debate to a broader public has, paradoxically, actually contributed to the public sphere's demise. The rise of the welfare state and other forms of liberal representative democracies have afforded greater rights and increased access to participation of a broader public, but as participation (or in the contemporary case the illusion of participation) has increased so has the need for the state and the powerful private institutions to manage consent. As discussed earlier, as the state has blurred the lines between private and public and merged Civil society into a singular complex,

the state needs to create a fictional public sphere made up of an informed and engaged public to maintain its legitimacy. As the number of potential participants in this public has increased, so has the need to manage and control opinion formation to maintain that legitimacy. This has by extension weakened the possibility of truly critical public sphere because the need to employ the tactics of political marketing have increased, replacing rational-critical debate.

This is not to say that the inclusion of more and more people are the problem or that opening up the avenues of communication to the "unwashed masses" is what has destroyed the public sphere. It is based more on the fact that that faux public sphere and the false consciousness it creates has become more pervasive, and the interests of the powerful now seem to be the interests of the people on a much broader scale. Also, Habermas is not arguing that the inclusion of these new entrants (those previously denied access to the bourgeois public sphere) is what has contributed to its degeneration. "The weakening of the public is not just a matter of new [lower class] entrants being mere consumers or substandard participants. On the contrary, Habermas asserts [with some empirical evidence], the consumption of mass culture increases with wealth, status, and urbanization. The most that can be said is that consumption levels are highest for those whose wealth has outstripped their education. And the result is that the public sphere as a whole is transformed, not just diluted around the edges" (Calhoun, 1992 p. 25). The dramatic increase in the size of *potential* actors in a critical public also contributes to the weakening of the notion of a single common good – the very idea of publicity itself is denigrated. "The transformation involves a literal disintegration. With the loss of a notion of general interest and the rise of a consumption orientation, the members of the public sphere lose their common ground. The consumption orientation of mass culture produces a proliferation of products designed to please various tastes. Not only are these not subjected, according to Habermas, to much critical discussion; none of them reaches the whole of the public" (Calhoun, 1992, p.27).

Public opinion then has become that "False Consciousness" that Marx articulated in his early collection of Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, the public believing that their interests are their own when really they are merely the articulation of the interests of the dominant economic powers. Public opinion has been reduced from that of a true publicity to a manipulative publicity, one that is carefully crafted and managed by the institutional powers of the state and its primary vehicle for its own legitimization, the mass media.

Recreating the Public Sphere. In *Structural Transformation*, Habermas is relatively light on ideas about how to recreate an inherently public space where private individuals can come together and, through the exercise of rational-critical debate free from the baggage of social status, meaningfully participate in the process of challenging the dominant institutions of the state and the growing power of the corporatocracy. Much of the difficulty here is that Habermas' own account of the rise and fall of this social space suffers from several internal contradictions. Perhaps the most glaring contradiction is the fact that, as the public sphere expanded beyond its early bourgeois roots, it began to disintegrate. If, as Habermas asserted, a characteristic of this space was universal access but that access was closed to only those who owned property for exchange in the commodity marketplace and the education level to engage in the discussions, how would the needs of the proletariat ever find their way into discussions about a single common good? Second, if it was the intrusion of the public (state) into the realm of the private (Civil Society, family), would the recreation of a truly public sphere necessitate the reversal of state restrictions and regulations on economic activity (such as worker rights, minimum wage etc.) which is a cornerstone of the current neo-liberalizing mission of global capital? At no time does Habermas argue for a return to these early conditions of bourgeois society, thus making it exceedingly difficult for him to find the institutional bases from which a newly reorganized public sphere could emerge. The conditions of late capitalist society and the gains made by institutionalizing the welfare state are not conducive to the re-creation of the public sphere along the same structural and historical lines as the one he describes. His answers to these questions remain incomplete and less than satisfactory, but he does hint at some possible solutions.

First, since the private and public realms have become so inexorably intertwined, the private realm of the economy has too much influence on the affairs of the public. Now the state must actively interfere even more to ensure that the public has equal access to participation. Second, the state must also work to provide the public an equal share in the benefits of the welfare state and by extension the public realm. Third, the presence of highly specialized experts that have been afforded a supervisory role over the public debate must be removed and the real public must be afforded access to the internal processes of the more and more complex institutions that dominate social life. Here he is calling for a transparency in the process; the people must be given the information about the inner workings of state bureaucracies and the

private economic powers that influence so that they can actually engage in a real debate, free from the false dichotomies of the carefully managed world of "public relations." Fourth, the power of late capitalism must be marshaled to better meet the needs of everyone, the creation of a truly affluent society. Expansion is now the only way to resurrect any of the ideal he saw in the bourgeois public sphere. "Any attempt at restoring the liberal public sphere through the reduction of its plebiscitarily expanded form will only serve to weaken even more the residual functions within it" (Habermas, 1989, p.208). Habermas suggests that these problems must be tackled one institutional complex at a time, to the democratization and reintegration of the dominant institutions, like the media. As Habermas argues, "To be able to satisfy these functions in the sense of democratic opinion and consensus formation their inner structure must first be organized in accord with the principle of publicity and must institutionally permit and intra-party or intra-association democracy – to allow for unhampered communication and public rational-critical debate." (Habermas, 1989, p.209).

Critiques

Structural Transformation has given rise to an incredibly diverse and rich body of criticism. Most of Habermas' critics have maintained the value of his work as an idealized framework that can serve as a jumping off point for wider discussions about civil society and the roles of publicity, the media and social movements. "The most important destiny of Habermas' first book may prove to be this: not to stand as an authoritative statement but to be an immensely fruitful generator of new research, analysis and theory" (Calhoun, 1992, p41).

Nicholas Garnham (1992) summarizes some of the dominant points of criticism. First, Habermas neglects the importance of alternative public spheres (i.e., trade unions) that developed alongside his bourgeois model. Second, he overly idealizes the bourgeois public sphere and does not take into account internal conflicts that arose as the new bourgeoisie fought for positions of status and power in the new political economy. Third, his exclusion of the household and other private areas prohibited the inclusion of major issues of gender and the division of labor from his analysis. Fourth, his model of public discourse, as described both in *Public Sphere* and later works, does not address the inevitable presence of conflict and the continuing need for compromise. Fifth, his conception of the public sphere (and later TCA) does not adequately take into account communication that is not directed to the reaching of consensus,

thus neglecting a wide spectrum of human communicative behaviors. Similarly, his focus on reaching consensus on controversial topics "neglects both the playful aspects of communicative action, which leads too sharp a distinction between information and entertainment and to a neglect of the link" (Garnham, 1992, p360). Finally, Habermas' discussion of the bourgeois public sphere's transformation by the rise of large-scale corporations and their power to manipulate public perception through media does not allow for the possibilities of the public-service model of state intervention. (This last critique is not as widespread as the others and may arise from Garnham's former role as a producer on the state operated BBC.)

Habermas' almost lackadaisical treatment of gender is perhaps one of the most common areas of criticism, which is understandable. If as Habermas freely admits women were unable to participate in this bourgeois public sphere but were relegated to the completely private realm of the conjugal family, how could this analysis hold any hope for helping to create a participatory public realm of rational critical discourse when fifty-percent of the population was excluded? Nancy Fraser has written extensively about the concept of publicity and how it impacts and is subsequently impacted by the social constructions of gender. Fraser writes that Habermas' discussion of the public sphere is "an indispensable resource" for "those of us who remain committed to theorizing the limits of democracy in late capitalistic societies" (Fraser, 1992, p.109). "It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually different from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state" (Fraser, 1992, p.111). She also points out the value of articulating a space that exists outside the manifestations of the marketplace, where ideas are exchanged for their own sake rather than for buying and selling and what happens when lines are blurred and the market philosophy intrudes on that space.

However, she articulates four main areas of critique that she argues makes the idea of a public sphere more useful in contemporary society. First, Fraser argues that the "bracketing" of social inequities Habermas describes is not the same as eliminating them altogether. The public sphere Habermas describes in the historical sense, with its requirement of property ownership, education and maleness, actually became its own form of institutionalized inequality, and there have been alternate publics throughout history, constituted by women (and others) as their own subordinated group. Habermas' failure to account for these nonbourgeois publics leads him to

idealize the wrong one. "We can no longer assume that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere was simply an unrealized utopian ideal; it was also a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule" (Fraser, 1992, p.166).

Second, Fraser argues that a more useful view of publicity is one that incorporates not a single public sphere but multiple publics. She writes, "I contend that in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public" (Fraser, 1992, p.122). In essence, Fraser argues that if there were to be a single public sphere, it would still advantage dominant groups, and there would be no discursive space for subordinate groups to discuss amongst themselves their own needs and desires. She argues that history has shown that women, people of color and gays and lesbians have often found that they need to create their own space where they can communicate about the issues important to them free from any interference from others. These alternative publics, which she calls "subaltern counterpublics," are parallel discursive spaces that enable these groups to discover ways to formulate their own identities in ways that allow them to be oppositional.

Third, Fraser argues that Habermas' distinction between the private (conjugal family) and the public (state and economy) is an artificial distinction, one that has traditionally disadvantaged women. Habermas' distinction takes many critical issues off the table such as domestic violence which she argues until recently was seen as a private matter, not a subject of public debate. Finally, she argues that Habermas' public sphere and its required distinction between private and public creates "weak publics" and strong publics." The decision making apparatuses of the state become strong publics because it is there that the power is truly invested, even in the bourgeois model. The discursive realm of those not in power becomes a weak public, one that can exert and influence but has no real power. While she acknowledges the current representative form of decision-making is clearly advantageous to earlier forms of social governance, the strict separation Habermas describes does not allow for strong publics not connected to the state. For example, workplaces and communities that are self-organized and managed are arenas of both opinion formation and decision-making that are left out of his analysis.

Habermas wrestled with these issues and others in the years following the republication of *Structural Transformation*. The major shift in his thinking is that he has moved away from the notion of the public sphere as the product of socio institutional forces towards the idea that

the potential for a society to realize the ideals of the public sphere he envisioned and the use of rational-critical debate to serve as the basis for social consensus exists in the world of interpersonal relationships and the communicative spaces they engender. "Habermas thus turns away from the historically specific grounding for democracy [though the public sphere remains the institutional locus for democratic political practice] toward reliance on a transhistorical capacity of human communication" (Calhoun, 1992, p.31). This shift in focus can also be viewed as one away from social *process* (the historically and structurally specific conditions of the bourgeois public sphere) towards the *product* of that public space, an open communicative realm where social and political opinions are based on rational-critical debate and the real process of consensus formation as opposed to manipulation.

Rather than reaching back towards any "golden age" to find the socio-structural conditions for human liberation, Habermas now focuses on the inherent nature of humans as communicative beings to find the promise for people to realize their own domination and supplant human relationships themselves as the locus for social integration rather than the structural bases of the economy and state power. The ideal of the public sphere, he argues, can be rescued by focusing more generally on the qualities of human discourse and the social conditions that impact the qualities of that discourse. The structural conditions of the public sphere are viewed less as the base from which these ideals originate, rather, it is the evolution of human communication itself that is the source for the potentially liberating discursive space of the public sphere.

In the following section I briefly track Habermas' intellectual journey from the early formulations of the public sphere to the more fully realized Theory of Communicative Action (TCA), highlighting some of the major benchmarks on the way, especially those that have direct relevance to the Theory of Communicative Action. Following that, I very briefly highlight the major elements of TCA, especially those that tie back to the idealized public sphere and contribute to understanding the project of the Independent Media Centers.

From Strategic Communication to Communicative Action

A Critical Methodology

Habermas' shift away from the historical specificity of *Structural Transformation* towards a more general theory of human interaction, socialization and how forms of dominance

are integrated into the roots of the social order is more than merely a shift in the locus of his analysis. In fact, the scope of Habermas' effort touches on virtually every aspect of social theory and inquiry. At its base is a departure from previous philosophical positions on the very nature of knowledge itself. As Habermas' intellectual project has continued to develop he (like Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School) has come to reject the primacy of positivism as the sole basis for knowledge and understanding, he has set out to reconstruct the very nature of historical materialism in order to provide a truly new philosophical space from which his theoretical work can develop. His approach is not to reject positivism and positivistic science completely but to give it its proper place as merely one amongst many forms of knowledge and inquiry. Habermas acknowledges, as did Marx and Hegel before him, that knowledge itself is a product of historically specific patterns of social relations. However, where Marx saw these relations through the simplistic lens of the labor/capital relationship, Habermas argues that a social theory of knowledge and by extension a critical theory of society itself can not rest solely on economic interests but must integrate multiple human interests and by extension multiple forms of knowledge. He articulates three fundamental areas of human interests as the sources of three forms of human inquiry and knowledge (Habermas, 1968).

The first area of human interest is that of "technical control" which arises from labor/capital/material relationships and is geared toward manipulating and maximizing the material world for positive outcomes. This interest is the basis of the analytical-empirical knowledge that is found in the natural sciences. The second area of interest he identifies is "practical understanding" which is the product of human relations both within and outside of labor relations. Here he is referring to the processes of meaning making between social actors and the formation of bonds that create culture and community and in turn the ways in which those contexts change the social relations themselves. Habermas argues that the form of knowledge rooted to this area of interest is at once empirical, analytical and interpretive. The third area of interest is one of "emancipation." This is the realm of critical theory and is concerned with exposing the dominant forces of the time (both material conditions and ideological beliefs) and the ways in which those beliefs distort human interaction, thus raising the awareness of social actors such that they can truly understand the forces impacting their experiences, world views and social relations. This understanding gives those actors an

intellectual and conceptual freedom that enables them to work to minimize the influences of those material and ideological forces.

Empirical-analytical methods are only applicable for those issues related to the cognitive interest of technical control (materialism). Interpretative or "historical-hermeneutic" methods are applicable for examining those phenomena that occur in the sphere of human interaction and culture. Habermas argues the these methods are not sufficient to provide the analytical tools to examine patterns of social domination, which he argues is the inevitable outcome of human communication and social action that has been distorted by the ideologies of the ruling classes. These ideologies that are taken up and adopted by the subordinate groups (a process described in detail by several different sources, as Alienation by Marx, Rationalization by Weber and the culture industry by the Frankfurt School). "Whereas the technical and practical interests are 'primary' bases of knowledge production, the emancipatory interest is a derivative 'meta-interest." (Scott, 1995, p 233). This meta-interest is a product of human evolution itself. As John Scott explains,

> If human evolution is seen as a process of reflexive self-formation – a process in which people seek to acquire higher levels of self-understanding and self-determination – human life cannot be seen simply in terms of technical control and practical understanding. Reflexive awareness of the social conditions under which thoughts and actions are produced leads to a recognition of the technical and practical interests that shape knowledge. This reflection expands the self-knowledge of the species and contributes to its emancipation from historically formed constraints. This form of knowledge comprises criticism that can be organized into the rational self-knowledge of an individual or species. Critical theory, then, destroys ideology and restores to people an awareness of their historical location as actors under constraints that can be rationally appraised and can, therefore, be fully understood and brought under control. (Scott, 1995, p. 233).

The unique nature of domination and the human interest in emancipation requires a new methodological base that lies somewhere between the positivistic world of science and the fuzzier realm of philosophy. This necessitated a new practice that could provide for an analysis of the symbolic nature of human language and interaction but which was not reduced to the

purely interpretative nature of past efforts. This methodological practice would integrate interpretive understanding of the symbolic social world, a critique of ideology and a historically oriented analysis of social systems that integrated elements of the positivistic endeavors of the natural sciences.

In the introduction to his translation of *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979), Thomas McCarthy describes Habermas' methodology and its resultant critical theory as "empirical and scientific without being reducible to empirical-analytic science, philosophical in the sense of critique but not of presuppositionless first philosophy, historical without being historical, and practical in the sense of being oriented to an emancipatory political practice but not to technological-administrative control." (Habermas, 1979, p. vii). In sum, the adequate social methodology should integrate interpretive understanding plus a critique of ideology plus an historically oriented analysis of social systems. This marked a departure from Parson's structural-functionalism and the broader notion of systems theory with their focus on clearly distinct structures and systems which Habermas argued were unable to capture the full range of social action where the boundaries between systems/structures/social actors are constantly being blurred, eliminated and recreated based on social interactions, and the communicative processes of meaning making. "Habermas concluded that if social systems analysis incorporated the historico-hermeneutic and critical dimensions as suggested, it could no longer be understood as a form of strictly empirical-analytic science; it would have to be transformed into an historically oriented theory of society with practical intent. The form such a theory would take was that of a 'theoretically generalized history' or 'general interpretation' which reflectively grasped the formative process of society as a whole, reconstructing the contemporary situation with a view not only to its past but to its anticipated future. It would be a critical theory of society" (Habermas, 1979, p. 37).

Universal Pragmatics

In *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979) Habermas attempts to flex the muscles of his methodological approach and articulates a linguistic theory that examines the ways in which the structures of human speech itself are constantly changing and the impacts those changes have had and are continuing to have on the evolution of the social order. He

attempts to construct a general theory of communication, which he calls "Universal Pragmatics," which he argues can become a base for the formulation of a general theory of socialization, that he believes is basically the acquisition of communicative competence. While Universal Pragmatics goes into great detail about the nature of human communication and the structures of speech itself, its primary focus is to zero in the processes of communicative action or the reaching of an understanding between social actors. It is this process that is central to human socialization and as such is the point at which those systemic distortions that lead to patterns of domination can best be understood, critiqued and eventually overcome.

Drawing on the linguistics work of Chomsky and J.L. Austin, Universal Pragmatics posits that communicative action (process of reaching understanding) has at its base the adherence to four different validity claims of human speech (Habermas, 1979). First, the actor must use an utterance that is understandable (comprehensibility). Second, the actor must provide the listener with something that can be understood and judged (truth). Third, the speaker must use tactics that make the information they are trying to convey understandable (truthfulness). Finally, there must be a cooperative process of coming to an understanding of what was uttered (rightness). In order for communicative action to take place, the participants must suppose that these validity claims are justified – where that supposition does not occur, communicative action is distorted. Unfortunately, there is rarely a full agreement on all four of these claims and most speech acts exist in a gray area in between which leads to a shift away from reaching an understanding and toward winning the point (strategic communication) or a cessation of communication altogether.

In essence Habermas argues that an empirical-analytical approach is suited only to the investigation of what constitutes a proper grammatical sentence which only satisfies the validity claim of comprehensibility; the other validly claims that must be met in order to reach understanding (truth, truthfulness and rightness) can't be understood employing this approach. "A successful utterance must satisfy three additional validity claims; it must count as true for the participants insofar as it represents something in the world; it must count as truthful insofar as it expresses something intended by the speaker; and it must count as right insofar as it conforms to socially recognized expectations" Habermas, 1979, p. 33). In other words grammar, which can be explained through an empirical-analytical approach, only represents one piece of "communication competence;" the other three, which can only be explained through a process of

reconstruction, must be met for understanding to take place. Traditional methods could not fully explicate these complexities. Positivism and empirical-analytical methods had to be augmented by the other two forms of knowledge to fully understand these processes.

Here Habermas is articulating the idea of what he calls the "double structure of speech" which first year communication students are taught as the content and relational dimensions of any message, both verbal and nonverbal. The content dimension is propositional and objectified and is meant to convey information. The relational dimension is an "illocutionary act," one that is non-objectified and is geared more towards conveying the underlying feelings and intentions of the communicator and which serves the function of relationship building and maintenance. Habermas refers to these as "meaning" (the objectified locutionary act) and "force" (the relational illocutionary act). In everyday communication one or the other can take precedence. "We have seen that communication in language can take place only when the participants, in communicating with one another about something, simultaneously enter upon two levels of communication – the level of intersubjectivity on which they take up interpersonal relations and the level propositional contents. However, in speaking we can make either the interpersonal relation or the propositional content more centrally thematic; correspondingly we make a more a more interactive or a more cognitive use of our language" (Habermas, 1979, p. 52).

It is in the illocutionary dimension of language that Habermas places his emphasis since it is here that social relations are created, nurtured or often break down altogether and through a series of long and complex theoretical explanations and movements, Habermas argues it is here that we can begin to understand ego formation, ego identity and by extension the processes of social integration and social evolution. Universal Pragmatics (a model of human communication) provides the base from which Habermas builds a broader theory that captures the ways in which patterns of domination intrude into social relations themselves. These social relations, which serve as the building blocks for broader social order itself, offer a locus of critique that can be extended out from the micro-level of human interaction to the macro-level of social institutions in a way that can illuminate how they have been socially constructed and influence human interaction and, in turn, how social interactions impact and routinely deconstruct and then reconstruct those institutions. In short, a critical theory of society must first be a critical theory of human communication itself.

Using the development of language as a base, Habermas argues that there can be a reconstruction of historical materialism and the critique of capitalist society. Building on these ideas, Habermas attempts to formulate that critical theory in his thousand page, two volume mega-work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. In the following section, I very briefly highlight some of the key features of this theoretical construct focusing primarily on those which I argue have value for understanding the project of the IMCistas.

The Theory of Communicative Action

Purposive and Communicative Action. As Habermas began to focus on the processes of human communication and developed the theoretical propositions of Universal Pragmatics as the cornerstone of socialization he was able to begin to examine the process of social evolution itself, no longer as an object of historical analysis but as a living, breathing process with social interactions at its base. He argued that these social interactions involved two major dimensions, purposive and communicative action. Purposive action is reflective of the means-ends rationality described by Weber in his earlier model of modernity. Here, social action is strategically oriented, geared toward the attainment of both material and social goals. When it involves the attainment of physical needs, he refers to it as instrumental action; when geared towards shaping the anticipated actions of others and the winning of a desired social outcome, it is strategic action. Communicative action on the other hand is geared toward reaching understanding between social actors in a cooperative fashion. These two forms of social action reflect two types of rationality, with purposive action (instrumental and strategic) representing a logical rationality based on maximizing means-ends relationships and communicative action representing a *communicative rationality* and the logic of unconstrained discourse. These two rationalities form the basis of all concrete social actions. Purposive actions involve work or other productive activity and communicative actions center on speech, social interaction and relationship formation. Each of these are shaped to a greater or lesser degree by both types of rationalities.

Labor for example is primarily shaped by purposive action, but there are the "non-contractual" aspects of labor relationships that are inherently communicative and develop through social interaction. Similarly, interactions that seem to be purely social in nature also contain elements of the means-ends rationality of purposive action. So the processes of social

labor (purposive) and social interactions (communicative) are inexorably linked in the formation of all social systems forming two interdependent sub-systems, the political economy and the institutional frameworks, that hold it all together. Where Marx argued that it was the economic conditions of the political economy that were the driving force in society, Habermas argues that it is actually the communicative social frameworks that exert the dominant influence through the creation of social norms and values.

Domination. Habermas argues that domination itself is an institutional framework that arises whenever labor (purposive action) and/or social relations (communicative action) are distorted through their interplay with one another with negative consequences for both. These distortions arise whenever the relations of production become exploitative thus alienating people from their own purposive action - their own labor. Marx argued that this alienation of people from their own labor also alienated them from each other through the rise of the inequitable conditions brought about by differences in power, class and social status that are characteristic of capitalistic societies. As these differences increase and one group is given dominance over another, communication and the building of social relations are distorted, eliminating the ability for free and open rational discourse amongst all social groups. Communication still occurs, but since it is shaped by these false social divisions the domination of one group over another that arises eliminates the possibility of unconstrained and equal access to various spheres of communicative action. The communication that results is systematically distorted and is no longer about reaching understanding but about competing ideologies and so the resulting framework of institutional norms has a corresponding ideological character. This allows the dominance inherent in these social divisions to strengthen and become institutionalized, polluting every aspect of society itself in a cyclical process that weaves domination throughout the entire social fabric.

This process is readily apparent in contemporary U.S. society. Ideology in this sense is essentially a replacement for true critical discourse and critical thinking. Political parties, interest groups and political pressure organizations reduce complex social problems into ten-second sound bytes that come to dominate the debate. As individuals learn these sound-bytes they believe that they understand the problem and the discourse they have with each other both in the interpersonal sense and mass mediated communication. The goal becomes one of shouting these short-cuts to real thought the loudest or most often to win the debate; true critical discourse

where rational argument is foremost becomes lost in the static. Those without the power to access the available means of communication are essentially removed from the debate, their needs and desires ignored in the most fundamental questions facing our society. Even those organizations trying to represent disaffected and dominated groups in the public debate are subject to these systematic distortions, and as professional communicators try to speak for them, their own voices and experiences are lost in the sloganeering that is characteristic of this mass marketing approach to the communicating of ideas. As I write this discussion I am listening to a self described progressive radio talk show host who is chastising fellow progressives saying that "politics is marketing; that's what it is, and until we understand that, until we play the game by those rules, we are destined to fail" (the radio program is called the Young Turks and is aired on satellite radio). In this sense, human communication itself has become a tool of domination.

Marx argued that this pattern of alienation and domination could be overcome only through the rejection of private property and institutionalizing cooperation through the communist state. Habermas rejects this idea, and consistent with his critique of the economic determinism of Marx's analysis and the positivism it reflects, he argues that the focus should be on the critique of ideology itself and the creation of communicative spaces where undistorted communication can occur, thus minimizing its social power. Drawing on his analysis of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas believes that undistorted communication is possible, even in late capitalistic societies. He describes an "Ideal Speech Community" where communicative action can take place and true understanding between individuals can be reached through free and open discourse that rejects the differences of power and class - where all can participate and the strength of the argument is the only factor in decision making. Critical theory then, drawing on that emancipatory rationality, should be viewed as a theory that critiques human discourse and the social conditions and institutions that shape it with the goal of creating autonomy of discussion for everyone and eliminating the distortions of communicative action.

System and Lifeworld. The final piece of Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action that has particular relevance to the discussion of Indymedia's project is the differentiation between the "system" and the "lifeworld." Through his examination of the social theories that have been articulated in the past, Habermas argues that there are essentially two types of theories, objective and subjective theories, and that there is an inherent tension between the two that critical theory should endeavor to address. Subjective theories deal primarily with the social

orientations between actors and rely on symbolic interactionism. Conversely, objective theories deal with the consequences of social actions – the institutions and structures that result from social actions and rely primarily on structural functionalism (Habermas, 1989b). He uses the term "lifeworld" to represent the way in which subjective theories view societies and "system" to represent the views of objective theories. A true critical theory, he argues, can't be viewed solely through the lens of social orientations or the consequences of those orientations because, as has been discussed above, the two are inexorably linked. Communication, the primary orienting force, has a direct impact on social structures, and those structures in turn impact the manner in which people communicate. The only theoretical approach that can truly serve a critical, and thus emancipatory function must focus on the realm of communicative action because it is here that the connections between both the social and consequence orientations.

Marx's social model emphasized a distinction between the "base" which included the material conditions created by a society's economic conditions and a "superstructure" that incorporated the society's broader political and ideological nature. The superstructure was a product of the base – economic determinism. Habermas, rejecting this positivistic view, believes that a more accurate model is reflected in the concepts of lifeworld and system. The lifeworld represents the sphere of social integration, the community element of the social order from which springs a society's norms and values. This is the realm of communicative action. The system is the sphere of economic and political integration that represents the realm of purposive action. These two social spheres represent the two fundamentally different forms of rationality described above with the system reflecting a logical rationality concerned with maximizing means-ends outcomes and the lifeworld reflecting the communicative rationality of social integration and the development of relationships based on an understanding of the needs, motivations and viewpoints of social actors. While Marx argued that the superstructure was dependent on the characteristics of the base, Habermas argues that the system and lifeworld exist are interdependent on each other in a cyclical relationship where the conditions of the lifeworld shape and re-shape the system, and conversely the conditions of the system impact the social realm of the lifeworld. Ideally, the two would exist in a state of balance with the needs of the lifeworld and its communicative rationality as the primary force shaping the system, and the system exerting structural pressure on the lifeworld to protect that rationality.

The process of domination discussed above occurs when the system and its purposive rationality exert too much influence over the lifeworld. Here again, Habermas draws heavily from Weber's concept and critique of modernity where means-ends relationships come to dominate human interaction tainting all human relationships replacing the ability for people to exist in a place where relationship formation for its own sake is rationalized, and human interactions become nothing more than an opportunity to "get something" in return. The lifeworld becomes an extension of the system and becomes dominated by its primary media, money and power. As Scott (1995) describes, "The economic and political systems – the market and the state – are the driving forces in social development, but they drive society in a blind and meaningless way" (p. 248).

The rationalization of the lifeworld replaces communicative action with purposive action and the ability for people to engage in meaningful relationships that are based on building a consensus of needs is constrained if not eliminated. The lifeworld becomes "colonized" by the system and so that its institutions of the state and economy become dominant and change the fundamental nature of the lifeworld so that true communicative action, based on a communicative rather than purposive rationality, becomes impossible. "Media such as money and power encode a purposive rational attitude toward calculable amounts of value and make it possible to exert generalized, strategic influence on the decisions of other participants while bypassing processes of consensus oriented communication…societal subsystems differentiated out via media of this kind can make themselves independent of the lifeworld, which gets shunted aside into the system environment" (Habermas, 1989b p, 183). As the lifeworld is uncoupled from the system, human communication itself is transformed such that true communicative action to build understanding is replaced by strategic communication designed to win. Through this process, all social endeavors become commodified, not only our institutions like the public sphere which has been reduced to merely a profit making enterprise dominated by the for-profit mass media where public opinion is bought and sold but also the very nature of human communication itself.

Herein lies the heart of Habermas' project – a critical theory that can liberate people by liberating human communication itself. There is a common thread running through all his theoretical work discussed above, beginning with his explication of the idealized public sphere, moving through his formulation of a critical methodology that deconstructed historical

materialism, to his discussion of a theory of human speech itself and the Theory of Communicative Action. The central idea being that the power for human liberation from the domination of late capitalist societies lies in the inherent nature of humans as communicative beings who under the right conditions can engage each other in a space that values the contributions of everyone regardless of their status in the social order. Their basic humanness gives them the right to have a seat at the table and meaningfully contribute to their society's future. His critical theory seeks to shed light on the ways in which our own communicative power has been stolen from us by those who seek to find profit in an ever increasing range of human endeavors. He argues that we have to power to combat those who would deny health care as a basic human right and deny it to those who can't pay for it - who see the natural resources of the planet as mere commodities to be traded on world markets for the betterment of a few while millions suffer - who have transformed the public square where all should be able to come together and meaningfully discuss the issues of the day into a monopolistic money machine. That power is our ability to form meaningful relationships with one another based on mutual respect and tolerance and to find ways to understand each other. The only way for us to harness that power is to realize the mechanisms through which our own speech and conversations have been hijacked by the forces of capital's program and methodically, piece by piece, dismantle those mechanisms so that we may communicate with each other and take charge of our own futures. His theory calls for a revolution, not one involving guns and violence but one of realizing our own personhood and the humanness of those we share the world with and rejecting the strategic patterns of communication in favor of real communicative action.

Conclusions

The previous discussion outlines what I believe to be the final two theoretical pieces in support of my argument that the radical alternative media project of Indymedia represents more than a radical media project but is instead an attempt to use the Internet and media making to create a totally new discursive space, one that has real potential (even as a model) for to challenge the dominance of global capital. The Autonomist Marxists have clearly articulated a re-formulation of Marxist thought that illustrates not only that the technological advances of capital have historically provided opportunities for subordinate groups to appropriate them to create crisis states that challenge capital's dominance. Through this theoretical frame, the

Internet, perhaps capital's greatest technical achievement, can be viewed as a tool not of furthering capital's dominance (which in many ways it has up to this point) but as a weapon that can be harnessed by subordinated groups to thwart capital's program for global control. This analysis, however, only takes us so far. While the theoretical ideas articulated by Autonomist Marxism answer the question "Is it possible?" and perhaps even "why" it is possible it does not really unpack how it would occur. Certainly the direct action of the hacktivists is one possible mode, but how does simply throwing monkey wrenches in the machine actually transform the more subtle influences of capital's domination? If those more subtle influences are not addressed, what real hope is there for liberation? Also, these attempts often have the unintended consequence of making the wrong people suffer, assuming that average people affected are merely acceptable losses. Do we really want to destroy technology that has the potential to provide real benefits for all people if it was not controlled by those currently in power?

I argue that the answers to "how would this work" are found in Habermas' critical theory, both in his historically bound, and somewhat flawed original articulation of the bourgeois public sphere and his later attempts to rescue the ideal through TCA. His discussion of the public sphere, the ideals of it rather than the historical manifestations of bourgeois society, gives us a glimpse as to what a truly public discursive space would look like; it articulates the types of spaces that we should be looking to create. Perhaps not a single public sphere but, as Fraser argues, multiple communications commons that are based on total inclusion, an abandonment of social status and hierarchies and the commitment to critical thinking and debate for decision-making. Clearly there are gaps in this formulation, but the Theory of Communicative Action fills those gaps by moving from the structural functionalism of *Structural Transformation* and the positivism it reflects towards a more person centered approach by focusing on human communication.

The Theory of Communicative Action illustrates that domination is not merely a product of material conditions but is much more fundamental and represents the systemic distortion of that most human of traits, the ability to communicate. His explication of the system and lifeworld shows how the rationality of the material world insidiously spreads into the realm of human interaction, cheapening human communication such that even our most basic relationships with one another become merely sales pitches to get us what we want, alienating us from our own basic humanity. As our basic humanity is distorted so are all of the social

institutions we build so that everything represents a market rationality, and those struggling without any power over their own lives are seen as mere casualties of market forces that are no longer viewed as social constructs but are given the same status as forces of nature.

Throughout the discussions in this chapter it should be evident how they apply to Indymedia. The IMCistas are using the power of the Internet to create these new realms of discourse through the processes of media making. In this way, they are directly challenging capital's dominance by telling the stories that the mainstream media refuses to tell thus better informing the public and opening up new areas of debate. However, they are also posing an indirect challenging through the process of empowering the people to tell those stories through a cooperative endeavor that allows them to explore their own abilities to engage in true communicative action. They are working to create radical media content but they are also working to create a new or perhaps an alternate public sphere that is non-hierarchical but cooperative, that is based on inclusion rather than exclusion and that attempts to minimize the status of its participants. This cooperative space is a place where the prefigurative politics described by Downing, Atton and others can be explored, refined and nurtured. In this way, I argue that this radical media project is much more than about media making but is about "re-training" its participants to recognize their own power of communicative action and the ability to find common ground with each other. If the lifeworld has been colonized by the system, radical media projects like the IMC are working to kick the colonists out so that it can be rescued, and in the process salvage our ability to form meaningful cooperative relationships where strategic communication is minimized.

As is undoubtedly clear from my discussion thus far, I am not an unbiased researcher. As someone who has seen the Indymedia project in action, I can't deny the incredible sense of potential those experiences have left me with. I have found myself transformed in such a way that I can no longer look at organizing for social change the same way ever again. In the past, I believed that structured leadership was necessary, that majority rules should rule the day and that at times we must adopt the tools and tactics of those we oppose to be successful. However, it was those moments (although admittedly rare) when we were all working on Indymedia together in cooperation, where it seemed as though everyone's thoughts and concerns were being given equal weight and where the work was getting done without formalized hierarchies that gave me that sense that there was a better way to do things. Perhaps it was during those moments that I

realized my own communicative power to forge relationships that were not about friendship but about a mutual respect for those around me, and an understanding of where they were coming from and finding ways to build consensus on areas where we disagreed. It was, perhaps, those experiences where the rationality of the system was replaced by one of the lifeworld that gave me a new understanding and appreciation of Habermas' work. While I understand that the inclusion of my own biases in this context is somewhat frowned upon, I believe that Habermas himself would consider it meaningful and a necessary component of real communicative action.

I am a realist however. While the basic structures, policies and practices of the IMC show the *intent* to create this new public sphere, how successful has it really been? In reality, many involved with the project would argue that there have been more problems than solutions and while IMC's commitments to decentralization, lack of hierarchy, local autonomy and consensus-based decision-making are all steps in the right direction, Habermas' ideal speech community is still a long way off. In the final two chapters I seek to examine this question of success both in terms of the network's structural workings and the attitudes of those involved.

CHAPTER 6
RESEARCHING THE IMC

"The elusive Indymedia, a beast often sighted in the wild, but which tends to be a difficult subject in the laboratory." – ***From an introductory statement outlining some suggestions about how IMCs can deal with researchers and research requests at the Indymedia Documentation Project***

In the previous chapter I examined the final theoretical pieces necessary to advance the argument that the alternative radical media project of the Independent Media Center has the potential for impacting the broader social order in the age of global capital, both through the creation of critical oppositional media content and more importantly through the processes by which that content is being created. I have argued throughout that it is these processes of media making that are more important to the liberatory potential of Indymedia than the content itself because it is here that we see the commitment to building an alternative public sphere or communications commons free from the enclosures of the corporate mainstream, one characterized by open and inclusive debate, consensus based decision-making and a minimization of its participants' status. As Downing and Atton articulated when they discussed the importance of radical media as spaces for prefigurative politics and Habermas discussed in TCA, these alternative commons are important because they enable those participating to explore and practice new ways of collective organizing and communicating. This is critical not only because these spaces can generate new models for collective oppositional social action but also because they can have a profound transformative impact on the communicative action of the individuals involved, which as Habermas argues in TCA, can itself be socially transformative. This focus on process has been a common element running through all of the theoretical approaches I have discussed thus far. Connected to any conversation about the process orientation of an endeavor, there must also be an examination of the structures that either enable or hinder that process.

Consider, for example, the positions articulated by the autonomist Marxists. Their theoretical re-formulation of the classical interpretations of Marx's critique that replaces the idea

of labor as mere object being drawn along by the steering currents of capital into an active subject that can, and historically has, charted its own course offers anti-capital globalization activists a conceptual base from which they can envision the success of their endeavors. However, while this framework enables us to consider that attempts to appropriate the Internet (or has many have argued, re-appropriate the Internet since its development was paid for with public money) *may* be successful, there must be significant structural considerations made to ensure that the avenues for this appropriation are available. Similarly, while both Downing and Atton have made the case for radical alternative media as spaces for prefigurative politics their process centered approach and the various examples they cite also include an examination of the structures these media establish and the technologies they use to give form to those processes. Habermas, while abandoning many of the specific socio-structural determinants of his analysis of the public sphere in TCA, also acknowledges that a radical re-working of the institutions that govern and regulate public discursive spaces and the structures they engender must also be undertaken if there is any hope of enabling communicative action on the social level to take place. In short, while the processes of radical alternative media are the major locus of the various analyses I have presented here, those processes can't be removed from the structural aspects of these projects.

In the next chapter I report on an attempt to conduct a "census" of the North American portion of the global IMC network in order to assess several structural components of the network including basic information on the types of media they are producing, the resources they have available, the types of outreach they are conducting and the tools they are using to do that work and some basic information about the people that make up their local collectives. However, before discussing this attempt it is important to examine some of the challenges facing researchers trying to examine this DIY media project. Indymedia is an unabashedly rebellious effort, one that is proudly critical of many of the dominant institutions, ideas and sensibilities of the status-quo. Consequently, the academic researcher who wades into the IMC project without understanding a little about its culture and its critiques of the academy could be faced with some unexpected reactions. Additionally, since the IMC was born in the midst of the Seattle conflict during the WTO and continues to be an integral part of similar protest actions around the globe, IMCistas have routinely been the victims of police repression and state legal challenges. Not surprisingly, the IMC culture tends to be very wary of outside interests looking for information.

In this chapter, I look at both of these areas in detail not only to share some of the challenges I faced when conducting my own study, which proved incredibly problematic in terms of collecting data, but also because these issues speak volumes about the culture surrounding the IMC and have descriptive value in their own right.

My first attempt to conduct any type of formalized examination of the IMC network occurred in 2004 while working with Dr. Andy Opel on a project designed to assess the efficacy of readily available online web site monitoring tools to measure traffic across the IMC network. During the data collection for this effort, it became apparent that there was a fair amount of distrust amongst the IMC community regarding academic research. We received several interesting responses refusing our request for the desired traffic server data. One IMCista responded with "We DON'T record visits by our users, ask the FBI," another responded "I have a hard time trusting anything from Florida" and a third quipped, "we don't keep that information, Mr. Ashcroft." While these responses represent the most extreme cases, there was a great deal of hesitancy from the IMC community to our inquiries (Opel & Templin, 2005, p.12).

Similarly, during a workshop in 2005 during the North American Indymedia Conference in Austin, Texas, where I presented my ideas about conducting a census of the North American portion of the network, my presentation quickly evolved from a simple round of questions and answers to a spirited round table debate about the role of research in Indymedia, the permitting of academics not directly involved with the IMC to have access to the network, the rights of academics to copyright their work based on Indymedia, the decision making process for creating an internal research apparatus and many other issues. I knew I had my work cut out for me when one IMCista from the Northwest proclaimed that "The universities only exist to promote capitalism and push the agenda for corporations that have taken over the schools; I don't trust the so-called academics." It became abundantly clear that the group of individualistic activists that made up the IMC, all working in their own way against society's various authorities was no compliant bunch. Any attempt to survey, question, analyze and report on their efforts would have to be conducted very carefully and as cooperatively with them as possible.

One concrete step did come out of the workshop however. A new working group e-mail list managed through the IMC list system was established to discuss these and other issues and decide whether or not an internal research program was necessary and if so, what form it would take. Since its creation the list, which I still help to administer, has had bursts of activity

followed by long periods of silence, and no consensus has been reached on establishing a research program. The list and its archives can be accessed at http://lists.indymedia.org/mailman/listinfo/imc-research. While my experiences in working on the Indymedia traffic project and at the IMC conference discussion prepared me for a difficult endeavor, it wasn't until I started looking into the work of other researchers who attempted other projects with the IMC and some of the discussions on the IMC Research list that I realized just how difficult this undertaking would be. I always believed that a closer examination of these issues would be informative about the network so I decided to carefully monitor this list to see if the exchanges yielded any meaningful information about the nature of this thorny relationship between the IMC and research community. I found that these exchanges describe many of the underlying reasons for this relationship between the net work and mainstream institutions and how, in many ways, the distrust these relationships reflect is not entirely misplaced.

Indymedia is firmly rooted in what Atton and others have called the DIY culture, a world where the pomp and circumstance of officialdom is rejected in favor of a more "punk rock" sensibility. This is reflected in the project's integration of many elements of anarchist thought including the elimination of formalized leadership, a passionate commitment to individual autonomy loosely coordinated through collectives that operate on the basis of consensus decision-making and an inherent distrust of institutions that are connected in any way to state or corporate apparatuses. As such, there are many logistical challenges facing the intrepid researcher who wanders into the world of the IMC. Even the most basic questions that mark the beginning of a research program are difficult for the uninitiated. Who do I contact to start the research? Where can I find a list of IMC members to question for my research? Where is the IMC located? Who is in charge of the project? These and other very basic questions pose immediate challenges to the researcher. While these can be overcome by spending just a little time on any IMC site, there are broader issues that run much deeper and which speak volumes about Indymedia both about the tangible project and the people that make it happen.

Don't Trust Anyone Over 30

The explosive growth of Indymedia following the creation of the IMC first site during the Battle of Seattle made the IMCs a prime target for the intense gaze of academic research. After all, while self-publishing and the posting of instant comments to web content have become

standard features of the Internet through the rise of the blogosphere, in the late '90s these were still revolutionary developments. That, coupled with the fact that Indymedia was the first self-organized, globally networked, self-publishing news project made Indymedia an irresistible subject for the academic's lens (Jankowski & Jansen, 2003). Additionally, since the bulk of the first IMC sites were born around mass protest actions against neo-liberal globalization and in many ways served as organizing hubs for those actions, scholars following this global movement were also drawn into the world of Indymedia as an important component of that movement. Consequently, the IMCistas were besieged with research requests about the work they were doing and these requests created a fair amount of consternation amongst those in the network. In addition to the pragmatic concerns mentioned above such as who can speak for an organization with no spokespersons or established leadership, many Indymedia activists felt as if they and the work they were doing was being reduced to the status of mere rats offered for examination in a social laboratory.

Through many one on one personal conversations with IMC activists and my participation in the IMC Research list referenced above, I have found that the concerns center on five major areas. First, many IMCistas are incredibly sensitive to the notion of being observed by those they feel are not directly contributing to the work they are doing. Academics represent the intellectual elite in our society and many IMCistas believe that if they are interested enough in Indymedia to research the movement, they should add their own intellectual energies to the project. As one Indymedia activist from Las Vegas told me during the 2nd National Conference for Media Reform in St. Louis in 2005, "We are not playing games here, we aren't just making media because we think its fun…we are trying to save the world. If a researcher doesn't get that we don't have time to explain it to them. If they do, they should get involved and do the work, then they can find all the information they need." Second, many of the IMCistas I have worked with are astutely aware of many of the criticisms leveled at contemporary academic institutions especially those dealing with the idea of an overly rationalized academy. As public universities have seen their share of increasingly scarce public resources dry-up, they have been forced to ally themselves with for-profit corporate interests for more and more of their programs. While these corporate interests have always played some role in university programs, many involved with the IMC are concerned that these relationships have grown substantially over the years and that these connections are inherently dangerous for the future of an independent academy and

intellectual freedom. Also, these relationships have led many to believe that universities and other institutions of academia are part of the overall system they are working against. (For an excellent discussion of these issues see, *Leasing the Ivory Tower: The Corporate Takeover of Academia* by Lawrence Soley, 1995) While the IMCista who proclaimed above that universities exist merely to advance capitalism is painting with too broad a brush, his sentiments are reflective of very real concerns in the IMC community.

Third, as with many radical media projects, Indymedia frowns on the copyrighting of any of its content and sees copyright policies as a barrier to the sharing of information and ideas. Published research articles are, for the most part, the copyrighted property of the publisher. If those contributing to Indymedia are content to do so without a copyright, so should those researching the project. Fourth, many are concerned that academics hold an inherent institutional bias, one that sees knowledge and wisdom as the product of formalized and programmatic learning measured by established degrees that are hierarchical in nature. An oft-stated goal of Indymedia is the empowerment of repressed and disaffected groups so that they can tell their own stories without the filter of institutional journalists, pundits and other professional storytellers. It seems as if many I have spoken to about this issue fear that the work they are doing will be viewed as "quaint" by an intellectual elite far removed from the day-to-day struggles of the masses. Finally, as I will describe in greater detail in the following section, IMC collectives have been the subject of some incredibly repressive actions by law enforcement and the state. These actions have justifiably created a fair amount of distrust amongst the IMC community towards any project seen as originating from the outside that looks too closely at the inner workings of their projects.

I am well aware that some may be reading this summation, bristling at the prospect of arguing these points. My goal here is not to defend or justify these concerns (although I believe all have some merit) but to simply provide a brief backdrop to help the reader understand the great sensitivity any researcher must cultivate to develop a working research relationship with the IMC community and to help explain many of the decisions I made when conducting my own project. These tensions may be best illustrated by looking at some of the discussions about questions of research that have taken place across the network.

As mentioned earlier, in 2005 a new working group and email list named "IMC-Research" was developed following the Austin conference of U.S. IMCs. The list, which came

online in May of that year currently has 38 members including IMC activists, students, university faculty and interested researchers that do not seem to be affiliated with any formalized institution. The list has had bursts of activity coupled with long periods of silence and has wrestled with many issues including the idea of creating an overall research program for Indymedia so that *we* can research the movement ourselves, the establishment of a web portal for this program, dealing with research requests from students and faculty and how (or if) Indymedia can develop meaningful mutually beneficial relationships with researchers.

I examined a collection of posts from this list in response to a request for assistance from a student researcher looking to conduct her own online survey of the network to get a sense of how individuals were using the IMC web sites. This request was forwarded to IMC-Research from the IMC-Process list which often serves as a de-facto portal to the rest of the network. I provide brief excerpts here and the full text of these are reprinted in Appendix A. The archives for the IMC-Research list can be viewed online at http://lists.indymedia.org/mailman/listinfo/imc-research. The initial request read as follows:

> Subject: [IMC-Process] Indymedia survey
> Dear all,
> I am an MSc Media Research and Analysis student at City University in London, United Kingdom. I would like to conduct an online survey amongst the users of Indymedia website as a part of my masters dissertation. The survey would offer Indymedia information about the usage of the website. I would be grateful if someone could let me know with whom I could discuss my project.
> Looking forward to hearing from you.
> Best wishes,

The first responses to this request was consistent with one of the suggested goals of IMC-Research (a set of concrete goals was never agreed upon by consensus) and speaks to the interest of having an established way to share research work with the network so that the endeavor is beneficial to both the researcher and the network.

> http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0602-2g.html
> Hi Folks, In reading through (this) request I had a thought. In doing our research, perhaps there is a way in which we can collectively share our primary "data" on IMC, such as U's survey, or when I am done I will have tons of transcribed interviews and field notes (if I can get the time or money to do transcription). This would all be done with the eye of both aiding our shared intellectual endeavors, but more importantly the growth and strategic outlook of the IMC network. In this way I am thinking of some sort of research collective. This could also develop into different research

> thoughtshares of sorts where we bring different (theoretical, political, strategic, academic) ideas, regarding IMC to the table and talk about them from our varied research perspective/agendas. Something like this could be done on IRC (Internet Relay Chat). Just some thoughts.

The next response however was not as favorable.

> http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0603-t0.html
> hi (name) and all the people on the various lists i've cc'd. please could you stop posting emails requesting a survey to either global lists or to uk lists: it is *not* gonna happen cos there are too many people who would block it (i am one of those). for some background, you might like to read the following 'guidelines for researchers' that uk-imc drafted this time last year, after a similar request from another bunch of researchers. there are also some further links available off that page. furthermore, this summer is a busy time for the united kollectives as we are preparing (sic) to cover the protests against the g8 in scotland. i would be surprised if other people have time to respond, and i would also imagine that if your survey was posted to the newswire it would be hidden as 'non-news'. of course, if you wish to become involved in indymedia yourself, that is a different proposition. you may wish to attend one of the london imc meetings to see what goes on. http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Local/ImcUkResearcherGuidelines
> http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/ImcResearchPractices
> there was also a huge load more debate in the imc-uk-process list from june/july last year - look for threads about social research and similar: http://archives.lists.indymedia.org/imc-uk-process/2004-June/

This post (made by an IMCista who has completed several research papers on Indymedia that I have cited) refers to a spirited discussion regarding a research request submitted to the UK IMC earlier in the same year. The guidelines referred to in the post will be discussed more fully later but it does reflect a common sentiment that the best way to research Indymedia is to become directly involved in one of the collectives rather than attempting to look in from the outside.

The discussion referenced above was a proposal to end what had been a long debate over whether or not the UK IMC would formerly participate (the autonomy of individuals enshrined in the 10 Key principles prohibits the "banning" of individuals from participating) in a different research project. This single post holds contains a treasure trove of insight into many of the areas of concern often articulated by IMCistas when faced with the prospect of participating

in academic research and highlights many of the points I have made above. First, it clearly articulates the viewpoints that Indymedia cannot and should not be judged according to the same standards as the mainstream media and that attempts to use these methods are both insufficient to understand Indymedia and in some ways reduce the nature of the project to just another media outlet. The discussants wrote, "The research project is an innovative audience study and, as such, it addresses Indymedia as a web-project with an audience. For a traditional (commercial) media outlet, participation would make sense. Traditional media outlets depend greatly on advertising. To get paying advertisers, they need to provide the number of hits and a profile of their audience. Income through advertising depends largely on the size of the audience." They point out however that, "Indymedia is set up in a completely different way. We don't have pressure to recruit advertisers or new members, or even to increase the hit rate. Communication within the Indymedia community does not work through marketing gadgets. We don't perceive users of Indymedia as an audience. Readers, writers, techies, artists etc are part of the same community, some more and some less active. Those new to Indymedia approach those more established via email lists, at meetings and in offline activities, and often become so active that they become part of the crew." They also point out that, "If we have a problem, it is not a lack of audience data, but the restrictions that come with a volunteer-based project: lack of time and people-power, not lack of understanding of how to improve our media and communications. We do what we are interested in, and expect others to join in with what they are interested in, in a DIY fashion" (http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-uk-process/2004-July/0729-ag.html).

Second, this conversation also reflects a level of distrust of the type of political change that could be achieved through the reliance on traditional academic institutions and their publications. They wrote, "Indymedia is an alternative news website. As such, facilitating governance is not our concern: be it e-government, e-voting or linux-based open publishing local council websites (which probably would be ignored anyway). Our political contribution is to empower people to use new technologies and to give a platform to those who are silenced in corporate media." They also discuss an "academic ghetto" where the power to influence social change is relegated to articles and books that find their way to policy makers rather than grass-roots organizing in the streets to empower groups to force those changes themselves. "Breaking out of the "activist ghetto"...to enter the "academic ghetto"? To have views from inside the Indymedia community reported to some administrators who need to develop-democracy? What

would change if the views of "the Indymedia audience" about voting and democracy would be collected and analysed in a book? More e-government, the revolution? If we want to reach out to the wealth of community groups in the UK, we need to approach them directly - offer indy-introductions, presentations, workshops, be around locally. Not wait until a book or article has made its way to some policy-makers who, in 10 years time, might have considered it enough to draw one or two sensible conclusions" (http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-uk-process/2004-July/0729-ag.html).

Third, the discussants also point out that, while the researchers are promising that the project will be collaborative, they see no real commitment to a truly collaborative relationship in large part because of the proprietary, copyrighted nature of academic work. They wrote, "The end-product, presumably a report, article or book about a groundbreaking, innovative research project which - for the first time - managed to break the gates of this stroppy, global movement stronghold, would probably be published by the researchers; and rightly so: because it would be their analysis. If we were interested in the topic of the research, we might want to use the collected data for our own analysis, which could be published together with the researchers' analysis, under a creative commons license." They also believed that participation in the project would be too time consuming for the IMCistas with little benefit to their project. "If the project were to be truly collaborative, it must involve additional work for members of the Indymedia collectives participating: from drafting and discussing our own questions to engaging with the research questions, from discussing the practicalities of the project to evaluating the data and analysing them, and finally drawing conclusions and putting them into practice. If the research questions were to be interesting enough for us to want to dedicate time to the analysis of the data, collaboration might make sense. With regard to the proposed project, we don't think this is the case" (http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-uk-process/2004-July/0729-ag.html). These concerns reflect the desire of those writing that any research should be truly collaborative without, as they see it, a hierarchical relationship between those who do the examination and the people examined. They point out that the very nature of the project and the researchers pledge to not create more work for the network means that the amount of true collaboration would be minimal.

Several people participating in the various discussions about researching Indymedia have also expressed distrust in the academic system itself. Many of these concerns center on the idea that academic researchers, involved with what they view as an over rationalized academic

world, will see their work on Indymedia used to copy the methods of its success and expansion and applied to the for profit world or projects of state apparatuses in an effort to manufacture consent.

> http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-xd.html
> A few thoughts on the interesting discussions on this list.
>
> First off, it seems clear to me that people are working from a number of fairly divergent concepts about what Indymedia is and should be. Of the general 'philosophical' views towards research expressed, I would probably be closest to the UK-ians. As an example of the obvious differences of concept, the discussion about the 'citizen journalism' is a good place to start. As I see it, we should be worried if the various hierarchical, government funded or capitalist incursions into 'citizen journalism' were anything other than virulently hostile to us. Their role in the grand scheme of things is to incorporate the obvious potential and energy inherent in projects like Indymedia, to de-fang them and turn them into 'orderly citizens' that accomodate (sic) themselves to the needs of power. There are rich rewards for whoever succeeds in doing so too and it is no surprise that various entrepeneurs (sic) are lining themselves up for an attempt. Much of academic research into networks like Indymedia also follows this logic. The logic of academic research into radical networks in modern times is very clear - it is structured to extract the magic ingredients that create the energy (and the upaid labour) so that they can be re-incorporated into traditional hierarchical organisations minus all the messy bits - and naturally without the accountability, openness and democracy that make it all so difficult. It is almost always written in a language that is incomprehensible to your average person and the control over finances ensures that the people asking the questions that researchers answer are always ultimately the elite. I should emphasise (sic) that I am talking about the structural and political role of academic research in our hierarchical world and not saying anything about the motives of the researchers involved. After all, my job is to write academic papers, some of which are related to Indymedia, and I assure you that my intentions in doing so are absolutely pure :-)

However, this same poster also acknowledges that research could play an important role in improving the project but that the research should be initiated by Indymedia activists themselves and be based in the needs they see for the network. In the same post he/she writes, “Anyway, after that brief trip into the structural role of research in modern capitalism, I should add that ignoring the problem will not cause it to go away. With our open nature we are easy to examine

and as long as we exist, we will live in a goldfish bowl of sorts. Research is also simply useful. We can't make the best decisions in the future unless we know our past and present. Systematic studies of various aspects of the network could equip local Indymedia volunteers with a wealth of invaluable information on which to base future decisions and avoid repeating past mistakes endlessly" (http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-xd.html). The person posting also lays out that the IMC movement should conduct research themselves; develop their own goals, research questions and methods for reporting results that are collective in nature and ensure that the results belong to the entire IMC community.

There are many other posts that illustrate that the concerns raised over research and working with researchers is not indicative of a general anti-intellectual bent. For example: "I must on some level protest the characterisation of researchers studying radical networks as "structured to extract the magic ingredients that create the energy (and the upaid labour) so that they can be re-incorporated into traditional hierarchical organisations minus all the messy bits". For a start, it implys (sic) a conspiratorial aspect to research that simply does not match my own , or I suspect others, experience within 'the ivory tower'. The simple fact is, researchers have all sorts of reasonings. Some are genuinely interested in a phenomena. Some would dearly like to get that Hons checked off so they can fuck off into better-paid world. Some have long term interests in theorising the social movements they are part of" (http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-th.html).

The poster also points out that, "I realise some studies into network (dis)organisation, like RAND's netwar papers for instance, has a specifically (sic) sinister intent. One should however note the diference (sic) between the agenda of the think tanks (Who I will freely admit to being somewhat hostile to) and genuine scholarly work of academics in this field." A response to this post also reinforces that the issues and concerns raised by many of the IMC activists regarding research requests are much more than a knee-jerk, anti-intellectual response. "Although I do admit to being somewhat sweeping in my indictement (sic), the point that I was trying to get across is that in the absence of a countervailing force, academic research into the network will tend to perform the function that I outlined. Power and hierarchies are as much attractors (to plunder a term) in academia as they are in most other aspects of this world. I am arguing that we should attempt to consciously become that countervailing (sic) force and attempt to steer research in directions that are deemed widely useful by the volunteers in the network"

(http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-vs.html). The poster also points out that, "Virtually every volunteer in the world probably has their own theory about the problems of Indymedia and ideas of how to solve them. What we lack is any rigour to our analyses. Without data and evidence, the various theories are constrained to making vague and broad generalisations. Without data there is no testability and in an environment without testability, wishful thinking, utopianism and general wooliness can and do flourish."

The point I am hoping to illustrate with these selected posts from IMC Research is that the concerns and criticisms regarding academic research and Indymedia is far more intellectually and practically grounded than my somewhat flippant title of this section would seem to indicate. There is a high regard for research in the IMC community (at least amongst those that participate in the research list not surprisingly) but that research needs to be approached in new and innovative ways that do not reduce the IMC phenomena to merely another media project, that involves the IMCistas at all levels of the research project and that promises something of value to their own efforts.

There has been some sporadic movement towards the realization of a research program undertaken by the IMC Network itself. Peppered throughout the many discussions that have yielded the types of posts included above are contributions to the discussion that move the group in that direction. Some posts clearly try to move the conversation in the direction of creating a new web presence in the network to formulate such a research project. For example:

> http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0608-2i.html
>
> What would be interesting is to follow a couple of potential ideas 1) Lets get published. By this I mean it would be nice to establish an online, peer reviewed (NOT 'elite' reviewed) journal of sorts, perhaps episodic and thematic, and with a focus on experimental and radical journalism.
> 2) But lets do this journal indy style. That is without a 'heirachy' of learned elders gatekeeping the whole thing, but instead by nurturing "open" editorial practices, perhaps with technological assistance from a CMS (perhaps an indy CMS tweaked for a more formalised academic bent.) or a communally (sic) edited wiki. >*From this second point, its here where we can start really throwing around* mad capped ideas on ways to improve Indymedia. Really zany stuff. We could replace 'sequences' of stories and 'heirachys' (sic) of categorys (sic) with a rhyzomic model of interconnected (sic) theses. We could utterly turf the idea of atomic stories and allow wiki style editing of other peoples stories. With revisions and the like. All wiki style (sic). There are plenty of ideas, and those there are 5 minutes worth of ADHD rambling rather than a considered proposal. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Things do move rather cautiously in Indymedia and no "official" action has ever taken place to create a research program and a web presence through it could be shared and coordinated. While some have responded with, "I think this is a GREAT discussion, one I'd love to see on the site itself! In the interest of moving forward, i'd like to propose we try and apply for a new imc. The only thing we don't currently have is the host, but I think we can start the paperwork with the new imc list" (http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-44.html). Others have urged caution:

> http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0610-5c.html
>
> I do agree Aaron that we slow down a bit. I do apreciate the work thats (sic) gone into this , from the conference on, but do be aware that some non US-ians are mildly concerned over a US-Centric push, particularly when some are so busy at the moment working on getting the G8 stuff happening (Over in "other" perth.) The process happening is the "correct" one, but we just need to take it easy easy. I'll be happy to set up a 'play around' site this weekend we can thrash some ideas around with, but lets take it gently. If we step on too many toes we wont get this right. And its harder to "fix" a consensus collective than it is to build one right from the beginning. Basically, the aproval is actually the more controversial (sic) topic. ;) The CMS stuff is immaterial really. If we dont like one, we ditch it and try another.

There have been attempts to set up a research website as part of the network but much of the discussions have centered around the technology of the site ("wiki" vs. "twiki" vs. traditional web site) and the best ways to incorporate that site into the network. Thus far, those voices calling for "easy, easy" have won out, not only because consensus has not been reached but because there have not been enough volunteers willing to jump in and create such a site, especially with no guarantee that anything will come of it in terms of network inclusion.

One critical area of concern that is often voiced in the IMC community regarding academic research that is not reflected in the selected posts above involves the security from law enforcement and state repression both for individual users and activists and the IMC collectives themselves. As noted above, much of the push back Andy Opel and I received when conducting the traffic study was not due to our status as institutional academics but centered on the IMCistas fears that any attempt to monitor usage traffic could pose a serious threat to the privacy of those

using the sites from the prying eyes of law enforcement and other elements of the state. In the beginning, I believed that these concerns were nothing more than a bit of paranoia in the post PATRIOT Act era, after all we had not seen any open signs of state surveillance of our own project here in Tallahassee.

However, following my experiences of police brutality aimed at protesters and Indymedia itself at the mobilization against the Fair Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) on November 19th – 21st 2003 in Miami and a review of the literature on Indymedia I realized that our lack of concern was based on a misplaced trust in the system and a failure to fully comprehend the perceived threat our efforts posed to the powers that be. In the next section I briefly look at some of the instances of repression aimed at the IMC movement through both direct violence and legal intimidation to illustrate some of the reasons why members of the IMC community are so reluctant to allow "official" access to the work they are doing.

Just Because I'm Paranoid Doesn't Mean They're Not Out to Get Me

Police Violence

As discussed in Chapter Two, the first Independent Media Center was created in the days leading up to the massive protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle. The first IMCs coverage of the violent responses by law enforcement generated hundreds of thousands of Internet hits from around the world with reports from these first IMCistas showing up in media outlets as undeniably in the mainstream as CNN and the IMC as a global undertaking has never strayed far from these early roots. Whenever large scale (and increasingly smaller scale) public protests are organized anywhere in the developed world (and increasingly in the developing world) IMC journalists are there covering the events from the perspectives of the protesters making violent law enforcement response to these actions a mainstay of Indymedia coverage. Rarely does this coverage take the form of "objective" journalism reported by detached news gatherers. In most cases, IMCistas are part of the story either as protesters themselves or as true embedded journalists who cover the events from a street level perspective, telling the stories in a very detailed and personal way, creating rich narratives where the mainstream may only give a passing glance. Therefore, it is not surprising that these participatory journalists and the IMCs they contribute to often become the targets of both violent law enforcement reprisals and legal challenges by state authorities.

Direct violence aimed at IMCistas and Indymedia centers have been relatively commonplace. Hamm (2005) argued that one of the major challenges facing Indymedia was that, "information technology does not exist outside the hegemonic system" and that regardless of technological advances, IMCistas must still operate under the constant threat that their physical connections to the world can be severed by state authorities (p.6). The first IMC in Seattle was tear-gassed by Seattle police during the Battle for Seattle. In Los Angeles during the 2000 Democratic National Convention a police raid on an Indymedia operation closed down a satellite broadcasting truck just before a planned IMC television uplink to a national grassroots community network. In 2001, during a mobilization in opposition to a G8 summit in Genoa Italy a grass-roots convergence center that temporarily housed an IMC was raided by Italian authorities. Reports from Indymedia sources, verified by a reporter from the BBC who witnessed the raid, indicated that over fifty people were injured including twenty-nine who were hospitalized including one whose injuries were life threatening (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1450876.stm). Computer hard drives as well as video and audio tapes were seized by the authorities and nearly sixty arrests were made.
In Warsaw, Poland in 2005 during the Council of Europe Third Summit, a raid on an IMC site led to the arrests and detentions of an IMC journalist and many other human rights activists. The IMCista was facing charges that would have led to a ten-year prison term and the IMC legal working group argued that the evidence pointed to the fact that he was deliberately targeted to maximize coverage of the arrest and by extension the fear of other protesters and organizers. In Argentina, an IMC journalist was beaten and had his camera stolen while filming an environmental protest.

Perhaps the most chilling event happened in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, on October 27th, 2006. The state had been rocked by protests during a popular uprising following the violent suppression of a strike by organized educators in the region and years of state repression by the Oaxacan state government. Brad Will, an IMC journalist from the United States was shot and killed while covering an altercation at a government barricade. Local authorities argued that the shots were delivered at close range and were fired by protesters but further investigations revealed that the two fatal shots were fired from a distance of 30-40 meters from an area where government paramilitaries had gathered indicating a targeted assassination by state forces. (http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/BradWillandothersDeadinOaxaca). This assassination

sent shockwaves through the IMC community both here in the U.S. and around the world and an image of Brad has been incorporated into the banner graphics for both the IMC in New York City and Indymedia.US, a site that collects and posts feature stories from local collectives around the nation.

I witnessed police repression of Indymedia first hand during the mobilization against the FTAA that took place in Miami in November of 2003. Over 20,000 activists representing labor unions, environmental organizations, global justice groups, anarchist collectives and from around the world came to downtown Miami to protest a meeting of government trade officials from the Americas region at the Intercontinental Hotel to solidify plans for the Fair Trade Area of the Americas, a dramatic expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Central American Free Trade Agreement. The mobilization involved three days of solidarity meetings, workshops, permitted and non-permitted concerts and rallies culminating with a massive permitted march through downtown Miami, just outside the four-block perimeter of the Hotel established by law enforcement. I worked for months to help organize the mobilization through my position with the Florida AFL-CIO but I also provided some organizational support to establish an Indymedia site to cover the events.

In the weeks leading up to the mobilization The Miami media market was flooded with stories about "anarchists" and "terrorists" who would be descending like barbarian hordes on the city, bent on committing acts of violence to further their "radical" agenda. The people's fear coupled with an $8.7 million federal appropriation hidden in the Iraqi War spending bill led to a massive overkill of police force. Over 3,000 officers were on the streets armed with full body armor, automatic weapons capable of firing several types of rubber bullets, rocket propelled tear gas canisters, concussion grenades, pepper spray and conventional firearms. The police presence was everywhere. They rode through the streets on horseback and in Armored Personnel Carriers. The skies were dotted with between three and six police helicopters at all times, day and night. The popular Bayside shopping area was closed, ringed by a complement of riot troops who refused to let anyone pass. There were officers in cruisers on every intersection in the downtown area; all of the off ramps to the downtown area were closed for much of the week. Minivans full of police officers patrolled the streets, occasionally stopping so that the officers could jump out, grab someone with long hair or tattoos or who didn't "look right" in some way and drag them off for questioning in some undisclosed location. Area businesses had been boarded up and the once

vibrant downtown became a ghost town. The city of Miami had become in every sense of the word a police state under undeclared martial law. A convergence center that had been established by grass-roots activists and which housed the IMC was raided on two different evenings leading to multiple arrests. Computer equipment was seized and paraded before television cameras as potential weapons that anarchists were planning to use to create mayhem.

On the final day, between 20,000 and 25,000 people peacefully marched through the streets of Miami. The young and old; white, black and brown; workers, retirees and students marched peacefully arm in arm signing songs of solidarity under clear skies. As the marchers moved block by block through the city, they were surrounded by police with large riot shields on either side of the street. As the marchers completed their loop through downtown (the permitted parade route kept the marchers well away from the FTAA meetings) they begin to slowly file into the Bayfront Amphitheater for the conclusion of the rally program. As thousands of marchers milled around Biscayne Blvd. waiting for entry into the Amphitheater, violence broke out over a hundred yards away at the fence line surrounding the prohibited areas around the Intercontinental Hotel. How it started is still being debated, but within minutes the peaceful climate eroded into chaos. Clouds of tear gas wafted over the crowd as lines of riot troops moved in, dividing the large crowd into smaller ones and moving them apart. Some were forced into the Amphitheater, the rest were pushed into the narrow streets of downtown. Hundreds of credible stories of violence and injury have surfaced and could fill volumes. Street by street, block by block the police moved the people through the city indiscriminately firing rubber bullets, streams of pepper spray and tear gas into the crowd. A very small number of people built make-shift barricades and threw rocks and tear gas canisters back at the police, but most just moved with the throng. Occasionally, when the police fired a volley into the crowd and people began to run, others would yell “walk, don’t run” to keep the crowd from stampeding. This went on for several hours.

Retirees and students, union members and environmentalists were all lumped together by the police. This went on for about 2 hours until the crowd had been split into smaller and smaller groups - eventually there was no crowd. The people were not there by choice, most wanted to disperse and get to their hotel or waiting bus, but all of their routes of escape were blocked by lines of armored riot troops who refused to let anyone pass.

At one point, I saw two young women wearing "Save the Dolphins" t-shirts approach a line of officers in tears, asking how they could leave – they were ordered to step back. When they did not and hysterically plead for instructions on how they could get away they were struck with batons, thrown to the ground and drug away. Later, as volunteers began to care for the wounded at a make shift clinic called the "Wellness Center" I saw watched officers enter the space and spray the inside of the building, including the wounded, with pepper spray. IMCistas with cameras and sound recording gear seemed to be particularly attractive targets and I saw several cameras and other gear smashed by police. By the end of the day, over 250 people, many of them IMC journalists, had been arrested, and well over 150 had been injured. Over the next few days and weeks it became clear to everyone, including the media, that the police violence had not been limited to violent protesters and anarchists. Attendees of all ages, from all walks of life, union and non-union alike have been telling the same stories about police violence and repression. The police action in Miami was intended to create a yoke of fear, keeping the people quiet and at home for future mobilizations but in the weeks and months following, thousands of people who were there were energized to contact elected officials both here in the U.S. and around the region and the FTAA has not been ratified. The temporary IMC site that was created to cover the events has become an established Indymedia collective, is still active and can be accessed at http://miami.indymedia.org.

Legal Challenges

In addition to the direct street level violence directed at Indymedia, agents of the state have also used the legal system to harass and intimidate the IMC. In 2001, during the buildup towards a large anti-globalization action organized to coincide with a hemispheric trade meeting of trade officials in Quebec City, Canada a copy of the security plans designed to keep protesters away from the delegates was stolen from the front seat of a police car and posted to the IMC central portal in Seattle. On Saturday, April 21, FBI agents raided the IMC offices housing the server with an order demanding server information in an attempt to track down the individual who posted the plans on the site. A gag order was issued, preventing anyone associated with the IMC from discussing the case and preventing posts on the web about the raid. However, word quickly spread about the raid and the warrant for server data in the mainstream press including articles in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Although the gag order and the injunctions were

eventually rescinded by the FBI following legal action by the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the Center for Constitutional Rights and the Electronic Privacy Information Center the raid and subpoena had a chilling effect on IMC collectives across the globe. As one IMC tech volunteer said, "Ever since the FBI event during the Quebec action in regard to the FTAA meeting there, logs of Indymedia web servers, their existence, use, format, et al, has been somewhat of an issue" she wrote. "Many IMCs have quit keeping server data altogether and those that do are very hesitant to share that information outside their own collectives." (Opel & Templin, 2005).

In 2004 during the week of protests outside of the Republican National Convention in New York City, news reports surfaced that the NYPD and other law enforcement agencies were actually using posts on the city's Indymedia site to track protest events around the city and to coordinate officers around the city (Scahill, 2004). The New York times reported that the U.S. Justice Department opened a criminal investigation into the Indymedia collective and subpoenaed the IMC's Internet service provider for a record of all of the IP addresses of those posting to the site. The Justice Department claimed that posts from IMC journalists that included listings of Republican delegates to the convention amounted to a form of "voter intimidation" but the wording of the subpoena was attempting to grant Justice unlimited access to all posts, not just those dealing with delegate lists. While the investigation was officially dropped, members of the NYC Indymedia argues that that threat of the investigation was "part of a larger campaign of intimidation" aimed at Indymedia's supporters and those who were engaged in peaceful protest at the RNC (http://subpoena.nycimc.org/). Similar legal threats have been made against individual collectives in the U.K., the Netherlands, Spain and Australia. An archival record of these legal challenges and other examples of state repression of Indymedia is available at (http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/ImcOppression).

Compromises on the Horizon?

In spite of the concerns still held by the many in the IMC community and the very real threats still posed by state authorities to the security and privacy of the IMCistas and Indymedia's users, the IMC community has made some strides in finding ways to work better with researchers. Perhaps the clearest indication of this has been the creation of a suggested list of guidelines for individual collectives to use when approached to engage in research projects. These guidelines were developed after the Indymedia collectives in the U.K. were approached to

participate in a research project, the same project that elicited that rather lengthy post included above that dealt with ending the discussion about participating in the research. While there was no formal agreement to participate in the research project, it was completed and published, only the focus of the final project shifted from the original research questions to detailing the ways in which the researchers claimed a small cadre of activists, referred to as "supernodes" in the article, both blocked the collectives from participating and exerted an undo influence on the editorial and other decisions of the collectives (Jones & Martin 2007). Interestingly, this completed article was posted at the IMC Documentation Project (http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/ImcEssayCollection) and the authors' conclusions were widely criticized by U.K. IMCistas and created another lengthy round of discussion about the relationships between the IMC network and academic research. (Portions of this discussion can be found beginning with this thread http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2007-December/1207-nl.html)

The suggested guidelines this controversy generated, which have since been refined by other IMC activists through the wiki, attempt to address the concerns described earlier. Here is another post in regards to a research request that more simply lays out the types of questions many in the IMC community have when facing research requests:

> http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-August/0908-5w.html
>
> first of all: *why* should we spend time on this? What is Indymedia gaining from taking part in your Master thesis? Will it be published without copyright? Where will it be published anyway? How did you come to choose Indymedia and us as your research object? Did you discuss this project with any Indymedia collective? and second: what is the *aim of this study*? Who will use the results for what? Who is paying for it? Or who is paying for you to be able to undertake this study? Are you on any university? and if so: how is that university's policy of who owns the research results of their students? Third is *my3q.com* : What do they get in return for offering free space for hosting surveys? Are they keeping a copy of the data you collect? Is the server logging IP numbers? third: you ask us for information, but *how about you*? Are you using Indymedia? Where are your answers to any of these questions? And fourth: you send this mail to *Indymedia mailing lists* , but you never ask whether anybody is actually part of a collective. Some answers so bluntly lack the certain options to answer, that it is pretty obvious that you did not seem to bother to include any Indymedia collective or volunteers into formulating it.

> (Just to give you an example: if i find a fallacy, i hide the article, because I am from a collective that has such a policy, and because I have an admin account). So: if you did not do your research properly before writing up this questions: why should anybody spend time on answering this?

While less philosophical than some of the other posts included in this section, these comments encapsulate many of the valid issues some IMCistas have with the prospect of participating in academic research and the suggested guidelines reflect these concerns.

These policy guidelines, while never being "officially" ratified are posted on a resource page at the IMC Documentation Project as well as a collection of research essays on Indymedia, links to free data collection software, information on open licensing and other activist research projects outside of Indymedia. There are also links to discussions on the IMC-Research list regarding the establishment of a dedicated web site on the network for research. These guidelines are presented as an email that individual IMCistas and collectives can cut and paste when responding to research requests. The full text of the proposed email and the guidelines is presented in Appendix B and can be accessed at https://docs.indymedia.org/view/Research/ImcResearchPractices#IMC_Research_Practices.

These guidelines lay out the basic agreements a researcher is willing to make with the IMC community. The guidelines specify that, "Our decision depends on several factors. For example: Is the research likely to create debates and results that are interesting for us as individuals or collectives? Does the researcher make his/her motivation, methodology, theoretical framework and hypotheses transparent? Will results and theories be discussed with Indymedia, before publication? Openness for collaborative research models? Authorship - relationship between researchers and the objects of the research? Timing - are we busy with a major reporting project? And finally - does anyone feel like spending time on this project right now?" They also provide some basic information about how a researcher should interact with the community. They specify that all information should be published under "copy-left" principles, that the entire completed project should be posted on IMC web sites, and that the research should involve full collaboration with the network including detailed feedback geared towards helping the movement improve their own efforts. They also provide some basic information about the network's communication structure and the best ways for researchers should navigate those structures.

While these guidelines steer clear of many of the thornier, philosophical issues reflected in many of the above posts, they do speak to the major pragmatic issues regarding research and the IMC. The guidelines clearly spell out that the IMC community expects the research to be of use to the overall project, that the work of the IMC should come first and that the IMC community should have access to the final product before it is published. The guidelines also help answer the most basic questions that can prove problematic to the uninitiated and lay out several basic agreements that should be met before requesting a research relationship such as the commitment to open publishing or copy-left principles, a meaningful collaboration with those being researched at all levels of the project and a full disclosure of the theoretical and methodological frameworks that will be employed. Again, while these guidelines have not gone through any formalized decision making on the network, the lack of any blocking concerns and their ease of use have helped to provide a de-facto agreement. Consider this research request forwarded to the IMC-Research list from IMC-Features earlier this year:

> http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2008-September/0913-mr.html
> hello imc-research,
> this email was sent to the www-features list. i am not aware that anyone has replied. i hope someone on this list can help.
>
> Hello,
> I'm in the process of writing a MA dissertation (Journalism) on the social implications of Indymedia in the context of citizenship and political participation (I have also been commissioned by the Independent on Sunday to write a feature on the subject). I'm eager to find out the overall take-up of Indymedia in various places around the world and to discuss why Indymedia is important from the perspective of those involved. Could you be so kind as to advise me on who the most suitable/useful people to contact are? Many thanks for your help,

The response was a simple line that directed the researcher to the guidelines posted on the IMC Documentation project page.

While the lofty goal of developing a research program for Indymedia and a dedicated site on the network that came out of the 2005 research workshop during the Austin conference has yet to come to fruition, the use of these guidelines marks an incredibly positive first step. In my opinion it also says a great deal about the ways in which decisions are made on the network. After three years, characterized by short but intense periods of discussion punctuated by even

longer periods of inaction, a solution, albeit not the one many were originally aiming for, presented itself through an organic conversation amongst dedicated activists who take moments out of their own busy lives to solve a problem. This is how Indymedia works and while to many the process may seem glacially slow and incredibly inefficient solutions do present themselves in spite of, or perhaps because of, the lack of any formalized leadership, official voting or paid staff. However, while this development is promising it is important to note, as reflected by the response to my own network research project detailed in the next chapter, that actually convincing individual IMCistas to participate in academic research is another matter.

CHAPTER 7
INDYMEDIA IN NORTH AMERICA

"I am interested to see the results of this, we do a lot of reflection but I don't think we do enough in terms of figuring out what is happening in the big picture, who is doing what, who has what and things like that. We are all so consumed with our own projects that we don't stop to survey the landscape." ***An email response from a participant who completed the online questionnaire for this project.***

Why a census?

The idea to conduct a census of the IMCs in North America came about while I was working with Dr. Andy Opel at Florida State University on a research project designed to assess the penetration of Indymedia in the broader community. While I have argued throughout this treatment that the "effectiveness" of radical alternative media can't be judged in the same terms as their mainstream counterparts (ratings, subscriptions, reporter resumes, etc.) the market penetration (for lack of a better term) of these media is still an important issue. We can argue scientifically that when a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, it does in fact make a sound; we can't say the same about media. If oppositional media content falls through the innumerable cracks of the Internet or is drowned out by the static of the mainstream not only is the value of its oppositional content diminished but, as I discuss in the following chapter, it can also have a demoralizing effect on those participating. Also, as all first year communication students learn, communication is dependent on a feedback loop between sender and receiver and understanding both sides of that equation is vitally important to understanding the overall communicative phenomena. So while it is easy to argue that radical alternative media can't be judged by the same standards as their mainstream counterparts, in practice it is still important to understand whether the content of radical media is being picked up by the public and how they are using that content. Unfortunately, the tools available for tracking the penetration of these media are still limited. Downing (2003b) pointed out that the lack of information about the ways in which audiences used radical media represented "a huge gap in our research knowledge" about the phenomena (p.626). The goal of our research was to investigate whether or not readily available web-site traffic tools could prove useful in providing not only data about the number of

"hits" or "visits" Indymedia sites received but about how, why and when people used them (Opel & Templin, 2005).

A member of the tech working group with the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC collective in our community had recently compiled data using a common free-ware web traffic tool that provided a wealth of information about the number of people visiting the site, how many different web pages they viewed and how that usage varied over time. We wanted others across the network to perform similar analyses of their own sites, so we could compile that data and see if any meaningful patterns emerged. We were able to collect data from eight different Indymedia sites around North America for the six-month period from January through June of 2003, the period of time leading up to and immediately after the outbreak of the ongoing war in Iraq. The data indicated that as the build-up to war increased both the number of raw hits to the sites and unique visitors to the sites increased dramatically, almost doubling in March when open hostilities began. While not conclusive, the plausible explanation we offered was that as the nation got closer to war, people sought out new and alternative sources for information. While the results were interesting and indicated that on-line measuring tools could prove useful, the process of getting the data proved even more so.

Initially, it seemed as if getting the server data would be a relatively easy proposition. As a member of an active IMC collective, I drafted an email message explaining the goals of the research, a link to the Tallahassee report to serve as a model of the type of report we were interested in and a promise of technical assistance if needed. I visited each of the IMC sites in North America (at the time there were about 50) to figure out the best way to get our message to each collective. What I found was a wide range of channels through which to reach the IMCs. Some sites had a direct email to allow people to contact the local collectives. Others relied exclusively on the global IMC list system described in Chapter Four; some had open lists, but most required the person looking to post a message to subscribe. Some had phone numbers listed, most didn't - some IMCs had a central point for requesting information, some did not. With such a wide range of ways for persons not currently involved with the various collectives to communicate with them, I wondered what advantages and disadvantages each alternative presented. For the most part, I simply used the open publishing newswire of each website and posted the research request as an online story. Some IMCs objected, since it was not in fact news, while others did not. Some had editorial policies that required the "hiding" of my post

(the relegation of the post to a separate section of the website not immediately visible) while others allowed the post to remain on the front page. Again, the broad range of policies was intriguing; what impact did the various editorial policies have on the overall usage of the site? Still more questions were raised once we started to receive replies to our requests.

Some IMCs had local tech collectives with the know how to generate the reports, but many did not. In fact, we found that many IMC websites were housed on servers located in places far removed from the communities they served. Some of these servers actually housed multiple IMC sites scattered all around the country and in fact, some local collectives reported that they had no idea where their servers were located. When there was a problem with the site or the collective wanted to make an upgrade, they merely sent an email to, as one IMCista I spoke with put it, "the techies in the sky," and the request was granted. How many IMCs were in this situation? Did the lack of local technical talent hinder the work of the collective? Were Indymedia sites that had their own in-house tech collectives at an advantage over those without, or did simply letting someone else do the technical housework free up time for other activities? Did problems arise from relying on remote technical support or having the server in a remote location?

These and other questions prompted me to try and get a sense of what the North American portion of the global network "looked like" and how the structural conditions of each IMC impacted their work and the sense of the volunteers about how satisfied they were with their project. Also, research reports (many of which have been cited earlier) began circulating that criticized the IMCs for being too white, too male and too representative of the college educated. Most of these relied on anecdotal data, personal experiences and/or mere speculation. Leading me to another question: what did the IMCistas in North America look like as a group and did the IMCistas across the network see their makeup as problematic.

All of these questions are certainly worthy of academic attention, but they are also critical pragmatic questions for the project as a whole. Regardless of whether or not the *success* of Indymedia is judged by more traditional standards such as market penetration or by more alternative criteria such as what type of radically democratic space has been created, the answers to these questions would be invaluable for both those wishing to start new IMC projects and those looking to improve their operations. I decided, primarily for practical reasons rather than academic ones, that there needed to be some type of census of the IMCs to at least get a sense of

what was out there. As I began work on this particular research project and began my examination of Indymedia through the Habermasian lenses of the public sphere and communicative action, I realized that this exercise had tremendous analytical value as well.

Shortly after I decided to develop a census of the North American IMCs as a data gathering tool for this dissertation, it was announced on the network that a group of IMCistas involved with the Austin, Texas IMC and others were in the process of organizing the first North American Indymedia Conference to be held in February of 2005. The group sent out a solicitation for possible conference workshops, and I contacted them and pitched the idea of a workshop to develop a research program for the IMCs. Numerous working groups across the global network had discussed the need for a program to assess the work they were doing as well as a mechanism to deal with academics who were increasingly coming to Indymedia in search of data for their own projects, so the idea of a research workshop was readily accepted. Dr. Andy Opel, Dr. Lisa Brooten and I were asked to facilitate it. I also communicated my idea for a national census, and two of the organizers shared that they were working on a similar idea, a questionnaire to be distributed before the conference so participants would have an idea about what other local collectives were doing. Their questionnaire was still very much a rough draft, and it was too late for them to distribute it before the conference, so with their permission to build on the work they had already done as well as their advice and cooperation, I refined their work and developed a short questionnaire to distribute at the conference (Appendix C).

The questionnaire, and my ideas for a North American census, as well as the need to develop a research program for the network were discussed at the workshop titled, *Researching Indymedia: Developing the Tools and Methodologies to Build A Movement* at the Austin Conference. (notes and archives from the workshop are available at: http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Local/ImcATXConf05ResearchIndyWorkshop#2nd_presenter_Lisa_B_Brooten)

The Census

Indymediaresearch.org. While some local IMCs have expanded their media projects into print, radio and community television, the Internet remains the core of Indymedia. In order to collect the census data, I worked with Mockingbird Multimedia, a locally owned web design company based in the Tallahassee Progressive Center that catered exclusively to progressive,

non-profit clients, to build a website at the address http://indymediaresearch.org. The server housing the website was owned and maintained by another tenant of the Tallahassee Progressive Center and due to a catastrophic server failure the site was lost in 2007. While the text and images of the site were recovered and still occupy the URL address, the questionnaire itself is no longer active. A hard copy of the website text and images is provided in the appendices (Appendix D). The questionnaire and its database remained active November of 2005 through February of 2007. As discussed above, there is a great deal of distrust in the IMC community to research requests thanks to previous negative encounters with academics, general criticisms of the academy and fear of state repression and interference from law enforcement. The research guidelines outlined in the previous chapter that have since been adopted by the network (although informally) had yet to be developed when I was developing indymediaresearch.org site so I had to use my own experiences with the network, feedback I had received at Researching Indymedia workshop at the Austin conference and many conversations with IMCistas around the country to develop a site that would be viewed favorably by the community and would ally their many concerns.

First, I designed the site to look very much like an IMC website. The banner for the homepage included images I had taken during the FTAA Ministerial protests in Miami in 2003, a major anti-globalization action that IMCistas from around the world established an IMC to cover. Am image of the banner is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1: indymediaresearch.org

The goal here was to visually demonstrate that the researcher was not only sympathetic to their various causes but was, in fact, one of them. To reinforce this, the website contained background information about myself, including my work with Florida's labor movement (labor

and union activity a common news subject on many IMC sites) and my previous involvement with Indymedia. I fully described the research questions I was exploring and the potential benefits those answers would have for the overall project. I also included links to the IMC-Research working group list, the archives of the workshop in Austin where the research project was discussed and links to other IMC research projects at the IMC Documentation Project. I also included an option that enabled others to post their own research about Indymedia.

Most importantly, I made several "agreements" with the IMC community, agreements that I later was pleased to learn were included in the above described research guidelines. First, I pledged to make all of my data and the full research report available to the IMC on-line community first, regardless of any impact that move might have on future publication opportunities. Second, I stated that anonymous participation was allowed and that no names or emails would ever be published in my final write-up and that at no time would IP addresses be logged as a part of the research. Finally, I pledged to turn the URL "indymediaresearch.org" over to the IMC Research group if the decision was ever made to launch a web site of their own.

The Questionnaire. The cornerstone of indymediaresearch.org was an online questionnaire, comprising six different pages on the site. The questionnaire was based on the feedback I received from the one distributed at the Austin conference and was expanded to include new items that many IMCistas articulated would be of benefit to the network, again this was an attempt to addresses one of the major concerns I had seen raised across the network, one that was later included in the network's research guidelines. The questionnaire contained sixty-six items, divided into five categories (Appendix C). Some of the items utilized pull-down menus and limited respondents to multiple-choice answers while others were open ended and allowed the respondent to freely answer the question. The online questionnaire was linked to a Microsoft Excel database that was instantly updated whenever a new respondent completed the questionnaire. In keeping with Indymedia's commitment to the development, promotion and use of open source software, I attempted to use such software to create and maintain the data base, but repeated attempts by the web designer and others to integrate the software with the website proved overly problematic.

Each of the five categories was designed to assess a different aspect of the IMC that could be used in my later analysis of the structural conditions they were operating under. The first category designed to collect general information about the respondent and the IMC

collective they were involved with. These questions sought to find out the number of members involved with each collective, what types of media projects the collective produced, what working groups the collective had established, how often the groups met and how those meetings took place, whether or not the collective had a physical location, and whether or not their decision making process was available on the web site so that I could refer to it later. The second category dealt with the actual content of the web site. This was included to get a sense of the activity level of each collective and included questions about the number of posts to the newswire, the number of posts that were promoted from the newswire to feature stories, how many of those stories dealt with local issues vs. national or international stories, whether or not the website had a translation feature and whether or not the editorial policy adopted by that collective was posted on the site. The third section asked about the collective's outreach methods. These questions included whether or not the collective had a local email contact or relied on the IMC lists system, how most new volunteers came to be involved with the collective and whether or not they had active working relationships with other organizations in their communities. The fourth area was designed to ascertain the technological capabilities of the collective. Questions included whether or not they had their own tech working group, if they used a local or remote server, if the group paid a private company for web hosting, whether or not they had a budget and where the majority of their funds, if any, were acquired.

The final category included questions about the diversity of their collective and whether or not the respondent was satisfied with their efforts to reach out to groups that some of the research literature on Indymedia had reported were underrepresented. The items asked whether or not the respondent believed that participation in their IMC by these oft cited underrepresented was significant including women, people of color, economically disadvantaged people and those without college degrees. I also added questions regarding participation by members of the LGBT community and people over the age of thirty-five. That last item was included because many of the IMCistas I spoke with while preparing the questionnaire expressed concerns that their collectives were dominated by college aged and younger individuals which had led to periodic losses of participants as these people graduated college or left to attend a university.

In order to distribute the web address for the research site and questionnaire I composed a short message outlining the nature of the research project and requesting assistance, making sure to articulate my own long-time involvement with the IMC, the goals of the research and all of the

agreements described above. I began by posting the request to several of the global IMC email lists including IMC-Research, IMC-Process and IMC-Features. I also distributed the request to numerous individual IMC activists I had worked with over the years, including all of those who had provided feedback on the research proposal and questionnaire at the IMC conference in Austin. After several weeks and with very little response, I posted the request to the newswire of each individual IMC in North America that had links on the cities list described in Chapter One. The request was posted twice on each IMCs newswire. While the number of responses was far less than I had hoped, I never received any communication indicating a blocking concern or an overt refusal to participate. Here is the post I made to the IMC-Research list.

> http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-November/1122-k4.html Greetings fellows on the research list,
>
> It is great that this list is active again with all of this discussion and information sharing. A couple of us here in Tallahassee have information for the oppression database based on some research we were doing, unfortunately I can't get to it right now but as soon as I can I will post it. Hope it helps.
>
> There was some discussion earlier on this list about the nature of Indymedia research, surveys etc. If you have not had a chance to look it over I encourage that you do...some very interesting points indeed. In February of this year, I presented some research ideas at the Indymedia Conference in Austin during the IMC Research panel discussion. That panel provided much of the original impetus for this list. An important part of the research we talked about was the need to get an idea as to what the network "looks" like in terms of resources and related areas. Erock and Jeff in Austin started that process by putting
> up a questionnaire (not a true survey in the strict sense) that asked questions in these areas. Based on that, I put together a website that includes a similar questionnaire as part of some research I am doing for my own academic endeavors. The discussions about Indymedia research on this list really helped guide the way in which that research is proceeding.
>
> I encourage everyone to take a look at the site and by all means, complete the questionnaire on behalf of your individual collectives. The site includes a complete description of the project and what implications it could have on the work we are all doing. I hope it can also as a starting point for an idea many of us on this list toyed
> around with months ago, the development of a website that contains IMC research. I have included some essays and articles from members of this list on the site.
>
> A couple of important notes that are elaborated in greater detail on the site:

* All information will belong to online community, first and foremost
* The final report on my findings will be posted on the network first, regardless of any implications for later publication
* The URL address will be happily provided if and when this group decides to go with an research website and petition to have it be included in the network

The site can be found at http://www.indymediaresearch.org/
If you have any ideas on the site please let me know, I would love the feedback!
Rich
In Tallahassee

I received several positive responses, including the one below.

ttp://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-November/1123-kr.html

Hi Rich and all,
your project looks really integrated, good luck with it! I'm looking forward to this "map" of imcs. By the look of it, your questionnaire is only aimed at imcs in the US -
did i get this right? One question about your ressources (sic) section - why did you say that the imc essay collection is "by chris andersen"? As far as I can see, there are at least six others who have contributed to it. I think the template was started by Blicero, GuamaniAn did some work on it in 2004 (maybe that's a nickname for Chris ;-), I keep adding new references and we included stuff from another essay collection:
http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Local/ImcUkImcResearchReferences. So I think this wikipage is a very good example for collaborative generating of ressources (sic).
I think the choice of URL "indymediaresearch.org" might be a bit overarching for one imc research project. imccensus or so might have described it better. But then, the site states clearly that it's a tool for the researcher and something like a service for the imc community. Btw, does anyone know what happened to the idea of an Indymedia research portal? Is anything happening with this draft:
http://www.robertcouch.net/IMC/ ?

While there were no direct challenges to this project the number of respondents was still relatively low leading me to speculate that the various issues described above still played a factor. A conversation with one of the respondents after the site was inactive it was shared that the questionnaire was perhaps too long and busy IMCistas, trying to balance their work with all of the other things people were doing (like living) were probably intimated by its length.

One of the items on the questionnaire asked if the respondents would be willing to answer more detailed questions about how the advantages and disadvantages they perceived resulting from their current structures in the areas of active member participation, outreach to new members, their ability to form coalitions with other organizations and the diversity of their collective. These questions were designed to get a sense of their perceived success in creating new spaces for communication and social organizing, their own alternative public sphere. The point is to ascertain what impact each of the different structural conditions had on the building of this new public space. The dual purpose of this exercise is both analytical and practical. Based on these perceptions, I hoped to be able to make some concrete recommendations to the IMC community about ways in which they may be able to improve their own projects.

Results

The website and online questionnaire were active for a period of 15-months, from about November 1st, 2005 until February 28th, 2007. In that time, I received twenty-nine responses including six responses representing three collectives, one response from a European collective and two responses that did not complete enough of the items on the questionnaire to be useful. In all, I was able to collect data from eighteen different local IMCs in North America, all located within the contiguous United States. One of the IMCs represented here (Tallahassee) has since disbanded and the site in Santa Cruz has since joined a regional IMC based in San Francisco at Indybay.org although the link to Santa Cruz is still active and all of its archives are still available online. All of the respondents whose questionnaires were used in this analysis reported to have been involved with their local IMC for at least six-months before completing the questionnaire, and the majority of those (16) reported being involved for more than one year. Through looking over some of the archive material (and my best recollection) I believe that there were sixty-two IMCs listed on the cities list for the U.S. at the time the questionnaire was active. A recent update to the list by IMC-Process has deleted those sites that went inactive and added several (including three sites in Florida) that have come online. Currently, there are fifty-seven U.S. sites on the cities list including Indymedia.us, a relatively new central hub that uses rich site syndication (RSS) feeds to collect feature stories from thirty-one IMCs in the U.S., allowing users to view news content from many communities at a single website.

As discussed earlier, Indymedia has no official leaders or designated spokespersons, and as such nobody has the authority to "speak" for an IMC collective or other related group. Rather, individuals are encouraged to speak about their own experiences and opinions about Indymedia, so those that responded to the questionnaire are doing so as individuals, not representatives of the IMC. The answers reflect information to the best of their knowledge and experiences. The two local IMCs that had multiple respondents showed a great deal of consistency between their answers, and all of the responses were checked against the information presented on the websites and found to be accurate for those items where the information could be publicly viewed. I have no doubt that once this project is released to the IMC community there will be some cases where individual IMCistas dispute the accuracy of the information based on their own experiences, which I hope will lead to some interesting follow-up conversations.

General Information. The responses to the items on the questionnaire dealing with the most general information on each local IMC is summarized on the next page in Table 2.

The longest operating IMC for which data was collected is located in Philadelphia and was founded in 1999. The most recent IMC that participated in the research is located in Asheville, and its website came online in 2007, just a few weeks before the questionnaire went inactive. Four of the eighteen IMCs represented here came online in 2003, a particularly active year for the global network according to information archived at the Indymedia Documentation Project. All eighteen of the IMCs represented have websites as the core of the operations and twelve have expanded into other media forms including print, radio and television.

Indymedia groups in Southern Illinois (Big Muddy IMC), Binghamton, Santa Cruz (Indybay) and Houston have print publications. Activists with Tallahassee Indymedia worked with members of the Tallahassee Green Party to start the *Apalachee Tortoise* (originally the Green Tortoise) a monthly print publication that outlasted Tally.IMC but which itself has since stopped publication. Tallahassee Indymedia and the *Tortoise* had a content sharing agreement, including a full page of local Indymedia stories while both projects were active. The Big Muddy publication, called the *Muddy Media Project* was first published in 2004 and is distributed free of charge on an intermittent schedule. In Binghamton, the IMC publishes *The Bridge*, which was first published in 2005 and is distributed free of charge through local businesses and community centers. Santa Cruz is directly involved with *Fault Lines,* a bi-monthly free paper based in San

Francisco that they distributed throughout the Santa Cruz area. Houston's Indymedia does not have its own publication per se but does have ongoing partnerships with Free Press Houston and the Houston Peace News, two free publications that have been distributed monthly for over ten years.

Table 2: General Information

Local IMC	Founded	Projects	Office	Phone	Working Groups
arizona.indymedia.org	2001	Web/Video/TV	Yes	No	Website/Video
arkansas.indymedia.org	2003	Web	No	No	Editorial/Tech/Finance/Photos
asheville.indymedia.org	2007	Web	No	No	Web/Editorial
Big Muddy (Southern Illinois) bigmuddyimc.org	2003	Web/Print/Radio	Yes	Yes	Website/Print/Radio/Other
binghamtonimc.org	2004	Web/Print/Video/TV	Yes	No	Website/Video/Television
buffalo.indymedia.org	2002	Web/Video	No	No	Editorial/Tech/Video/Outreach/ Fundraising
chicago.indymedia.org	2000	Web/Video/TV/Radio	Yes	Yes	Website/Print/Video/Radio
cleveland.indymedia.org	2002	Web/Radio	No	No	Editorial/Tech
houston.indymedia.org	2000	Web/Print/Video/ Radio	Yes	No	Website/Video/Radio/Finance/ Tech
milwaukee.indymedia.org	2003	Web	No	No	Editorial
phillyimc.org	1999	Web/Video/Radio	Yes	Yes	Website/Video
Pittsburgh - www.indypgh.org	2001	Web/Video/Radio	Yes	Yes	Website/Radio
richmond.indymedia.org	2001	Web	No	No	Editorial/Content/Radio/Tech
Rogue Valley (Southern Oregon) rogueimc.org	2003	Web/TV/Radio	No	No	Website/Video/Television/ Other
Santa Cruz - Indybay.org/SantaCruz	2001	Web/Print/Video/Radio	Yes	Yes	Website/Video/Television
Tallahassee - tallyimc.org	2002	Web/Print	No	No	Editorial/Content/Outreach/Tech
Tennessee - www.thimc.org	2002	Web/Video/Radio/TV	No	No	Website/Video/Radio/Television
worcester.indymedia.org	2004	Web/Video	No	No	Website

I was surprised to learn that over half (11) of the IMCs that participated in the questionnaire produced their own radio programs. I was aware that some IMCs were involved in radio production and broadcast but did not expect that number to be so high. In Tallahassee, the Indymedia content from tallyimc.org was presented in a weekly segment on the "Your Voice" radio program on WVFS 89.7 FM, an all volunteer college station that is an official charting station for the College Music Journal (CMJ). Big Muddy in Southern Illinois has a weekly one-hour talk and music program on WDBX 91.1 FM. In Chicago, the IMC has a one-hour program airing monthly on the local Pacifica Radio affiliate. In Cleveland the IMCistas produce a weekly radio program on the college station at Case Western Reserve University. The Houston collective produces a weekly, 30-minute program on the Pacifica Station, KPFT. The Philly IMC produces "Radio Volta" a 24-hour webcasting station that can be found at www.radiovolta.org. Rustbelt Radio a weekly program airing on WRCT-FM (affiliated with Carnegie Mellon University) is produced by the IMC in Pittsburg. In Santa Cruz, an IMC working group produces Indynewswire, a weekly show on Free Radio Santa Cruz at 101.1 FM. This station has been broadcasting for over 12 years without a license in open defiance of the Federal Communications Commission. As its website states, "We go on the air to protest corporate control of the airwaves, to bring local control and local accountability to our community media, to produce and broadcast a diversity of programs that are simply unavailable on corporate controlled stations" (www.freakradio.org). In Richmond the IMC produces "Indymedia Live" a weekly program on WRIR LPFM, a low power FM community station. Finally, the Tennessee Indymedia Report airs weekly on Radio Free Nashville at 98.9 LPFM.

Four of the IMCs that participated in this research project also had a regular presence on local television, all of which aired on community cable access stations. In Binghamton the IMC produces a weekly one-hour show on cable access. The Pittsburg IMC compiles video footage of its "Rustbelt Radio" program to air on one of the local cable access channels. The Rogue valley IMC has producers that work with the RVTV public access channel and who intermittently air reports from the collective, a similar situation exists in Arkansas.

Eight of the respondents reported that their IMCs had office space. In Arizona, the IMC operates an office that serves as a public computer lab in Tucson, and Big Muddy operates out of donated space in Carbondale's historic district. Binghamton Indymedia rents a small space behind a coffee shop. In Chicago, Houston, Pittsburg and Santa Cruz the IMCs all share portions

of office space with other community groups. Philly IMC is part of the Lancaster Avenue Autonomous Zone (LAVA) which serves as a center for radical media and organizing. The space includes a library, community kitchen and space for organizational meetings, lectures, video-showings, benefit concerts and other community events (www.lava.org). IMCs in Carbondale (Big Muddy), Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Santa Cruz all report maintaining local phone lines.

Content. As described above, several items on the questionnaire were designed to assess the content of the IMCs. First, it assesses their activity level based on the number of new feature stories either produced as features or moved from the open publishing newswire by the editors and also by the number of editors actively monitoring the newswire for potential feature stories. Second, as discussed earlier, the global IMC network has made major strides in developing open source software packages that enable IMC editors to quickly translate features into other languages, and I wanted to see how many IMCs in North America were utilizing this technology. Finally, I was interested to find out how many of the features posted on the site dealt specifically with local issues rather than other happenings posted across the network. A summary of these responses is located on the next page in Table 3.

The majority of those responding (12) reported that their IMCs had fewer than two feature stories posted in the features section per week, which I found surprising since Tallahassee Indymedia averaged between one and two new features per week, and the members of our collective believed that was too small a number and certainly felt as if it was below the "average" for IMC collectives. Five of those responding reported that their local IMCs had less than one new feature per week including Arkansas, Big Muddy, Milwaukee, Pittsburg and Worcester. The numbers for Big Muddy and Pittsburg were particularly surprising since both of those collectives seemed to be incredibly active, but as I found out later, there was less of an emphasis on web stories than radio and video. Seven of those responding reported that they averaged between one and to stories per week including Arizona, Asheville, Chicago, Cleveland, Richmond, Rogue Valley and Tallahassee. I was surprised at this number from Chicago Indymedia but learned in later conversations that their collective tries to post more detailed feature stories compiled by their own reporters rather than simply moving posts from the newswire, a goal we had in Tallahassee that never came to fruition. Six IMCs, Binghamton,

Buffalo, Houston, Philly, Santa Cruz and Tennessee, reported that they had more than two new features per week which seems consistent with the overall activity level of these IMCs.

Table 3: Content

Local IMC	Weekly Features	Local Features	Translations	Site Monitors
arizona.indymedia.org	Between 1 & 2	More than 60%	No	5
arkansas.indymedia.org	Less than 1	More than 60%	No	4
asheville.indymedia.org	Between 1 & 2	More than 60%	No	5 to 6
Big Muddy (Southern Illinois) bigmuddyimc.org	Less than 1	More than 60%	Yes(Spanish)	No answer
binghamtonimc.org	More than 2	More than 60%	No	No answer
buffalo.indymedia.org	More than 2	More than 60%	No	5
chicago.indymedia.org	Between 1 & 2	More than 60%	No	No answer
cleveland.indymedia.org	Between 1 & 2	More than 60%	No	3
houston.indymedia.org	More than 2	More than 60%	Yes(Spanish)	6
milwaukee.indymedia.org	Less than 1	40% to 60%	No	3
phillyimc.org	More than 2	More than 60%	No	No answer
Pittsburgh - www.indypgh.org	Less than 1	More than 60%	No	No answer
richmond.indymedia.org	Between 1 & 2	More than 60%	No	5
Rogue Valley (Southern Oregon) rogueimc.org	Between 1 & 2	More than 60%	No	4 to 5
Santa Cruz - Indybay.org/SantaCruz	More than 2	More than 60%	Yes(Spanish)	4
Tallahassee - tallyimc.org	Between 1 & 2	More than 60%	No	3
Tennessee - www.thimc.org	More than 2	More than 60%	No	All members
worcester.indymedia.org	Less than 1	More than 60%	No	2 to 3

The Indymedia movement has strived to localize its efforts as much as possible, trying to move away from its roots of reporting on large-scale protest events in far flung regions of the world towards a more local focus that serves the communities of which they are a part. Consistent with this principle, all but one (Milwaukee) reported that more than 60% of their

feature content dealt with local stories and issues. The number of editors (or other IMCistas depending on their own internal structures) that dealt with monitoring their newswires ranged from a low of two to three (Worcester) to a high of six in Houston. All of the IMCs reporting more than two new features per week also reported four or more active monitors of their newswires with the exceptions of Binghamton and Philadelphia that did not complete that item on the questionnaire. Three of the IMCs responding, Big Muddy, Houston and Santa Cruz (Indybay), reported that they did provide translations of their content, all in Spanish. As I learned in later follow-up conversations, all of these IMCs served communities with large Spanish speaking populations. The IMC in Philadelphia reported that they were working on incorporating such a feature, but repeated visits to their website did not show any evidence of that having happened.

Technology. Several of the items on the questionnaire were designed to examine the overall technical capacity of each local IMC including their access to servers, their level of tech support within their own collectives and what equipment they had that could be used by both IMC members and the broader community. I had anecdotal data indicating that many IMCs had both equipment and "skill share" classes to show people in the community how to use that equipment so I wanted to asses the prevalence of this practice. I was also interested in investigating the level of technical proficiency and access to servers that each IMC collective had. In addition to the reasons outlined earlier in this chapter, my experiences with the Tallahassee collective had shown that serious problems could arise if there were not a sufficient number of people with the technical expertise to maintain the website or if those with the technical ability did not have server access. At tallyimc.org we essentially had one individual responsible for maintaining the website and its codebase who also happened to be the owner of the server. While I will go into greater detail about some of the problems this created in the next chapter, some of these should be self-evident. For example, whenever the collective wanted to make changes to the site, above and beyond those granted to editors and others through the software itself, we had to wait until this one person was either ready or willing to make those changes. I wanted to see how common this was across the network. The basic data collected from these items is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Technology

Local IMC	Server	Pay Hosting	Host Others	Tech Support	Equipment
arizona.indymedia.org	Remote	No	Yes	Local	None
arkansas.indymedia.org	Local	No	No	Local	None
asheville.indymedia.org	Local	No	No	Local	Computers
Big Muddy (Southern Illinois) bigmuddyimc.org	Remote	No	No	Local	Computers, Projector, Still Cameras
binghamtonimc.org	Remote	No	Yes	Local	Vid cameras, Vid &Print Software, Vid Library
buffalo.indymedia.org	Remote	Yes	No	Local/Remote	None
chicago.indymedia.org	Remote	No	Yes	Local	Computers, Audio recording
cleveland.indymedia.org	Remote	No	No	Remote	None
houston.indymedia.org	Remote	No	Yes	Local/Remote	Computers, Audio editing station
milwaukee.indymedia.org	Local	No	No	Local	None
phillyimc.org	Local	No	Yes	Local	Computers, Video & Audio recorders
Pittsburgh - www.indypgh.org	Local	No	Yes	Local	Computer, Audio & Video Recorders
richmond.indymedia.org	Local	No	No	Local	None
Rogue Valley (Southern Oregon) rogueimc.org	Local	No	No	Local	None
Santa Cruz - Indybay.org/SantaCruz	Remote	Yes	No	Local/Remote	None
Tallahassee - tallyimc.org	Local	No	Yes	Local	None
Tennessee	Remote	No	Yes	Local	None
worcester.indymedia.org	Remote	No	Don't Know	Local/Remote	Video, Digital cameras

Of the eighteen IMCs represented in the responses to the questionnaire, less than half (8) had their websites housed on servers in their communities. Respondents for Indymedia in Arizona, Carbondale (Big Muddy), Binghamton, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston, Santa

Cruz, Tennessee and Worcester all reported that their website were housed on remote servers outside of their immediate communities. There does not appear to be any connection between the activity level of each IMC (as judged by number of media projects, features etc.) and whether or not their servers were local or not. This was not expected in that I believed that the more active IMCs would have their own dedicated servers. Only two of those responding reported that their local IMC paid for hosting privileges, the rest of those that reported using remote servers stating that they had been donated server space from other Indymedia collectives or other grass roots organizations. As discussed earlier, this practice seems to be rather common across the network and the snapshot of the network represented in this census bears that out with eight IMCs reporting that either their website was hosted on servers with other Indymedia sites (Arizona, Binghamton, Chicago, Houston, Tennessee) or that their own local servers hosted other sites (Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Tallahassee). In an interesting example of how geographic location has become irrelevant in Indymedia's technical world, the website and archives for Santa Cruz Indymedia, which is now a working group within IndyBay IMC (San Francisco), is hosted on the server belonging to Pittsburg Indymedia.

I was surprised by the number of IMCs that participated in this study that relied almost exclusively on their own local working groups for tech support. As I described earlier when explaining the traffic report study that was the impetus for this census, the lack of local tech expertise seemed to be one of the contributing factors towards the inability for many local collectives to generate their own traffic data (Opel & Templin, 2005). The results of this questionnaire, albeit very limited by the small number of respondents, seem to contradict that idea. Every IMC that participated in this study reported having its own tech support group as part of its collective although many of these reported using the network from tech support from time to time. Four IMCs including Buffalo, Houston, Santa Cruz and Worcester reported that they also used tech volunteers from the larger network on a regular basis. The Arizona IMC reported that it used the network for tech support on an ongoing basis, and Asheville responded that it relied almost exclusively on network help when it was first establishing its website.

Half of the eighteen IMCs included in this study reported that they had no equipment that was collective owned or available for use indicating that individuals relied on their own equipment for their media work. The Asheville IMC responded that they had computers available for use by the collective. The remaining seven of the IMCs reported having one or

more of the following: computers, projectors, video and still cameras, audio recording and editing equipment and software. Eleven of the IMCs reported having public media skill share events and workshops for the community including: Arizona, Big Muddy, Binghamton, Worcester, Santa Cruz, Pittsburg, Houston, Chicago and Philadelphia. Only Pittsburgh, Houston and Buffalo reported having equipment available for use by individuals not directly involved with the local IMC.

Outreach. The questionnaire also included items designed to asses the types of outreach that each IMC engaged in and other items designed to assess their overall relationships with groups and individuals outside of their own collectives. These items asked the most common ways that new members became involved with the collectives, other ways they found new members joining, if and how they used the Indymedia lists system described earlier, how the IMCs worked with outside groups and general information about fundraising. The responses to those items dealing with the ways in which the IMCs make contact with potential volunteers and other members of the community are presented in Table 5.

I anticipated that the most common method for the recruitment of new volunteers was through the collectives' websites and/or through email contact. However, while the results above indicate that all of the participating IMCs do use emails and their websites to make contact with the public, the answers to many of the open-ended items and several follow-up discussions with the respondents indicated that live meetings and other events such as video screenings, speakers, workshops and panel discussions were the most common way that new people became involved with their local IMC. Additionally, many IMCs also reported that new volunteers joined their efforts through organizations whose events had been covered and/or promoted by Indymedia.

Based on my experiences with the traffic report study described above, I also expected to find that the bulk of IMCs relied exclusively on Indymedia Lists for communicating with the public. Fifteen of the participating groups indicated that they used the Indymedia Lists system described earlier for the bulk of their communication both within their collectives and the broader public. However, the majority of the participating IMCs reported that they had established their own local email addresses for communication with only Arizona, Arkansas, Buffalo, Pittsburg and Worcester reporting that they relied exclusively on Indymedia lists. Only

the IMCs in Asheville, Philadelphia and Richmond reported that they did not use the lists system, relying instead on their own local email lists.

Table 5: Outreach

Local IMC	New Volunteers	Other	Indymedia Lists	Local E Mail
arizona.indymedia.org	Other	Community Events	Yes	No
arkansas.indymedia.org	Emai/Meetings	NA	Yes	No
asheville.indymedia.org	Email	NA	No	Yes
Big Muddy (Southern Illinois) bigmuddyimc.org	Email/Other	NA	Yes	Yes
binghamtonimc.org	Email/Other	Video screenings	Yes	Yes
buffalo.indymedia.org	Email/Meetings	NA	Yes	No
chicago.indymedia.org	(no answer)	NA	Yes	Yes
cleveland.indymedia.org	Email	NA	Yes	Yes
houston.indymedia.org	Meetings/Groups/Other	Radio program	Yes	Yes
milwaukee.indymedia.org	Email	NA	Yes	Yes
phillyimc.org	Other	Face-to-face invites	No	Yes
Pittsburgh - www.indypgh.org	Meetings/Other	Radio program	Yes	No
richmond.indymedia.org	Other	Community Events	No	Yes
Rogue Valley (Southern Oregon) rogueimc.org	Email/Meetings	NA	Yes	Yes
Santa Cruz - Indybay.org/SantaCruz	Groups	NA	Yes	Yes
Tallahassee - tallyimc.org	Email/Meetings	NA	Yes	Yes
Tennessee - www.thimc.org	Email/Meetings	NA	Yes	Yes
worcester.indymedia.org	Email	NA	Yes	No

Most of the participating IMCs reported that they used Indymedia Lists for the bulk of their communications because the system automatically archived all of their discussions. The respondent from Binghamton Indymedia reported that they primarily used their lists on the system for community announcements, boasting over 600 individuals subscribed. The Cleveland IMC reported that while they used the subscription list for the majority of their internal communications, they did provide their own local email addresses for new volunteers and to allow anyone using the site to report technical problems or other issues.

A common feature on most Indymedia websites is a calendar that allows users to post information about upcoming political and community events. In Tallahassee, this was an important feature in that it enabled our website to serve as an organizing hub for progressive organizations to get the word out about their events, and it also ensured that members of our collective were aware of these events to provide coverage. The calendar, provided by the group radicalcalendar.org which described itself as "an open, non-corporate effort to provide calendar and event listings for radical and progressive organizations," became one of the principle drivers of traffic to our site. Seventeen of the IMCs participating in the census reported having the calendar feature with only the respondent from the Richmond collective reporting that they did not. While the overwhelming majority of the IMCs represented reported having the feature, I also wanted to get a sense of how well the calendar served as a community outreach tool by finding out how well it was utilized by outside groups. Respondents were asked to rate the usage of their calendar as "well utilized," "somewhat utilized," "not well utilized," or "no outside utilization." Five of the participating IMCs replied that their calendar feature was well utilized by outside groups including Binghamton, Buffalo, Chicago, Pittsburg and Santa Cruz. Almost half (7) reported that their calendar's were only somewhat utilized (Asheville, Arizona, Cleveland, Houston, Philadelphia, Rogue Valley and Tallahassee). Respondents from the IMCs in Arkansas, Milwaukee, Southern Illinois (Big Muddy) and Tennessee reported that their calendars were not well utilized by outside organizations. The only IMC that reported that its calendar feature was not utilized at all (except Worcester which has no calendar) was the collective in Richmond.

In general, most of the respondents completing the questionnaire reported that their local Indymedia had cultivated relationships with other organizations in their communities although just over half (11) characterized those relationships as "ongoing." The most common types of

groups that were mentioned included campus radio stations, peace and justice groups, environmental groups, gender equity organizations, labor unions and organizations promoting local businesses. The respondent from Binghamton reported that their IMC had become "the focal point for peace and social justice groups in our community" and was producing video projects highlighting the different groups. As mentioned earlier, the IMC in Philadelphia is a partner in LAVA, a cooperative center for activists. The Tennessee IMC reported ongoing relationships with nineteen different organizations ranging from three state universities to the National Organization for Women to the Green Party of Tennessee to the Tennessee Immigrant Rights and Refugee Network and several incarnations of Earth First! and Food Not Bombs. Big Muddy and Pittsburg Indymedia both reported having formalized relationships with their local labor unions. Several of the IMCs indicated ongoing relationships with religious organizations including various interfaith alliances, the Unitarian Universalist Church and Pagan organizations.

One additional way that some Indymedia Centers have conducted outreach in their communities and found new recruits for the effort is by conducting "skill shares." These community workshops are designed to teach people in the community about different aspects of media making from reporting and writing to video and audio production. These events were relatively common amongst the IMCs participating in the questionnaire with only the Indymedia Centers in Arkansas, Asheville, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Tallahassee and Tennessee reporting that they did not offer these events.

The final set of questions dealing with outreach centered on fundraising which in many ways serves as an expression of support from the community. Indymedia Centers worldwide pride themselves on being able to operate with little or no funds, relying instead on contributions of personal time and energy. In fact, some in the IMC community actively reject any financial contributions for the services they provide, arguing that the acceptance of financial support both weakens the statement they are making about the power of DIY grass roots media and lessen the likelihood that the donor give instead of his or her time and personal energy thus prohibiting them from the empowerment of media making. The Indymedia Center in Milwaukee for example, is very clear on its own website that financial support is not what they are looking for. They post, "Milwaukee Indymedia doesn't need financial support at this time.
What we do need is your participation. People willing to write for the open newswire constantly, people to attend meetings and fight for consensus, people to be active all year round. That's what

we need" (http://milwaukee.indymedia.org/en/static/support.shtml). However many have found that securing a small operating budget can be instrumental in building a vibrant IMC; enabling the purchase of promotional materials, basic equipment, physical space phone and data lines and what many would consider to be "essentials."

Respondents from seven of the eighteen IMCs participating in the questionnaire reported having an ongoing budget and the majority of those reported that benefit events were the most common ways they raised funds. Nine of the IMCs represented reported that they had options for online donations on their websites including Arkansas, Big Muddy, Buffalo, Cleveland, Houston, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Santa Cruz and Tennessee. Data from the questionnaire and follow-up conversations with respondents from those IMCs that reported the ability to collect donations online indicate that this option is not overly successful. Four of the IMCs listed above (Arkansas, Cleveland, Santa Cruz and Tennessee) reported that online fundraising was so slight that there was not enough regular revenue to have any formalized budget.

Membership. The final set of items from the questionnaire asked about the local IMC's membership both in terms of numbers and composition based on a wide range of factors, especially those relating to groups that the research literature and many IMC activists have argued are underrepresented in the movement. Some of the items asked about demographic characteristics of the respondents, their overall judgments and their satisfaction level on the diversity of their collectives. A summary of the data generated by these questions is found in Table 6. Some of those responding did not provide all of the requested information on their own demographic characteristics.

The participants in this study represented a very homogenized group. They were overwhelmingly white, male, college educated and considered themselves to be middle income. Only three of the respondents reported that they were female, although only two are included in Table 5 because one was a duplicate response for the IMC in Santa Cruz. None of the respondents reported considering themselves trans-gendered. Only four (Big Muddy, Milwaukee, Tennessee and Worcester) considered themselves to be low income. None of the respondents reported anything other than a straight sexual orientation. One characteristic I found surprising was the number of respondents who reported being over the age of 30 since many in the IMC community, including those of us in the over 30 category ourselves, operate under the belief that most of our fellow IMCistas "out there" are college aged.

Table 6: Membership

Local IMC	Respondent	Diversity	Satisfaction
arizona.indymedia.org	White/Male/Straight/>35/College	Fairly Diverse	Somewhat Satisfied
arkansas.indymedia.org	White/Male/Straight/College	Not Diverse	Not Satisfied
asheville.indymedia.org	White/Straight/Student	Not Diverse	Not Satisfied
Big Muddy (Southern Illinois) bigmuddyimc.org	White/Straight/No college/Low income	Fairly Diverse	Not Satisfied
binghamtonimc.org	White/Male/>35/College/Unmployed	Fairly Diverse	Somewhat Satisfied
buffalo.indymedia.org	Latino/Male/Straight/Some College/Middle	Not Diverse	Not Satisfied
chicago.indymedia.org	White/Male/Straight/>30/College	Not Diverse	Not Satisfied
cleveland.indymedia.org	White/Female/Straight/College	Fairly Diverse	Satisfied
houston.indymedia.org	White/Male/Straight/<40/College/	Fairly Diverse	Not Satisfied
milwaukee.indymedia.org	White/Male/College/Low income	Fairly Diverse	Not Satisfied
phillyimc.org	White/Male/Straight/College	Fairly Diverse	Somewhat Satisfied
Pittsburgh - www.indypgh.org	White/Female/>30/Straight/College	Diverse	Not Satisfied
richmond.indymedia.org	White/Male/Straight/College/Middle	Fairly Diverse	Not Satisfied
Rogue Valley (Southern Oregon) rogueimc.org	White/Male/College/>50/Middle	Not Diverse	Not Satisfied
Santa Cruz - Indybay.org/SantaCruz	White/Male/Straight/<30/Middle	Fairly Diverse	Not Satisfied
Tallahassee - tallyimc.org	White/Male/Straight/<35/College/Middle	Not Diverse	Not Satisfied
Tennessee - www.thimc.org	White/Male/Straight/>35/Low income	Not Diverse	Not Satisfied
worcester.indymedia.org	White/Male/>30/College/Low income	Not Diverse	Not Satisfied

On the question of overall diversity, eight of the respondents reported that they considered their IMCs to be "not diverse," nine of those responding indicated that they felt their collectives were "fairly diverse," and only one believed that their group was "diverse." In terms of the respondents' general satisfaction over the diversity of their group, only the respondent from the Cleveland IMC reported that they were "satisfied." Three respondents reported that they were "somewhat satisfied," but the majority of those participating (14) reported that they were "not satisfied" with the overall diversity of their collective.

Table 6a

Local IMC	Gender	Race	LGBT	Age	Economic	No College
arizona.indymedia.org	Significant(30%)	Not Significant	Not Significant	Somewhat	Not Significant	Not Significant
arkansas.indymedia.org	Not Sig. (10%)	Not Significant	Not Significant	Somewhat(20%)	Somewhat	Not Significant
asheville.indymedia.org	Significant (30%)	Not Significant	Somewhat	Somewhat(30%)	Somewhat	Not Significant
Big Muddy (Southern Illinois) bigmuddyimc.org	Significant(50%)	Not Significant	Somewhat	Significant(20%)	Significant (75%)	Significant(75%)
binghamtonimc.org	Significant(40%)	Not Significant	Not Significant	Significant(40%)	Somewhat(5%)	Somewhat(50%)
buffalo.indymedia.org	Not Sig. (10%)	Somewhat	Not Significant		Somewhat(20%)	Not Significant
chicago.indymedia.org	Very (40%)	Not Significant	Very Significant	Very(40%)	Not Significant	Very(30%)
cleveland.indymedia.org	Not Sig. (10%)	Not Significant	Not Significant	Somewhat(30%)	Not Significant	Significant(30%)
houston.indymedia.org	Very (65%)	Somewhat	Somewhat	No Response	Somewhat(10%)	Very(50%)
milwaukee.indymedia.org	Significant(40%)	Not Significant	Not Significant	Somewhat	Significant(50%)	Not Significant
phillyimc.org	Very (40%)	Somewhat	Somewhat	Somewhat(20%)	Not Significant	Very(90%)
Pittsburgh - www.indypgh.org	Very (50%)	Somewhat	Somewhat	Somewhat	Very(75%)	Not Significant
richmond.indymedia.org	Not Sig. (10%)	Somewhat	Not Significant	No Response	Somewhat	Not Significant
Rogue Valley (Southern Oregon) rogueimc.org	Somewhat(33%)	Not Significant	Somewhat	Significant(65%)	Somewhat(33%)	Significant(50%)
Santa Cruz - Indybay.org/SantaCruz	Somewhat(33%)	Somewhat	Somewhat	Somewhat(20%)	Very(90%)	Significant(50%)
Tallahassee	Not Sig.(10%)	Not Significant	Not Significant	Very(60%)	Somewhat(20%)	Not Significant
Tennessee - thimc.org	Not Sig.(20%)	Not Significant	Not Significant	Significant(50%)	Significant (50%)	Not Significant
worcester.indymedia.org	Significant(40%)	Not Significant	Somewhat	Significant(50%)	Somewhat(25%)	Not Significant

Additional items in this section of the questionnaire asked the respondents to provide their overall judgments about the representation of several of the groups that some have argued are underrepresented in the IMC movement (women, people of color, lower income, older, not college educated) and members who were gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and/or trans-gendered.

Respondents were also asked to estimate the percentage of their collective from these groups. A summary of the results from these questions is included in Table 6a. The respondents' overall assessment is listed first and possible answers are "not significant," "somewhat significant," "significant" and "very significant." The estimated percentage of the members of their collective who fall within these categories is listed in parentheses although not all of the respondents provided these estimations.

In most instances these results mirror the overall judgments of the respondents presented earlier in Table 4 for each IMC. It is important to note that the designation relating to significance is not standardized and is based on the interpretation of the respondent. For example, the respondent from the Big Muddy IMC felt that 20% of the collective over the age of 35 was significant while the respondent from Philadelphia felt that this percentage was only somewhat significant. As I found out later during several follow-up conversations, these judgments were based in large part on the demographic make-up of the communities where the IMCs were located. For example, staying with the questions on age, in areas where the progressive community was dominated by students, a smaller number of people over the age of 35 was deemed more significant than in areas where the community was more equally distributed with age.

These results provide further evidence in support of earlier described claims that the movement has much more work to do in diversifying the voices involved and is currently dominated by white, college educated men from middle and upper middle class backgrounds. Since women make up just over 50% of the population in the Untied States, the fact that only three (Big Muddy, Houston, Pittsburg) of the eighteen participating IMCs reported women making up 50% or more of their collectives is, in my opinion, problematic. The fact that six (Arkansas, Buffalo, Cleveland, Richmond, Tallahassee and Tennessee) IMC collectives reported that women made up 20% or less of those groups is even more so. There are other problematic areas as well. Only one of the respondents (Buffalo) reported that they were a person of color, and none of the respondents reported that participation in their collective by people of color was significant or higher.

In terms of the IMC movement including voices of the economically disadvantaged and people without a college education, this simple census does seem to indicate that the situation in North America is not as bad as some have indicated. While the descriptive value of the data

concerning the participation of the "economically disadvantaged" is minimal since the term was not clearly defined but rather left up to the participants to decide, the results are interesting. Only four of the IMCs participating in the questionnaire (Arizona, Chicago, Cleveland and Philadelphia) reported that the number of economically disadvantaged people participating was not significant. The largest number the respondents (9) reported that they believed participation from this group was "somewhat significant" ranging from a low of 5% (Binghamton) to a high of 33% (Rogue Valley). Respondents from the Indymedia Centers in Southern Illinois (Big Muddy), Milwaukee, Pittsburg, Santa Cruz and Tennessee all reported that participation from those they considered economically disadvantaged to be significant or very significant from a low of 50% (Tennessee, Milwaukee) to a high of 90% (Santa Cruz). Finally, while a majority (10) of the respondents reported that participation by non-students without a college education was not significant, the remaining eight reported that participation by this group was significant to very significant from a low of 30% to a high of 90%. The fact that almost half of this small group of IMCs reported that a third or more of their active members did not have a college education seems to run counter to the perceptions of many both in the IMC movement and academics who have researched it.

The final area (included for mere curiosity's sake) involved the respondents' perceptions about the involvement of people of varying sexual orientations. Many of the respondents reported that they were unsure as to the sexual orientation of the members of their collective which I found surprising. Since so many IMCs are involved with the LGBT movement communities and the social and political struggles for justice in these communities is a mainstay of Indymedia coverage, I assumed that the subject of sexual orientation would be more open. Nine respondents reported that participation by lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans-gendered individuals was not significant, eight reported that participation was somewhat significant and one (Chicago) reported participation was very significant.

Conclusions

Obviously, with only eighteen individual IMCs represented it is extremely difficult to generalize these results across the entire network. However, since this convenient sample of IMCs covers a broad geographic range, includes long established centers with relatively new projects, combines data from IMCs in small communities and large urban areas and represents

both IMCs that are strictly web projects and those that have expanded into other media forms such as print, radio and TV, it does offer a glimpse of the North American network that while limited is still useful. The goal was to assess the physical and structural elements of this new communicative space in an effort to help understand the ways in which it can contribute to an alternate public sphere, and while the picture is still admittedly incomplete, it does represent a healthy start. Most of the discussions about the results are self explanatory but I have drawn some additional conclusions from this data which are presented below.

Expanded Media. One of the more encouraging conclusions that can be drawn from this brief look at the network is the fact that Indymedia has expanded from simply a web based platform into a variety of other media with only four of the eighteen IMCs reporting that their media production was still confined to the web. While the Internet is still the core technology driving Indymedia, many have successfully used that base to build programs that now include print publications, radio (both broadcast and internet), television and film (for example the Hudson Mohawk IMC boasts two major documentary film awards).

Of particular interest to me was the fact that over a third (7) of the IMCs reporting that had regularly scheduled radio broadcasts. Radio is one of fastest growing areas for alternative media. As the big media companies leave those portions of the spectrum behind for the digital revolution, those frequencies are now available for community organizations and radical media makers. Low power FM (LPFM) stations are popping up all over the country, and while the FCC has a long way to go in its licensing process to truly democratize the medium and open up access, progress has been made. Most of the IMCs represented in this census had developed partnerships with their local college radio stations to get their programs on the air. With over 200 core college stations charting with CMJ (College Music Journal) and hundreds more that are not part of the CMJ program, this could represent a huge untapped resource for Indymedia. Not only do these stations represent an easy way to get on the air (without having to purchase the equipment or acquiring a license), they offer a treasure trove of human resources with lots of young energy from people looking to learn the ropes of radio. Many college stations are also committed to being experimental in nature, exploring new models of programming and cutting edge content. For example, the station at the University of Missouri uses a completely "open programming" model, meaning that each DJ is able to choose the format for their time slot

whenever they go on the air. This type of model, which is quite radical in the world of radio, is growing across the country and seems to be a natural fit for Indymedia.

Resources. The information gathered from the questionnaire also indicates that the Indymedia movement has become resource rich (relatively speaking) since its early beginnings in that downtown Seattle storefront. Consider some of these developments: over half of the groups reported that they had their own space, eight of the local IMCs had their own computers, cameras, digital recording and editing equipment and an equal number had their own servers. These are not products of mere monetary gain but seem to be connected to the movement's number one resource - people. While most reported that they had little in the way of formalized fundraising programs, this does not to appear to be a problem; almost half had limited budgets and those that did not seemed unhindered by a lack of funds. The respondent from Chicago wrote in an email, "We really just raise money when we need it for something specific, and usually we don't even get the money, but someone in the community gives us what we were looking for." A conversation with the IMCista from Rogue Valley was even more illuminating. He said, "I think people would be shocked at just how much we accomplish with noting but committed people using their own or borrowed equipment. I started with the IMC in Portland and did amazing projects with video and audio and a great website that was always fresh but that was because of people; it really isn't about money. IMCs definitely have more to work with but it isn't just because of money."

While the first IMC had a physical space, which also served as a convergence space for many other activities surrounding the Seattle protests, my experiences before this project led me to believe that most did not have their own space. The fact that so many of the collectives represented in the questionnaire did was surprising but seems to be an important development. For example, the respondent from the IMC in Philly which shares space in the cooperatively organized Lancaster Avenue Autonomous Zone (LAVA) told me that the ability to have a physical space has made all the difference in their project. He said, "Things really took off when we got an office. As soon as we were able to have meetings and events in our own space, we had the flexibility to be a lot more active. The office also serves as a central spot where different groups doing really amazing work can co-mingle, share ideas and energy. So many of the people in our collective came to the IMC that way; it really helped us grow, and it helps us be more on

top of what is going on so we can be there." In Tennessee the IMC is very active (based on the quantity of new posts on their website, other media production and active relationships with other groups) but does not have an office space. The respondent told me that, "We do so much of our work online and we see each other at events and the radio station, but if we had an office, we would be able to do so much more, and I think people would want to do more because we could be more of tight knit group."

Outreach. As discussed earlier, my experiences with the traffic report study I participated in with Dr. Opel and the difficulty in acquiring the data made the mechanisms the network had developed to communicate with the general public a topic of particular interest. I fully expected that those groups relying almost exclusively on the subscription lists system at list.indymedia.org would be at a disadvantage in outreach. While this assumption was somewhat supported by the data and follow-up conversations, I also found that many IMCs have found novel ways to do outreach in the community, making email contact from the websites less important. Community events and other opportunities for face-to-face contact were the most common ways that IMCs recruited new members. The expansion into new forms of media also seemed to be a major source of outreach with many of the groups reporting that their print publications, radio shows and cable access programs served as common channels that brought new people to the project. As described in the previous section, only five of the IMCs (Arizona, Arkansas, Buffalo, Pittsburg and Worcester) reported that they used the subscription lists as their only means of communication. While this system has many benefits, chief of which is the fact that all messages are archived for anyone to access, I found it overly complicated and expected that many would find committing to a list a little intimidating just to get some basic information. After the questionnaire was closed I had email exchanges with the respondents from Arkansas and Pittsburg. Both indicated that email contact was not the principle way that people found out about their IMC but acknowledged that a few people not directly involved with their respective collectives were not well represented on the lists. Both said that providing local, direct emails would be a positive development.

The community calendar, a relatively small feature on sites across the network, appears to be a vital and useful tool for building relationships with the public. In an email exchange with the respondent from Binghamton, one of the IMCs reporting that their calendar feature was well utilized wrote, "The calendar is what helps anchor our site with the community, even though

every thing is open publishing, the calendar is one the main things that people really know belongs to everybody. It also really helps drive people to the site because it is a central one-stop-shop to find out what's happening." In Tallahassee, our calendar was probably the most popular part of our website. It is always a challenge for community groups to promote their events and is often the most frustrating and time-consuming aspect of planning an event. The fact that the local corporate media very often refuses to help out in this area, especially if the groups are advocating controversial issues or ideas that are not consistent with mainstream thought, the availability of our calendar almost seemed comforting, as if people knew that at least news of their event was somewhere. (Anyone from Tallahassee who has used Tom Baxter's famous email list can attest to that. In fact we included a link to "Tom's List" on our front page.) Based on the data and my own experiences, the community calendar seems to be relatively easy way to build connections with the community.

Tech. The results of this simple, limited census indicate that the network or at least a portion of it has grown in its technical proficiency from the time I was working to collect server data for the traffic report study. Based on those experiences, I believed that a census of the IMCs would indicate a great disparity across sites in terms of technical abilities and access to tech support. While the small number of responses make it impossible to generalize across this portion of the network, this data disputes that belief. With virtually every site reporting that they relied on their own working groups to handle the technical aspects of the site, an over reliance on the network did not seem problematic. Additionally, while most had their own local techies, virtually every site reported that they also got support from the Tech Working Group of the global network. In most cases this support was in relation to the open source software package used to create and maintain the web sites such as DADA or MIR. In general, it appears that the network has developed a fairly efficient system, merging the skills of local tech volunteers directly involved with collectives and remote support from those on the broader network. The IMC-Tech working group has developed a fairly significant system of email lists and technical guides to allow anyone with basic programming or web design skills to contribute to the effort. Most of these can be accessed online at http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Devel/ImcTech.

Membership. The data clearly indicates that the network still has problems reaching out to and involving members of those demographic groups that have been and continue to be under represented in the mainstream media. The fact that fifteen of those responding were male,

seventeen were white, fourteen considered themselves middle income and most had college educations supports many of the anecdotal claims appearing in the literature characterizing the IMC movement in the U.S. as one dominated by white college educated men. The fact that only one of the respondents reported that they felt satisfied with the diversity of their collective indicates that most IMCistas know they need to include more diverse people in their efforts. In examining the data, the numbers indicate that the Big Muddy IMC has the most diverse collective, reporting that half of their group are women and over three-quarters is economically challenged and without a college degree. In a follow up conversation with the respondent from Southern Illinois, he said, "We are one of those IMCs that really came out of a marginalized community in Carbondale. The city has a long history of activism, largely connected to the university, (Southern Illinois University) but a lot of the people like me not affiliated with college have always been real active as well. When the IMC got started, it was a real great partnership between the people in the city and some student groups so many of us don't have college educations. The economy over the last few years has been really hard in the area, and the average wage is real low, so many of us are struggling. I guess the real key to our diversity is that we started as a community project with students involved, not a campus project. The one big problem is that we have like 30% of the population is black, and we have almost nobody from that community involved, we really need to work on that."

These sentiments were reflected in several other follow up conversations. In those communities where the IMC started as an outgrowth of student activism, the collectives are less diverse. In those communities where there was a partnership or in the urban areas, the collectives are more diverse although only slightly. The lack of people of color is particularly troubling especially since so many of these groups are the most marginalized in society and have the stories that need to be told the most. In Tallahassee, we tried to work through organizations within the black community to increase involvement, but it was incredibly difficult to convince these groups that we were not asking them to help our project but to be partners in what could be their project. The respondent from the IMC in Philadelphia shared a different perspective in an email. He wrote, "We have had a good bit of luck in helping people of color feel like this project, which was started by a bunch of white guys, is really theirs if they want it to be. I think a big part of the challenge is that computers and the Internet are just not a widely used as activist tools in many of those communities, so I think believe that the technology itself is a big part of

why we have not had more luck. IMCs in other parts of the country and in Central America that have set up computer labs and hold classes are doing much better." I have heard plenty of stories about IMCs doing this type of work, and the results of the questionnaire seem to indicate that the practice is fairly common with twelve of the eighteen IMCs all reporting those type of outreach efforts.

As of 2008, This is the first time any kind of patterned examination of the structural qualities has taken place. While the small number of respondents is somewhat disappointing, this examination demonstrates that this type of study could have merit for academics but more importantly for the IMC movement itself. Obviously there are challenges to increasing the number of participants in a census study like this with the movement's distrust of the institutional world (based on many valid critiques), the constant threats posed by law enforcement and the justice system and the basic punk rock, DIY, independent streak of the IMCistas. However, getting a better picture of what the movement looks like, the structures it has established and the policies it functions under is critical if we are to ever really understand how, or perhaps more importantly if, the IMC and projects like it are able to recapture a portion of the communicative world and carve out a truly democratic public sphere that can become a tool of our own liberation.

CHAPTER 8

THE TALLAHASSEE-REDHILLS INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER

"The idea of making a whole new media outlet where people could talk about the issues that were important to them and bypass the Tallahassee Mullet-Wrapper was really exciting and energizing. The slog of long meetings where everything had to be decided by consensus, working on bylaws, begging people for submissions wasn't." – ***Tallahassee IMCista***

The census results and discussion in the previous chapter focused primarily on structural elements of the various IMC collectives including the types of media projects, basic information about their online content, the mechanisms they developed for outreach and building relationships with the community and the composition of their active membership. While this information can tell us a great deal about the basic form of the IMC network and by extension a little about the structural makeup of the new public sphere it is working to create, it tells us very little about the social processes that underlie it. In this chapter I try to illuminate those fuzzier aspects of the IMC, the social processes and relations created by a space that is characterized by radical democratic principles such as transparency, equal access, the lack of formalized hierarchy and consensus based decision-making. To accomplish this, I leave the broad boundaries of the global movement and the North American IMC network and focus specifically on the inner workings of a single IMC collective – the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC. The examination of this specific IMC takes place in two interrelated stages.

As discussed earlier, Chris Atton (2003) argues that for any analysis of alternative media to yield useful results, the organizational practices should form a primary site of examination. Throughout this research project, I have placed these practices at the center of my analysis. He further asserts that the research methods employed should include "case studies that at times approach ethnography and at others offer close textual and organizational readings" (Atton, 2003, p.3). Following that recommendation, I utilize both of these research methods in an effort to unpack the intricacies of the social process of creating and maintaining a local Indymedia collective. In the first stage I examine the policies that governed the practices of this particular IMC. Potter (1996) defines textual analysis in the context of media studies as the close examination of texts or policies through any number of frameworks in an effort to understand the

culture of either the producers or receivers of mediated content. In order to get a sense of the culture of the Tally IMC, I look at the bylaws of the Tallahassee collective focusing specifically on the collective's basic organization, its decision-making process, the editorial policy and criteria for membership. These bylaws are illustrative because they are both a product of that group's beliefs, aspirations and guiding philosophies and a representation of the philosophical base from which the group's own internal culture developed over time.

In the second stage I attempt to get a sense of the attitudes and perceptions of the members of the collective regarding these polices and the ways in which they were established. This includes their feelings about the process of creating the organizational framework, their perceptions about the successes and/or failures of those features and perhaps most importantly, how they as individuals operated within that framework and how it impacted their participation. If this collective was trying to create new spaces for open dialogue, discourse and individual empowerment, the experiences of those operating within those spaces is of paramount importance in trying to figure out whether or not they succeeded. Potter (1996) has defined ethnography as a methodological tool for understanding media organizations as "the patterned exploration of how communities are created and held together through human interactions" (p. 51). Ethnographies also seek to document the cosmology that is the knowledge and belief systems that contribute to both the coherence and the tensions within the group. My purpose here is to see how this small community was created, sustained and challenged by the communicative space they were working to build under the general framework and guidance of the principles of the Independent Media Center movement.

These principles, which I discussed at length in Chapter 4, define in the broadest ways possible the outer boundaries of this new communications commons, but they do not tell us how the people working within them feel about those boundaries. As I have demonstrated throughout, many researchers have discussed the IMC movement in terms of a new public sphere or communications commons but few have really conducted a close analysis of how the individuals within this space are grappling with the issues surrounding an undertaking that marks such a radical departure from more widely accepted organizing methods. These are the methods that characterize not only the available model of the corporate media but also the bulk of our own institutional experiences. If researchers hope to truly understand the true scope of projects like Indymedia, it is critical that they look more closely at the perceptions of those involved.

This examination presents the final piece of the argument I have been working to support throughout - that Indymedia, through its attempt to both harness the liberatory potential of the Internet and its application of radical democratic principles, is creating an alternate public sphere that empowers those involved, gives a voice to those who previously had no voice and provides a living laboratory for experimenting with new ways of organizing that can be applied both to individual organizing projects and perhaps the broader social order as well. First, I provide a brief history of the Tallahassee IMC.

The Rise and Fall of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC

If the Tallahassee Independent Media Center had a founder it would have to be a member of Tallahassee's relatively tight knit activist community who was already working in the area of online activism. He had developed the website *WhoseFlorida.com* which in many ways served as the pre-cursor to the IMC. Florida was then under the administration of Governor Jeb Bush, who at that time had recently re-routed
all of the various agency and state division websites though a central online portal controlled by the Governor's office (called "My Florida." The site still exists and myflorida.com now adorns the state's standard vehicle license plates.) Many of the governor's critics were wary of this move because now, if anybody wanted to get any sort of information from the state about public services or policies, they had to go through the Governor's website where they were exposed to what many considered to be state propaganda. The name *Whose Florida* was a direct parody of that site. Bush had presided over the largest layoff of state workers in Florida's history and had eliminated career service protections for thousands of others. *Whose Florida* was established as an online bulletin board for both currently employed state workers and those that had been laid off to anonymously post stories from their experiences on the job, in essence giving anyone the ability to be a whistle blower about the inner workings of the state without either losing their job or being blocked from further hire. Tallahassee (whose number one employer is the state) was under the specter of an unwritten gag order imposed on state workers and there was a tremendous amount of fear and paranoia about being critical of the Governor, but with massive layoffs, drastic service cuts and multi-million dollar privatization deals in the works there were stories that he believed needed to be told. *Whose Florida's* creator wanted to expand this idea and was drawn to the open publishing aspect of Indymedia. He teamed up with a local web

designer and server administrator who had a long history of social activism, and they took the initiative to reach out to the IMC community to find out what was needed to create an IMC for Tallahassee.

The Tallahassee IMC was born at an open meeting held at the now defunct Arise Community Center and Infoshop in Tallahassee in early February 2002. The site of this first meeting is illustrative of the background and philosophies that guided the project. Arise was a project of university students and college-aged community members and was designed to be a meeting space for progressive groups, a reading room, a space for artists and workshops on everything from green sustainable living to bike repair to anarchist ideas of organizing and intentional living. (For a more detailed look at the growing, largely anarchistic Infoshop movement, see Atton, 2005.) Since IMCs are community driven, the main purpose of the meeting was to see whether or not there was sufficient interest in pursuing an Indymedia Center of our own and the gauge the level of community support. This is keeping with one of the requirements for new IMCs seeking inclusion in the global network, which is to demonstrate that there is enough interest in the community and enough volunteers to sustain the center. That first meeting drew about fifty people, and following an extended conversation a consensus decision was reached to pursue the project. The next several meetings were designed to give those interested a background of the IMC project, what it entailed and what was required to establish a site that could be included in the network. It was established early on that there would be no leaders, nobody would be in charge and the meetings would be organized and guided by the principles of consensus and open participation. Since there was no "formal" consensus structure yet adopted, no guidelines established and in fact no IMC, these meetings were at times maddeningly long with little in the way of formal action taken. Still, despite all the chaos, the circular conversations and the rehashing of past issues for new attendees, over the next few weeks the IMC began to take shape.

The initial focus of the weekly meetings was to prepare all of the documents and policies needed for inclusion in the network and to launch an early version of the website to get the broader public involved. In the weeks following those first few meetings the number of active participants precipitously declined, but the shrinking group had no impact on the activity level which continued to increase as more concrete tasks took shape and the group began the work of "being the media." Over the next three-weeks a web shell was online detailing all of the meeting

conversations, the decisions that were made and a collection of all working documents including a set of basic guidelines for the modified consensus that was being used at the meetings, an early editorial policy for the site and a rough outline of the various working groups and the types of work each would be doing. A link to this early site remained available on the website so that newcomers could get a sense of the early processes that led to its creation. As discussed earlier, the global IMC tech working group had established several different open source software packages that could be used to build IMC sites. Each of these templates offered various features and functionality and shaped the basic look of the site. The very small group that was working to build the website chose the DADA IMC code base for our IMC. The completed website went online in the summer of 2002 at the now defunct URL address tallyimc.org.

Many of the early organizers of the IMC were already involved in several environmental activist organizations in the surrounding areas such as Heart of the Earth and the Big Bend Sierra Club. These members were instrumental in shaping the name of our local IMC. They believed that it was important to point out that the people of the Florida Big Bend area were connected by a very unique ecosystem and argued passionately that the IMC should not limit itself to political designations like cities or counties but should focus on issues facing an area defined by the natural geographic features of the surrounding area to illustrate this connection. At the time, there was a great deal of discussion in the mainstream press and the community that Tallahassee's growth was having dramatically negative consequences on the communities "downstream" of the area's rivers and aquifer system. They thought that the name of this new radical media project should reflect that reality and serve to raise consciousnesses about our area's interconnectivity through the natural world. Geologically, this area is often referred to as the "Red Hills Bioregion" and so by consensus our local IMC was named the Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center. (Similar decisions were made in Southern Illinois with the Big Muddy IMC and in Oregon with the Rogue Valley IMC.) One of the required elements on any IMC site that is included in the network is the inclusion of the ((i)) logo, but each site has creative license to modify it to suit the local community. On tallyimc, the ((i)) was morphed into an animated photo of the St. Mark's lighthouse, localizing the logo and embodying our hope that out efforts would serve as a guiding light in what we believed were very dark times.

Once the initial documents had been approved by IMC Process and tallyimc.org was added to the cities list, the difficult work of establishing the detailed policies of our endeavor was

underway. One set of items included in the questionnaire described in the previous chapter questioned each responded about their own decision making processes and whether or not their policies were available online. The answers to these questions, and an examination of the polices online at the various sites and several follow-up conversations after the questionnaire was closed, indicated that the Tally IMC's policies were much more comprehensive and exhaustive than appears to be the norm. With the exception of the IMCs in Chicago, Pittsburgh and the central hub for the San Francisco group at Indybay, all of the IMCs participating in the census had far simpler policies, a few only comprising two or three sentences. The process of finalizing the bylaws took almost three months, a fact that many of the individuals interviewed for this chapter credit for the IMCs eventual decline and dissolution. By the time the website was online and being used by the community, the initial group of fifty had dwindled to between ten and fifteen active volunteers and within another year that number had dwindled to nine core members of the local IMC.

Over the next three years the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC waxed and waned with periods of intense use followed by bouts of relative inactivity. Our group organized meetings on the FSU and FAMU campuses as well as the Leon County Public Library to show people how to use the site to post their own stories as well as short workshops about audio and photo editing for posting online. We reached out to established environmental, social justice and other community groups to conduct presentations at their meetings to illustrate the usefulness of this new media as a tool to bypass the single mainstream daily newspaper and the three broadcast stations to get news about their efforts out to the community. The Tallahassee Green Party started a quarterly print publication called the Green Tortoise, and when the group split the publication from the Party, changed the name to the Apalachee Tortoise and began publishing weekly, the IMC worked out a content sharing agreement. Stories from the paper were posted on the website and each month a full page was given to the IMC to post stories from the web. "Your Voice," the progressive news and information program on WVFS, 89.7 (V89) dedicated the last 15-minutes of each hour long weekly broadcast to air audio stories compiled by IMC reporters or to share information from the website. A community calendar, provided by the group RadicalCalendar.org was built into the site so that organizations could post information about their meetings, concerts and speaker events and news of rallies and demonstrations could be publicized. This feature became the most popular program of the project. Beginning in

February 2003 and in February of each year the project was active, a birthday party and fundraiser was hosted at the local American Legion Hall, featuring live music, speakers, information tables from other community groups and live demonstrations on using the site. These events were always well attended and raised enough money to pay for outreach materials and other basic needs. On an interesting note, while the local mainstream media was made aware of these community events and encouraged to provide coverage through all of the established methods of media outreach, they failed to show at a single event and never provided any coverage of the effort.

In spite of all these outreach programs, convincing new users to post their stories on the site remained a constant challenge. Most of the IMCistas interviewed for this project remembered two periods of increased activity on the website, both coinciding with critical events to the progressive community. The first was in early 2003 during the period of the buildup to the Iraq War when numerous protest actions and marches were held at and around the Capitol complex. The second was in late 2004 and early 2005, the political season that saw the re-election of George W. Bush to the presidency and the aftermath of the "I have political capital and I'm going to use it" polices early in his second term. With the exception of those two periods and some shorter bursts of activity throughout, self-initiated usage from the community remained relatively light. This was a source of constant consternation among the IMCistas, and as active members of the collective became disillusioned by the amount of effort that was going into something that did not seem to have a visible pay-off, people began to leave the project. Some shifted their energies to the Apalachee Tortoise which had embraced advertising, generated a small budget and had used its sponsors to increase distribution. Others simply moved on to different phases of their lives. By the time the IMC was taken offline in April of 2005, there were only three people keeping the site active.

Sometime on Thursday, April 28th, a self-professed right-wing computer hacker named Brett Chance, using the alias "The Clorox Cowboy" hacked between ten and fifteen IMC websites across the country as well as the websites of several other progressive organizations. The hacker had discovered a security flaw in the DADA IMC code base and had used that flaw to take over the web sites and post fascist imagery and the following message:

> You have lied to the American People over and over again... Expect more of this. American Imperialism is non-existent. Our soldiers are dying over sees to give men,

> women, and children a taste of freedom and you call them imperialists. You are nothing but pigs. You are not against Bush you are against Republicans; you are against anyone who has a different opinion and way of thinking than you. Your box got rooted for lying to the American people.

The images and message was the only item viewable on the websites but the hack, using a string of PHP language code, not only defaced the websites but also incapacitated the servers where they were housed. News of the hack spread quickly through the Indymedia network and members of the Tech Working Group who had discovered the weakness days earlier developed a patch but for many IMCs it was too late. By May 2nd, between eighteen and twenty-five IMCs were crippled and had to be taken down. Chance had formed a group called the Goons during the Republican National Convention in 2004, and these hacktivists organized through a website at rightwingextremist.org. This was the second time the group had hacked the network, but prior attempts had been mere annoyances, simply redirecting users to right-wing websites of the group's choosing. This time the effects of the hack were catastrophic. The FBI was notified but refused to investigate, so IMC techies worked to track the source of the hack down to a staff computer at a Texas community college where Chance was a computer studies student. IMC techs posted his name, the name of his college and even his medical history in retribution and hundreds of emails flooded the school demanding that they take action. The college suspended Chance for two years for his activities on a university owned computer, but no formal charges were filed. (For a complete account of this story see an article from the Boulder Weekly independent newspaper and other accounts at
http://milwaukee.indymedia.org/en/2005/05/203347.shtml and
http://madison.indymedia.org/newswire/display_any/23902.)

In the days following the hack a critical weakness of our IMC became apparent. At the time, the tech support for the effort was provided by a single individual, one of the founders of the group who also donated space for the site on his own server. He had become disillusioned with the effort and had scaled back his involvement. Unfortunately, he was the only person who could fix the problem, and even if someone else came forward with the expertise to do it, he was hesitant to provide the necessary access to his server which the Clorox Cowboy's nefarious activities had completely disabled. There was an attempt to find someone to help and broker a

compromise, but those efforts fell flat so after three years of working to help people in Tallahassee "be the media" the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC ceased to be. I have made several attempts to recreate the IMC, usually at the request of student groups comprised of Tallahassee newcomers who find their way to me after doing some digging to find out why there is no IMC in Tallahassee, but in each case the lack of technical know-how has seen these efforts fail.

The Bylaws of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC

As mentioned earlier, the consensus process that generated Tally IMC's bylaws generated a document broader in scope and far more detailed than what appears to be the norm in the Indymedia Community. Of the eighteen local IMCs that participated in the online questionnaire described in the previous chapter, only three (Chicago, Pittsburgh and Santa Cruz/Indybay) had documents approaching the size and technical complexity of the one developed for Tallahassee. The thinking amongst the first few groups that met in Tallahassee was that we should take the project seriously enough to plan for it to be a huge success and as such, the bylaws should be drafted carefully enough to provide solutions for as many potential problems as possible. There was also the concern that if (or more accurately reflective of our optimistic thinking, when) the site became a huge success and others who did not share our commitment to the radical democratic principles of the IMC movement or our general political philosophies found out about it, there were adequate protections in place to maintain the spirit of the original project. The goal was to ensure that a well organized minority could not easily hijack the effort and shift the project's mission.

I had extensive experience with the basics of statutory construction as an instructor of parliamentary law at the university and registered parliamentarian. I also served as Senate President of FSU's Student Government Association for two years and had supervised a re-working of the entire Student Statutes (which carry the power of law under the Florida Administrative Code) and was a registered lobbyist who worked on legislation changing state statutes, so the job of helping guide the process and produce a document that accomplished what the group wanted fell to me. These prior experiences undoubtedly led me to advise the group to produce a document that read and looked more like a formal organizational constitution than the project actually warranted. The development of a document of this size and detail using consensus was an incredibly long and challenging process and as is evidenced in the next

section, many of the members that remained active believe that this long process that had nothing to do with media making contributed to the large number of people who left the project during those first few weeks. A complete copy of the bylaws is provided in Appendix D.

In keeping with the spirit and intent of the IMC movement, the basic internal organizational structure of the IMC reversed the dominant type of structure in mainstream media. Where most media companies are organized according to a pyramidal-type structure, with the decision making power coming from a small group or single individual at the top, we inverted that pyramid so that all the real decision making power in the IMC was vested in the largest group possible, the collective. Article V, Paragraph A of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC states, "The ultimate authority in the Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center is herby vested in the Collective. The collective of the IMC shall consist of all voting members from every authorized subdivision of the IMC." The collective was charged with creating an annual plan for the IMC, making final decisions in cases of dispute between individuals and/or working groups, making any changes to the documents contained in the affiliation packet with the global network and both interpreting the bylaws and approving any recommended changes. The most important function of the collective was to serve as the primary conduit between the community and the IMC. The collective meetings were open to everyone, and all attendees were able to participate in the discussion process; to use more conventional terms these meetings were analogous to shareholder meetings of a corporation, only the shares were free and everyone had the same amount.

Moving down the inverted pyramid, the second level of the IMC's organizational structure was the working group. Working groups are a common organizational element across the IMC network and are usually created to fulfill a different aspect of the total project. In Tallahassee, the bylaws established six of these groups. The editorial group included all the editors who monitored the open publishing newswire for potential posts to be "promoted" to the more prominently placed features section. The editors were also charged with making grammatical and other technical changes to features and ensuring that all newswire posts conformed to the relatively liberal editorial policy. The content working group was charged with finding subject matter for potential IMC originated features, leading workshops to help people in the community learn to be better writers and to recruit new writers for the IMC. The financial group handled all aspects of fundraising and keeping records about any and all expenditures from

the projects meager budget. The outreach working group promoted the IMC in the community and handled the logistics of all special events. The tech working group managed the technical aspects of the website including programming updates and the addition of new features requested by a consensus of the collective. As discussed earlier, process in Indymedia is almost as important as the creation and dissemination of media, and collectives across the network were constantly experimenting with new ways to conduct meetings, reach consensus and organize their efforts. The job of the organizing working group was to monitor our own process, keep abreast of these developments and both make suggestions to the collective about new ways to conduct business and find ways to implement any suggestions from the collective. There was a process to create temporary working groups and for the collective to approve new permanent groups as amendments to the bylaws. The process required to create new working groups was somewhat difficult, an intentional move designed to ensure that new groups were not routinely created on a whim without the required human resources to keep them viable without taking away from the key tasks needed to maintain the organization.

Continuing down the pyramid, the smallest group with little decision making power was the coordinating council, a largely administrative group made up of elected members (by consensus) from each of the six working groups. The coordinating council's responsibility was to provide logistical support to the collective, maintain organization records, work to coordinate the efforts of the working groups and perform other day-to-day operations in between meetings of the collective. One of the conditions required for a local IMC to be included in the network is the commitment to provide volunteers to participate in coordinating the global network by participating in the network's own working groups. Although not specified in the bylaws, the council members served this function. The coordinating council was designed to serve the collective, to implement the policies it chose and work to make it easier for people to do the work of media making and promoting the IMC by handling the more tedious aspects of the organization.

In general, the Tallahassee IMC's structure was an attempt to connect the organic nature of collective self-organizing through radical democracy with the efficiency and organizational protections characteristic of more traditional organizations. The goal was to invest as much power in the general collective as possible while providing the stability and support necessary to keep the group from dealing with the more mundane issues of maintaining an organization. In

examining the policies and procedures of other IMCs and speaking with members of their collectives I believe now that we erred too much on the support side, creating an organization that was probably too formalized, intimidating bright eyed newcomers who perhaps read our bylaws (posted on the site and always available at collective meetings) and thought their lack of a law degree prohibited them from being a part of their community media outlet. The other IMCs I examined had far simpler policies and yet they were still viable community projects, some still functioning after as many as nine years and producing a wide range of media content.

Managed Chaos

The fifth unifying principle of the IMC network reads, "All IMCs recognize the importance of process to social change and are committed to the development of non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian relationships, from interpersonal relationships to group dynamics. Therefore, they shall organize themselves collectively and be committed to the principle of consensus decision-making and the development of a direct participatory democratic process that is transparent to its membership." The Tallahassee-RedHills IMC attempted to create a process that honored this core principle but also respected the time of the participants by placing checks on unlimited debate and discussion before a decision could be reached. The bylaws of the Tallahassee IMC stated, "Decisions by consensus is a guiding principle of the International IMC movement, and the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC is committed to that principle. All efforts will be taken to ensure that decisions made by every subdivision of the IMC are made by consensus and that all voices are heard before a final decision is reached." Several early members of the collective were or had been members of the Tallahassee Green Party, a chapter of the Florida Green Party, a movement that also adhered to the principle of decision making by consensus. Several of these members argued that pure consensus was far too time consuming and allowed very small minorities or individual participants to hold up the process in perpetuity. As one young politically active organizer who worked extensively with anarchists and considered himself to have strong anarchist beliefs explained to me once, "Consensus is supposed to ensure that everyone gives up a little something in decision making for the greater good, but too many people use it to ensure they never have to give up anything." In order to address this oft cited "tyranny of consensus," the group decide to adopt a process of modified consensus that they hoped would generate consensus by giving everyone the ability to have their

views heard but which had a fall-back voting process and a way to end discussion if it did not appear that consensus could be reached.

At each meeting, a different volunteer facilitator would be chosen by a consensus of the group. The goal of having a different facilitator at each meeting was to ensure that no single member took on the qualities of chairperson and as stated in the bylaws "so that everyone is given the opportunity to participate in that valuable portion of the consensus process." The facilitator was charged with keeping the discussion flowing, working to ensure that no one monopolized the discussion, diffusing any personal attacks and discouraging any disrespectful behavior. Facilitators were encouraged to pay attention to anyone in the group who was particularly quiet and not participating and check and see periodically to see if they had anything to add.

At the meetings any proposal could be brought forward by any participant. Proposals seeking to change the bylaws must have been provided to the public and advertised on the website for at least one month before they could be adopted. Once a proposal was brought forward people in the group could ask questions of the proposer aimed at clarifying his/her idea. When all questions had been answered, the facilitator would ask if there was consensus on the proposal. If there was, the proposal would be adopted, and the facilitator would move on to the next proposal. If there was not a consensus, a discussion would ensue. A large visible list, or "stack," was kept in the front of the room and anyone wanting to speak would signify such, and the facilitator would add his or her name to the stack. Everyone was given the floor (often signified in some groups by a speaker's stick or some other object) in the order in which their name appeared on the stack. At the end of each stack the facilitator would again seek consensus. In our IMC, participants could indicate their level of support for a proposal by holding up one to five fingers with five indicating strong support and one expressing a "blocking concern." If any participant displayed a "block," that would indicate that a consensus had not been reached. At the conclusion of each stack, the bringer of the proposal was able to modify the idea to address any concerns raised during the discussion in an effort to assuage the blocking concern. This stacking process would be completed three full times, and if at the conclusion of the third stack consensus had not been reached, a vote of the active members would be taken and a two-thirds supermajority vote was required for adoption. The only rule governing discussion in the bylaws reads, "The Tallahassee-RedHills IMC is committing to elevating the quality of discourse in

society by ensuring that all participants in its meetings are treated with dignity and respect." If the group believed that an individual was being disrespectful, they could request that the person be censored for the duration of the meeting by consensus or a two-thirds vote. Fortunately, in over three years of meetings that provision was never needed.

As discussed above, the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC adopted this process in an attempt to reach a balance between total consensus and a return to the divisive and hierarchical old notions of majority rule. However, many in the anarchist, IMC and other movements have rejected the idea of modifying consensus, arguing that limits on discussion and the presence of a fall back voting process provide convenient outs to the difficult process of working together to find the common elements in different points of view. It is important to note that consensus has not been adopted by the IMC and other radical movements out of any commitment to "feel good" psychology. They commit to consensus because they believe that in the long-run, a process that forces individuals to continually re-evaluate their own positions in relation to those of others' and struggle to find the common threads running between them makes for better decisions and stronger organizations. It also helps individuals learn that the concept of majority rules fundamentally boils down to a "might makes right" approach. An approach that divides people rather than bringing them together creates subdivisions within groups that have more in common than not and places an emphasis on winners and losers rather than cooperation. On the societal level, the pervasiveness of this process in all elements of social life all too often contributes competiveness and division between subordinate groups, keeping them from realizing the true nature of their subservience to the institutions of power. As a dedicated anarchist friend said to me after a large meeting of the collective, "This isn't consensus; this is just majority rules with some new age mumbo jumbo. You are just putting a deadline on a vote, pressuring people to go along or have their ideas voted out." He promised to lead a workshop for our group on better ways to reach consensus but before that happened he moved to a cooperative community to work on their organic farm in return for food and shelter.

For many of us, our process of modified consensus was to be a work in progress. The bylaws included the paragraph, "There are many methods for working towards consensus. The Tallahassee-RedHills IMC is committed to working through various consensus processes in an effort to find the method that allows for the maximum amount of input from all participants and ensures equal access to decision making" and that we would use our process "until such time as

the Collective deems necessary to amend this process as outlined in these bylaws." However, the overwhelming majority of our group was not as interested in experimenting with decision making as some, and as I will discuss in the next section, many felt that this process was already too cumbersome, no further attempts to refine it were ever undertaken.

One final element of the Tallahassee IMC's process that needs to be addressed is the subject of membership. While the bylaws guaranteed anyone the ability to participate in discussion of the collective, membership was not immediate or automatic. The seventh principle of unity of the global IMC movement is "All IMCs recognize that a prerequisite for participation in the decision-making process of each local group is the contribution of an individual's labor to the group." As described in the previous chapter people's time and energy is the most important currency in the IMC movement. As the IMC website in Milwaukee reads, "Milwaukee Indymedia doesn't need financial support at this time. What we do need is your participation. People willing to write for the open newswire constantly, people to attend meetings and fight for consensus, people to be active all year 'round. That's what we need" (http://milwaukee.indymedia.org/en/static/support.shtml).

In a follow-up conversation with the respondent from Milwaukee it was explained to me that, "What we mean is that we don't need armchair liberals who satisfy some kind of yuppie guilt by writing checks. We need people willing to jump in the mix and help us do this work." Membership is defined solely by an individual's commitment to actually work with the IMC. Tallahassee's bylaws state that, "Membership in the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC will be based on an individual's commitment to the IMC through service. Only working members of an authorized subdivision (working group) of the IMC will be given voting privileges." Since anyone had the right to participate in any discussion at any meeting of the IMC, membership only became an issue when the consensus process had been exhausted and the fall-back voting option was required which was rare. Our policy of ensuring that everyone had the right to participate in discussions was designed to create a sense of empowerment and to clearly illustrate that there were no cliques or entrenched management, that the IMC truly belonged to everyone. However, we wanted to make sure that only those who had shown a real commitment to the project through their time and energy were able to make decisions on contentious issues. We also hoped that this simple restriction on decision making would serve as an incentive for those who were interested in the project to take a more direct and active role in making it happen.

The goal of these policies and processes was to create an environment consistent with Habermas' articulation of the idealized public sphere, event though most in our group had no idea who Habermas was. It should be evident however that we were laboring to build space that existed within the confines of our media collective where everyone was able to participate regardless of status and where the influence of personal characteristics that traditionally translated into increased communicative power were minimalized. Most importantly, we hoped to create a new communicative space where "power" itself was vested in the strength of the argument and the ability of individuals to find common ground between diverging viewpoints and work cooperatively with all of those involved. As can be seen in the interviews in the next section, many of us also hoped that the qualities of this space would serve as a change agent for those participating, encouraging them to examine their own communication patterns and alter them to become more cooperative, less competitive and have a greater commitment to reaching an understanding with others. There are skeptics to this thinking; many in our own group scoffed at the idea of personal change coming from political organizing. However, as was clearly evidenced earlier in Chapter Five, there is a theoretical framework for these notions as expressed in the Theory of Communicative Action, and this idea has been a mainstay of many traditions of anarchist thought for generations.

Promote, Hide or Remove?

While most of the IMCs examined for this project did not have internal polices as complex as the Tallahassee IMC, all of them had clearly defined editorial policies, which is one of the requirements for new IMCs to be included in the global network. In keeping with the IMC movement's commitment to decentralization and local autonomy, the network is fairly light on its specifications for a local IMC's editorial policy. The network stipulates only that the editorial policy be articulated clearly, be completely transparent and open for review. It must also allow for open publishing and permits those doing so to remain anonymous. Individual IMCs are given great wide latitude to develop the specifics of their own editorial policies within these basic criteria and as such there is a wide range of policy specifics across the network. (A collection of editorial policies and debates about editorial practices can be found at http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/ImcEditorialCollection).

In the same way that the group tried to develop an organizational structure and decision making process that balanced the goal of a truly open space for participation and the needs of efficiency, the editorial policy was also an exercise in balance between open publishing and a rejection of "professional" journalism and the need to ensure the credibility of the project in the public's eye as a bona-fide news source. When crafting our own editorial policy we decided to develop basic general principles that reflect our own philosophies of what citizen journalism should look like and build the specific policies from those principles. The editorial working group carefully examined the polices of other IMCs across the network and used them to craft four general principles that would guide our editorial decisions. First, we acknowledged that the goal of the policy was to provide an un-moderated, open-publishing newswire in accordance with the principles of the IMC. Second, we committed to keeping this online community space a safe environment for all users, especially for those people who were members of groups that were typically marginalized and disempowered in both the mainstream media and society at large. The point of this second core principle was to acknowledge that many groups had long been victims of stereotypes, hate speech and other types of communications and portrayals that contributed to their marginalization in the social order. We wanted to affirm our commitment to keeping Indymedia a space free of these types of damaging communications so that these groups that were typically ignored or demeaned in the mainstream press could have a safe space to tell their own stories. However, while we recognized that a full expression of free speech carried a great potential to harm others, we believed that instances of injurious speech should also be seen as opportunities for insurrectionary response. We believed that speech acts and the re-telling of myths and narratives that help keep groups oppressed or marginalized in society could also open doors for a rational critique that could lessen their negative impact in the future.

Finally, we pledged to use the editorial policies to preserve the quality of the media we produced so that it could be a truly useful resource for the community and protect that resource from legal action resulting from clearly illegal (as opposed to undesirable) activity. Commentary was fine but we also wanted to ensure that the editorial policy encouraged the development of well researched stories that could be independently verified. The editorial policy stated that:

> In accordance with our mission, Tallahassee-RedHills IMC media efforts are designed to empower individuals to become independent and civic journalists by providing a direct, un-moderated forum for presenting media, including text articles, audio and video

> recordings, and photographs, to the public via the Internet, print and broadcast. Within that general framework, we specifically encourage individuals to publish: 1. Researched, timely articles; 2) Personal accounts of community events and demonstrations; 3) Coverage of issues involving Tallahassee and the Red Hills bioregion; 4) Media analysis with particular regard to corporate media; 5) Investigative reports exposing injustice; 6) Stories on events affecting underrepresented groups;7) Media produced from within underrepresented groups; 8)Local stories with national or global significance; 9) Stories on people or projects working towards social and economic justice.

Our goal was to foster the creation of citizens' media that was not bound by the rigid guidelines of so-called professional journalism but reflected the sensibilities of every day people so that everyone could feel free to contribute their own stories told from their perspectives without the intimidation of being forced to meet the standards of those who had completed journalism school.

This is not to say, however, that there were no standards, but those standards were not about technical proficiency or notions of journalistic objectivity but instead about fundamental accuracy. This was a key point. Mainstream journalists and media outlets have long operated under the rubric of objectivity, but in their often blind pursuit of this ideal they have sacrificed accuracy. In many cases, when a mainstream journalist or other media professional is working to report a story, their commitment to objectivity compels them to include viewpoints from multiple sides of a controversial issue, even if some of those positions are verifiably false. These factually inaccurate viewpoints are simply retold with little if any critical examination of their veracity, for to do so would be to seem un-objective. Consequently, the debate over complex issues is often tainted by verifiably false information, and as such it distorts the entire process of communication at the societal level. Consumers of this media are led to believe that they have been exposed to equally valid positions, but if one or more of those positions are inaccurate, objective truth is sacrificed and with it the ability of the people to solve complex problems.

Any member of the collective could serve as an editor, and the editorial policy empowered the editors to

> 1) Edit postings and contributions to correct spelling, grammar or format problems, without consulting the author; 2) Choose features based on what they believe to be an article's importance to Tallahassee and the Red Hills bioregion or the Florida

> Government, the solidity of the research and sources, and the quality of writing; 3) Hide posts, without consulting the author, that in the editor's opinion: a. Are duplicates (we will keep the oldest post) b. Are in an unreadable form c. Are boldly slanderous or libelous d. Advocate violent or destructive activity with a specific time, place and manner e. Are contrary to the mission or goals of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC."

In keeping with the core principles described above, the editorial policy also gave editors the ability to "keep posts that, in the editors' opinions, are merely offensive or controversial in order to encourage open discussion and debate."

In most cases, posts that violated the policies were simply "hidden" as opposed to removed. Hidden posts were no longer visible on the main page of the site but they were still available for review in a separate section of the website clearly marked with a link on the main page. Each time a post was hidden, the editor would append a comment to the story explaining why it was hidden and provide a link for anyone to communicate directly with the editor about the decision. If an email was included with the story, the author was notified by the editor about the decision and was given the opportunity to respond and/or clear up the problem. Each time an article was hidden by an editor, the software package automatically generated an email to the other members of the editorial group.

There were two procedures for hiding posts; "simple" hides took place when a post was blank, contained only links to other web sites or included job postings or advertisements. "Complicated" hides occurred whenever a posted story met the simple criteria outlined above but potentially violated one of the core principles outlined in the policy. The bylaws outlined a careful deliberative process involving all of the members of the editorial working group and all of their deliberations were available for review by any user of the site. The bylaws outlined the process for complicated hides as follows:

> Simply violating one of these principles does not in itself justify hiding a post. Perceived violations must be weighed against the other principles through mindful discussion. In relation to a particular post, one principle may be found to conflict with another. These principles provide the ethical framework for decision-making, even as they inevitably complicate editorial discussions. Our editors are prevented from hiding articles rashly or without principled discussion, and remain accountable to clear (though flexible) policy

> guidelines. When an editor identifies a post he or she thinks should be hidden, he or she alerts the other editors, either making a formal proposal to hide the post or requesting conversation on the subject. Once an editor proposes hiding the article, all editors begin a focused discussion in accordance with its consensus process. If the editors decide to hide the post, the editor who made the proposal hides the post and appends a signed comment to the posting explaining why it was hidden. If the author of the post has given an email address, the editor sends him or her an explanatory message and copies it to rest of the editors. Any additional email conversation is also copied to the rest of the editors.

The key consideration was transparency of process, fairness to the author and a responsibility to the community. Posts were rarely hidden, and in most cases the hides were simple.

In one case an image was posted that involved Nazi images like the Swastika superimposed over a map of the U.S. Some members of the editorial working group felt that the image could be intimating and insensitive to certain segments of the community and since it stood alone and was not placed in any context with an accompanying story was a violation of our bylaws keeping hate speech off the IMC. Others felt that the image even as stand alone graphic was open to interpretation and could only stimulate a healthy discussion on the current status of the country. After a lengthy email discussion over the course of the next two days, consensus could not be reached to hide the image but a counterproposal was adopted to actually promote the image to a feature article and append to it all of the emails from those discussions and inviting the public to weigh in through the comments section. This single image elicited dozens of lengthy comments creating on online discussion about the problems inherent in casually using Nazi references, that commonalities did exist between Democratic Socialist Germany and the U.S. and comments about our own editorial process and decision making. This was one of the finer moments of our IMC and demonstrated the potential that many of us saw in the project. Working through the consensus process the editorial working group was able to find a novel solution, create a teachable moment and enable the community to directly participate in the decisions of their local media.

Who Was the Tally IMC?

The previous discussion about the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC's bylaws, decision making processes and editorial policy illustrates the overarching principles inherent to the culture the IMCistas were working to create. It also demonstrates how both this individual IMC and the Indymedia movement as a whole has worked to create radical alternative media that is not only concerned with the production of oppositional content but also the creation of oppositional processes that completely re-work most of the dominant assumptions held by the mainstream corporate media. What this review does not provide however, is any indication about the how this alternative space, this new communications commons, truly constitutes a radical new public sphere. While Habermas' analysis focuses primarily on describing the structural components of an idealized public sphere to serve as an analytical tool, pointing the way towards reclaiming (or creating) a discursive space that has the potential to free both institutions and individuals from systematically distorted communication and its negative effects, this approach only goes so far. The next step is to unpack the thoughts, attitudes and judgments of the individuals operating within these spaces and gauge the effect of these conditions. If we can agree that Indymedia has been working to create the structural components of the public sphere Habermas describes, then we should be able to take the next step and delve into the personal experiences of those who operate in those discursive spaces to assess its impact. In this sense, the Tallahassee IMC and others like it could prove to be invaluable social laboratories to explore the influence these types of spaces have on the people working within them and could provide further evidence as to the liberatory power of radical media.

In this section I report on an attempt to conduct such an examination. The conversations presented illustrate a wide range of conflicting viewpoints on the nature of our own IMC and whether or not the effort was a success, with more criticism than praise for the processes of organizing through cooperative collectives than formal hierarchies and working with consensus rather than majorities. I believe however, that these criticisms are extremely informative and while on balance my examination does not provide a glowing recommendation for this type of organization, there are kernels of hope that point the way towards creating a more inclusive discursive space that approach the perhaps yet realized promise of a radical new public sphere.

As discussed earlier, the first few meetings of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC began with an estimated fifty people. Over time that number shrank to the point where in mid-2003, a period I described earlier as the height of Tally IMC, the collective was comprised of nine active members including myself. This number may seem small, but it appears not to be unusual across the network. While the bulk of the respondents to the questionnaire described in Chapter 6 declined to estimate the number of active members in their own collectives, follow up conversations and answers to questions about the various working groups seem to indicate that most of the participating IMCs have memberships totaling between ten and twenty participants, although some like the IMCs in Portland, New York City, Urbana-Champaign and Houston, boast considerably higher numbers. In 2005, shortly after the hacker incident that took our IMC offline, I attempted to contact all eight of these former members. One had left the area and another declined to participate.

I began the interviews in August 2005. Each interview was approximately one hour long, and while the discussions were kept intentionally free-form, I did use an interview guide to ensure that all the participants were asked relatively the same questions and that I did not omit any of the key areas I was investigating. A copy of the interview guide is presented in Appendix E. The interviews were loosely structured to cover four different areas. The first was designed to assess the participants' involvement with the Tallahassee IMC including their length of participation, the type of work they did and their reasons for leaving the project. The second area questioned their motivations to join Indymedia, prior involvement with activist groups, their prior experiences with decision making processes and their attitudes towards those processes. The third dealt with their recollections of our own decision making process, their attitudes towards that process both in the beginning and over time, how they felt the process directly impacted them and how they believed the process impacted others in the group. The final area questioned what particular aspects of the process and the overall project they felt were effective, which were not and advice they would give to others looking to start an IMC.

In some respects the timing of these interviews was fortunate because several months had passed since the IMC had gone offline, and the participants were afforded the benefit of hindsight when discussing the project. However, I also think that the collapse of the IMC negatively colored the group's perceptions of our efforts. Thousands of hours of work vanished in the blink of a well placed piece of malicious computer code. The fact that no one seemed to

notice was incredibly demoralizing for most, even those that had left the effort prior to the hacker attack so I question whether or not some of the negativity was in fact a product of the IMC's dissolution. In keeping with my commitment to those participating in the online questionnaire, I have decided to change the names of those I interviewed, not because of any direct request but for their own protection because many, especially potential employers, might view Indymedia as a "radical organization" without any of the positive characteristics I would ascribe to the term. Obviously those reading this who were involved with the Tallahassee IMC will recognize the players from their descriptions. Since I was intimately involved with the course of events, I try to report the results of these interviews using the IMCistas' own words as much as possible so that their recollections and stories are given primacy over my interpretations of what was said, clearly delineating my own views from theirs.

Jared, one of the co-founders of the effort is a white male, mid-sixties who has had extensive experiences with movement work dating back to the 1960's. A former state worker he was the founder of whoseflorida.com. Jason, another co-founder, is a white male from the former Yugoslavia who had lived in the U.S. since the mid-70's and also had some experience with movement work, especially efforts to raise awareness and provide support for the people of Bosnia during the siege in the mid-90's. He also had been involved with a group called *tecnica*, a grass roots organization that provided assistance to popular movements in Nicaragua and South Africa in the mid-'80s. He owned and operated a one person web design and hosting company. Kathy is a white female in her mid-30's. A German citizen, she had lived in Tallahassee for approximately two years when she got involved with the IMC. She had been active with some environmental organizations in the area like *Heart of the Earth* and, like me, had been an active member of the Tallahassee Green Party. She was working as a freelance writer and did some work as a state employee.

Eric is a white male also in his mid-30's at the time who had recently secured his first professional job with the state. He reported little prior work with activist organizations although he had participated in some protest actions as a college student in Tallahassee. He also had been through some rehabilitation programs for drug and alcohol abuse and brought an interesting perspective to our group through his experiences with twelve-step groups and the Reevaluation Counseling movement. Donovan is a white male, mid-30's who had recently returned to Tallahassee after a several year absence. Before leaving he had lived in the area for several

years, and while he had limited to no participation in activist political groups, he had been a reporter for the formerly independent newspaper the *Florida Flambeau*, a publication that had been very involved with the area's progressive community. Taylor was a graduate student during his time with the IMC in the Philosophy Department at Florida State. He is a white male who was in his late-20's at the time who reported having no activist experience before working with the IMC. As I described earlier, I was working as the Communications Director for the Florida AFL-CIO during my time with the IMC and had done extensive activist and organizing work with a variety of organizations and political groups working for social, economic and environmental justice.

Why Radical Media?

As should be evident from the brief descriptions above, most of the individuals that made up the core of our collective had little if any prior movement work or organizing experiences. None fit the stereotypical profile of the young college student recently radicalized while away at school. These were people who were further along in life, working to juggle careers, active social lives and all the mundane trappings of adulthood. What could have motivated this diverse group, most of which had little experience with organizing and activism, to give of their time and energy to a radical media project? As is evidenced below, most were spurred by frustrations with the political climate at the time; the election of George W. Bush, the outbreak of the Iraq War, the clamp down on civil liberties following the attacks in the World Trade Center in 2001 and local issues like St. Joe's new push to develop the area all contributed to a sense of urgency that something had to be done.

In every case there were serious concerns over a mainstream media complex that appeared to have ceased functioning as it should, that most viewed complicit in the political problems they perceived. As discussed in Chapter 2, this was a time when the media corporations were engaged in a full-scale power grab. Buoyed by Bush's election and his strong support for de-regulation, media companies were working in both the FCC and the Congress to remove any and all barriers preventing wholesale consolidation of media enterprises, and in 2002 this push for increased power had become a fairly major political issue in communities across the country, and the decision to work with the IMC seems to be in part a direct reflection of that growing unease.

Those with activist experience saw the IMC as a logical extension of their prior work. Jared, one of the original founders, felt the need to get involved with some type of radical media project following the tumultuous events of the 2000 elections and the Florida recount. "After the 2000 elections I heard Nader talk about the need for a truth telling machine, something that would be an alternative media source that would let people tell the truth to other people. So I went to all the big groups like NOW and the unions, and nobody was willing to help, so I put up a site myself (whoseflorida.com). Later, I was at another Nader speaking event and somebody handed me an IMC flyer saying 'Be the Media' and I thought it sounded like a good idea, so I started looking at Indymedia as a bigger movement doing exactly what I was trying to do myself. So I spoke with the IMC in Central Florida and some people there started us down the road to becoming part of the network."

Jason, his early comrade on the start-up, had similar reasons. He said, "There was an immediate reason and a more lasting reason. The immediate reason was [Jared]. He and I had been talking about for months about how screwed up information is and how little we get in the media about our local community, and we had both been on the web looking at other web sites including Indymedia. In 2002 we both got so outraged over the St. Joe situation and the ways the legislature was helping them with their plans for so-called developing North Florida. I was thinking and concluding that if people only knew what was going on, they would do something to stop it. We looked into the Indymedia model and decided we wanted to do that…to go with that."

I had similar reasons. For years I had lamented, like most people doing radical movement work, over the fact that no matter what we tried we could not crack the seemingly impenetrable wall erected between the mainstream media and the public. The only time our efforts received any coverage was if we did something truly outrageous or there was violence, but then of course the coverage shifted to the stunts or the violence perpetrated by a few individuals, and the message was lost. My frustration was compounded after I started working with the labor movement. I was shocked at how vibrant the movement was in Florida, how much political activity union members engaged in across the state, and yet as a heavy media consumer I had never seen anything about it. The reporters I was working with all knew about these activities; they seemed to respect the efforts, but the stories never made it into their newspapers or were broadcast on their TV stations. Eric had similar reasons reflecting a distrust

of what the media was telling him. He said, "When I was first in college I still believed in the government and the FBI. I grew up in a military family, not a real conservative military family, but I believed in most of what the authorities said. I went through an Italian class and learned from a guy about how the FBI took pictures at protests, and I didn't believe that, but then as a bystander at a protest rally, I saw men in black suits taking pictures! Then when the big report about COINTELPRO came out, basically confirming what people had been saying for years, and I realized that I was wrong." Eric's trust in government and the authorities had been shaken to the core and he began attending protests with his fellow students on a wide range of issues. "I protested the School of the Americas several times, and I was at the Cassini Protest at NASA, but I was only loosely affiliated with people. I was never involved with any organization. I would not consider myself to be an activist in any sense of the word. But those experiences started me using the net to find alternative news, and I started reading Indymedia so when I saw a flyer for a meeting, I showed up."

Two of the core members were attracted specifically to the idea of citizens' journalism. Kathy, who was herself a freelance writer said, "I was kind of a combination of activist and journalist, but I wanted to emphasize journalism because that is what I wanted to do, so I needed to get more experience with community reporting." As for others the St. Joe development issue was also a major factor for her initial involvement. "A primary motivation was what was happening with St. Joe; it wasn't a new issue, but it was a main motivator for me. Having just moved from South Florida and development mania, I could not believe that would happen again here." She continued, "An IMC could be a tool, a medium to cover aspects of the issue that the local media just wouldn't cover and probably help organize people to get together and organize against it." Donovan, a former reporter, was also interested in the journalistic aspect of the process. "When I started with the IMC, I considered myself a progressive, not an activist journalist but a progressive journalist. The journalism side attracted me, being a part of something from the ground up, but I was also looking forward to do some activist work." The *Florida Flambeau*, where he had worked before its dissolution and takeover by the institution friendly *FS View*, was certainly alternative media with a long history of covering grass-roots organizing, progressive politics and investigative journalism aimed at university and government corruption. Donovan's experiences with the paper primed him for Indymedia. "The recount and other things were parts of it; politics had taken such a negative turn, you know, when Jeb was

elected, I joked that I was out of here, but then I found myself back in Tallahassee, and he was governor, so I figured something had to happen. The *Flambeau* experience, you know, making an alternative to the *Democrat*, to the corporate media in town, gave me some experience with what needed to be done."

Taylor, the philosophy graduate student who often had differing viewpoints from the rest of the group, recognized the problems with the mainstream press but was more interested in working on a project that worked toward the traditional standard of journalistic objectivity than the rest. "I got interested in it because I realized there was a problem with the mainstream corporate media; I thought it was important to get alternative voices out there. In my own viewpoint I thought there was no meaningful dialogue between different philosophical positions. You had your right wing media, your left wing media; the thing I was most interested in doing was providing a space for that conversation, trying to foster a dialogue between people of different political backgrounds. This is not what most of the group wanted to do; they wanted to set up another progressive viewpoint on more local matters, and I was also interested more in national and international issue." As I will discuss later, this was a recurring tension between Taylor and the rest of the group, one with interesting implications.

Consensus or Chaos?

Initial Perceptions. It was made clear at the very first public meeting that the IMC movement was concerned with more than just media making and that a central element of joining the network was a commitment to organize in ways vastly different than the mainstream media and most organizations. While I have been fairly laudatory throughout this project about the potentials of collective organizing and consensus decision making, the response to my interviews challenge many of those assertions. Each of the members of what came to be the core collective brought a slightly different perspective to decision making based on their prior experiences. Most were somewhat skeptical of consensus and to this day believe that much of the energy of those early meetings was lost because of the long, drawn out meetings as we wrestled with learning to make consensus work, especially in the beginning.

Jared was the only member who had any real experience with truly cooperative organizing and consensus based decision making. "None of this was new to me because in the 60's I was involved with communal groups, you know, communal decision making. We had a

communal bookstore in '68 in Baltimore, a school that grew out of it, a commune that grew out of it, you know, thousands of people had been impacted by what we did. We had a board of directors that worked by consensus, not the type we used at the IMC; it was more unofficial. We never called it consensus. We just kept talking until we all agreed or everybody was ok with the decision." Jason did not have an extensive history with consensus decision making but had always felt extremely negative toward organizational internal politics and the concept of majority rule and became one of the main proponents of consensus. On the idea of majority rule he said, "I hated it every time, and I have seen it used against people in all sorts of organizations and businesses." He was very intrigued by the model offered by the IMC movement. "It seemed very genuine…very democratic in every sense of the word. Instead of democratic I should use the word self-organizing because that is really a better word for me. It is more inclusive, more participatory. It looked like an effort where people who could do things did them; there was some formalized decision making but if people could do something, if they could participate, they would just do it. I like that, I like that principle a lot." He also was probably more committed to the anarchistic principles of autonomy than anyone else in the group. "I always hated the idea of following rules from above, from the outside somewhere. The people leading discussions, they were usually part of this. People accepted rules; it was a form of self coercion. We are not used to asking questions of people in authority, and without asking questions meaningfully there is no way to have truly democratic decision making."

I was extremely interested in the consensus process not only because I was intrigued by the possibility of building a more democratic organization that empowered people to take a more active role in decision making but also because I saw it as an opportunity for personal growth. I had been heavily involved in student politics both as a founder of a campus political party and president of the student senate and had gone into state politics as an advocate for the labor movement. I knew how to play the majority rules game--how to lobby, how to count votes, build voting blocks and position issues for passage. I knew how to play the game, but it always felt a bit dirty, and in spite of the fact that I was always advocating for the little guy and progressive ideas, using the political process as a means to enact positive social change, I couldn't shake the idea that I was part of the problem. Consensus seemed to be a way out of the morass of traditional politics; I wanted to learn the most effective ways of doing it, not to win but to figure out ways to make the groups I would be a part of in the future more democratic and cooperative.

Eric had similar personal motivations. "I was real interested in being a part of a community of people who were interested in working under consensus, you know, forming relationships with people that were interested in that. I did have some experiences working in rehab, with some twelve-step groups. They all had a form of anarchy that seems to work for them, so I had some experiences with loosely affiliated groups that seemed to function well without many hierarchical rules and chaos. How much more chaos can you get than a group of recovering drunks and addicts, but they seem to work just fine. It was the motivation and the relationships that made it work, and I wanted to be part of something like that."

Others in the group were less enthusiastic. Donovan, like many of the others, found those first few experiences to be frustrating, one of the most common words used to describe our decision making process. "Coming from a more traditional organizational structure, a boss, mid management, workers…the lack of a leader, consensus, it was all very group oriented, and that was totally different for me. It was frustrating at first because I felt that it often impeded things, not discussion, discussion was plentiful. But it often impeded results, you know, that something was actually getting done. My first impression, my first reaction, was frustration." Taylor was skeptical of the consensus process from the very beginning and for the most part remained so throughout his involvement. "I think that in general decisions should be based on majority rules because it is just impossible to get unanimous consensus on anything. I am a majority rules person. I think otherwise one person can stop things from happening. If someone is stubborn or bullheaded or just feels really strongly about an issue, they can hold up the whole group, and that is really inefficient." Kathy had some experiences with consensus based decision making, but those had left her cool to the idea. "I was wary because my recent experience with that type of decision making with the Green Party was not that hot. I think people are pretty starry eyed about that, but I have not seen it work. It is very slow, challenging, and only a certain type of person can deal with it."

A Rough Practice. One of the very first challenges facing the IMC was the creation of the bylaws, including our own process of modified consensus. Since we began the project without any guidelines for decision making, the first few meetings were tortuously long and often yielded little in the way of tangible outcomes. A common belief amongst the core group is that these first few frustrating meetings were responsible for the initial significant drop-off of active participants. Jared argued that our attempts to create a strong process of modified

consensus to empower individuals and give them a greater stake in the media project actually had the inverse effect. He said, "People had an energy to do something, and we didn't give them anything to move with right away, we wanted them to do all this policy stuff, and that is not what they wanted to do so they dropped off." He argued that rather than involving the broadest group possible in the very beginning, allowing them to take ownership of the organization and its policies, was counterproductive. "If we had not had the big outreach from the beginning and started small and set it up and then invited people, that energy that people had in the beginning would not have been lost. We should have just set it all up and then changed it later based on people's wants." Did we, in our attempts to build a truly cooperative media project, wind up alienating the people we were trying to involve? Jared said, "I don't know--maybe. I don't remember chasing anybody away, but people basically said that they did not want to be a part of the organizational stuff, they just wanted to use the site. They would say, 'Contact me when you guys are done,' and then we did, but they never came back because the energy was lost. I think all the meetings, the stuff that seemed more like work, they just didn't want to do that. Activists are really busy people, and we were just giving them another meeting; we should have made it seem more like fun." Kathy shared those sentiments. "I think the process in the beginning weeded a lot of people out…people that would have been beneficial to the project but just couldn't deal with it. I don't remember names but do remember people kind of fading out because they could not bear to stick with it. A lot of people with news skills just couldn't take the consensus. I don't even know why I stuck around that long. It was interesting, it was a good experiment. I do like the idea, and I would really love to see an example of where it works."

Donovan had direct anecdotal evidence that seemed to confirm some of the suspicions described above. "The two people I spoke with, both who dropped out early, had real problems with our process. One just didn't have the time, but I think that evolved from all the sitting around working on consensus, so people felt it was not the best use of their time. For another person, the whole process was very new, and since she was a professor at a major university, I think she was more used to being in the classroom and telling people this is how it is going to be or in faculty discussions arguing a point and then having a vote in a time certain way. She was frustrated by a sense that nothing was ever getting done and decided to stop coming to the meetings." I personally reject this recurring idea that "nothing was getting done." As someone who had a great deal of experience in volunteer organizations, I was astonished at the amount of

work we were able to accomplish without any voting, very little in the way of formalized rules of debate and an iron clad commitment to ensuring that anyone who wanted a voice would be heard. Consider the bylaws. Many were frustrated at the length of time they took to prepare, but I don't think most in the group ever really appreciated the difficulty of creating a set of policies that answers for the widest possible range of potential problems, that are internally consistent and that enable various subdivisions of an organization to work together with minimal structural conflicts. I concede that the bylaws were probably overdeveloped and that most of the IMCs across the network seem to be functioning (at least producing media) without such elaborate internal structures and policies, but that fact aside the document these volunteers created without any of the trappings of traditional organizational politics or decision making is, in my opinion, quite remarkable.

On Leadership. Perhaps the biggest concern cited by members of the collective involved the all too common tension that exists amongst groups organizing by radical democratic principles between traditional notions of leadership and a lack of hierarchy. A central component of the anarchistic principle of autonomy is the rejection of formally designated leaders in favor of truly independent individuals choosing to work cooperatively for the benefit of both the group and the individual. The traditional concept of leadership is so entrenched in our overly rationalized society that many have a hard time conceiving of an organizational structure without it. The IMC as a movement has rejected the idea of formalized leadership. There are no elected officers, there are no spokespeople; everything is organized through autonomous collectives. Our collective actually was different than most in that while we did not have any formalized leaders in the traditional sense, we did have a coordinating council that was charged with performing support functions for the collective and a council chair who served the council. The purpose in creating these two quasi-leadership structures was to ensure that there were people who would be accountable for making sure that the IMC met its obligations to the public and the collective (meeting notices, record keeping, etc.). The mere presence of these positions was in many ways antithetical to the organizing philosophy of the IMC movement but we included them as a compromise position with those concerned that a more purely collective structure would be too inefficient.

In spite of these and other attempts to find the right balance, most of the group was unsatisfied with our attempt. Contrary to most in the group, Eric believed that the initial loss of

people was not the product of too much deliberation, too rigid an adherence to consensus and not enough leadership but exactly the opposite. When asked if his initial positive impressions of consensus and self-organizing changed once we got into the actual work of the project, he answered, "They didn't in the beginning. No doubt. What I had not known was how challenging it is to put people with various visions in the same room and hope to come up with some form of consensus in a way that is inclusive, where no one is left out, where everybody has a way to influence the final outcome. I had never participated in that kind of organizing before. So as far as the concepts, those did not change. Of course there is always this dilemma between effectiveness and being true to the principle, and I think that is where we failed actually." Where others believed that we had gone too far in involving the broadest possible group in every aspect of the process from the beginning, Eric believed that we had not done enough to empower people. He actually felt as if too much was done outside of the group, that there needed to be an even greater effort to have every single decision made in the beginning by full consensus. For example, he said, "When you have a meeting, you usually set an agenda; you get ready for that meeting. Well, when people have never seen you before and they see that you are prepared, they sit back and become observers. If it doesn't look like they can have a direct say, they go away. Especially in this culture, that is part of the culture just like don't ask questions. So I think the fact that we were trying to move towards a finished product, and a few of us did all the work made people feel like it wasn't theirs, they weren't needed." He believed that we were in fact "too organized" which stifled participation. This stood in stark contrast to the views of the majority of the group who felt that our deliberative process afforded too much to deliberation and consensus and not enough to efficiency.

Jared however, echoed the same concerns as his fellow founder. "I agreed with [Jason] and kind of egged him on that we were all doing too much and that was keeping people away, that we should just let stuff go and see who stepped in to keep it going or fix problems but it was hard to get everybody else to think that. My experiences had always been that the more a small group decides to do the less there is for other people to do outside the group. When we decided to do everything, it didn't lock people out, but it didn't invite them in."

Conversely, Kathy believed that the focus on these concerns was counterproductive. She complained, "The one thing I didn't understand was, since consensus was basically required, why did we worry so much about letting people work on it and whether they owned it or not.

[Jared] and [Jason] should have just established this is what we will start with and let that be it. The ideal was a good, but Jason and you (Rich) and Jared were too afraid of it looking like you were the people in charge--that was a killer. I think we talked round and round only to get to the point where we had to be anyway to be a part of the network. I think that we lost many good activists in those early days by doing that." She keyed on a primary tension between the cooperative nature of consensus and the supposed increased efficiency of more traditional decision making processes. "It is always a question when you do things consensus based that you reject any leadership…if there is no leadership, nothing really happens. Someone has to feel a sense of responsibility to make things happen. I would say the fear of leadership was a real detriment to getting the project going."

Donovan had a slightly different take. He believed that in spite of the emphasis many of us put on the fact that everyone had an equal say, more traditional leaders still arose. "Even though consensus tries to eliminate leaders and our bylaws did not provide for them, leaders still emerged just like in any organization's structure. These leaders can be just as intimidating in consensus as they are in other ways of doing things." He was clear to point out that he personally felt empowered rather than intimidated and that he was referring to others in the group. When asked if he believed people were able to move things in a direction different from that articulated by these leaders he said, "I don't think new people changed direction on anything major. I think it was sort of like, the leaders built a house, and when we were all decorating the house, some people could have said, 'I want the lamp in this corner' and we were OK with that because it didn't change the structure of the house. I don't think the house ever changed." In terms of new people joining the group, he was concerned that consensus actually became a tool to maintain the status quo. He continued, "I was afraid that new people weren't heard. I don't think it was intentional, but they were coming into a totally different type of process than they were used to, one that was already running. It was designed to protect people, but in some ways I think it actually intimidated them."

Clearly there were serious tensions on issues of leadership, autonomy and how our process impacted newcomers to the group, but through my conversations with IMCistas from other collectives I am convinced that this is a relatively common occurrence. One aspect of this issue that I take issue with, and this is with opinions on all sides of this issue, is the primacy they are placing on our actions and process when trying to explain why many left after the first few

meetings and why our collective remained relatively small. Any experienced grass-roots organizer can tell you about the "rule of halves." For example, consider phone banking for a particular event. If your goal is to make contact with an entire list, you will be doing well if you contact half of them. Of the half you make direct contact with, half will agree to participate. Of those who agree, only half can be expected to show up. The rule of halves guides you in choosing the size of your initial universe based on your goal for attendees. I firmly believe that the drop-off from those early numbers was a product of this process. While that first meeting began with fifty people, we lost roughly half each time the project became more organized and those attending were asked to increase their commitment through to completion of set tasks. It is easy to get a large group together to discuss potential but once potentiality becomes actuality the numbers always reduce. This is not to say that the concerns raised above are not valid or informative, I merely question how much our choice to organize the project in the manner that we did played a factor in overall involvement.

Did it Work? Most members of our collective, including some of those initially skeptical of consensus as a decision making tool and those who felt that it may have cost the IMC volunteers in the beginning, acknowledged many positive outcomes. First, most agreed that consensus made them feel as if they were instrumental to the project, that their opinions mattered and that the project was truly theirs. Taylor, the self-professed "majority rules" member acknowledged that even though he often held different opinions from the rest of the group, he felt as if his views were important and given careful consideration. He said, "I think I was heard; I think people knew what I had in mind. I don't think I was marginalized--there were really vocal people in the group such as yourself, but our process allowed me to be vocal too, and a lot of times what I wanted wound up being the decision, and that was often surprising." Kathy believed that our process gave people a sense of ownership of the IMC. "I did not feel that all the issues were decided ahead of time or by a small group. There clearly was a set criteria about some of the basics from the main IMC, but once it was up and running people could make it their own."

Second, in spite of some reservations, most people in the core group believed that the consensus process helped keep people from being marginalized in decision making. Taylor recalled seeing others marginalized in group settings and believed that we avoided that problem. "I have been a part of groups, classes and study groups where certain people are marginalized. I

was part of a graduate class in philosophy, and I remember these two female students whose views were never heard, and I was close to one of them, and she would get really upset that her views were not being taken into consideration. I think that we did a really good job of keeping that from happening." However, he still had concerns over consensus in general. "I think it is important to encourage people to speak up and to take in opposing views, but it is a delicate balancing act, and you want to be as inclusive as you want. That has to be weighed against making decisions and putting things into action, and if you let one or two people bring everything to a halt, that's just, I think, works against things, it's counterproductive. I will admit though that dwelling on specific guidelines of the process and holding to it did show people that their views would be heard." Eric's view was also positive but without the reservations. "I guess in the past I was one of those quieter, excluded people, so I think I always noticed the people that were not being included or being paid attention to and I think the fact that we really drew discussions out took lots of time in our process to, give everybody many chances to speak up and then gave their opinions equal weight when they did was really positive."

Third, many believed that consensus based decision-making helped them to become more attentive and engaged and helped them work better with others.

Donovan, the IMCista with the background in journalism who was skeptical of the consensus process, believed the overall effect was positive. During the interview he said, "It made me listen more; it made me try to put myself in their shoes more and get a sense of where they were coming from, it gave me more empathy. It was kind of a deep rooted, deep thought process. At a regular meeting, like at a state office or even at the newspaper, someone just says, we are going to do this; are there any objections and people just nod their heads and move on. In this process you had to be a part of the conversation. You have to speak your opinion, but at the same time you have to really pay attention to what others are saying because you know they have that blocking vote, so you have to really be a part of the discussion."

Jason and Jared hold firm to the belief that our process did not go far enough and our attempts to modify consensus for the sake of efficiency drifted too far from the ideal while at the same time acknowledging that they were equal partners in the effort. Jared said, "I always feel that I have ownership of something or I wouldn't do it, so, yeah, I definitely felt a sense of ownership in our process. I thought it was good; I thought our modified consensus was good. Everybody could say what they wanted and usually everybody would get their way on the things

that were most important to them." He countered, however, "I think the formalized consensus stuff sucked…I think when we were just talking and doing things it was much better. I think when a facilitator is keeping the people that talk too much from talking too much and makes sure that everyone has a say, that's good. But when it gets all formal like we had it in the bylaws, it just gets in the way. The energy can't flow; when you are done there is no energy about the decision. It is not as organic. You have to have a real good facilitator to do it without all the formal rules. I think consensus is good, but having a written formal process just drains the energy." Jason believed that in some ways our attempts to modify consensus and the imposition of time constraints and a fall back voting process actually coerced some people to agree simply to move things forward. "I certainly accepted the process - fully endorsed it - but I think I remember perceiving that people were coerced. It was not the fault of anyone in particular but people's prior experiences, their thinking that they had to go along to keep the time from running out or force a vote. I wish we had talked about that at the time to see if people's past experiences were influencing them, keeping them quiet when they really didn't want to be."

Finally, all of the participants shared the belief that the difficult process of consensus and operating a project without any formalized hierarchy greatly contributed to the cohesiveness of the group. Kathy, one of those often frustrated over issues of efficiency said, "In some ways it was really strange that we all were so different but came to work together so well. I think this process, the long and drawn out process, created a group that bonded through it. We stuck with it, learned a lot about each other and felt really committed to work together and see it through." Eric had similar perceptions and believed that consensus and self-organizing created a more committed group. "In the beginning I remember there were a lot of people coming from an ecological perspective, you know, talking about what we were going to name it and why. There were people who were interested in alternative transportation, some who were interested in state politics, a lot of people concerned about the war, some anarchists from ARISE, and I think that everyone was concerned that the issues they cared about would not be given enough treatment. Our process, though, showed people that the IMC could be about all those things, and that if were committed to the project, people could make it what they wanted, and that made us very tight and cohesive. We were all committed to something bigger, a bigger cause, and we thought we were people with enough resource in their lives to make something good happen."

In retrospect, I believe that our experiments with modified consensus were as successful as each individual wanted it be. As Habermas articulates in the Theory of Communicative Action, the fact that we all have grown up in a social system dominated by institutions characterized by distorted communication has a tremendous impact on our own personal communication patterns. As the public realm has been dominated by the means-ends rationality of markets and state institutions, our ability to orient ourselves away from strategic communication towards communicating to reach collective understanding has been diminished. As Ralph Nader has famously said, we have all "grown up corporate." Our world views have become so dominated by the attitudes and values of capital's program, we are unable to realize that another way is possible even when it is staring us straight in the face. Look at many of the comments I have included here, most of those involved with the IMC realized that consensus was a better way to arrive at decisions for individuals but they seem unable to look beyond the need for standard ideas of efficiency and realize that there are also benefits for the entire group and the media project itself.

Jason probably summed it best. While acknowledging the frustrations people experienced over consensus, he believed those frustrations actually provide the strongest evidence that the overall experience was beneficial. He said, "Why would those frustrations surprise me? I know people were frustrated. But those situations provided us opportunities to learn about each other and about different ways of organizing. Not too long after we started our IMC I went to Brazil and worked with the IMC covering the World Social Forum, and I saw it work; I know it can work. It was fantastic and encouraging. I think it is really important right now, with everything that is happening with globalization, not to rely on leadership or personality; it is necessary to move beyond that. We need to suffer these problems to get away from the old model, we don't have to always start somewhere we can start from nowhere and let everybody build fresh."

What about the Media?

A final area that needs examination centers on the media project itself and how the people working to create this radical/alternative media project felt about the fruits of their labor. One of the earliest disputes over the nature of our IMC was over the types of stories we would include. While most were interested in collecting, creating and sharing content from an

unabashed leftist perspective, Taylor the philosophy graduate student envisioned a forum where viewpoints from the right and the left were presented to create a dialogue between the varying positions on the issues. "I wanted to make it an inclusive voice. You know, let the best and strongest argument win, and I think that the left would win the argument, but I thought if it was more open, it would get out in the community more, and people might be attracted to if it spoke to conservatives and moderates as well. I think the group wanted it to be just left because there wasn't enough left voices out there. My view was, that's true, but let's do something that has all the arguments and attracts people from opposing views, and maybe they can be persuaded by the best arguments not just the left wing. Otherwise you are just preaching to the choir."

For the rest of the group, even in those early days when our numbers were much greater than this core group, there was a lot of hesitancy towards this idea. Most believed that the mainstream media was already dominated by voices they considered to be "right-wing" or, perhaps more accurately, supportive of the status quo. No one wanted to do the work of creating a space that would be used to give any more coverage of those voices. Everyone was committed to open publishing, and at no time was there any discussion about somehow censoring more mainstream or conservative viewpoints. However, there was no interest in becoming a venue to further the ideas already dominating the mainstream. Jared said, "I had no problem with dialogue; I thought that was a good thing. But I wanted to create a place for media that was specifically dedicated to those ideas that were being ignored, and let's face it; those were not conservative ideas."

While the group reached a consensus that the IMC would not actively work to promote stories and viewpoints in support of the status-quo and which reflected the dominant views already being disseminated in the mainstream, this tension raises an interesting point. If a truly democratized public sphere is really about creating a communicative space where all viewpoints are able to be shared equally by everyone so that society can make informed choices about critical issues, isn't that exactly what Taylor was advocating? The answer is most assuredly yes; however, as discussed in Chapter 3, radical/alternative media exists in response to social conditions that allow those in power to dominate the various channels of communication at the expense of those ideas that challenge their power. If these spaces are forced to adhere to notions of journalistic objectivity that give equal weight to all positions, the strength of that oppositional content is diluted, not because of the strengths of the arguments of those in power but because

they have colonized the very spaces that have formed to serve as a check on that power. If the entire mediascape were democratized, and marginalized or subordinated groups were given an equal voice, perhaps the goal should be to provide a forum like the one Taylor described. However, in the current media climate, those working to break free of the corporate yoke should feel no compunction to share their limited, hard-fought, precious space in the media environment with those who dominate the rest.

Despite this fundamental disagreement, Taylor states that the open and inclusive structure of our IMC prompted him to stay involved. He said, "I understood we had to move in the direction of the group, and that was fine. I had no grudges or anything. In fact, I think all the discussions we had brought people around to my point of view a little, and they wanted to do whatever they could to support my efforts. People never stopped me from doing what I wanted to do. I posted stories to encourage discussion. Everybody responded really well to that; it just wasn't their focus. I think our organization did fine. I think we gave everybody a chance to be as involved as they wanted and to have their views heard."

The fact that our IMC was still predominately Internet based media also created some problems. As described earlier, at the same time we were working to create our IMC, another group (including many from our own Project) were creating a print publication, the *Apalachee Tortoise*. Two of the core members from our collective left the IMC to dedicate their time to this publication. Kathy, who became the principal organizer of the *Tortoise* believed that print was an altogether better medium, one that could generate the resources to make the project viable. "It was the idea of seeing something in print, a product that you can hold in your hand and show people. [The paper] was never supposed to be separate, and it wasn't at first. We shared stories and content. It was all supposed to be community media that groups would contribute to, but with no advertising at the IMC there just wasn't any money. The *Tortoise* had ads and so the resources were there." Donovan, the member who worked as a professional journalist also left the IMC for the paper, and he explained his decision as one based on the increased visibility of the print format. "Way more people have heard of the *Tortoise*. We have it in machines on the street corner. We go to advertisers who distribute it in their businesses. We are able to promote ourselves better because it is tangible. Because it is out there more, people want to write for it; they can see their work in public." The *Tortoise* became somewhat of a competitor rather than a

complementary, effort and with more resources it won (although the publication is now also defunct).

Finally, most of the core group expressed that they felt somewhat demoralized that more people did not post their own content to the site, and when they did, there was not the type of investigatory journalism with the goal of promoting action on key issues. Donovan said, "The people I know and I got feedback from all thought it was a great idea. They were excited to have it and hated to see it go, but I don't think people participated. I think people were confused with the concept. We could have done better. They thought there was a group of people that they needed to bring the story to them rather than them do it themselves. I think it is human nature. People will attend to those things that impact them directly, and the IMC is asking people to think about issues that may be beyond their immediate lives. Other IMCs are really strong like Eugene and Portland. I don't know if Tallahassee was ready for it." Jared was more philosophical. "In 2004 people chose to have a totalitarian regime. They allowed Kerry to drop out of the election even though people knew there was a problem in Ohio. People did not want to fight back, so they didn't need things like Whose Florida or the IMC. When people were not out on the street to protest that election, I figured that was it, and people needed to realize how bad things were or maybe they gave up. I don't know." Kathy was disappointed that the website did not encourage more grass-roots organizing in the community. "I hoped that our stories would mobilize people, get them excited to organize against a lot of what was happening. I don't think the IMC lived up to that. We had the calendar going, and that was good, but we never served as a catalyst to get people working together. The potential was there. Other sites seemed to be that way, but in Tallahassee we just never made it."

Conclusions

The final topic area of the interviews centered on the advice this group would give to others looking to start and IMC and most of those suggestions mirrored the various areas of tension described above. In the following section, I look at some of the concrete suggestions made by this group and share some final thoughts of my own.

Kathy believed that an IMC should do more outreach to established groups including other alternative media, and with those groups to collate efforts into a single project. "I would encourage people to make sure that they research what is happening locally, what other

alternative news outlets exist, print and online, newsletters etc. and coalate those into one place. I still think it's crap that all the groups in Tallahassee have their own website, but it is really hard to get groups to fold what they are doing together with others. Everybody wants to have their own things. There should be a central, one stop place." Jared echoed the importance of reaching out to organized groups but stressed that all efforts should be made to allow them to maintain their own autonomy. "I think that the thing we could have done much better was to get participation from all the groups. The thing is that groups want to keep doing their own thing, keep their own stuff, websites, papers etc. It needs to be presented in a way that this is a tool for people to use not taking away from anything they are doing."

Donovan, who left the IMC for the newspaper and whose background was in print journalism, encouraged future IMCistas to adopt some elements of the mainstream. "There needs to be more promotion. People need to know more than that it exists for it to be effective. I hate to use the word, but tap into marketing; the marketing community gets a marketing guru to look at other news organizations and find ways to compete and get their product out there." He also advised for the organization to think beyond its own internal processes and keep the focus on media production. Attract people who are not only going to work on the site and the organization but are actually going to post stories. You [Rich]were always good about posting stories about the unions and the insider stuff about state politics but more people need to do that." Taylor also suggested outreach was key and held strong to his idea of reaching out to people of all political persuasions. "I think the IMC needs to move away from just being a left leaning website promoting left leaning media. I think it should be more like a forum; the controversy creates viewer that generates posts, that keeps it going, and that is key."

Eric stayed true to his concerns about the individuals involved and creating a supportive environment for those participating. He said, "I would be more concerned with providing some form of social support. I was at a protest at a football game against Nike, and I got really attacked by an assistant coach, and there was no support there from the loosely knit organization that had put together the protest. Nobody knew what the trespass law was, nobody knew what our rights were. That really shut me down, and I think groups should think about things that could happen and find ways to support people when they happen." He also spoke highly of our effort, believing that the work we did, while perhaps not as immediately successful as most of us would have wanted, was important because of our attention to detail that was aimed at creating

something for the long-term for future activists to use and build on. "One of the things that made me happy about setting up the IMC was that even if there wasn't a great deal of immediate participation, we were setting something up for the long haul, something that could be built and molded over time by the community. When things got worse, this outlet would be here for people. It is too bad it is not up and running right now."

The one universal suggestion was for future collectives to diversify their tech support. In addition to the concerns raised earlier, everyone in the group felt as if the real demise of the IMC was simply the product of relying on a single person to maintain the site. In the weeks immediately prior to the hacking incident that destroyed the web site, the IMC had seen a resurgence of activity. The number of new posts had reached a level not seen since 2003. A group of students was interested in forming a video working group, and the few of us still involved were strategizing about ways to re-build the collective. Unfortunately, while there were some from the community who offered technical assistance, no one was willing to commit the time and energy needed to recover the site and all of its archives and move it to a different server. There were some attempts made to elicit help from the global tech group but none of us remaining even had the vocabulary needed to work with them, and Jason, our lone tech person, was unwilling to grant access to his server which had been crippled by the hack. As I found when conducting the census, this problem was not as widespread across the network as I believed and seemed to be largely limited to our project.

I believe that regardless of many of the somewhat negative views expressed here, that our collective did some solid and impressive work. A group of people, most of which had with little to no grass-roots organizing experience, built a media outlet using challenging, unfamiliar methods, and while that project is no longer active, their was for a time a completely open space where anyone in the community could share their stories. They were able to do so not as isolated individuals but as a part of a truly global network, one that for a time included the relatively small community of Tallahassee. This diverse collection of individuals formed an incredibly cohesive group that all agree respected one another, empowered each other to be equal voices in decision making and balanced the needs of the individual with the needs of the group. This examination sought to better understand how radical democratic principals could contribute to an alternative public sphere, one that could use media to expand its model from an isolated group to a broader community. If anything has been learned it is this: radical democracy is hard work,

and after years of being socialized in a social order that places means-ends rationality and communicating to win over personal relationships and communicating to develop understanding, it is not easy for any of us to let go of these old assumptions of the world. However, if Habermas is correct and reclaiming a democratized public sphere is a central socio-structural step towards changing our dominant communication patterns, thus securing our own liberation, this is the work that needs to be done. As Jason advised others looking to create an IMC said, "Follow the principles and review them all the time to make sure what you are doing is following those principles. Inclusion is the key, but real inclusion doesn't come easy, but keep at it as long as it takes, god dammit! In America we want everything instantly. Do people want a drive-thru IMC? Can I have an IMC medium-rare. We want the final product; we don't want to spend any time in the kitchen. It took us a long time as a society to come to where we are today. All the experiences we have had over the years have made us what we are today. Bad people did not tell us what to do, it is a progression. If we are going to change that it will take a lot of time, the process is just as important or even more important than the product."

A great deal has been written about radical/alternative media and Indymedia as an example of this type of social endeavor. Most of these accounts have only skimmed the surface. This examination of the internal policies and practices of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC and the people who created them was designed to peel back an another layer in order to get a better sense of people's motivations to do this work, their attitudes about organizing using radical democratic principles and how they felt about the numerous challenges they faced, challenges that should be expected whenever there is an effort to pound even the smallest crack in the fortified enclosures the corporate media has built around those working to challenge the world's dominant power structures. While still predominantly descriptive in nature, it is my hope to build on this type of analysis to inject a more social element into the study of radical alternative media. At some level, any study of the media is an examination of the people who make it, the people who use it and how it impacts their views of the world. This albeit limited examination was an attempt to add that human element back into the mix.

CONCLUSION

"…In a perceived crisis situation, the actors in civil society…can assume a surprisingly active and momentous role. In spite of a lesser organizational complexity and a weaker capacity for action, and despite the structural disadvantages…at the critical moments of an accelerated history, these actors get the chance to reverse the normal circuits of communication in the political system and the public sphere. In this way they can shift the entire system's mode of problem solving." – ***Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, p. 381.***

The rapid development of new global communications and information technologies, transportation systems and increasingly proficient manufacturing technologies have enabled capital to coordinate its efforts to dominant resources, both material and human, on an international level. This coupled with their creation of global institutional structures like the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and liberalized free trade agreements has enabled capital to expand its free market economic models to the entire planet. While market forces have in some senses always operated internationally, never before in the history of the human experience has capital been able to coordinate its efforts so efficiently on the world stage. International boundaries are being dissolved, perhaps not literally but functionally, and new international super corporations now wield almost absolute power over the planet as the leaders of sovereign nations give control over their people and national resources to the agents of global capital. Whether that control has been given willingly or coerced through the IMF or World Bank or even at the barrel of a gun, capital's dominance has, for the first time, become truly global.

As capital domination has gone global, so has the resistance against it. The same information and communications technologies that capital has developed for its own purposes have also enabled those organizing against this international power grab to coordinate their efforts. As capital has worked to create and then subjugate a global labor force, this newly constituted global class is working to organize that group by creating new connections and by extension a new class consciousness to unite formerly provincial efforts into a single global movement. Complex networks of populations around the world are able for the first time to globally expand the reach of their message, coordinate their efforts and share vital information

about struggles that in the past would have seemed unrelated. As I describe in Chapter Five, the theoretical project of the Autonomist Marxists offers a framework through which we can understand this process. Through their re-interpretation of classical Marxist theory, the autonomist school of thought articulates that the rise of this global resistance and its use of capital's innovations is to be expected. The emphasis here shifts away from the classical interpretations that position labor as mere subjects, floating on a tide of capital's development to an active object that can and historically has responded by turning those innovations into weapons of struggle against those developments. These actions have historically created crisis conditions for capital, forcing it to reevaluate and re-tool its own efforts--precisely what we are seeing today.

The institutions of the global market make up an intricate global complex that includes international financial institutions, national governments, law enforcement and other mechanisms of local control. A key component of that complex is the corporate media. Media companies have become integral parts of global conglomerates, inseparable from parent companies that control ever increasing portions of this newly global market. Newspapers, television and radio stations and increasingly Internet service providers are controlled by the same companies that dominate markets as diverse as food production and distribution, energy production, construction, and even weapons manufacturing. As components of these massive corporations, media companies have become indispensable tools in their effort to manipulate national governments and create a compliant population that will willingly cede their national resources and their own labor power to capital's cause.

In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas applies earlier conceptions of the idealized public sphere and the Theory of Communicative Action (TCA) in an attempt to draw out the implications the ideas comprising these constructs have on understanding the social and institutional complexities inherent in the "duality of modern law" the idea that laws on one level appear to be the expressions of those in power who have the ability to punish those who do not comply but on an another are not simply commands backed by threats but expressions that carry the legitimacy of a broader public. In discussing the complex of institutional and social processes that underlie these legitimacy claims, Habermas comes back to the idea of the interplay between the public sphere, and more accurately, the various interconnected publics with the mass media. In light of the some of the trends outlined in Chapter Two and similar

developments in other late capitalist societies, Habermas argues that, "The sociology of mass communication depicts the public sphere as infiltrated by administrative and social power and dominated by the mass media" and that "the power of the media should thus be neutralized and the tacit conversion of administrative or social power into influence blocked" (Habermas, 1996, p. 379). While acknowledging that this view of media power forces those concerned with the potential for social actors to have an influence on the political system to adopt a fairly cautious view of their ability to do so, he offers this clarification, "To be sure, this estimate pertains only to a public sphere at rest. In periods of mobilization, the structures that actually support the authority of a critically engaged public begin to vibrate. The balance of power between civil society and the political system then shifts" (Habermas, 1996, p.379).

The goal of this dissertation has been to further illuminate one of these global movements that is beginning to vibrate. This movement pushes back against not only the corporate press and its control of information but the entire globalization program itself; it is the Independent Media Center movement. While there has been a fair amount of academic attention given to the rise of networked politics and the new forms of social movements it has engendered (movements that many argue transcend the identity politics of the past), examinations of Indymedia specifically have been relatively few and have only scratched the surface. In the most general sense, I hoped to examine the IMC through several theoretical frameworks in order to provide a better picture as to the scope of the project and more importantly to find how it can contribute to this new and critical struggle against capital's global enterprise. Additionally, I hoped to provide the first detailed look at the inner workings of both the North American portion of the network and one particular IMC to examine its resources, organizational structures and policies and how individuals operated within its framework. Specifically, I argue that the IMC members' contribution to the current movement against global capital control in favor of social justice transcends its oppositional content. By making media in ways radically different from the mainstream, they are creating spaces for prefigurative politics spaces that approach the ideal of the public sphere articulated by Habermas. They help to create not only a new public sphere and radically democratic discursive space but also provide a tangible example of alternate ways of organizing that minimizes systematically distorted, strategic communication in favor of communicative action. Remember, TCA articulates a dynamic and interconnected relationship between the "system" of institutions and the "lifeworld" of human interaction and relationship

formation. If changing the structural elements of discursive spaces can, in fact, have a transformative effect on the personal communication patterns of those involved then the actual work of the IMC (the processes of making oppositional media) are just as important to the movement as the information they are sharing. I have advanced this argument in several stages.

In Chapter One I provided a fairly comprehensive history of the IMC including some of its precursors such as the global computer mediated networks created around the uprising for social justice and military response in Chiapas, Mexico. This historically significant event, which many argue was the birth of the current anti-capital/anti-globalization movement (before the Battle in Seattle) represented the first time that new computer technologies and Internet mediated networks were used to both widely publicize the details of a local struggle in a remote part of the world and coordinate a global response in support of the victims of corporate and state repression. I described how Marcos' call for the creation of an "electronic fabric of struggle" was heeded by the first IMC organizers who were part of the historic "Battle in Seattle," the first large-scale protest of the World Trade Organization, one that captured the world's attention. This history provides a great deal of insight into both the motivations and the tactics of those comprising the IMC movement and clearly situates it as an integral part of this new global struggle.

In Chapter Two I looked at the past fifteen years of media policy in the United States, illustrating the detrimental effects that media deregulation and consolidation has had on our nation's ability to get the information we need and deserve to be meaningful participants in the decision-making process of our society. I also detailed some of the major aspects of the current push against media deregulation through the media reform movement, careful to make the distinction between it and its DYI, punk rock cousin, radical media. This context is critical for understanding not only the need for alternative citizen's media but also why Indymedia has organized in the manner it has.

The corporate media, with profit as its principal motive has become a sham as a tool for public information. Rather, it has become the primary means for both manufacturing public consent and marginalizing dissent. The IMCistas see the problem with the media not just in terms the media messages themselves but all of the dominant assumptions about what the media is and how it should be organized. Power is vested in the hands of a tiny minority of gatekeepers on the top floor in the corner office. Pundits with little to no connection to the public they are

speaking to tell us not only what to think about but how to think about it. Community voices are relegated to the back pages of newspapers and are relatively non-existent in other media forms. Decisions are made in boardrooms far removed and well insulated from the public they purport to serve. The tools for media creation and dissemination are available only to those fortunate enough to have sequestered more than their fair share of resources. Indymedia activists are working to smash all of these conditions, not through legislation or the institutions of the state but by simply going out and showing that another way is possible and working to make the corporate media irrelevant. They are working to do so through their unwavering convictions to transparency, open publishing, the empowerment of citizen journalists, organizing through radical democratic principles and a rejection of profit.

However, many contemporary ideas about radical media support the thinking that Indymedia and other radical media projects are about much more than media. In Chapter Three I provide a detailed look at two of the more dominant contemporary theoretical frameworks of radical alternative media, the descriptive theories of Atton and Downing. Here I illustrate what I consider to be the major tenet of both theories, especially in their explanatory power of Indymedia, that the process of media making in these endeavors is just as important if not more so than the oppositional content they produce. Downing clearly illustrates that much of the transformative power of these efforts is a result of their commitment to anarchist principles of radical democracy including self-organizing, autonomy, a rejection of formalized hierarchies and consensus based decision making. These spaces provide social enclaves for prefigurative politics, where new ways of social organizing can be explored with the potential for export to the broader community. The slogan for the World Social Forum, a massive annual event in celebration of the hope that self-organizing and truly cooperative efforts can solve many of the current global challenges, is "another way is possible." Atton and Downing argue that alternative radical media is working to find that way. Additionally, Atton's framework posits that alternative media provide a unique opportunity to blur the traditional boundaries between media producers and consumers. Indymedia, with its commitment to open publishing and empowering everyone to be journalists, eliminates those boundaries altogether. The result is a true community space where stories are shared between equals rather than told by those in power to those without.

How does Indymedia rise to meet the potential offered by Downing, Atton and others? In Chapter Four I examine the policies and practices of the global IMC network through these frameworks, illustrating the ways in which the movement has applied radical democratic principles in their organizing and the use of web based innovations like open publishing to transform media readers into media writers. While the Internet community has embraced many of these same technological advancements of open publishing as evidenced by the explosion of the blogosphere, video sharing sites like You Tube, and the ability to instantly publish comments on mainstream news sites, these innovations were pioneered by Indymedia. As corporate interests continue their attempts to place enclosures similar to those found in older media around the Internet, the IMC and other radical projects with their commitments to truth telling rather than commerce are uniquely situated to push back against this trend.

The theories articulated by Atton, Downing and others are extremely useful in helping to understand the IMC movement and its liberator potential. However, I argue, as have others, that the frameworks articulated by German critical theorist Jürgen Habermas are uniquely suited to explain the ways in which radical media projects offer real potential for social liberation, both on the macro societal level and the micro level of the individual. While the connections between Habermas' work and the IMC have been discussed before, I have labored to provide a more detailed look than most at the major elements of his work that are particularly relevant to the IMC. In the broadest sense, Habermas is working to build a fundamentally critical theory of society, one that exposes the mechanisms of social domination and by extension, guidance as to how those mechanisms may be dismantled. In Chapter Five I examine some of the major milestones of his overall project--most importantly the idea that the potential exists to alter society's structural elements to create a public sphere where the impact of harmful social constructs such as race, gender and socio-economic status are minimized thus giving all members of the social order the opportunity to engage in the debate on social issues where the strength of their argument is paramount.

While many of the historically specific aspects of his earliest analysis in the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* have been rightly criticized on the merits of some of his conclusions about the historical conditions of early bourgeois society, most in the research community have acknowledged both the analytical and practical applications of his construct of an idealized public sphere. I also describe how his structurally bound analysis of the public

sphere has given way to a more fundamental theory of human communication itself through the Theory of Communicative Action. Here Habermas ties the structural components of a society organized around domination to the ways in which humans communicate with each other. He argues that the systematically distorted aspects of the broader social order (system) are transferred to the fundamentally social world of interpersonal relationships (lifeworld). Social structures, he argues, are inexorably tied to the ways in which we talk to each one another; patterns of domination at the societal level are manifested at the personal level and vice versa in an interwoven cycle. As patterns of domination inherent in the system colonize the lifeworld, our most basic relationships come to be characterized by a mirror image of that domination. Our communication becomes strategic in nature, designed to gain something in a reflection of the rationalization process articulated by Weber and others. We cease speaking to reach an understanding with each other and maintain the social bonds. In order to liberate societies, Habermas' theoretical work indicates that the emphasis must be on both correcting the patterns of domination by reforming social structures and institutions and attending to the ways in which we organize our communicative relationships.

Each chapter summarized above provides a critical piece for my overall argument about both the nature of Indymedia and its potential to be a meaningful part of the broader movement for global justice. First, the IMC is rooted to this movement as evidenced by its early history and its precursor found in the struggles of the Zapatistas, indicating its goal of creating a truly global alternate public sphere. Second, the dramatic increase in corporate mass media power, which is attached to the same complex of the capital forces pushing globalization, has forced the public to attend to that power in different ways--both by changing the regulatory structures overseen by the state and by creating its own media and new communication commons. Third, these new media projects provide a greater potential for liberation from this new global threat than the information presented in their mediated content. Fourth, just as Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere is a mediating force between political systems and the world of interpersonal relationships, so is Indymedia using this potential to create a discursive space that impacts not only the world of systems but also the world of relationships and interpersonal communication by providing its participants an opportunity to explore new ways of social organizing.

However, these movements across the theoretical landscape take us only so far. In order to truly understand the processes by which these spaces are created (or more importantly *if* they

are being created) we have to look at their qualities both in terms of their structural elements and resources and how those working within these new media spaces feel about these conditions.

In Chapter Six I report on the numerous challenges facing anyone who attempts to research the radical DIY project that is Indymedia. These challenges are included both for the practical reason of explaining why the census of the North American I attempted did not generate more generalizable results but also because these tensions and the principles and philosophies they reflect are extremely informative as to the overall culture of the IMC. This is a group that is willing to challenge everything people believe, not only about media making but about the fundamental legitimacy of contemporary social institutions. As such, they demand to be an integral part of any research project and want to ensure that they are not simply reduced to the status of human lab rats to assuage the curiosity of and build the curriculum vitae of institutional academics. Also, this group has been subject to severe reprisals from both law enforcement agencies and the legal systems from around the world, understandably creating a group that is less than completely trusting or compliant with requests from those outside their movement.

These challenges not withstanding, just as Habermas' critical analysis involves elements of both general social structures and individuals, I too focus on both in my examination of Indymedia. In order to examine the structural elements of this space more fully, I examine many elements of a portion of the North American network to get a sense of the types of media the IMC has expanded to, the resources the network has to work with, the structures in place to develop relationships with the broader community, how the groups navigate the technical challenges of the network and basic information about the IMCistas themselves and the diversity of their collectives.

In Chapter Seven I report on the findings of my initial attempt at a census of the network, a task that has yet to have been reported on in the research literature. While the small number of respondents make it impossible to generalize any conclusions to the entire network, it did generate some interesting findings which I discussed earlier. In many ways this attempt should be viewed more as a pilot study, representing the first time any effort like this been made (at least as has been reported in the research literature) and pointing out a possible way to gather this critical data about the network and some of the pitfalls to be avoided. In the most general of terms, the results indicate that this new media space is becoming increasingly sophisticated, with

IMCistas expanding into a wide range of media types, developing more independent technical proficiency and creating new ways to reach out to the community. The small group represented also illustrates that many of the concerns raised anecdotally about the relative lack of diversity in the movement could be justified.

Finally, I attempt to get a sense of the perceptions and feelings about this new space from those working through radical democratic principles and consensus to create a local Indymedia Center. The conversations I had with the group, augmented by my own recollections paint the clear picture that learning how to organize without the traditional hierarchies and decision-making apparatuses of the status quo can be incredibly difficult. Our own communication patterns and world views are so completely bound up with the dominant notions of efficiency, formalized leadership and might equals right decision making that attempting to move beyond those notions can seem as unnatural as flapping our arms and taking flight. However, the experiences shared by those intrepid explorers of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC also show that this work of doing the unnatural can have real benefits for those involved. Almost to a person, the group reported that they often felt more engaged in the organization and decision-making and that no one was marginalized or relegated to outsider status. They felt more empowered to be a part of the effort and that a strong cohesive group was created out of group of individuals with radically different life experiences and circumstances.

A Personal Note

I began this project with two audiences in mind: the academics who would read this as a part of the formalized educational process I had to fulfill and my comrades in the IMC community. I had hoped that I would be able to shed some light on some of the practical problems the movement is facing, problems that should be expected in a movement as diverse and global in scope as the IMC. I also hoped to excite readers in the IMC community by slogging through the theoretical soup to tease out the ideas that illustrate the incredible potential this effort, and others like it, has to change the world. I hoped to communicate to those interested, in a single place, some of available theoretical evidence in support of the work they are doing in a manner that minimizes the complicated academic speak common to these writings. While I acknowledge that my efforts fell short on the first count, I sincerely hope that I was able to achieve the second. As I was reading and re-reading the works of Habermas, Downing, Atton, the autonomist Marxists

and others, I repeatedly came across nuggets of information that led to those "a ha" moments when I realized that the IMCistas were truly on to something. Clearly, I have not approached this endeavor as an unbiased observer conforming to the academic mandate of analytical outsider because I am not. I gave thousands of hours to the movement. In the end, as our own IMC in Tallahassee folded, I was the last person standing, running around trying in vain to get the site back up and running. I have launched efforts periodically to build a new collective, but those attempts have similarly failed. I am still an avid reader and writer on the IMC network; the home page on the Internet browsers on my various machines are all set to U.S. Indymedia, and I contribute to the efforts whenever possible. While the shiny, "whiz bang wow" of the early days when the IMC was on the cutting edge has been dulled by a networked world where blogs and You Tube have made open publishing common place, I am still amazed by the truly collective nature of Indymedia. I marvel at its commitment to challenge capital and its lap dog corporate press in ways that preface people over profit, cooperation over competition and collective autonomy over hierarchy. If we are to chart a truly new course for our shrinking world, this could be a viable way to do it.

APPENDIX A

SELECTED POSTS FROM IMC-RESEARCH

The following is a collection of postings from the IMC-Research List detailing a conversation regarding whether or not the IMC Network should participate in academic research projects. A link to the post in the archives of the IMC-Research group is included in the fist line of each.

Subject: [IMC-Process] Indymedia survey
Dear all,
I am an MSc Media Research and Analysis student at City University in London, United Kingdom. I would like to conduct an online survey amongst the users of Indymedia website as a part of my masters dissertation. The survey would offer Indymedia information about the usage of the website. I would be grateful if someone could let me know with whom I could discuss my project.
Looking forward to hearing from you.
Best wishes,

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0602-2g.html
Hi Folks, In reading through (this) request I had a thought. In doing our research, perhaps there is a way in which we can collectively share our primary "data" on IMC, such as U's survey, or when I am done I will have tons of transcribed interviews and field notes (if I can get the time or money to do transcription). This would all be done with the eye of both aiding our shared intellectual endeavors, but more importantly the growth and strategic outlook of the IMC network. In this way I am thinking of some sort of research collective. This could also develop into different research thoughtshares of sorts where we bring different (theoretical, political, strategic, academic) ideas, regarding IMC to the table and talk about them from our varied research perspective/agendas. Something like this could be done on IRC (Internet Relay Chat). Just some thoughts.

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0603-t0.html
hi (name) and all the people on the various lists i've cc'd. please could you stop posting emails requesting a survey to either global lists or to uk lists: it is *not* gonna happen cos there are too many people who would block it (i am one of those). for some background, you might like to read the following 'guidelines for researchers' that uk-imc drafted this time last year, after a similar request from another bunch of researchers. there are also some further links available off that page. furthermore, this summer is a busy time for the united kollectives as we are preparing to cover the protests against the g8 in scotland. i would be surprised if other people have time to respond, and i would also imagine that if your survey was posted to the newswire it would be hidden as 'non-news'. of course, if you wish to become involved in Indymedia yourself, that is a different proposition. you may wish to attend one of the london imc meetings to see what goes on. http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Local/ImcUkResearcherGuidelines
http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/ImcResearchPractices
there was also a huge load more debate in the imc-uk-process list from june/july last year - look for threads about social research and similar: http://archives.lists.indymedia.org/imc-uk-process/2004-June/

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-uk-process/2004-July/0729-ag.html
Hello all,
We would suggest that, before discussing ways to support the research project proposed by…we should assess wether it makes sense for us to participate in the project at all.
The motivation to put time into such a project could be that we feel the research would provide a contribution to Indymedia in some way. We can´t see this contribution in any aspect - content, outreach or fun. Therefore we propose to end the debate by August 8, and send a letter to the researchers to inform them that Indymedia uk is not interested in the proposed collaboration. However, we would like to point out that, of course, Indymedia resources are openly archived and can be used for research. Some guidelines for researchers are archived on the Indymedia documentation project:
http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Local/ImcUkResearcherGuidelines
Why we propose not to collaborate in this project:
We have thought about the possible benefits for Indymedia mentioned by Jane, Royston and Nessuno, but could only imagine one reason to participate in the project: to be part of an innovative research programme, independent of the topic (you can get interesting results in any framework). Some of us might consider doing this as a job, but not as voluntary, unpaid work. Most importantly, we don´t think that being part of an innovative research programme justifies offering our website to support a project that is neither news nor campaign nor explicitly critical analysis. Not even if this would be a one-off rather than a precedent – and we don't think it could or would be.
We have also considered whether by saying "no" to this project we would deprive ourselves of an important political initiative, a ground-breaking production of knowledge, or a crucial contribution to our bigger project. We came to the conclusion that this is not the case. In the recent debate, we found five reasons in favour of IMC-Uks collaboration in this project.
1- Indymedia can find out more about its audience, we could include our own questions in the questionnaire
2- research about the relationship between internet use and democracy could influence how the state is setting up e-government, e-elections etc. By collaborating in the project, Indymedia could contribute to real political change
3- breaking out of the "activist ghetto." The views of the Indymedia audience could be heard by policy-makers, academics and other people outside the activist ghetto who may otherwise not listen to our voices
4- the project would not mean more work for Indymedia. Filling in the questionnaire would be voluntary, and interviews would only be conducted with those who ask to be interviewed. The main target of the research is not the collectives, but the audience.
5- the project is set up as a collaboration between Indymedia and the researchers.
Here are our comments:
1. Does Indymedia need to know more about its audience?
The research project is an innovative audience study and, as such, it addresses Indymedia as a web-project with an audience. For a traditional (commercial) media outlet, participation would make sense. Traditional media outlets depend greatly on advertising. To get paying advertisers, they need to provide the number of hits and a profile of their audience. Income through advertising depends largely on the size of the audience. Therefore, it is useful to tap into the audience, increase hits to the website, develop user profiles based on market research and web questionnaires, etc. For a traditional media outlet, or a commercial website, an offer to approach this audience via a research questionnaire would probably be exremely (sic) attractive. So we are not surprised that the big brother website and the lord of the rings website collaborated with Jane in previous projects. Similarly, a big NGO which relies upon donations, or a traditional political body whose power relies on the number of its members, must always try to increase its market profile, that is, must find out details about its "constituency". However, Indymedia is set up in a completely different way. We don´t have pressure to recruit advertisers or new members, or even to increase the hit rate. Communication within the Indymedia community does not work through marketing gadgets. We don`t perceive users of Indymedia as an audience. Readers, writers, techies, artists etc are part of the same community, some more and some less active. Those new to Indymedia approach those

more established via email lists, at meetings and in offline activities, and often become so active that they become part of the 'crew.' To offer new-comers or casual visitors a questionnaire would send the wrong message: tick a few boxes, rate some features, write a few sentences, that´s all you need to do to keep us going. No, that is not how it works! The Principles of Unity captures this sentiment in the first statement: "1. The Independent Media Center Network (IMCN) is based upon principles of equality, decentralization and local autonomy. The IMCN is not derived from a centralized bureaucratic process, but from the self-organization of autonomous collectives that recognize the importance in developing a union of networks." [1] True, some collectives could do with more active participants. But the way we address this is different from, say, a political party. We don´t need to ask what they want us to do. Mostly, we know quite well which activities would be good, because we are our own audience. If we have a problem, it is not a lack of audience data, but the restrictions that come with a volunteer-based project: lack of time and people-power, not lack of understanding of how to improve our media and communications. We do what we are interested in, and expect others to join in with what they are interested in, in a DIY fashion. This is similar to the ethos of free software development: "You don´t like it? Here´s the code, go and change it." We don´t need to know how many percent of Indymedia users are over 40, or how they would rate the quality of Indymedia on a scale from 1 to 5. We don´t need to know how much time the average user spends on our website, and how often she clicks. We don´t need to know the statistics of how many people want a rating system on the newswire. What would we do with the data from such a questionnaire? In a traditional organisation, it would be used for outreach or marketing. But our marketing is in the work we do, the features we write, the offline activities we organise. This is appreciated in many ways - grassroots group who start sending quality reports, websites that link to us, the sometimes almost embarrassingly friendly responses we get from people we meet at demos, protests, events, squats, meetings, gigs. The point where it gets interesting is when someone says: "I can code it, I can help implementing it, I am willing to work within the Indymedia structures, shall we do it?" Therefore, what is needed is, for instance, a clearer contact page, manuals and how-tos that are easy to find and easy to understand, people who help newcomers to find their way in, collectives who constantly develop their structures in a dynamic way. These are things that are already being worked on: for example, ocs.indymedia.org ; theimc-uk-outreach list [2]; and open-events for sharing knowledge and skills. The information we might get through the proposed research project, even through our own questions in the questionnaire, would be meaningless for our outreach work.

2. Real political change?

Indymedia is an alternative news website. As such, facilitating governance is not our concern: be it e-government, e-voting or linux-based open publishing local council websites (which probably would be ignored anyway). Our political contribution is to empower people to use new technologies and to give a platform to those who are silenced in corporate media. It may be honorable to research why young people are not voting, or how they see democracy, but this is not an Indymedia task. Again, we refer to the Principles of Unity: "6. All IMC's recognize the importance of process to social change and are committed to the development of non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian relationships, from interpersonal relationships to group dynamics. Therefore, shall organize themselves collectively and be committed to the principle of consensus decision making and the development of a direct, participatory democratic process] that is transparent to its membership." [1] However, people´s views can be found on the newswire and sometimes in the email lists, in the frameworks they choose to express themselves. In a way, promoting the proposed questionnaire in a feature or banner would be similar to handing over a customer database (although the decision to respond would still be up to the individuals). This should only be considered for a project that concerns the Indymedia project directly. To be honest, we cannot think of an example where this has happened. Even when imc-volunteers themselves address the community about the Indymedia project, this has to our knowledge only ever happened on the newswire, with an invitation to the readers to post feedback as comments below. Such an article was recently posted by Sydney Indymedia and received over 60 responses in just a few weeks [3]. Perhaps if, within UK Indymedia, the kollectives were to implement major changes, they might decide to open the website temporarily for an internal discussion.

3. Breaking out of the "activist ghetto"...

... to enter the "academic ghetto"? To have views from inside the Indymedia community reported to some administrators who need to develope-democracy? What would change if the views of "the Indymedia audience" about voting and democracy would be collected and analysed in a book? More e-government, the revolution? British Counsellors (sic) suddenly realising that tolerating squats is the way forward?

There is plenty of room for us to communicate with academia - we can publish books and articles, speak at conferences, give interviews etc. If we want to reach out to the wealth of community groups in the UK, we need to approach them directly - offer indy-introductions, presentations, workshops, be around locally. Not wait until a book or article has made its way to some policy-makers who, in 10 years time, might have considered it enough to draw one or two sensible conclusions.
4. The project would be collaborative
For the time being, there is collaboration between 2 researchers and an individual, Nessuno. We assume that the researchers are working on this project in their paid work time - or will be, once it starts properly. Nessuno argues that Indymedia would be rewarded by information about "the Indymedia audience". We have already explained why we think that the results of the research would not be of much use for us - which might have been different with previous projects about the lord of the rings and big brother websites. The end-product, presumably a report, article or book about a groundbreaking, innovative research project which - for the first time - managed to break the gates of this stroppy, global movement stronghold, would probably be published by the researchers; and rightly so: because it would be their analysis. If we were interested in the topic of the research, we might want to use the collected data for our own analysis, which could be published together with the researchers analysis, under a creative commons licence. But since most of us are not interested enough in the main topic of research to donate time for such a collaboration, this option is not feasible. The researchers point out that they would strive to be non-biased. This already contradicts the point of it being collaborative: Indymedia UK proudly states its subjectivity – how to reconcile these two ideas? Furthermore, in order to be valuable for Indymedia, a research project would need to 'feel' itself into the questions that are important for the Indymedia community - a type of bias some of the best research projects are based upon. We could imagine a great, empowering project about political views of people who are likely to use Indymedia - something comparable to the history workshop movement, where researchers and locals work(ed) together. But this would require an entirely different, qualitative methodology, and a group (apart from the paid researchers) which finds the project so important and so exciting that it is willing to dedicate many weekends and evenings over months and maybe even years. The character of the proposed project is quantitative, relies on a large number of returned questionnaires - hence the need to be promoted prominently. Even though an online questionnaire can leave space for open answers, it is unlikely that the data collected can amount to a sensitive qualitative research, which would include reflections on the interaction between researchers and their objects, fieldnotes, dialogue. Qualitative analysis is not about turning things on a number, putting them on a scale - it is about understanding emotions, subjective perceptions and their meanings within a wider society. A collaborative project, as we understand it, would require collaboration not only in data gathering, but also in analysis. The role of a researcher in such a framework would be to offer his/her specific skills, as one contribution to the project.
5. No additional work for active Indymedia volunteers
If the project were to be truly collaborative, it must involve additional work for members of the Indymedia collectives participating: from drafting and discussing our own questions to engaging with the research questions, from discussing the practicalities of the project to evaluating the data and analysing them, and finally drawing conclusions and putting them into practice. If we were to agree on this collaboration, we would need to have a use for the data to be collected. Otherwise, we might as well leave it. If the research questions were to be interesting enough for us to want to dedicate time to the analysis of the data, collaboration might make sense. With regard to the proposed project, we don't think this is the case.

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-xd.html
A few thoughts on the interesting discussions on this list.
First off, it seems clear to me that people are working from a number of
fairly divergent concepts about what Indymedia is and should be. Of the
general 'philosophical' views towards research expressed, I would probably be closest to the UK-ians. As an example of the obvious differences of concept, the discussion about the 'citizen journalism' is a good place to start. As I see it, we should be worried if the various hierarchical, government funded or capitalist incursions into 'citizen journalism' were anything other than virulently hostile to us. Their role in the grand scheme of things is to incorporate the obvious potential and energy inherent in projects like Indymedia, to de-fang them and turn them into 'orderly citizens' that accomodate themselves to the needs of power. There are rich rewards for whoever succeeds in doing so too and it is no surprise that various entrepeneurs (sic) are lining themselves up for an attempt. Much of academic research into networks like

Indymedia also follows this logic. The logic of academic research into radical networks in modern times is very clear - it is structured to extract the magic ingredients that create the energy (and the upaid labour) so that they can be re-incorporated into traditional hierarchical organisations minus all the messy bits - and naturally without the accountability, openness and democracy that make it all so difficult. It is almost always written in a language that is incomprehensible to your average person and the control over finances ensures that the people asking the questions that researchers answer are always ultimately the elite. I should emphasise that I am talking about the structural and political role of academic research in our hierarchical world and not saying anything about the motives of the researchers involved. After all, my job is to write academic papers, some of which are related to Indymedia, and I assure you that my intentions in doing so are absolutely pure :-)

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-xd.html
Anyway, after that brief trip into the structural role of research in modern capitalism, I should add that ignoring the problem will not cause it to go away. With our open nature we are easy to examine and as long as we exist, we will live in a goldfish bowl of sorts. Research is also simply useful. We can't make the best decisions in the future unless we know our past and present. Systematic studies of various aspects of the network could equip local Indymedia volunteers with a wealth of invaluable information on which to base future decisions and avoid repeating past mistakes endlessly. The key to the usefulness of research is who sets the questions. I think that the best possible way that we could handle the question of relations with academia would be for us to come up with a set of questions that Indymedia people want answered - through as broad and inclusive a process as possible. For example, it would be interesting to do a comparison of the editorial policies, or the organisational and decision making structures of IMC's, their conflict resolution mechanisms, their size and correlate these things with measurements of their local influence and the acheivement (sic) of their collective aims. Then we could evaluate any approach from academica from the point of view of its usefulness in providing answers to these questions. I have absolutely zero interest in devoting time and energy into research projects that are not going to provide useful information for the network itself. There is also nothing stopping us from organising our own internal research projects. There are easily enough smart and well-educated people involved in the network to allow us to conduct far more thorough and systematic studies, coming from positions of real insight, than any academics ever will. We should also remember that the point is less to describe reality than to change it. Whereas most academics will merely attempt to describe us, normally in a fairly superficial way by concentrating on those things that we already know well about the network, we should be looking for ways to make it better, where 'better' is something that is defined by the network - not by ambitious entrepeneurs (sic) or academics with internalised biases towards 'pragmatism'.

I think that a research group, from indymedia's point of view would be best suited to pursuing the following course of action.

> 1. To define in as collective a manner as possible the theoretical and practical questions that we want answers to. 2. To come up with, again in as collective a manner as possible, a set of methodological approaches for gathering evidence and data to help answer these questions and to carry out this research ourselves, in cooperation with any academics whose work will help us to answer these questions and who are willing to work within the overall project. I think that such a research (sic) project should be profoundly collective in nature, in contrast to the aggressively individual framework that academics work within. As well as our transparency, it is the collective nature of the project that really sets Indymedia apart from its suburban cousins, the bloggers. If we went about it in a sufficiently (sic) organised manner, there is no reason why we couldn't extend that principle to a scientific research project.

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-th.html
I must on some level protest the characterisation of researchers studying radical networks as "structured to extract the magic ingredients that create the energy (and the upaid (sic) labour) so that they can be re-incorporated into traditional hierarchical organisations minus all the messy bits". For a start, it implys (sic) a conspiratorial aspect to research that simply does not match my own , or I suspect others, experience within

'the ivory tower'. The simple fact is, researchers have all sorts of reasonings. Some are genuinely interested in a phenomena. Some would dearly like to get that Hons checked off so they can fuck off into better-paid world. Some have long term interests in theorising the social movements they are part of.

The problem is really that untheorised actions risk grave danger of sinking into crass reactionism. "See bad, do". Theres a history to back this up as well. Infact to take an extreme, fascism is precisely powered on this notion.

I realise some studies into network (dis)organisation, like RAND's netwar papers for instance, has a specificallly (sic) sinister intent. One should however note the diference (sic) between the agenda of the think tanks (Who I will freely admit to being somewhat hostile to) and genuine scholarly work of academics in this field.

On the matter of readability. i do understand this point. There is a joke I remember from my undergrad days;- "A postmodernist gangster is one who make you an offer you cant understand". There is at times a certain obscuratanism within some humanitities (sic) academia that serves it no good purpose. I'm looking at you Mr Derida(rip). But this alone does not necessarily disclaim the work from having useful properties. Consider the work of Negri and Hardt, and there media theory 'cousin', Biffo and co. Much of this work is quite unpenatrable. I shall freely admit to finding "Empire" a hell of a difficult read. Certainly a corpus of work I'm not comfortable I fully understand yet. Yet despite this, I also know these works have inspired one of the most creative innovations in radical
activism I've seen in 15 years of activism. Namely the rise of the autonomists, or the de-boring-ification of the marxists. Now as someone with little truck in marxism I havent fully probed the full nature of this movement. I'm still an old world syndicalist at heart, but I admire fully how these aparently (sic) unreadable texts have translated into a vital and
active street level social movement in italy and beyond.

Imagine if you will a "torus". Its just a donut really. If you cut the torus along the 'tube' you end up with a cylindar. If you slice the cylindar you have a flat piece of paper. When connected back up. A dot travelling on the surface of that paper can travel in any direction as far as it wishes to. In a two dimentional (sic) sense , it is "free". That is from
its own perspective. But viewed from three dimensions, its just a little dot flipping around a finite donut. The perspective from inside a system does not always reveal the immanant (sic) properties of the system as apparent to those outside it. Conversely there are immanant (sic) properties to the system that are not apparent to those outside the system. For our donut observer the 'lack of freedom' of the dot is quite real. For the dot its 'freedom' is absolute. Both of these are correct observations, yet aparently (sic) they contradict. Within Indymedia sometimes I feel like that dot. I can write stories. I can tweeze code. I can put motions to my collective and chances are they'll be accepted cos folks trust me to do the right thing. And sometimes I look at Indymedia and think "FUCK THIS MEDIUM IS LIMITED". The dots just flying around in loops chasing its own tail. But more often I'm the dot asking the question "Why if this medium is so awesome do seem to be treading the same ground. This does not compute". The problem is , We are the dots. We cant be the donut watchers*. And that means that despite our own intuitions that something is amis, I'd argue we won't ever be able to fully articulate the limitations, or strengths, of our medium when we arent able to fully disconnect from our own praxis and take an 'outsiders' look at the network. But the outside academic CAN "watch the donut" , so to speak. There will be properties the outside academic won't be able to observe. But there are properties we are too enmeshed in the Indymedia 'system' to observe ourselves.

I think there is room for study.

*I am now rather pleased with myself for coining the term 'donut watcher'
in a semi-academic-ish context.

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-vs.html
I refer you to the following quote from my mail: " I should emphasise that I am talking about the structural and political role of academic research in our hierarchical world and not saying anything about the

motives of the researchers involved." Although I do admit to being somewhat sweeping in my indictement (sic), the point that I was trying to get across is that in the absence of a countervailing force, academic research into the network will tend to perform the function that I outlined. Power and hierarchies are as much attractors (to plunder a term) in academia as they are in most other aspects of this world. I am arguing that we should attempt to consciously become that countervaling (sic) force and attempt to steer research in directions that are deemed widely useful by the volunteers in the network.

I think that we are particularly good at self-critiques and many of our problems are probably widely appreciated by people within the network. Virtually every volunteer in the world probably has their own theory about the problems of Indymedia and ideas of how to solve them. What we lack is any rigour to our analyses. Without data and evidence, the various theories are constrained to making vague and broad generalisations. Without data there is no testability and in an environment without testability, wishful thinking, utopianism and general wooliness can and do flourish. The volume of information flow on the network and the ease of producing ungrounded speculative flights of fancy as against grounded and well researched analyses means that the former tends to drown out the later and remove any incentive to put the work into it.

If you engage in a properly scientific study, based on empirical evidence, it shouldn't really matter how enmeshed you are in the system - the numbers should indicate any signficant (sic) evidence that you have missed. Formulating a research methodology to attempt to get around inherent biases is a very standard research tool. It's not rocket science and it's exactly what academics do and there's no reason that we can't do it ourselves - and do it far better and more thoroughly too. I'm also quite certain that the theoretical or conceptual 'magic bullet' does not exist and think that we will be waiting a long time for the key insight to fall from the ivory tower. In my opinion, our problems are mundane ones which have been experienced by many organisatoins (sic) many times in the past and their causes are as obvious as the nose on my face and we only need to be systematic in our approach in order to draw them out.

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0608-2i.html

What would be interesting is to follow a couple of potential ideas 1) Lets get published. By this I mean it would be nice to establish an online, peer reviewed (NOT 'elite' reviewed) journal of sorts, perhaps episodic and thematic, and with a focus on experimental and radical journalism.
2) But lets do this journal indy style. That is without a 'hierarchy' of learned elders gatekeeping the whole thing, but instead by nurturing "open" editorial practices, perhaps with technological assistance from a CMS (perhaps an indy CMS tweaked for a more formalised academic bent.) or a communally (sic) edited wiki. >*From this second point, its here where we can start really throwing around* mad capped ideas on ways to improve Indymedia. Really zany stuff. We could replace 'sequences' of stories and 'hierarchies' (sic) of categorys (sic) with a rhyzomic model of interconected (sic) theses. We could utterly turf the idea of atomic stories and allow wiki style editing of other peoples stories. With revisions and the like. All wiki style. There are plenty of ideas, and those there are 5 minutes worth of ADHD rambling rather than a considered proposal.
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0609-44.html

i think this is a GREAT discussion, one i'd love to see on the site itself! in the interest of moving forward, i'd like to propose we try and apply for a new imc. the only thing we don't currently have is the host, but i think we can start the paperwork with the new imc list (not completely clear on how that works). below is the list of criteria, it looks like we are almost
there. can anyone take the reins and send this to new imc (or review the new imc process, i'm not sure exactly how to move forward):
1) an official mailing list
(WE ARE ON IT!)
2) mission statement
(SEE BELOW)
3) editiorial (sic) policy
(SEE BELOW)

4) plan for the site itself
(http://www.robertcouch.net/IMC)
5) way to host
(NO LUCK SO FAR)
Mission Statement:
The IMC movement is at a critical crossroads. We need to develop the research tools and methodologies necessary to understand the ways in which the movement is growing, how the application of radical democratic principles are impacting our work, how people are using the network, the effectiveness of our outreach etc. This site is about how we can work together to create a more coherent, comprehensive research program.
Editorial Policy:
This site will be administered by anyone who asks for an admin password. Those who have admin passwords will remove unwanted content from the site. This site will have a research newswire which will function like most IMC newswires. The following content may be removed w/o notice:
• Posts not pertaining to research of Indymedia, alternative media, organizing, mainstream media, or related topics
• Borderline' advertising or promotional material (i.e. events charging admissions that are not clearly fundraisers, ecological service businesses, etc.)
• Destabilization posts intended to undermine the usability of the newswire
• Copyrighted articles that have been copied and pasted that do not contain a link to the original article
• Duplicate postings: two or more articles consisting of identical or near-identical content
• Empty or incomprehensible postings
• Pornography and sexist/abuse posts
• Racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic and other 'hate speech' posts, or advocating illegal activity
• Libel, slander, defamation and abusive personal attacks
• Posts of personal information designed to harass, intimidate or otherwise threaten
• Bomb making instructions and similar paramilitary information
• Commercial advertising
• Misinformation intended to disrupt activist actions and discussions
(i.e. false information regarding an event, with the intent to disrupt the event)
• Copy-written material in which the author has not given permission for
posting
• Posts where the admits have received a 'cease and desist' letter
from an attorney and chooses not to challenge it.
• Death threats including calls for the death of people

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2005-June/0610-5c.html
I do agree Aaron that we slow down a bit. I do appreciate (sic) the work that's gone into this , from the conference on, but do be aware that some non US-ians are mildly concerned over a US-Centric push, particularly when some are so busy at the moment working on getting the G8 stuff happening (Over in "other" perth.) The process happening is the "correct" one, but we just need to take it easy easy. I'll be happy to set up a 'play around' site this weekend we can thrash
some ideas around with, but lets take it gently. If we step on too many toes we wont get this right. And its harder to "fix" a consensus collective than it is to build one right from the beginning. Basically, the aproval (sic) is actually the more contraversial (sic) topic. ;) The CMS stuff is immaterial really. If we dont like one, we ditch it and try another.

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2008-September/0913-mr.html
hello imc-research,
this email was sent to the www-features list. i am not aware that anyone has replied. i hope someone on this list can help.
Hello,
I'm in the process of writing a MA dissertation (Journalism) on the social implications of Indymedia in the context of citizenship and political participation (I have also been commissioned by the Independent on Sunday to write a feature on the subject). I'm eager to find out the overall take-up of Indymedia in various

places around the world and to discuss why Indymedia is important from the perspective of those involved. Could you be so kind as to advise me on who the most suitable/useful people to contact are? Many thanks for your help,

http://lists.indymedia.org/pipermail/imc-research/2008-September/0915-bu.html
[Imc-research] FAQ: where is the letter for replying to researchers' requests?
Mon Sep 15 09:05:41 PDT 2008
answer: it's here:
https://docs.indymedia.org/view/Research/ImcResearchPractices

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH GUIDELINES FROM THE IMC NETWORK

The following email is currently being used by many in the IMC network to respond to research requests. This email and the guidelines it includes have not been agreed to by consensus of the network and as such are not a part of any formal IMC policy.

Guidelines for Researchers

Indymedia is getting more and more enquiries from researchers. In the June 04 archives of the imc-uk-process list, this topic was discussed. Here are some draft "Guidelines for Researchers", formatted for pasting into an email. Please feel free to add links etc.

Dear Researcher,

Thank you for your enquiry.

We are interested in scholarly analysis about the Indymedia project, and look forward to seeing your contribution.

Indymedia receives many requests by researchers - Ph.D, M.A. and B.A students - as well as journalists, freelance writers and intellectuals. We have developed some guidelines, including some background information, and hope this will help you in pursuing your project.

Indymedia is a network of volunteers dedicated to social change. Our core interest is to run the Indymedia websites and promote the Indymedia network online and offline. Therefore we only participate in selected research projects.

Our decision depends on several factors. For example: Is the research likely to create debates and results that are interesting for us as individuals or collectives? Does the researcher make his/her motivation, methodology, theoretical framework and hypotheses transparent? Will results and theories be discussed with Indymedia, before publication? Openness for collaborative research models? Authorship - relationship between researchers and the objects of the research? Timing - are we busy with a major reporting project? And finally - does anyone feel like spending time on this project right now?

Please feel free to get in touch with us. We can be contacted at:

FORMALITIES

1. You are welcome to study the newswires, center columns, publicly archived email lists and any other resources you will find browsing any Indymedia website.

2. Unless stated otherwise, all Indymedia content is published under a copyleft, GFDL or creative commons licence. This means that you can (in general) copy, quote and distribute our content, as long as a reference (URL) is included.

We also consider it appropriate that publications about Indymedia be published under such an open licence.

3. We consider it appropriate that publications about an open publishing project are made accessible on the web. If you don't have the resources to do so, you are welcome to upload your work in pdf format or directly on to: http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/ImcEssayCollection

4. Since it is considered good practice within the academic community to feedback the results of any research to those who have been studied, we expect you to inform us about the results of your work. You can do so by providing a link to your work and, if it is in print, a reference, on http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/ImcEssayCollection We also expect you to inform the appropriate lists or contacts you have made about the completion of your work.

5. If your work is to be published in print, we would expect a minimum of 3 review copies prior to publication.

COLLABORATION

Many researchers are planning to collect data through questionnaires and/or qualitative interviews. It can be quite hard to get hold of Indymedia volunteers to be questioned or interviewed.

As a decentralised network of volunteers, Indymedia has no headquarters, no "one point of contact" for researchers, no press office, no spokes-people. No one person or group can speak for the entire Indymedia network. However, individual volunteers might decide to participate in your project as individuals. You don´t need any collective permission to interview individuals who agree to participate. Local Indymedia collectives (like IMC Bologna, IMC Germany) can reach a consensus to participate as a group. If you want to use Indymedia resources for your research (beyond studying our public content), you will need the consent of the group you are willing to collaborate with.

If you wish a more intensive collaboration with Indymedia volunteers, please send a description of your project. Apart from your contact and institutional details, this should include research design, methodology, theoretical framework, hypotheses and research questions, as well as planned proceedings with the results. It helps if you offer reasons why your project should be supported by Indymedia.

More intensive collaboration includes, for example: extensive lurking or subscribing to lists, qualitative interviews with Indymedia volunteers (via questionnaire, email, on the phone, f2f, chatrooms etc), participating in meetings (f2f, irc), action research, participant observation online and offline, using imc resources to find respondents for questionnaires etc. This list is not exhaustive!

Based on the information you give us, we will discuss your proposal and, if people are interested, get back to you for further arrangements and negotiations.

CONTACT

The archive of Indymedia mailing lists is a good starting point to find the appropriate contact:

http://lists.indymedia.org ...and a list or person...

APPENDIX C

AUSTIN INDYMEDIA CONFERENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

2005 Indymedia Network Questionnaire

This is the first portion of a two-part questionnaire designed to asses the nature of the network of Independent Media Center Network in North America. This survey is part of a larger research project investigating the qualities of the new communicative arena that has been created by our network. The overall project is focused on two research questions. First, how do the structures and decision-making processes within the Independent Media Center Movement challenge the current corporate media paradigm by creating a radically different communication space. Second, how do the current structures and processes of the Independent Media Center Network (IMCN) contribute and/or detract from the movement's goals of challenging the corporate media and creating a new democratized communicative space? This first survey is a "census" of the network. The second portion, to be distributed later, will be designed to investigate the thoughts and opinions of individual IMC collective members. ***The researcher is a founding member of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC Collective and the data collected will be used for the purposes of this research project only. The final report will be made available to the Indymedia and academic communities but individual IMC's will be anonymous in that report for security purposes. This research is not being conducted in connection with any arm of law enforcement or local, state of federal government. If you have any questions please contact Rich Templin at laborman2@netzero.com.***

Please list your IMC collective:_____

Your E Mail (optional):_____

How are you involved with the IMC? _____

Approximately how many members are in your collective or how many regular volunteers do you have? _____

Does your IMC employee any paid staff? YES NO

Does your IMC have a physical space, office etc.? Please describe:

_____

Has your IMC expanded into different types of media other than the web site? If YES, please list and describe:

_____

_____

Does your IMC have a local phone number? YES NO

Does your local IMC utilize the lists.indymedia.org list system? **YES** **NO**

If YES, please explain how your collective uses this System: _____

_____

_____

Does your local collective have a local email system? **YES** **NO**

Is there a local information request email on your web site? **YES** **NO**

How can interested new volunteers contact your collective? _____

_____

Is the server housing your IMC located in your community or in a remote location? (listing the general location is optional)_____

_____

Does your collective have its own tech group? **YES** **NO**

If NO, how do you maintain your website? _____

_____

APPENDIX D

INDYMEDIARESEARCH.ORG

About this site
This site was designed to facilitate data collection for a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a doctoral degree for the researcher. This site is not a product of — nor has it been endorsed by — the global IMC community. It has not been considered by the IMC decision making process for inclusion in the network.

The researcher is a founding member of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC collective, and this research project was discussed during the RESEARCHING INDYMEDIA: DEVELOPING THE TOOLS AND METHODOLOGIES TO BUILD A MOVEMENT workshop at the Indymedia Conference held in Austin, Texas, in February of this year. For more information on the workshop and the conference, check out the conference wiki.

The final project and all data collected will be made available to the IMC community regardless of any implications that may have on future publication in any academic journal or other proprietary publication. There is currently a group of IMCistas discussing research and the IMC network and the establishment of a website to facilitate that research. This web site will be made available to that endeavor if that working group feels it would be useful. For more information on this group and to join the discussion, please check out the discussion list. The questionnaire presented on this site was made possible in part by Jeff and Erock at the Austin IMC collective.

CLICK TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH AND FILL OUT QUESTIONNAIRE

About the questionnaire
This questionnaire had been designed to complete a rough "census" of the North American IMC community, focusing on basic structural components of individual IMC's. Once this census is completed, members of individual IMC's will be asked to complete a more targeted questionnaire to assess how the structural conditions of their IMC contributes and/or detracts from their work. The data collected will be made available to the IMC community to help

individual collectives asses the functioning of their own IMC in relation to others in the network and to help promote further research.

About the research

In the most general of terms, the goals of this research project are two-fold. First, while many scholars have examined the Indymedia phenomenon through a variety of theoretical lenses, these theoretical analyses are still relatively few. I hope to add in a meaningful way to the ongoing theoretical conversations about Indymedia and the broader alternative/radical media movement. Second, and perhaps more important, I hope to provide some grounded practical suggestions to the IMC community — based on careful examination and research — in an effort to help my fellow IMCistas navigate through some of the tensions and challenges that have arisen in the past few years, challenges that are to be expected in movement as vibrant and comprehensive in scope as the IMC.

Specifically, this research project will attempt to answer two questions. First, how do the structures and decision-making processes within the Independent Media Center Movement challenge the current corporate media paradigm by creating a radically different communication space or "public sphere"? In order to investigate this I will employ a multi-method, multi-sited approach using textual analyses of various Indymedia artifacts, an autoethnography of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC collective and detailed case studies of the establishment of both the Tallahassee-area Indymedia and the IMC collective established to cover the protests at the 2003 Fair Trade Area of the Americas Ministerial meetings in Miami, Florida. Second, how do the current structures and processes of the Independent Media Center Network contribute to and/or detract from the movement's goals of challenging the corporate media and creating a new democratized "public sphere"?

This analysis will be conducted through a broad "census" of the North American IMC community and detailed follow-up interviews. The project is designed to assess the perceived impacts of certain features of the current NIMC structure on the relative success of the endeavor in terms of daily operations and community outreach.

About the researcher

Rich Templin is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. His research interests include radical media, rhetorical strategies of social movements and the (dis)connections between networked activism and traditional labor politics. He has been involved in Florida's activist community for over ten years and is a founding member of the Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center. He is also a founder of the Tallahassee Progressive Center, a new community center in Tallahassee designed to provide support for a wide range of environmental, social justice, labor and radical political organizations in the Big Bend region of Florida. He is the Communications Director for the Florida AFL-CIO where he works to build strong coalitions between labor unions, environmental, social justice, community, and fair trade organizations across the state of Florida.

Links to other Indymedia research
If you have any links to research articles or other interesting pieces on Indymedia, please feel free to e-mail them to Rich Templin.

IMC Essay Collection

Is anybody reading this? Indymedia and internet traffic reports in ***Transformations Journal*** by Andy Opel and Rich Templin.

A Gang of Leftists with a Website: The Indymedia Movement in ***Transformations Journal*** by Jon R. Pike.

Comments
Please e-mail any suggestions or comments on the questionnaire or any other aspects of this research to Rich Templin.

Links

Global IMC Portal

Indymedia U.S.

IMC Research Working Group

researching imc: investigations into the new public sphere

This questionnaire should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Use the control key-left click combination to answer multiple questions. Please answer all of the questions you feel comfortable answering; any information will be helpful. Thank you very much for your time. I pledge to do everything I can to ensure that the information you share will be used to help strengthen the IMC network. If you have any questions about this research or this site please do not hesitate to contact me at rtemplin@flaflcio.org. Thanks again – Rich Templin

Your name or an alias.

Your email address.

With which IMC Collective are you currently involved? (please include internet address)

When was your collective originally organized?

How long have you personally been involved?

What project(s) is your IMC currently involved with?
Please select all that apply

- Website
- Print
- Video
- Radio
- Television
- Other

What projects are you currently involved with personally?
Please select all that apply

- Website
- Print
- Video
- Radio
- Television
- Other

What working groups are active in your collective?
Please select all that apply

- Editorial
- Tech
- Video
- Print
- Photo
- Outreach
- Fundraising
- Process
- Other

If there are other working groups not included above, please list.

If your IMC has a print publication, what is it called?

How long has it existed and how often is it published?

Is your publication distributed free of charge?

- Yes
- No

If your IMC has a radio and/or television presence, please describe:

How often does your collective have face-to-face meetings?

How many active members are generally involved with your collective?

- ☐ 0-5
- ☐ 5-10
- ☐ 10-15
- ☐ 15-20
- ☐ 20-30
- ☐ 30-40
- ☐ 40-50
- ☐ 50 plus

Does your collective meet online?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, please describe briefly (do you use IRC, wiki etc.)

Do the working groups meet separately?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Which working group would you consider the most active?

How many members would you estimate are involved with each of your active working groups?

Does your collective have an office space?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how would you describe the arrangement? (rent, own, share space etc.)

In general, what activities take place in your office space?

Is your decision making process described on your web-site?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If no, could you briefly summarize your process here?

How many members actively monitor the newswire on your website?

Is your collective's editorial policy available for public viewing on your web site?

☐ Yes ☐ No

How many features does your IMC publish in an average week? (either internally generated or moved from the newswire)

☐ More than 2

☐ Between 1 and 2

☐ Less than 1

In your estimation, what percentage of the articles in your features section deal with local issues?

☐ More than 60%

☐ Between 40% and 60%

☐ Between 20% and 40%

☐ Less than 20%

In your estimation, what percentage of stories published on your newswire deal with local issues?

☐ More than 60%

☐ Between 40% and 60%

☐ Between 20% and 40%

☐ Less than 20%

Does your IMC have a calendar feature?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how would rate the usage of your calendar by outside groups?

☐ Well utilized

☐ Somehwat utilized

☐ Not well utilized

☐ No outside utilization

Does your IMC website provide translations of content into other languages?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what languages?

In general, how do new people initiate involvement with your collective?
Please select all that apply

- E-mail
- Phone
- Show up to regular meetings
- Through involvement with other groups
- Other

If "other," please list:

What is the most common way new people get involved with your collective?
Please select all that apply

- E-mail
- Phone
- Show up to regular meetings
- Through involvement with other groups
- Other

If "other" please list:

Does your collective have a local phone number?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Is the number available on your web site?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Does your collective currently use the indymedialists.org system?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, briefly describe how your collective uses that system.

Do you have local email addresses for people interested in participating with your collective?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Is the email your collective has available for new people to get involved a part of the indymedialists.org system or does the email go directly to an individual or working group?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Has your collective ever worked with other established groups?
(environmental, social justice, labor, media etc.)

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please explain.

Does your collective have any ongoing relationships with other established groups?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Does your local collective have a budget?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how does your collective raise funds?
Please check all that apply

- Grants
- Individual donors
- Benefit events
- Other

Does your collective have a way for individuals to make donations online?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Does your collective provide skill sharing opportunities for your local community?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Go to Page 4 of Questionnaire

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researching imc: investigations into the new public sphere

Is the server hosting your IMC website located in your community or is it located somewhere else?

Local
Remote
Don't know

Does the server hosting your IMC host other sites in addition to your own?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

Does your collective pay for hosting?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have local tech support for your website or do you rely on support from other sources?

☐ Local ☐ Other

Do you receive tech support from the IMC network?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, is that support ongoing or was it short term etc.? Please explain.

What equipment does your collective have for general use by your members?

Is this equipment available for use by other groups or non-members?

☐ Yes ☐ No

How would you describe yourself in terms of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, formal education level, economic status?

In terms of overall diversity of members, how would you describe your collective?

- Not diverse
- Fairly diverse
- Very diverse

Are you personally satisfied with the overall diversity of your collective?

- Not satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

In terms of diversity, how would you rate participation by women?

- Not significant
- Somewhat significant
- Significant
- Very significant

If you were to estimate, what percentage of your collective are women?

In terms of diversity, how would you rate participation by people of color?

- Not significant
- Somew hat significant
- Significant
- Very significant

If you were to estimate, what percentage of your collective are people of color?

In terms of diversity, how would you rate participation by members of the LGBT community?

- Not significant
- Somew hat significant
- Significant
- Very significant

If you were to estimate, what percentage of your collective are members of the LGBT community?

In terms of diversity, how would you rate participation by economically disadvantaged people?

- Not significant
- Somew hat significant
- Significant
- Very significant

If you were to estimate, what percentage of your collective are economically disadvantaged?

In terms of diversity, how would you rate participation by members without college degrees?

- Not significant
- Somew hat significant
- Significant
- Very significant

If you were to estimate, what percentage of your collective do not have college degrees?

In terms of diversity, how would you rate participation be members over the age of 35?

Not significant
Somew hat significant
Significant
Very significant

If you were to estimate, what percentage of your collective are over the age of 35?

Would you be willing to be contacted directly (via email) to complete a follow-up questionnaire?

Yes No

Submit questionnaire

APPENDIX E

BYLAWS OF THE TALLAHASSEE-REDHILLS INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER

The Bylaws of the Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center

Article I Name

This organization shall be known as the Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center, also known as the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC, also referred to in this document as the IMC.

Article II Definition

The Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center is a community based, democratic media outlet affiliated with the global Indymedia Collective. The Tallahassee- RedHills Independent Media Center adheres to all of the guiding principles of the world-wide Independent Media Center Network.

Article III Purpose

The Tallahassee-Red Hills Independent Media Center is a grassroots organization committed to promoting social and economic justice in our community and our environment through democratic access to media and information technologies. We are dedicated to providing an open and inclusive communication forum where diverse viewpoints, including those not represented in mainstream, commercial media, may be represented.

Article IV Meetings

A. Consensus - Decisions by consensus is a guiding principle of the International IMC movement and the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC is committed to that principle. All efforts will be taken to ensure that decisions made by every subdivision of the IMC are made by consensus and that all voices are heard before a final decision is reached.

B. A facilitator will be chosen at every meeting of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC Collective. The role of this facilitator is to assist the meeting participants in their efforts to reach consensus and to ensure that the meeting progresses as smoothly and efficiently as possible. All efforts will be made to ensure that there is a different

facilitator at each meeting so that everyone is given the opportunity to participate in that valuable portion of the consensus process.

C. There are many methods for working towards consensus. The Tallahassee-RedHills IMC is committed to working through various consensus processes in an effort to find the method that allows for the maximum amount of input from all participants and ensures equal access to decision making. The Tallahassee-RedHills IMC shall make decisions based on the following system of modified consensus until such time as the Collective deems necessary to amend this process as outlined in these bylaws.

1. When a proposal is brought the participants in the meeting will be given the opportunity to ask the bringer of the proposal clarifying questions. Once all questions have been answered the body will be asked if there is a consensus to adopt the proposal.
2. If there is not a consensus, a list of those wishing to speak on the issue will be taken by the facilitator. All meeting participants are eligible to be on this list.
3. The facilitator will recognize each person on the list or "stack" in the order in which they were placed on the list. Time limits and other restrictions may be placed on the speakers by consensus of the meeting participants for the duration of the meeting as necessary.
4. At the completion of each stack the meeting participants will be asked to show their opinion on the issue by show of hands. Individuals who strongly support the proposal should indicate that by displaying 5 fingers. Those who support the issue should indicate that with 4 fingers. Those who are neutral should indicate that with 3 fingers. Those who have concerns but are still willing to adopt the proposal should indicate that with a show of 2 fingers. Individuals who do not agree with the proposal and have blocking concerns should indicate that by showing 1 finger.
5. The presence of a blocking concern indicates that consensus has not been reached and a new stack will be created, starting with those who had a blocking concern. This process will be repeated 3 times or until consensus has been reached.
6. At the start of each new stack the bringer of the proposal may amend it to address the blocking concerns.
7. If consensus can not be reached a vote will be taken. If 2/3 or more of those IMC members in attendance support the proposal it will be adopted. If not the proposal will not be adopted.

D. The Tallahassee-RedHills IMC is committing to elevating the quality of discourse in society by ensuring that all participants in its meetings are treated with dignity and respect. To that end, the Coordinating Council shall develop and maintain, with the approval of the Collective, a basic code of respect for all discussions at IMC meetings.

E. Attendees at meetings who repeatedly refuse to respect others in discussion can be asked to leave for the duration of the meeting by a 2/3 vote of those present.

F. All meeting records of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC are open to public examination and must be made available by the Coordinating Council on demand.

Article V Collective

A. The ultimate authority in the Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center is herby vested in the Collective. The Collective of the IMC shall consist of all voting members from every authorized subdivision of the IMC.

B. The following powers and duties are conferred on the Tallahassee-RedHills Collective; in no way should this record be considered exhaustive or exclusive.

1. Act as the primary venue for community involvement and input.
2. Establish the overall vision and focus of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC.
3. Establish a yearly overall plan for the IMC on an annual basis.
4. Serve as the final decision making body in the case of disputes within any subdivision of the IMC.
5. Establish in conjunction with the Fundraising Working Group rules and procedures for the collection and expenditure of funds for the IMC.
5. Ratify any changes to the documents contained in the affiliation packet of the IMC.
6. Propose and/or ratify any changes to the Bylaws of the Tallahassee- RedHills Independent Media Center.

C. The Collective shall meet at least 4 times per year with no more than 3 months between meetings. Meetings will be scheduled by the Coordinating Council but any member of the IMC may call for a meeting providing she/he has the written consent of 1/3 of the membership, determined by the Coordinating Council.

D. The Coordinating Council will publicly announce all meetings of the General Assembly no less than 1 month prior to the meeting through the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC website and one other public communication medium.

G. In the case of a meeting called by the membership for a pressing concern, there will be no less than 72 hours notice though the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC website and one other public communication medium.

Article VI Working Groups

A. The primary subdivision of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC is the Working Group. The working groups are charged with performing the day to day operations of the IMC.

B. Each working group is charged with creating their own written guidelines of procedures to be maintained on file by the Coordinating Council.

C. All meetings of the working groups shall be announced within 24 hours of the meeting through the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC website.

D. The following working groups are hereby established:

a. The Technical Working group shall maintain the technical presence that is the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC web site and is charged with the research and development of different communication technologies as the IMC develops.

b. The Editorial Working Group is hereby charged with the development and implementation of the editorial policy for the IMC based on the established procedures for that group.

c. The Outreach Working Group is hereby charged with the development of programs to encourage and maximize involvement with the community. The Outreach Group is also charged with building and maintaining coalitions with other community based organizations who share the principles and overall vision of the IMC.

d. The Fundraising Working Group is hereby charged with the development of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC financial policies and shall develop a program for the collection of funds for IMC operations.

a. The Fundraising Working Group shall maintain all financial records in accordance with the financial policies of the IMC.

b. The Fundraising Working Group will deliver complete financial reports at each meeting of the Coordinating Council and the Collective.

5. The Content Working Group is hereby charged with the solicitation of writers and other producers of content for distribution through the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC network. The Content Working Group will also work to bring new and innovative content of the highest quality to the IMC.

6. The Organizing Working Group shall work to maintain the bylaws and other affiliation documents of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC. This group is also charged with creating and/or modifying the structure of the IMC to meet the needs and goals of the Collective.

E. Temporary working groups may be created as needed by the Coordinating Council. These working groups may only function as an official subdivision of the IMC for a period of three months or less. Members of the community are encouraged to create such groups through the Coordinating Council.

H. Permanent working groups must be approved by the Collective as an amendment to these bylaws. Recommendations for new permanent working groups may be made by the Coordinating Council or any member of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC.

Article VII Coordinating Council

A. The Coordinating Council will be composed of one representative and one alternate from each Working Group. The working groups shall select their own representatives to the Coordinating Council based on their own rules of procedure.

B. The Coordinating Council shall hold regular meetings once each month. Notice of these meetings must be announced at least 30 days in advance on the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC website and through one other public communication medium.
C. Additional meetings of the Coordinating Council may be called as necessary by 1/3 of the Coordinating Council members. There must be a minimum of 72 hours advance notice given for these meetings on the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC website.
D. The Coordinating Council shall choose a council chair who will serve for three months. The chair is charged with facilitating the meetings and ensuring that proper notice of all meetings is given. The chair shall develop the meeting agenda in conjunction with the members of the Coordinating Council.
E. The Coordinating Council is hereby charged with the following responsibilities. This list is not exhaustive and the Coordinating Council may be charged with additional responsibilities by the membership of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC.

    a. Ensure cooperation and facilitate communication between the working groups.
    b. Members shall serve as information contact for the public.
    c. Maintain membership data.
    d. Handle the organizational activities of the IMC and maintain all official documents and archives.
    e. Work with the general membership to develop meeting agendas for the Collective.
    f. Act as the Collective in all matters until such time as a meeting can be convened.
    g. Give final approval of the working groups' rules of procedure to ensure relative consistency across groups. The Coordinating Council is hereby directed to give a great level of deference to the desires of the working group and only reject those rules that are in violation of the principles of the International IMC movement or the spirit of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC.

Article VIII Membership

A. Non-Discrimination
Membership in the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC is open to everyone.

B. The Tallahassee-RedHills IMC is committed to serving to the community; to that end all meetings of the IMC or any authorized subdivision of the IMC shall be open to the public.

C. All members of the community, regardless of membership status in the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC shall be permitted to make their views known at any meeting of the IMC or subdivision of the IMC.

D. In cases where a vote is required, only Tallahassee-RedHills IMC members are authorized to vote

E. Membership in the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC will be based on an individual's commitment to the IMC through service. Only working members of an authorized subdivision of the IMC will be given voting privileges.

F. The amount of service required for membership will be decided by the individual subdivisions of the IMC. In order to ensure a minimum level of consistency between the working groups of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC Coordinating Council will make recommendations to each of the working groups regarding membership requirements.

G. The Coordinating Council is herby charged with maintaining and updating all records of membership.

H. In cases where an individual or group of individuals become disruptive to the effective functioning of a working group that group may ask, by a 2/3 vote, that the person or group participate in the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC through a different working group. The Coordinating Council will work to find a new working group for those persons and ensure their continued participation in the IMC.

Article IX Dissolution of Membership

A. The Tallahassee-Redhills IMC will strive to be an open and inclusive community based organization that strives to include all persons and ideas. However, in those rare cases where an individual or group of individuals becomes a hindrance to the mission of the IMC or a threat to its continued functioning, the following procedure is hereby instituted for dissolution of membership from the Tallahassee-Redhills IMC. The framers of this document strongly encourage all future members of the IMC to take this action only after all other prudent measures have been exhausted.

B. Dissolution of membership may be instituted for the following reasons. In no way should this list be considered exhaustive.

1. Repeated and deliberate violation of the bylaws or other organizing documents and/or principles of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC.
2. Repeated misrepresentation to the public. Individuals may speak to their experiences with the IMC not for the organization itself.
3. Repeated violation of the organization's principles of respect. All participants in the IMC will be treated with the proper level of respect.

C. Procedure for dissolution of membership.

1. The dissolution procedure shall be instituted by the Coordinating Council per the request of a member of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC.
2. The Coordinating Council will engage in a comprehensive investigation and finding of fact.

3. The Coordinating Council will then make a recommendation to the Collective within 1 month of the initial request. The subject of the complaint is guaranteed the right to explain the situation to the Coordinating Council
4. The collective will make the final decision regarding dissolution following the procedure outlined herein. The subject of the complaint is guaranteed the right to explain the situation to the Collective.

Article X Editorial Policy

A. The following editorial policy most directly applies to the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC website. As the IMC expands into new communication media, new specific policies will need to be developed following the guidelines outlined below.

B. Our responsibility for the stewardship of the newswire, and of the website in general (consisting of features section and newswire section), is expressed in these four guiding principles, which form the basis of Tallahassee-RedHills IMC editorial policy:

1. To provide an unmoderated, open-publishing newswire in accordance with established IMC policies and philosophy.
2. To maintain the newswire and website as a community space and a safe environment for users, especially members of disempowered or marginalized groups.
3. To acknowledge that speech has the power to cause injury, but that instances of injurious speech should also be seen as opportunities for insurrectionary response.
4. To preserve the quality of the website as a useful media resource.

C. Postings to the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC newswire are unmoderated. Members of Tallahassee-RedHills IMC regularly monitor the newswire, keeping our eyes open for particularly significant, informative contributions to add to the front page's center-column feature section.

D. While committed to maintaining the open nature of the newswire, as noted above, in rare circumstances our editors may reclassify postings as news or opinion, or remove them from view. In most such cases, postings are reclassified or hidden because they are empty or duplicate posts, or because they consist of advertising or libelous or other inappropriate content.

E. In accordance with our mission, Tallahassee-RedHills IMC media efforts are designed to empower individuals to become independent and civic journalists by providing a direct, unmoderated forum for presenting media, including text articles, audio and video recordings, and photographs, to the public via the Internet, print and broadcast. Within that general framework, we specifically encourage individuals to publish:

1. Researched, timely articles;
2. Personal accounts of community events and demonstrations;
3. Coverage of issues involving Tallahassee and the Red Hills bioregion;

4. Media analysis with particular regard to corporate media;
5. Investigative reports exposing injustice;
6. Stories on events affecting underrepresented groups;
7. Media produced from within underrepresented groups;
8. Local stories with national or global significance;
9. Stories on people or projects working towards social and economic justice.

F. Our editors will make final editorial decisions, and are empowered to:

1. Edit postings and contributions to correct spelling, grammar or format problems, without consulting the author;

2. Choose features based on what they believe to be an article's importance to Tallahassee and the Red Hills bioregion or the Florida Government, the solidity of the research and sources, and the quality of writing;

3. Hide posts, without consulting the author, that in the editors opinion:

a. Are duplicates (we will keep the oldest post)
b. Are in an unreadable form
c. Are boldly slanderous or libelous
d. Advocate violent or destructive activity with a specific time, place and manner
e. Are contrary to the mission or goals of the Tallahassee-RedHills IMC;

I. Delete posts, without consulting the author, that in the editors opinion:
   a. Are not news related (spam, commercial posts)
   b. Violate copyright laws;
J. Keep posts that, in the editors' opinions, are merely offensive or controversial in order to encourage open discussion and debate. The Tallahassee-RedHills IMC acknowledges that speech has the power to cause injury, but that instances of injurious speech should also be seen as opportunities for insurrectionary response.

I. PROCEDURE FOR HIDING POSTS: Hiding articles is a drastic measure, and our editors take such actions only when necessary. Newswire posts found to violate editorial policy are here divided into two categories: simple and complicated.

Simple

Posted articles or media representing unambiguous violations of policy, which can usually be hidden from the newswire without extended discussion, fall into three categories:

1. Posts containing no content, or consisting only of links to other sites.
2. Duplicate posts.
3. Posts consisting of advertising or job descriptions.

When an active editor identifies such a post, he or she immediately hides it, and appends a signed comment to the hidden article explaining why it was hidden. If the author of the post has given an email address, the editor sends him or her an explanatory message and copies it to the rest of the editors. Any additional email conversation is also copied to our editors.

Complicated

Posted articles or other media not falling into the above simple categories may still be found to violate one or more of the four core principles of our editorial policy, as follows:

1. To provide an unmoderated, open-publishing newswire in accordance with established IMC policies and philosophy.
2. To maintain the newswire and website as a community space, and a safe environment for users, especially members of disempowered or marginalized groups.
3. To acknowledge that speech has the power to cause injury, but that instances of injurious speech should also be seen as opportunities for insurrectionary response.
4. To preserve the quality of the website as a useful media resource.

Simply violating one of these principles does not in itself justify hiding a post. Perceived violations must be weighed against the other principles through mindful discussion. In relation to a particular post, one principle may be found to conflict with another. These principles provide the ethical framework for decision-making, even as they inevitably complicate editorial discussions. Our editors are prevented from hiding articles rashly or without principled discussion, and remain accountable to clear (though flexible) policy guidelines.

When an editor identifies a post he or she thinks should be hidden, he or she alerts the other editors, either making a formal proposal to hide the post or requesting conversation on the subject. Once an editor proposes hiding the article, all editors begin a focused discussion in accordance with its consensus process. If the editors decide to hide the post, the editor who made the proposal hides the post, and appends a signed comment to the posting explaining why it was hidden. If the author of the post has given an email address, the editor sends him or her an explanatory message and copies it to rest of the editors. Any additional email conversation is also copied to the rest of the editors.

Article X Amendments

Amendments made by the approval of the Collective. All amendments must be made public at least 1 month before they are decided by the Collective. Discussion on proposed amendments may take place at any meeting of the Collective.

APPENDIX F

ETHNOGRAPHY INTERVIEW GUIDE

Ethnography Interview Guide

To the best of your recollection, when did you first get involved with the Tallahassee IMC?

Before you became involved, what other community, political or activist organizations had you been a part of?

Did you consider yourself an activist?

How did you find out about the push to create an IMC for Tallahassee?

What prompted you to become involved?

Since I was one of those members do you feel as if you could share in this interview any information that you might think I would take personal offense?

What were your initial perceptions about the IMC project?

Once meetings started, how did those perceptions change?

A big part of the IMC movement is focused on changing the processes for decision making etc. How would you describe your initial approach to making decisions? Majority rule etc.?

Had you ever noticed that particular people were marginalized in past groups you were a part of?

How would you characterize those people?

Do you remember any of those groups making a special effort to reach out to those people or include them in some way?

What do you remember about the process through which the IMC decision making process, the debates etc.?

Where there a wide range of viewpoints on this issue or was everyone pretty much in agreement?

How would you describe that first group in terms of overall political leanings…was everyone pretty much on the same page pr were there a ride range of view points on the issues?

If there were a wide range of viewpoints, do remember what some of those were?

Do you remember any particular tensions?

How would you describe the overall cohesiveness of that initial group?

How much do you feel that your input was taken into consideration?

Do you feel as if you had ownership of the local IMC process? Please explain.

How would you describe the decision making process for our local IMC, as you remember?

Was this process really new for you? If so…how?

Did you have any reservations or concerns about this change in process?

Once the process was up and running, were those reservations or concerns addressed or did they get worse?

Do you think that the process was adequate to ensure that everyone had a chance to be heard?

If everyone was heard…do you think that their viewpoints were actually considered in the final decision making?

What about gender, people of color, do you remember any people like that?

Was that an issue in the beginning? If so how was it discussed, handled etc.?

How effective do you think this particular IMC's process was?

What aspects of that process do you think were particularly strong?

What aspects do your think were particularly weak?

How did you personally feel about the process, liberated…frustrated etc.

Let's shift from the process and talk a little about the project itself…

The IMC was broken into working groups, what groups were you involved with?

What type of work did your group do?

APPENDIX G

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

Office of the Vice President for Research
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763
(850) 644-7900 • FAX (850) 644-4392

March 30, 2009

Richard E. Templin
2038 Wahalow Nene
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Re: (2009.2386) Rage Against The Machine: How Indymedia's Radical Project is Working to Create the New Public Sphere

Dear Mr. Templin:

I am writing to inform you that the above referenced project was reviewed by the FSU Human Subjects Committee on March 18, 2009. It was determined that you initiated and completed human subject research without review and approval by the FSU Institutional Review Board (Human Subjects Committee). The federal regulations governing the protection of human subjects in research and the University's letter of assurance with the Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP) require that research involving human subjects receive review and approval by the Human Subjects Committee prior to initiation of the research. (See 45 CFR 46.103).

Therefore, the Committee voted to "Disapprove" your research project. It was determined by the Committee, however, that you shall be permitted to use the data for graduation purposes only. No further publications or use of this data is allowed. Pursuant to 45 CFR 46.109(d), you have the opportunity to appeal in writing or in person to this letter of notification at or by the next Committee meeting scheduled for April 8, 2009. The Committee requests that you successfully complete the FSU training module on human subjects' protection and send a copy of your completion certificate. (http://humansubjects.magnet.fsu.edu/training/trainingslides.html)

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely,

Thomas Jacobson
Chair, FSU Human Subjects Committee

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rich Templin received his B.S. from Florida State University in Communication and Psychology. He received his M.S. in Speech Communication from FSU in 1998 and his doctorate in Mass Communication in 2009. During his time at Florida State University he taught courses in communication theory, argumentation and public speaking. Templin was involved with the Program for Instructional Excellence and in 2000 received the Graduate Student Citizenship Award. At Florida State he served as the President of the Student Senate for two terms during which he was awarded the Milton Stover Caruthers Ethical Courage Award. He is a long-time activist involved with movements for social, economic and environmental justice and has been involved with radical media production and the media reform movement since 2000. He was a co-founder of the Tallahassee-RedHills Independent Media Center in 2002. In 2005, Templin co-authored a study of the IMC network with Dr. Andy Opel of Florida State University. Templin has produced and hosted the Your Voice radio program covering grass roots progressive movements and Florida politics on WVFS-Tallahassee, 89.7 FM since 2001. In 2007, he was invited to serve as a panelist for a hearing of the Federal Communications Commission regarding the elimination of regulations governing the cross-ownership of newspaper, radio and television outlets by single media companies. He is a union member with the Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 73 and is active in the labor movement. Templin frequently teaches media strategy to union leaders and activists at the National Labor College in Silver Springs, Maryland and other venues across the country. Templin is a member of the International Labor Communicators Association and has received several awards from the organization for labor reporting. He currently serves as the Communications Director and registered state legislative lobbyist for the Florida AFL-CIO.