Move! Guerilla Films, Collaborative Modes, and the Tactics of Radical Media Making

by

Tish Stringer

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

George Marcus, Professor
Anthropology

Christopher Kelty, Assistant Professor
Anthropology

Hamid Naficy, Professor
Art History

HOUSTON, TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is an ethnography of video activists with the Independent Media Center (also known as IMC or indymedia) creating collectively made videos aimed at affecting political change. I explore the larger Independent Media Center Network, beginning in the Zapatista Encuentros of the late Nineties, the “trial run” in Seattle during the meeting of the World Trade Organization in 1999 and the subsequent growth into a world wide network with almost 200 local collectives producing radical news and providing distribution outlets for media makers. Indymedia is situated within a social movement, commonly known as anti-globalization, but more properly termed the global justice movement. I investigate indymedia videos as insider media; videos that come out of are circulated within and support the social movement. Indymedia videos are political interventions, but they also constitute a social intervention as IMC videographers make politically informed choices to shape the filmmaking process itself. Social movement based media is not a new phenomena, and as part of this dissertation, I
explore several examples of other radical film collectives operating in different historical periods with different technological apparatuses. I treat the complication of being a group committed to openness and democracy in an environment of political repression and surveillance. Finally, I discuss doing contemporary experimental ethnography within this complex environment and my role as both an activist and an academic.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intersection One</td>
<td>The Fourth World War</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>(((i )))) indymedia</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection Two</td>
<td>Trading Freedom: The Secret Life of the FTAA</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>This Is What Democracy Looks Like</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection Three</td>
<td>Off The Pig</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>Guerrilla Media</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection Four</td>
<td>79 Primaveras</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>Transparency and Anonymity in a Surveillance Economy</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection Five</td>
<td>i: The Film</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td>Clandestino</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection Six</td>
<td>We Interrupt This Empire...</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One
Introduction

A tour, even if it is merely expository, of the different resistances in a nation or on the planet, is not just an inventory. There one can divine, even more than the present, the future. Those who are part of that tour, and those who make the inventory, can discover things that those who add and subtract in the armchairs of the social sciences cannot manage to see. To wit, that the traveler and his path matter, yes, but what matters above all is the path, the direction, the tendency. In noting and analyzing, in discussing and arguing, we are doing so not only in order to know what is happening and to understand it, but also, and above all, in order to try and transform it.
-Subcomandante Marcos

In March of 2005, an international symposium was held in Cologne entitled, “Camcorder Revolution: Video activists, Politically Committed Documentaries and an International Public.” On the opening night of this conference a screening was held of a new, made-for-television film, Seeing is Believing, a documentary about video activism around the world. The film’s directors casually declare, “Video technology is changing the world.” Is the availability of the camcorder to a mass market a revolution? Have thousands of citizens hitting the streets armed with video cameras changed the way we see the world, or how we think about filmmaking?
The "camcorder revolution" is typically considered to have begun in 1991 with the broadcast of a video showing members of the Los Angeles Police Department beating Rodney King, shot by bystander George Holliday. The national broadcast of this tape was America's first real look at the power of witness video. Ordinary citizens armed with inexpensive camcorders could monitor their own communities. Using the Rodney King affair as a point of origin for this revolution suggests that it was not the technology that sparked the change, but rather what people did with the technology.

This dissertation is an ethnography of video activists with the Independent Media Center (also known as IMC or indymedia) creating collectively made videos aimed at affecting political change. Indymedia is situated within a social movement, commonly known as anti-globalization, but more properly termed the global justice movement. I investigate indymedia videos as insider media; videos that come out of and are circulated within and support the social movement. Indymedia videos are political interventions, but they also constitute a social intervention as IMC videographers make politically informed choices to shape the filmmaking process itself. Social movement based media is not a new phenomena, and as part of this dissertation, I explore several examples of other radical film collectives operating in different historical periods with different technological apparatuses.
As with the King example, it is not the availability of video technology that created indymedia video activism, but rather how people use the technology that makes for a radical change. Arguably, video is not actually the appropriate central technological figure to connect with the history of indymedia. It was not the advent of the portable video camera that coincides with the rise of the indymedia network, but rather the consumer availability of digital media of all forms. Indymedia emerged at a moment when digital media started to replace analog forms and be widely distributed on the Internet for download. Analog tape recorders replaced with MiniDisc recorders, 35 mm film cameras became digital cameras, and analog video moved to digital when consumer grade Mini DV cameras hit the market. The novel difference with new digital technologies is media can now go directly into the computer without processing or cumbersome conversions and directly from the computer to the Internet.

A new social movement emerged on the world stage in 1999 during the World Trade Organization’s ministerial meeting in Seattle, Washington. Tens of thousands of demonstrators, who forged historic alliances, effectively shut down the meetings by engaging in civil disobedience in the streets. However, this movement was not new; organizations had struggled
with the political issues of fair trade and global bodies of supranational power for decades. Still, the images of environmentalists and union members standing together in opposition to this institution took the world by surprise. One central reason people read out about this particular demonstration was the launching of a new alternative media network, dubbed the Independent Media Center (IMC) or indymedia. The brainchild of a mixture alternative media groups, indymedia set up a workspace in a storefront in Seattle to provide coverage of those now historic events.\textsuperscript{3}

Six years later, the IMC has grown into a full-fledged international network, with nearly 200 local nodes representing thousands of volunteers on the ground producing radical media in their local communities. Within indymedia, process is just as important as product as participants actively build their network based on principals of direct democracy, horizontality, and cooperation. In doing so, this network is more than the content it produces; it is an international social experiment in building alternatives. Far-flung network nodes communicate with each other and the world using the Internet and other electronic means. The websites, which are all connected through a standard "cities list" of links on the front page of any given IMC site, helped to map connections, to imagine a global movement at
once decentralized and connected across the world. The indymedia websites created for readers a vision of an international social movement, with individual nodes just one click away.

Indymedia is an emergent, fluid and complex global field site. It's impossible to know indymedia without learning about the broader social movement and its underlying principles, the institutions of global finance upon which the movement has focused its attention, global communications infrastructures, the field of journalism and historical alternative media practices, media making technologies, copyright and intellectual property regimes on a global scale and histories of political repression and contemporary international anti-terrorism policies. It has been a potentially never-ending, boundless field site.
Such complex contemporary field sites are difficult to negotiate with traditional anthropological methods, and this range of topics is obviously beyond the scope of a dissertation. I have used two framing concepts for narrowing this field and choosing indymedia video practice as my focal point. First, the Netwar concept developed by David Ronfeldt and Ron Arquilla, which argues that for a structure similar to that of the movement for global justice to exist, it must be supported by a dense communication infrastructure. I interpreted indymedia as being this communication infrastructure for the movement. The second narrowing framework has been paraethnographic texts—texts produced by interlocutors, as discussed by George Marcus and Doug Holmes. They suggest looking to these texts and their producers as a means to discover information about a social field when conducting anthropological research in complex global field sites. The films made by indymedia about social movement actions are paraethnographic documents, and are nexuses where many of these complex issues come together.

I have been repeatedly struck by parallels between my work as an ethnographer and the work of indymedia video activists. Video activists engage their subjects, providing close up, intimate storytelling from the
inside. What anthropologists might call thick description. This closeness purposefully eschews the expected objective distance of the documentary filmmaker. As a student of the school of cultural critique of the contemporary I also choose to tell intimate stories, foregoing the accepted, if not expected, vocational distance of anthropological objectivity. The parallel work of video activists and my ethnographic work is a thread that runs through this dissertation to interrogate both film and anthropology, in relation to constructions of objectivity and truth.

Method

My methodology follows a trend in anthropology resulting from the 1980s writing culture critiques responding to a broad crisis of representation. These critiques encouraged anthropologists to rethink ethnographies as texts and to develop new methodologies and experiment with ethnographic forms. The writing culture critique highlighted the situatedness of the researcher, and suggested that contemporary ethnographies could begin to share ethnographic authority by including multiple perspectives, translations and experimental dialogues. My research design and subsequent field work has been deeply informed by these disciplinary strategies. My sustained fieldwork is guided by a multi-sited methodology. This methodology has
given me a vision of the project as a whole, allowing me to always connect local specifics to the global network. A multi-sited approach has also allowed me to study both the impacts of and simultaneous production of the global network. I have interacted with my interlocutors not as others, but as collaborators in a field where my involvement marks me as complicit. My texts are of two types: written and visual (film). In my written work, I attempt to achieve some of the lofty goals of sharing ethnographic authority through multi-vocal, dialogic strategies.

I have engaged filmmaking as an ethnographic fieldwork practice, but not as might be immediately assumed. Before coming to Rice Anthropology, I made ethnographic documentary films. While a student in the Rice Anthropology department, I made some 30 films, mostly shorts and one feature-length film. These films are not ethnographic films, as they do not have as their focus indymedia activists who are the subject of this ethnography. I conducted much of my research into indymedia by doing indymedia projects, by making indymedia films. I did not make films about my subjects; rather I made films with my subjects. These are not my films; they are indymedia’s films. These films are multi-authored “texts” that ultimately belong to the social movement out of which they came. There is a
compelling reason for my not making a film about indymedia,⁵ and that reason is access. The social field of political activists is infused with paranoia.⁶ Had I been shooting video in many of the situations in which I have found myself, I would never have been able to learn as much as I have about this community because people would have censored themselves and their actions.

My research method has been practice-based multi-sited ethnography. I have spent five years doing day-to-day observation and work with the local indymedia collective in Houston, Texas. I have traveled to work at large-scale indymedia centers at mobilizations of the global justice movement in Quebec City, Canada, during the Free Trade Area of the Americas Ministerial; New York City during the World Economic Forum and the Republican National Convention; Porto Allegre, Brasil, during the World Social Forum; and Miami, Florida, during the Free Trade Area of the Americas Ministerial. I have traveled to activist gatherings where indymedia media activists held caucuses at: The Allied Media Conference in Bowling Green, Ohio; Hack The Knowledge Lab: Technology, Creativity, Social Organization in Lancaster, England; The National Media Reform Conferences in Madison, Wisconsin, and St. Louis, Missouri, and the World
Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela. I have traveled to visit indymedia centers and conduct interviews notably in San Francisco, New York City and London. As part of my work on reception studies, I traveled from Brooklyn to Spokane some 6,000 miles in three weeks on tour with the film “The Fourth World War,” almost every town we visited had an indymedia center that hosted a screening. I organized a project to create a feature-length documentary about the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the demonstrations around the world during the ministerial held in Quebec City in 2001. As part of that project, I traveled to Oregon for two weeks to work with an editorial collective to do the bulk of the editing work on the film, which I ultimately finished at the Rice Media Center. As part of my work with the Houston IMC, for four years I organized a monthly film screening of radical documentaries, often made by indymedia video activists. In that capacity, I was able to meet with more than twenty directors I invited to Houston and learned about their films and processes.

Traveling to various locations does not fully account for the multi-sited nature of this project. The majority of my time spent with indymedia has been on the Internet. I have spent thousands of hours in front of a computer, browsing websites, talking with people around the world in IRC channels,
editing websites, administering servers, reading email lists and watching films. I have also been a media producer, spending three years helping to produce a weekly indymedia radio program on KPFT 90.1 fm in Houston and making short films on my own for indymedia websites and the indymedia Newsreal. I have had to learn an amazing amount of new technology in order to function in this world, and in true indymedia fashion, I have offered workshops to share with others what I have learned. For example I have offered the workshop: "Guerrilla Video: Video Activism and Tactical Media" seven times in Houston and once in Dallas.

I have learned what is to be a part of indymedia, what skills are necessary, what political assumptions inform its process, what debates rage within the network. Simultaneous to this has been my academic work, where I read related materials, keep field notes, write papers and give conference presentations on indymedia. When "reporting" about indymedia to other audiences, such as at academic conferences, I cannot help but see the uncomfortable resemblance between an informant and myself, an insider providing information to outsiders. Other indymedia activists recognize this dichotomy in me as well. People with whom I have had years-long working relationships will interject into conversation, "This is off the record." They
say that because they know someday I could write about that experience for public consumption. As an insider, I know more than I could possibly report. Not simply because of the truth that there are too many possible connections to make, too many stories to tell; but because I know there are stories that should not be told. Because telling them would endanger someone or because telling would constitute me breaking my word. It is an impact of working in a field of people engaging in political action, but it is likely also the case with any deep anthropological research. If the anthropologist is successful in his/her report, if s/he gains trust and access, s/he will likely have access to privileged information that does not necessarily belong outside of that context. If the anthropologist has become culturally literate, s/he his-/herself knows, as I know, what that information is. Being true to that knowledge is being true to your word, is being true to the trust that is earned.

**Form**

The form of my dissertation is contrasted to traditional ethnographic writing in several ways. The first and most obvious way is because I conducted my research through a participatory model—I appear in my dissertation as both the analytic observer and a participant. The placement of myself in the text
is a conscious break from an anthropological voice of distant objectivity. I have tried to foreground the voices and experiences of others, in their own words. While this is a single-authored dissertation, I wanted it to have the feel of a multi-vocal, dialogic text. For this reason there are long quotations and raw sections of transcripts. I have purposefully tried to give others the last word on a given topic. Because I want my work to be interesting and useful not only to anthropologists, but also to academics in other media-related disciplines as well as to my indymedia collaborators, I have avoided the use of technical jargon and attempted to use plain speech wherever possible.

I recognize that many of my stylistic conventions in writing come from my experience as a filmmaker and the particular film style I have developed. I write as if I am editing a film. Gather all the material together, then cut and splice together the disparate parts, trying to coax the pieces into telling a story, mixing them up as if on a non-linear storyboard. In my films, I never use a narrator’s voiceover. I have always preferred to simply present information and empower the viewer to come to his or her own conclusions. I have seen this manifest in my writing as a lack of introduction to a new document or transcript or a follow up on same to point out the significance to the reader. I am fascinated by form. I want to see the form of a material:
email headers in the text, a coffee stained flier pasted to the page, I want films projected on brick walls to run along side the text. I long for simple film conventions: transitions, fades, soundtracks, the subtlety of the image or the power of two images juxtaposed to permeate my writing. Because my project was so multi-sited, bits and pieces of experiences from many parts of the world and cyberspace are woven throughout. At times, I encourage my writing to be a somewhat abstract patchwork. I appreciate the multi-layered, multi-vocal quality, which reflects well the complexity of my multi-sited project.

**Relevant Literature**

Several different fields converge to create the relevant literature base for my investigation: works about indymedia specifically and alternative media in general, new media studies, science and technology studies, especially those on the Internet and the open source/free software movement, network theory, social movements, and ethnography. Literature that has been influential to my work has been written by academics and activists, even an activist academic or two. While there is an over abundance of material tangentially related to my work, there is not one single body of literature that defines my field.
Structure: Movement, Indymedia and the Internet

Throughout my research, I have been fascinated by the organizing structure of the global justice movement. This movement is composed of small-scale decentralized groups integrated into a network, supported by dense communication and organized through collective ideologies and ethics regarding the evil nature of the corporate state and the need to protect citizens and the environment from exploitation. The structure is horizontally articulated, flexible and expanding. It is organized through non-hierarchical models and has no central location or leadership. Resulting studies of structure of the indymedia network as well as the physical infrastructure of the Internet appeared to all resemble one another. This structure repeated itself at the social, ideological and technical levels. This form is directly opposed to hierarchical, centralized models of bureaucracy, states, corporations and militaries. By actively building a network based explicitly on decentralized heterarchies, indymedia is on the level of form and structure critiquing these other forms and simultaneously building an alternative.

The most useful theories that helped me understand this structure have come
out of the work of David Ronfeldt and Ron Arquilla, ironically funded by the U.S. Military through the RAND Corporation (1996; 1998; 2000; 2001). Their studies of “Netwar” and swarming conceptualized my vision of this structure. Netwar is an emerging mode of conflict on a societal level that employs network forms of organization. The users of Netwar are described by Ronfeldt and Arquilla as dispersed, small groups who communicate, coordinate, and act in an internetted manner, without a central leadership or headquarters. While the authors’ focus is mainly on criminal activity, such as terrorist groups, they also state that the Netwar spectrum will increasingly also include, “a new generation of revolutionaries and activists who espouse postindustrial, information-age ideologies” (ibid., 1996). They argue that their ideologies transcend the nation state into global civil society. They further argue that there are two important elements that this design must have to be strong for it to maintain itself over time. One is a unifying ideology; the other is an infrastructure for the dense communication of functional information. This key element, dense communication infrastructure, brought to light the fact that indymedia was a backbone for the international conceptualization and growth of the movement for global justice.
Two other models for social movement structure (and by extension, indymedia and the Internet) that I have usefully explored have been the rhizome by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1984; 1994) and Segmented, Polycentric, Integrated Networks, or SPINs by Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia Hine (1970). The rhizome is a model of horizontality, not just of language or social organization, but also of structure—structure that can be found in repeating levels throughout scales and scopes of biological and sociocultural life. Beyond that, the rhizome is a way of restructuring our thinking and creating processes. The rhizome is a useful way to think of this movement as distinct from hierarchically oriented movements such as Leninism by the structural nature of being horizontally articulated and composed of semi-autonomous nodes in communication with one another.

Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine published their book on social movements in 1970 and analyzed several different movements such as Pentecostalism and Environmental and Black Power groups in terms of networks. They developed the acronym SPIN to describe the structure of social movements and to help us think about how this type of organization is fluid, dynamic and expanding. SPINs are models of social movements based on anthropological fieldwork in movements for change done the United States...
and Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. This model was articulated about movements and adaptability to fields of turbulence under conditions less dramatic than they are today in terms of transnational solidarity networks, decentralization and horizontal articulation of cells within larger movements. The SPIN model remains a clear and insightful characterization of the structure of social movements though it prefigured other work with similar findings by decades. Now, network theory is coming into vogue again and the work of Gerlach and Hine has been resurfacing as social theorists such as Ronfeldt and Arquilla argue network forms of organization are on the rise.

**New-new social movements**

In recent years, a veritable cascade of books about the movement for global justice has emerged, sparking theorization of a new-new social movement as analytic studies contrast this movement to the “new” social movements of the 1960s and 70s. The majority of this work focuses on the transnational dimensions of the movement for global justice and the emergence of a global civil society (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2004; Clark, 2003; Conway, 2004; Guidry, Kennedy, and Zald, 2000; Sanjeev, Riker, and Sikkink, 2002; Mayo, 2004; McIntyre-Mills, 2000; Smith and Johnston, 2002; Smith,
Chatfield and Pagnucco, 1997; Waterman, 2001). Other theorists of this movement highlight the relationship between the movement and new technologies, such as the Internet (Webster, 2001; Cleaver, 1999; Melucci, 1996, Ronfeldt, Arquilla, Fuller and Fuller, 1998). Melucci’s book, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*, stands alone in addressing collective action and therefore has been useful to my conceptualization of collective modes of production. A handful of books cover both the issues and institutions of globalization and their relationship to the movement (Ayres, 1998; Fox, 1998; Hamel 2001; O’Brien, 2000). Some work focuses on the underpinning principals of the movement, democracy and autonomy (Ibarra, 2003; Katsiaficas, 1997) and there are local studies on movement protest such as in Australia (Burgmann, 2003). Some of the best research on the movement to date has been done by state monitoring agencies, for example the report, “Anti-globalization—A Spreading Phenomenon” was prepared by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS, 2000). Others are co-authored between state authorities and academics, such as the article, “Anarchist Direct Actions: A Challenge for Law Enforcement” written by Randy Borum from the University of South Florida and Chuck Tilby from the Eugene, Oregon Police Department. These state-authored documents offer the fascinating perspective of not how
the movement is organized, but how they think the movement is organized and what their next steps will be to control it. Finally, there have been scores of books and edited volumes about movement action produced by activist or activist academics (Cockburn, St. Clair, and Sekula, 2001; Crimethinc, 2001; David and X, 2002; FTAA Diary Collective, 2001; Jordan, 2002; Mertes, 2004; Shepard and Hayduk, 2002; Solnit, 2004; Various, 2001; Yuen, Burton-Rose and Katsiaficas, 2004). Many of the books in this last group, most of which are edited volumes, contain novel literary forms such as the first person narrative of street action, or represent collections of original organizing documents which would have been lost had they not been collected.

**Globalization**

It is impossible to know this internationally coordinated social movement for global justice without knowledge of the process and forms of global capitalism, or globalization. This movement is situated within and reacts to the current world system. Globalization involves a hyper-mobility of particular flows, including among other things money, people, goods, information and diseases in a global system and a decline in sovereignty of the nation-state, increased power of the multinational corporation and a new
architecture of the global system. Many thinkers helped me conceptualize and understand and map these systems. In Arjun Appadurai’s work on the circulation of media objects around the world, which he calls mediascapes, helped to consider the life of objects such as video cassettes flowing around the world as an actor in processes of globalization (Appadurai, 1998).


Naomi Klein’s book, *No Logo*, is widely considered not only the bible of the anticorporate globalization movement because of its description of actions but it has also functioned as a recruiting tool because of its accessible descriptions of the mechanisms of corporate globalization (Klein, 1999).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s book, *Empire*, was also widely popular within the movement. This neomarxist description of our contemporary moment of globalization as empire and the resistance as the multitude, while I would say, not hitting the mark in representing the contemporary social movement, was a salient description of late capitalism and its reaches into
everything—there is no longer any outside of empire (Hardt & Negri, 2000).

Frederick Jameson’s essay, “Cognitive Mapping” helped me to grasp that the complexity of the system of globalization is unknowable in its totality (Jameson, 1988).

**Media Studies**

The most influential works on my thinking within the field of media studies have been those about alternative or accented media groups. John Downing’s book *Radical Media* (both editions) is the closest example of similar scholarship available. He writes that this book is the first comparative treatment in the details of what he calls “self-managed” media groups. He notes there is a large body of work on self-managed factories but not media groups. It is fairly exhaustive, covering the United States, Portugal, Italy and Eastern Europe. It has a rich section on Newsreel, covering 15 years including both California and Third World. Downing defines a radical media as one that encourages the widest possible participation to emphasize multiple realities, is not a tool of a party, privileges movements over institutions and emphasizes prefigurative politics in the organization. The 2001 updated volume contains essays on the role of the Internet and political organizing but no section on indymedia. He has,
however, published a great essay in 2003, “The Independent Media Center Movement and the Anarchist Socialist Tradition” which is one of the few essays to really investigate the IMC and its connection to anarchist thought and tradition, a common political position of indymedia activists.

The term collective mode of production in my framework comes from working with Hamid Naficy. His book, *An Accented Cinema*, gave me the typology collective modes of production, distribution and reception. This typology has been extremely useful for organizing a messy body of material and to understand the films I look at as differentiated from mainstream films, not only in content but also in production process. Although Naficy’s book is focused on ethnically based diasporic communities, his conception of cinema content and production practices made by interstitial groups as accented, fits nicely with indymedia films.

There is a lot of relevant literature for my work in the field of media studies, but the work that has been most helpful is of two kinds: those that deconstruct corporate media (Achbar, 1994; Gitlin, 1980) and those that focus on alternative medias (Couldry and Curran 2003; Opel and Pompper, 2003; Critical Art Ensemble, 2001). I am grateful for the wide body of work

Chris Atton’s book *Alternative Media* (2002) and DeeDee Halleck’s book *Hand Held Visions: The Impossibilities of Community Media* (2002) deserve special attention in the media studies field because of their particular relevance to my work. In Atton’s book, he defines a model of radical and alternative media elaborating a six-point typology of alternative and radical media composed of both products and processes. His work is based on several case studies, the largest on zines and anarchism online. He engages issues of copyright and open distribution and ends up focusing on the role of radical media in new social movements as blurring boundaries and transforming social relationships. Halleck’s book is an excellent historical overview of community media initiatives, especially video and film groups. It includes an excellent timeline from 1922-2001 of important moments and advances in media and media movements. It also has an excellent chapter on indymedia, focusing on the author’s experience producing daily satellite broadcasts from the 2000 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles.
She argues that the scope of coverage indymedia is capable of achieving through cooperation is far and above what corporate media is able to do with money and hierarchy. These two books are the only ones in the media studies body of material that address collective modes of production.

**Indymedia**

There have been scores of articles about indymedia: in the corporate presses, in edited volumes, in journals, in dissertations and theses. Because of its newness, no one book has been devoted to indymedia, but there must be some on the way. Previous authors have written about indymedia in terms of law (von Lohmann, 2004; EFF 2005), social networks (Scahill, 2004), new uses for the Internet (Meikle, 2003; Hyde, 2002), role in social movements (Uzelman, 2003; Downing 2001b; Kellner, 2003; Kidd, 2003 and 2004), cyberactivism and free software (Hill, 2003; Coleman, 2003), journalism (Pavis, 2002; Brennan, 2000; Hayhoe, 2002; Morris, 2003; Brooten, 2004) and as a communication commons (Kidd, 2002 and 2004). Longer articles of course cover many of these areas, but almost every article about indymedia is about the rise of new democratic forms for participation in a global civil society because of the Internet. Most articles written about indymedia are written by outsiders (for example, see Beckerman, 2003),
albeit mainly sympathetic ones, and thus the focus on the Internet makes sense as the Internet is the most visible arena of indymedia.

Indymedia is much more than the Internet and for this reason my work foregrounds practices by focusing on video production and circulation. Also, I compare indymedia with other activist media groups, to see what, if anything, is novel about indymedia. Because my work is informed by 6 years of sustained engagement with indymedia as a field site, I see beyond statements of openness and consensus (so lauded by proponents of a new digital democracy) to a critical view of the real tensions and negotiations that go on behind the scenes to maintain these ideals. There has been one in-depth study of local indymedia collective, Vancouver Indymedia (Uzelman, 2002), which focuses on internal processes and politics in relation to social movement ideal of direct action. To my knowledge, no other long-term study of indymedia has been undertaken.

Field Guide

This dissertation is composed of seven chapters and five intersections. These intersections are intended to provide a rhythmical break to the standard form of the chapter in between each of them. It seemed to me
absurd to be writing about all these films, while the films themselves were conspicuously absent from the text. There is strong connection between the process of making films and the finished content of a film—a connection that can often be seen visually. I wanted the reader to see the films. These intersections are my attempt to textually include some relevant film material in my dissertation. Each intersection details one scene or short clip from a film. The form of these intersections is significantly more casual than the chapters. I wrote them in a prose style—in my style. They were a joy for me to produce while writing this dissertation. I want these intersections to provide a screen on which the reader can imagine the projection of these political films.

Chapter One: *Introduction*

Intersection One: *"The Fourth World War"*

Chapter Two: (((i))) *indymedia*, focuses entirely on the IMC network. I trace its roots to the call for an international alternative media network made by the Zapatistas and the follow-up planning based on that call leading up to the beginning of the first indymedia in Seattle. I explore the social
conditions that contributed to indymedia’s emergence at that time and offer examples of similar, contemporaneous experiments that did not continue. Indymedia has grown by leaps and bounds since first opening its proverbial doors in 1999. I suggest that the open publishing model used by indymedia is the central factor in their rapid growth and is the crucial difference between indymedia and the other less successful similar experiments. Indymedia is directly tied to the global justice movement, expanding during a period of intense resistance to economic summit meetings. While openness and a commitment to democracy are the hallmarks that lead to indymedia’s success, they are also contested and continually renegotiated in practice. I use two examples of indymedia centers set up at large scale mobilizations to provide ethnographic case studies, Prague in September of 2000 and Quebec City in April of 2001. In both cases, I describe the demonstrations and the media center activity as the two are irrevocably intertwined. Finally, I discuss criticisms of indymedia such as too much focus on protest coverage at the expense of local issues and elitism.

Intersection Two: “Trading Freedom: The Secret Life of the FTAA”
Chapter Three: *This Is What Democracy Looks Like* describes specifically the process of filmmaking in indymedia. I use the structure of collective modes of production, reception and distribution to bring normally invisible production process to light. The chapter details how an indymedia feature documentary is produced—from the set up at the mobilization all the way through the distribution of the film. The collaborative production process used by indymedia is democracy in action and the films reflect that in content through use of multiple camera angles, depth of coverage and multi-authorship. Indymedia inserts its politics at the point of origin. That is, the production process is itself politicized, sharing the goals of the broader social movement and is in opposition to the mainstream media model.

**Intersection Three: “Off the Pig!”**

Chapter Four: *Guerrilla Media*, argues that while there are some novel cinematic practices evidenced by the indymedia video team, their work as radical filmmakers working inside of social movements is not unique. The aim of this chapter is to provide both historical and contemporary contextualization through which we can more closely read the practices of indymedia. This context is other radical film groups, collectives and their
films and processes. The main examples given in this chapter are: Soviet Film Trains, the direct cinema movement and its impact on documentary forms, newsreel, riot porn and Iraqi insurgent videos. The central themes throughout this chapter are objectivity and truth—two kinds of truth, a pure truth that one believes can be accessed or a contested truth that must be fought for.

Intersection Four: "79 Primaveras"

Chapter Five: *Transparency and Anonymity in a Surveillance Economy*, is centrally about the techniques employed by a political network operating with values of openness within a surveillance economy. The chapter opens with a case study of the confiscation of two indymedia servers through a complex web of international legal treaties and suspicion. This era of heightened criminal surveillance systems, as well as a long history of disruption and prosecution of activists produces a culture of paranoia within reason, which is pervasive in activist groups and encourages the use of technologies of concealment, seemingly in contradiction to the openness idea. There exists a difficult balance between openness and concealment to maintain, and it is constantly contested and renegotiated. Openness
produces space for free speech, but must be protected by obscuring identities and thwarting spammers. I offer the story of a personal case in which I discovered indymedia was unintentionally providing surveillance to the police, a further complication of total openness. I propose the model of the mask as a way to explain how political activists operating in public places, such as on the Internet, can negotiate both open and concealed positions to their advantage. The chapter ends with two ethnographic vignettes: one from the Miami meetings of the Free Trade Area of the Americas Summit and one from a film-editing project in Oregon to paint a portrait of the experience of paranoia and conspiracy and my situatedness within this world.

Intersection Five: “i: the film”

Chapter Six: Clandestino, begins with an anecdote from an indymedia center in Brasil and three researchers working in it on projects about indymedia. This leads into reflections on my fieldwork practice, as an insider and outsider. I argue that while conducting research in paranoid field sites, my insider position allowed me access. This insider position was garnered through work and study. For example, I learned to run and maintain an open source server. It was like completing an unrecognized second language study. But insiderness has come with a price of not being taken seriously by
an academy still clinging to the rent garment of objectivity. This insight begins a discussion of ethnographic methods, leading to conducting ethnographic fieldwork in dislocated, complex, emergent, global field sites. I discuss paraethnography and give examples of paraethnographic materials produced by indymedia. I also come to terms with the concept of complicity when I pair it with collaboration by calling myself a conspirator and snitch. Following this section, I lay out my own research method and process and promote Gomez-Peña’s idea of the hybrid as a way to think about blurring the boundaries between what might seem like distinct cultural worlds—in my case activism and academia. The chapter winds up being a critique of objectivity, drawn from the words of video activists and then applied to possible anthropological labor using examples of ethnographic work of Zora Neale Hurston and Trinh T. Minh-ha.

Intersection Six: “We interrupt this empire…”

Chapter Seven: Epilogue. The Future is Unwritten. The epilogue to this dissertation offers brief words on the current state of the movement and indymedia centers and video activism. It concludes with comments about the work I expected this dissertation to do and what work I believe I and it is
Field

It is an exciting time in academia to be doing this work. There is a burgeoning constellation of new academic institutes and centers focused on global media studies, community information and technology initiatives and new media. Increasing numbers of colleges and universities are starting to pair their journalism and communication departments with media labs for community reporting and use. There has been a resurgence of academic interest in media and its role in social relationships. However, the majority of the work being done on global media investigates corporate medias and the global/local divide; for example the impact of importation of international media to a local area, or strategies of local stations such as Aljazeera⁹ and Telesur¹⁰ to reach a global audience. Very little work is being done on grassroots media in a global context and virtually no studies are being produced contemporarily about collective modes of production in media groups. With my work, I hope to provide insight into the work of video activists operating in a global network, the production and circulation of video activist materials in social movements and the impact these materials have had on the creation of alternative political subjectivities of
participants in this movement who are conceptualized as a global civil society. I also hope to be a part of reinvigorating a dialogue within the anthropological discipline about positionality and situatedness of the researcher and reengage a conversation about objectivity, which in my mind should have been put to bed decades ago but continues to reemerge, especially when presented with work such as mine.
Intersection one

“Fourth World War”
Produced by Big Noise Tactical
2004, Digital Video, 72 minutes

What I am about to describe takes up only 1 minute and 49 seconds of a film that’s 72 minutes long. The film continues—just as deep, just as challenging, just as sophisticated, just as beautiful for the next 70 minutes. This 2 minutes, the opening title sequence, is our introduction to the topics and sets the tone for the film. There is an enemy, an antagonist, clearly defined in this sequence, and a hero, a protagonist. The texture of this sequence places it squarely in a genre. Sophistically edited, heavily worked digital video. It’s a look that would have been nearly impossible to
do in film, especially in low budget film. It’s a film of the contemporary and it looks and feels like the contemporary, or perhaps, the not yet.

"The Fourth World War documents the history of the future before it is born. . . and while we can still do something about it. -Peter Wintonick

Unlike the other intersections to follow, so much is going on in this scene; I needed to divide it into columns. I feel slightly disingenuous describing the images, because when you are watching the film you cannot see them all. This style creates an overall portrait, a feeling, a texture. It reaches down into our brains and taps our ability to make sense of the abstract. But the source material is important and was of course, not left up to chance, so I will describe it, in some cases, frame by frame, because that is how long many of the images last, one frame, 1/30th of a second.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>My Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A war without a battlefield.</td>
<td>Soft music.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A war without an enemy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A war that is everywhere.</td>
<td>The music continues</td>
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<tr>
<td>A thousand civil wars.</td>
<td>throughout, gaining momentum.</td>
<td>The over-all effect of this sequence is that you are watching a series of films, like you are watching newsreels, like you are watching history. Their appearance as strips of film jumping framing marks them as being history.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A War without end.</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Voiceover (Suheir Hammad).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fade to black.</td>
<td></td>
<td>It is hard now to remember what life was like back then.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Image:</td>
<td></td>
<td>I believed them when they told me that I was alone in the world.</td>
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<td>What looks like a</td>
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<td>When they tried to alienate me, to keep me isolated, when they imposed distance.</td>
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<td>edges flickering.</td>
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<td>A soldier’s machine</td>
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<td>gun, diagonal images</td>
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<td>bullets, torches? A</td>
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<td>tank appears and</td>
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<td>stays in the center.</td>
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<td>It flickers off</td>
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<td>as a strip of film,</td>
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<td>jackets near a</td>
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<td>burning tire,</td>
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<td>changing image to a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zapatista woman</td>
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<td>wearing a scarf</td>
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<tr>
<td>across her face, a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexican soldier’s</td>
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<td>face turns, a woman,</td>
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<td>an old man</td>
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quickly pass by, a demonstrator holds her arms in the air in her face determination, a man in a march puts cups his hands around his mouth, screaming into the air. Hands are grasped, holding string together, the soldiers face quickly passes, the old man returns, his lined face serious, knowledgeable. Passing ruined buildings and rubble, a boy comes into frame and puts his fingers up in the peace sign, his fingers fill the frame. Quickly passing by the red light from before and demonstrators in gas masks, their arms in the air. Resting on a burning building, a child stands in front of it. Frames flicker by, abstract, a fist, color, the World Trade Center. A man stands, shirtless waving a red flag in the air; he is shot from far below the perspective making his feet large, reminiscent of Russian propaganda posters. A group of police riding horses at full run. A sea of

| And that this place, | Before that day |
| and this time were invincible. | |
| This is the natural order of things. It cannot be changed. | |

| in September, |
| in April |
| in December |
| in May |
| in November |

These are the days we learned that it was not inevitable, that we were not alone, that we could strike blows. These dates run together on the voiceover, marking them as speeding up and being simultaneous. I’m guessing these are lists of important days for “us”—the movement. I can only speculate as to which they are, but I would guess September 11,
people, one man in front frame raises his arm. Quickly passing, people dance, the man with the red flag, the Zapatista woman, people’s feet run away, the old man. Boys smash concrete stones, making rocks, picking them up. Frames fly by, repeating dancing feet; it stops and stays center as their feet stomp forcefully on the ground, dancing. The frame repeats, flying by. Abstractions of people at a bonfire, the reds and golds blown out, out of frame, the red light returns—is it the light of a police van? Off frame, destabilized, its back this time a full shot, it’s a street light, the whole frame is washed in red, a lone person walks quickly, crouched over, wearing a gas mask. A bonfire rages, fists, guns, people, flicker by. A woman in a gas mask stands in front of a line of riot police, her arm raised in the air. A fist, the Zapatista woman returns the red scarf covers the lower half of opened
and we lived a hundred years of history in one afternoon.
The world has changed.
And we have changed with it.
The stories we were told
about ourselves
and our place in the world
no longer seem to make sense
and they have left us to walk these streets

2001, New York City.
April—Apartheid falls in South Africa,
December 19,
Argentina rises up against a state that has driven the economy to collapse under neoliberal policies,
Mayday in South Korea, November 30,
Seattle and the meetings of the WTO.
But there are so many other Aprils, other Septembers, other Mays, as our struggles overlap.

So many people in this sequence look directly at us. This speaks at two levels: one, they are looking to us, asking us to see them, asking us to know them, to know their stories, to know their struggles. And two, it speaks to the position of the camera. These are intimate portraits, these are not images of people “stolen” from across the street. This camera is right there, with the people, standing with them, intimate with
her face, as the shot zooms in her eyes look directly at us, quiet, serious. The old man returns. A boy stands in front of a demonstration looking at us. The old man, a group of Zapatista women, their faces covered, several are carrying babies in colorful slings—the women, the babies look at us. Police, the woman in the gas mask in front of police lines looks at us, a man with his face covered by a black mask looks to us. The light, police shields. A group of Zapatistas walks, their faces covered in black masks. The light, the gun turret of a tank. A huge number of demonstrators, a sea of red, flags waving. The old man, the man shouting, a Zapatista council, concrete to smash, boys with t-shirts wrapped around their faces as masks, look at us. A Zapatista woman looks at us. Hands grasp. People in white shirts and red bands tied around their heads gather together as strangers and so we walk and we listen to other voices in other places.

them, they are willing and comfortable to share themselves with it, with us. There is trust this story will be told. Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN said about the film Zapatista, also made by Big Noise, “It is not the same thing to see Zapatismo through the large television networks as it is to see it through this camera. The reality seen through this camera is more real.” What does that mean? Access to the truth, but how? Anthropologists should be asking this question. We can see the answer in these people’s eyes. We are told that things have changed, that we have changed and what we thought was true, the metanarratives no longer hold. We are told we will walk and listen to other people in other places, it suggests that through that, we will find the answers, and we are shown images that are to come later in the film, of other people, in other
singing, chanting. Hands clasped, the shouting man, traditionally dressed Zapatistas, one man waves to us as they walk by. The shouting man, the soldier. A group of people walking we see them from behind, the shot focuses on their feet, marching, running, together.

Cut to black.

One small square moving image of a train comes on screen in a field of black. Another image joins it, people running. The frames are edged in gold. One by one, more small films join it until the screen fills with 16 small boxes in a square, each one framed, each one running its own movie. Tinted differently in different frames, they create a flickering effect. So much information: neon signs, police, stock markets, people, manufacturing, armies, burning oil fields, places. Does this mean that this is only for those of us in a place not shown? No, for everyone, anywhere, there are portraits of other people, in other places.

Everywhere today.
Every aspect of our lives is being violently reorganized.

Everywhere there is war.
A war without a battlefield.
A war without an enemy.
A war that is everywhere.
A thousand civil wars.
War without end.
The Fourth World War.

On the one side is a system of terrifying violence.

This section answers the question, what is the Fourth World War? It is all of this, all of these images. But there are so many images going its impossible to look at them all. But we get a feeling. We try to make sense of it.

Sergi Eisentsein defined montage as two previously unrelated images placed next to each other that create in the mind of the viewer a third idea from drawing a relationship between them. What happens when there are thousands of images placed next to each other? Does the same thing happen, a third idea? It paints a
McDonald’s.

Cut to white.

One image fills the screen, flickering rapidly, so rapidly—one frame per image, 30 images a second. The colors are brilliant. People, soldiers, civilians, advertising, government, Americana, Iraqis, American soldiers in Iraq, arms, sex, corporate logos, George Bush, teeth whitening, repeating, War, sex, people, death, advertising We get closer to them closer and closer An eye, a tie, the barrel of a gun, a fist, a french fry, stars on the American flag. They abstract into colorful pixels Pixels so close, they are blown up, just a few filling the screen, just colorful dots.

Cut to black.

The next set of images is light, bright, the focus is soft, they are still rapid, but are

and on the other side

is all of us,

all of us

who will stop this war.

Crashing, loud beats. But these aren’t ordinary drums, these sound like the sounds of the city being played by the hands of the people.

There are whistles and screams in it.

It sounds like sticks on garbage bins or signs or

portrait, in this case of the Fourth World War. The Fourth World War is neoliberalism, it’s the global economy, it’s the spread of alienated consumer lifestyle, it’s the endless war, the violent force, the terror the system must use to sustain its power, its control, it’s the empire.

It is uncomfortable to watch these images as they speed up because we are able to make less and less sense of them, but I notice that even the blurry edge of a Ford Logo is recognizable to me. The speed, the fragmentation, the assault and the impossible knowing characterize the global system of neoliberalism and terror.

The film has just told me this is us. I have been addressed, this is me, I am a part of that we that will stop this
refreshingly slow after the last section.

*Piqueteros* carry tires on a highway. People pushing a dumpster together down the road. Running on a highway, rolling tires and carrying sticks, smashing a large piece of concrete into smaller pieces on the ground. Someone else, somewhere else, smashes a large rock on the ground. A boy shoots a rock out of a slingshot. This is where the opening text starts:

Big Noise Tactical presents.

A demonstrator throws a tear-gas canister. A slingshot throws. A woman throws her fists into the air; a man throws his fist into the air. A boy throws a rock. A tire is set on fire. A demonstrator hits a line of riot police with a Molotov cocktail.

People are running down a road. We see a close-up in one of the highway barricades.

There are occasional louder crashing beats, sounding like explosions corresponding to movement in the image. There is some on-location sound.

A horn honks. And then where you would expect a beat to be, there is slightly different sound.

FWOOAH

war. I feel a quickness of breath.

I wait to see what we do.

We are fighting, resisting, we are breaking rocks, throwing them, putting them in slingshots, throwing Molotov cocktails, we are blocking traffic, raising up our fists. We are fighting. We are full of courage.

This section is one story line, the only one in the opening. It’s in South Africa, in the townships. Later in the film we will see a demonstration for an imprisoned organizer named Max. This is a riot following his imprisonment. The
hands is a large rock as he stands by the road. Two men stand on the side of the road, holding rocks behind their backs. They run towards a white truck, throwing rocks at it. A rock bounces off the truck’s smashed windshield. We see the back of a truck, the tailgate is open. A man standing behind it has just dropped in something on fire as an ignition source, and starts to back away. The truck quickly catches fire. Just at the moment the back of this truck comes into view the title of the film comes in from the left.

FOURTH WORLD WAR.

The truck burns.

Fade to black.

It’s hard to spell, WHOOOH. FOOSH. WOOSH. SHOOOF. But it’s very important. It’s the sound of ignition, the beginning of a fire.

truck belongs to someone who works for the privatized water company coming to turn off water. Residents drive these agents of neoliberalism out of the neighborhood.

The title is red, like the fire next to it. The whole image is very bright with high contrast and saturated colors. The white is very bright.

This tiny moment of sound is my favorite part of this film. I would wait for it, feel it, hope the sound in the theater was right to catch it. It’s loud above the rhythmic soundtrack compared to other on location audio in the scene.

This film opens on such a powerful note to the beat of the burning truck of a man who personified neoliberalism on the ground. In the townships in South Africa, such as Mandela Park, in Cape Town, water and electricity have been privatized through a structural adjustment program following a
World Bank loan signed by the ANC. The constitution drafted by the ANC granted the right to water, electricity and housing. But the IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies privatized all three. It is so expensive many people can’t pay for it, with tens of thousands losing access every month. There are anti-privatization movements organized in the townships that address privatization on the ground through direct action. When the water and power workers come, they are chased out of the neighborhood. If they succeed in turning off a resident’s water or electricity, teams of volunteers turn it back on. When landlords come to evict, people stand and protest, driving them away, or people’s belongings are quickly moved out and then moved back in. But this is not done outside of the system’s use of terror to maintain authority. Armed police chase demonstrators off, firing tear gas. People are arrested, jailed, beaten. This man in the white truck is one of the enforcers of that system. He is at the end of the network of globalization, of the IMF and World Bank. He is their enforcer. His truck is burned as a direct action against this whole system of economic domination and terror.

Our word is our weapon.

“Sometimes we fight with our bodies in the street sometimes with pixels on a screen, but we are not making works of art, we are making a new world.”
The people who made this film, also made the film *Zapatista*, about the indigenous movement for self-determination in Chiapas that has spread around the world. Asked why he started making movies, one of the Big Noise filmmakers responded, “We listened to the Zapatistas and they said, ‘Our word is our weapon.’ And we asked ourselves what a word would look like here, in the north, and we realized it would be visual, it would be video.” This video, *The Fourth World War*, is a word, is a weapon; against alienation, against fear, in favor of ruptures, of breaks, of faith, of courage to act, to stand, to do, and in so standing, to stand with others, to be an interconnected movement against the Fourth World War, against neoliberalism, against empire, to make history. It is mythmaking. It is our biography. It is global-making connections, educating us about our own history as we make it. It is showing us what our history will be.

I choose to tell the story of the opening sequence of the film because of the sound and the image of the car on fire. Why this image, this sound? It’s a powerful way to begin, ignition. I wish my dissertation could start with this sound. When you open it and read the title, I wish you could hear the sound of a fire starting, the sound of people moving in the streets. I wish my
dissertation could have the subtlety of the image, could fade, could layer, could have a booming soundtrack. I'm jealous, jealous of the sophistication of the image, jealous of the storytelling, jealous of the effect the film produces in people.

I'm telling this story for another reason too. This is the sequence of the film I have seen more than any other. I have seen this particular sequence in theaters tens of times. In the fall of 2004, I accompanied one of the directors of this film on part of the U.S. tour. We drove from Brooklyn to Spokane—some 6000 miles in 3 weeks—and screened the film in cities all the way. When I left in Spokane to return to Houston, the tour went on. This film has screened in hundreds of venues, all over the world. From college campuses, to cafés, on a Russian Cinetrain tour, on Aljazeera, in film festivals and factories.

The screening process in all the cities was the same, repeated: Go in, meet the people, get the DVD playing and test the equipment, set up the merchandise table with videos and t-shirts, and wait for the people to come. The director would introduce the film in a similar way every time: "When someone like me gets in front of you to show you a film like this and tells
you this is a film like this is theirs, they are lying to you. This film belongs to movements. It come from movements, is a part of and supports them.”

Then the lights would dim, the film would start and this sequence would play. We would wait for the film to get to the first Argentina sequence, where the first subtitles appeared so we could be sure they were working, and then we would walk out of the theater. If there was a place nearby we would go have a beer while the film was playing and then return to the theater. Our venture to the nearby bar was carefully timed to come back and conduct a discussion while I sold DVDs. I took notes: who came, what group sponsored the screening, what issues they connected to the film, what kind of information was available to pick up and get involved in political action, what the questions and answers were. I was conducting “reception studies” of the audiences. And I learned from them. I learned that films like this need to exist inside of the movement that supports them, do in fact live because of the movement, and give life to the movement. I learned that the perennial question, “How do we get this important information to a larger audience of the unconverted?” is the wrong question to be asking. But where I learned the most on that trip was the one-hour in the bar (because the bar has always been where the best ethnography happens) or the drive
between towns. Those conversations challenged me in a way I hadn’t been challenged in a long time, by someone more intimately familiar and with a more poetically theoretical grasp of my tiny area of expertise than I. He was my “subject,” but I was his student.

After it was over he said, “You are not an anthropologist and I was never your subject. Why would you bother sending Clausewitz to write about Guevara or Smith and Ricardo to write about Marx?” This was a challenge to my fretting about epistemological issues of insider/outsiderness he easily dismissed. This period of time, the poetry, the impact, the multi-layeredness, and the feel of this film has made it difficult for me to write about. I found I could not answer one question that still nags at me from the trip.

We were driving along a winding country road in the Midwest. It was dark. We had been driving for more than 10 hours. The only illumination came from the dashboard instrument panel. It cast an eerie glow, silhouetting only the outline of his face, in profile to me as he drove. We talked in argumentative tones about why he made the kind of films he does and why I engage in the kind of academic projects I do. The conversation was electric
and somehow felt important. He asked me something that stopped my confident arguing in its tracks. He challenged, “What kind of change do you hope to effect among academics?” Digging some bravado up from the bottom of my throat, I answered something about challenging notions of objectivity. I knew it was weak, and I didn’t care. I had nothing better to say.

He always taunted my connection with the academy. He loved to tell people along the way to have caution, as they were now my subjects. He was the perfect anthropological subject, charismatic, full of evasion and the remaking of stories, remaking of himself. I don’t blame him or anyone subjected to the anthropological gaze. I am the snitch. It is my job to see him, to see through him and find some way to tell the world what makes him tick. I know, like that night in the car, I will come up with something to say, and I know the text won’t be the living reality that I saw.

A woman in the audience at a screening in San Antonio asked during the after screening discussion, “What is the message of this film, are we supposed to throw rocks?”

He answered, “That would be a start.”
My experience with this film changed me. It is not simply that anthropologists change their field site by their presence; it is also that our field sites change us. Those barroom conversations, watching so many viewers respond to the film affected me. It made me strive to be more, to have courage, to have faith. The courage I have internalized through these experiences affects me on multiple levels, in multiple situations. Today it affects me by my taking a deep breath and reporting. Reporting my ethnography fully conscious of my position, knowing I can speak with authority as myself, not a dispassionate observer. Why would you send Clausewitz to write about Guevara? Clausewitz would get it wrong. These words are my weapon, my rock. If only I knew what I was aiming for. Am I aiming at the academy as he suggested, or am I just reporting? Is this a challenge to anything, does it need to be?

If this were a film, these questions would be addressed in a much subtler way. Here, at the start of my dissertation, I long for it to begin with the sound of fire as well, but because text is limiting, I will just refer to this one.

FWOOAH
Chapter Two
(((i))) indymedia

We declare that we will make a network of communication among all our struggles and resistances. An intercontinental network of alternative communication against neoliberalism, an intercontinental network of alternative communication for humanity. This intercontinental network of alternative communication will search to weave the channels so that words may travel all the roads that resist. This intercontinental network of alternative communication will be the medium by which distinct resistances communicate with one another. This intercontinental network of alternative communication is not an organizing structure, nor has a central head or decision maker, nor does it have a central command or hierarchies. We are the network, all of us who speak and listen.12 - Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, at the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in Chiapas in 1996

There is no coincidence that these words of Subcomandante Marcos’ closing address to the Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism resemble those of the Independent Media Center (IMC), or indymedia, network described in this chapter. Indymedia was organized specifically to answer Subcomandante Marcos’ call.

When the Zapatistas first emerged on the world stage in January 1994, social movements around the world would never be the same. Tens of thousands of people around the world participated in movements of solidarity with the
Zapatista struggle, but in a radical new way. People marched and organized not simply in support of the Zapatistas, but as Zapatistas.

The Zapatistas held a series of encuentros\textsuperscript{13} in the mists of the Lacondon jungle beginning with the First Intercontinental Gathering for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in July 1996, to which the Zapatistas invited the social movements of the world to come and participate in creating a new way of thinking about politics, about engagement, about struggle. They gathered to think about struggles across the globe, not simply as connected, but as the same struggle. But not the same struggle as was supposed by the international gatherings where a global working-class was imagined or in the multicultural framework where everything is difference. In the framework of Zapatismo, autonomy and difference are considered strengths within a common conception of the oppression of neoliberalism, war and capitalism and resistance formed of creativity, vitality and strength. As the Zapatistas say, "One no, many yeses. One world in which many worlds fit." About 3,000 people from 43 countries attended this first encounter. A second encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism followed in July 1997; this time it was decentralized in Spain. At the second encuentro, in a social center in Barcelona, delegates worked specifically on moving forward with
the call for an alternative global communication network, trying to imagine what this network might look like.

Much of the discussion around the internal organization of the network took place in a visual manner that is not easy to relate in words. We started off by rejecting the traditional pyramid structure of news media where local sources feed up to region level, which feed to national and perhaps the global level before news trickled down again to other regions. In discussing what a network without a centre could look like but in recognizing that some people have more time and resources to dedicate to the flow of information than others, we came to use the human brain as an analogy. Here the many nodes have major paths that carry information between them but it is possible for any two nodes to form a connection and for any connection to improve in speed and the amount of information it can carry if this is needed. Therefore many minor paths also exist. There is also a two-way flow of information and feedback on the information that is sent.

This image flowed out of what the network already is in practice. We considered for instance the path a communiqué from Marcos might take after he has written it in the heights of some Ceiba tree in the mountains of the Mexican southeast. Perhaps it goes on horseback to the nearest settlement, from there by car to San Cristobal where it is typed onto a computer, translated and suddenly takes more paths, perhaps by fax to newspapers and solidarity groups on the one hand, on the other it jumps onto the Internet and runs down the telephone lines to listservs like Chiapas95. Here it replicates hundreds of times and makes its way onto a desktop in Ireland where it jumps onto web pages and more lists but also gets printed out and stuck up as a poster in a bookshop or reproduced and distributed in the _Mexico Bulletin_. Simultaneously it has arrived in Istanbul, where it is also printed out and travels by bus to some distant town and a union meeting. Multiply this path by thousands and consider all the alternatives and we see the network already exists without a centre, indeed the different
nodes have not only never met but can be unaware of each other’s existence (Flood, 1997).

When the second *encuentro* ended, the creation of this network did not stop. One of the more viral aspects of these *encuentros* is the spread of the message and the movement by the delegates when they return to their local communities. Zapatista activists continued to hold regional *encuentros* in their home communities. In the United States there were two significant events, media and democracy conferences. The first, the Freeing the Media Teach-In organized by the Learning Alliance, Paper Tiger TV, and FAIR in Cooperation with the Media & Democracy Congress, January 31 and February 1, 1997, in New York City. Marcos was invited to attend this conference but instead sent a videotaped message to those in attendance:

> We have a choice: we can have a cynical attitude in the face of the media, to say that nothing can be done about the dollar power that creates itself in images, words, digital communication, and computer systems that invades not just with an invasion of power, but with a way of seeing that world, of how they think the world should look. We could say, well, “that’s the way it is” and do nothing. Or we can simply assume incredulity: we can say that any communication by the media monopolies is a total lie. We can ignore it and go about our lives. But there is a third option that is neither conformity, nor skepticism, nor distrust: that is to construct a different way—to show the world what is really happening—to have a critical world view and to become interested in the truth of what happens to the people who inhabit every corner of this world.....

... In August 1996, we called for the creation of a network of independent media, a network of information. We mean a
network to resist the power of the lie that sells us this war that we call the Fourth World War. We need this network not only as a tool for our social movements, but for our lives: this is a project of life, of humanity, humanity which has a right to critical and truthful information (Marcos, 1997).

The media groups that attended that conference began thinking about this network of networks, collaborating and strengthening relationships between them and their projects. In October 1999, Austin, Texas, played host to the Grassroots Media Conference, at which some people focused their work on:

building a decentralized intercontinental network for alternative communications—making media for change and changing the media—as acts of education, imagination resistance, creativity, and movement building (Grassroots Media Network, 1999).

Then, at a Media Democracy conference in Austin, Texas, in 1999, people who worked with different radical media collectives in the United States attending the conference talked of the momentum building around plans for upcoming demonstrations in Seattle, Washington during the ministerial meetings of the World Trade Organization in November. At this conference, media activists decided to take concrete steps to create the intercontinental network of alternative media described by Marcos, using Seattle as a “test run.” The discussions were not simply speculation. Much planning was devoted not simply to outreach, movement needs or continuing the work, but
very specific planning for the technical infrastructure of multimedia
coverage and distribution.

Technically, the news of actions coming out of the [IMC] in
Seattle will be abstractly converted into print, audio, video,
graphics and photography. The available methods for
distributing these media include web, email, listserv,
RealAudio, RealVideo, MP3, satellite, audio and video tape,
disk, paper, mail, phone, fax, events and gatherings, and word
of mouth.

A one-stop-shopping website, to be mirrored on decentralized
URLs and servers, was proposed to connect people outside of
Seattle with the available news. The site would allow media
activists on the ground in Seattle to upload their particular
offerings through a web-based interface, and also allow any
community or media group outside of Seattle to download
whatever they would like to pass on (Grassroots Media
Network, 1999).

In the late 1990s, a constellation of factors produced an environment ripe for
the successful launch of a new “collective of collectives”—an
intercontinental network of alternative media at the service of social
movements. The most important of these being the rise of the Zapatistas,
but also networking of groups fighting against corporate globalization or
neoliberalism, Internet-based progressive media groups and a bit of software
called “Active” developed for a website set up to provide and coordinate
coverage of the “Carnival Against Capitalism” on June 18, 1999, which made “open publishing” possible.

Fueled by not wanting to see “our story” through a corporate lens, being told from behind police lines, dismissed by right wing media as uniformed rabble, plans were set in motion to open an indymedia center to collect coverage being produced by multiple media collectives working in Seattle and around the world. A storefront media center, decentralized media studios and an open publishing website were the production and distribution modes of this fledging independent media center (IMC), or indymedia. Originally conceived of being a one-off experiment, the up-to-the-minute rich multimedia coverage was widely successful, and participants imagined whether this model could be repeated in other cities.

Six years later, with some coding, cheap equipment, and the commitment of passionate volunteers, indymedia has been able to set up participatory websites providing news production, distribution and commentary in at least eighteen languages and across six continents. The indymedia network has grown from one website and media collective begun in Seattle to nearly 200 local IMCs around the world in 2006—with more joining the network every
week. All local media centers agree to a shared set of working principals. These principles declare among other things that indymedia is a grassroots, independent, non-corporate media collective that functions as a decentralized, leaderless organization informed by concepts of consensus and participation. The ability for anyone to "become the media" by uploading content to open publishing websites has been successful in terms of news coverage and distribution and as a communications strategy for an emergent global social movement.

The Internet is the most visible arena of indymedia. There is a global main Internet site, sites for all local IMCs, topic sites and project sites. The software designed to run IMC websites contains no obstacles to the immediate publication of material to the website by the producers themselves. All local IMC websites run similar free/open source software that is a technical manifestation of an ideology of increased democratization of the media. Jay, an indymedia volunteer, declared the internal working structure of the IMC as well as the manifestation of that structure in the code as, "fitting this movement like a glove." By utilizing the principles of the free/open source software movement and open publishing, indymedia is
manifesting the global justice movement’s desires for increased democracy, transparency, decentralization and communication.

Indymedia traces its roots to the Zapatista encuentros in Chiapas, Southern Mexico during the late 1990s. There are three main reasons for this. First, the Zapatistas, by pioneering the rapid dissemination of news and ideology through Internet-based email listservs, bulletin boards and activist websites, were able to build a transnational solidarity network and could sound the alarm and mobilize international assistance rapidly when they encountered state repression (Cleaver 1999). Secondly, the Zapatistas’ struggle, directed against capitalist-driven neoliberalism, is shared by the movement for global justice. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the Zapatistas envisaged an international activist communications network as I described earlier.

Indymedia’s mission statement on the ‘About Us’ page of the global website closely aligns the group with the Zapatistas’ vision:

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 (indymedia, 1999a).

The independent media center’s birth and growth has been directly linked to
the movement for global justice. The first posting to an indymedia website boldly declared:

The resistance is global ... a trans-pacific collaboration has brought this website into existence. The web dramatically alters the balance between multinational and activist media. With just a bit of coding and some cheap equipment, we can set up a live automated website that rivals the corporate’s. Prepare to be swamped by the tide of activist media makers on the ground in Seattle and around the world, telling the real story behind the World Trade Agreement (maffew and manse 1999).17

From the first day of transmission during the WTO protests in 1999, indymedia has grown and taken shape through the trajectory of other mass mobilizations of the global justice movement, for example: demonstrations that took place at the meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in Washington D.C. in April 2000 and in Prague, September 2000; the Group of Eight (G8) meeting in Genoa, Italy in June 2001; the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, Canada in 2001; World Economic Forum Meetings in New York City, January 2002; the International Day of Action to stop the war in Iraq on 15 February 2003; and the G8 meetings in Evian, Switzerland in June 2003. It is often acknowledged that indymedia functions best when providing multimedia, rapid-fire, diverse coverage of these large-scale mobilizations of the global justice movement.
The political left in the United States has explicitly defined corporate media as an enemy. Activists accuse the media of bias in selection of stories, important information being left out of stories and falsification of news information. Mainstream media is believed to be a pawn of corporate interests and government agencies. From this distrust, a desire for progressive reporting expresses itself in an independent media movement.

The contemporary independent media movement has numerous manifestations: through the publications of underground, small or alternative presses, independent radio networks, micro-radio, independent filmmakers, through zine writers and publishers, fliers, teach-ins, and radical pedagogies.

People say the Internet made indymedia possible. But it is not simply a factor of a new medium of communication. During the 1990s several Internet-based progressive independent media groups surfaced that shared indymedia goals, some process and most importantly people. I will focus on countermedia and Direct Action Media Network (DAMN!) to show the similarities and differences with these precursors to indymedia on the Internet.
Countermedia

Countermedia was an Internet-based news source specifically set up to provide journalism from a grassroots perspective during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1996.

Countermedia will focus on the protests, actions and issues ignored by conventional media sources, during this summer’s Democratic National Convention and beyond. We’ll document community struggles and protests as they occur, help reporters find out about demonstrations and local organizing campaigns, and make video images, photographs and reports available to mainstream media outlets and the alternative press, both locally and nationally (Countermedia, 1996).

Central to this mission statement is the focus on covering stories that are left out of mainstream news. The omission of information from the mainstream news outlets was also the driving force behind the creation of the indymedia center in Seattle. Countermedia did not have an open publishing policy. An editorial group located within a makeshift office in Chicago added reports to the website. Virtually anyone could become a Countermedia reporter by showing up to the office and offering content to the editorial team, but posts from afar were not possible. The news story that ended up being the central focus of the site, and that flowed from it into other online political forums was actually not of the demonstrations of the DNC, but instead of the illegal
arrests of Countermedia videographers. The news ultimately focused on the process of gathering news instead of the news events themselves.

    Rather than arrest demonstrators the police seemed to be focusing on the media makers. That surprised us, but in retrospect we realized what that said about both our novelty (kids running around with video cameras making sure the police stayed in line?!) and their appreciation of our effect (Jay, 2001, B).

Countermedia was a one-off experiment of having a physical center where independent journalists could work and collaborate on providing alternative news under one central umbrella. Countermedia stopped producing content after the events of the Chicago DNC. The project stopped in part because they imagined it as a one-time event coverage organization, but more precisely because most Countermedia organizers became indymedia organizers and continued their work under the umbrella of indymedia. This is not just a relationship of resemblance; it is directly connected through the people involved.

    Jeff, one of the main organizers of the Seattle IMC, was one of the arrested [Countermedia] videographers. My sense is that Jeff patterned his vision of the organizing of the IMC somewhat, if not primarily, on Countermedia (Jay, 2001, B).

**DAMN!**

Direct Action Media Network, or DAMN!, was a news-oriented website and email list that allowed the reader to participate in creating the news as well
as receiving it. It was very much in the same format as indymedia but began around two years earlier. I spoke with a founder of DAMN! and he told me most the organizers and producers with DAMN! started working on indymedia projects and let DAMN! go since indymedia was fulfilling the same role.

The Direct Action Media Network (DAMN!) is a multi-media news service that covers direct actions that progressive organizations and individuals take to attain a peaceful, open and enlightened society. DAMN! places its coverage of social justice actions into both historical and contemporary context so that any audience will find the events and issues covered accessible. The group operates as a non-hierarchical democratic institution to ensure that its operations reflect and augment the values of the projects and actions it reports. DAMN! accepts as an affiliate any media outlet, social justice organization, or individual reporter who agrees to provide or disburse news for the service. While DAMN! provides a free space for the exchange of affiliates’ information, it also reserves the right to determine its own original content (DAMN!).

DAMN!, as we see from this mission statement has parallels with indymedia’s social organization as a non-hierarchical organization and with the newsgathering focus on coverage of protest actions.

An important difference between Countermedia, DAMN! and indymedia is the open editorial policy. To differing extents, these groups all have an editorial function that restricts the free posting of content to the site or to the
news wires. This restriction was removed on the indymedia website using the open publishing software known as Active, produced mostly by the catalyst tech collective from Australia. Now, indymedia, depending on the local IMC, either allows unrestricted posting, or allows withdraw of postings only for issues such as: duplication, testing, grievous errors or hate speech. However, the IMC software codes offer no way to stop the immediate publication of material to the website. This position of openness embedded in the software itself exemplifies, in material form, a crucial underlying ideology of the organization, the increased democratization of the media. This openness is what was revolutionarily new and different about indymedia in contrast to the other groups that had come before.

Of course, ideals of openness and democracy are not as straightforward and uncontested as they appear. Openness, for example, is a practice continually being contested, negotiated and reconstructed within the indymedia network. Like any open space, indymedia attracts all kinds. While the network itself does have a particular political position, the principle of openness means including anyone, regardless of political position. But this is not how actual practice works. As I described above, editors remove posts that contain hate speech or errors, but more frequently are removed because they are not in
line with the political position of a local indymedia collective’s mission statement.

Because the websites do not have editors previewing the material before it is published, indymedia frequently has right-wing postings on the websites. These postings are made by persons whose political position either differs strongly from that of the indymedia collective or is simply provocative for disruption purposes. Website editors regularly remove this type of content from the websites’ newswires because it is not in line with the mission statement of the editorial guidelines of the group and is seen to degrade the quality of the information on and the experience of the website. However, the removal of posts happens after they have been published to the site. When posts are removed, they go onto another “hidden articles” page of the website which contains all the articles that have been hidden, so they are always available for viewing, but made one click further away.

Trolls are people who deliberately cause disruption on websites, either by baiting arguments or mass-posting articles contrary to the editorial policy of the website. Every local collective has its own trolls to deal with, and some span the network. Trolls are the source of much heated debate within
collectives over developing and maintaining editorial guidelines as well as the hiding of articles. Indymedia tech collectives have developed tools\textsuperscript{18} to try and cope with trolls through technical means.

The openness ideal, however continually contested, is crucial to why indymedia was able to grow from one site, like the three sites mentioned above, into a global network of sites and projects involving thousands of activists through a model of covering large-scale protests and later evolved into local ongoing media collectives. But this did not just occur magically through a miracle of code. It happened through years of hard work of alternative media organizers working to make the Zapatista vision of an intercontinental network a reality.

Indymedia grew in leaps and bounds following the trajectory of large demonstrations at summit meeting of institutions of global finance and trade. In the next sections, I will describe two examples of large-scale demonstrations of the global justice movement and the work of indymedia at those events—S26 in Prague and A20 in Quebec City.
September 26, 2000 (S26) was called a “Global Day of Action” against the policies and programs of the IMF and the World Bank. This day of action focused around meetings of these organizations taking place in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. Thousands of activists from across the globe convened in Prague for a week of activities sponsored by the Initiative Against Economic Globalization aimed at educating people about IMF/World Bank and disrupting the IMF/World Bank annual summit. On September 26, up to 20,000 people gathered to shut down the summit. Protesters maintained a circular blockade of the conference facilities in a similar fashion to the demonstrations in Seattle, and some protesters gained access to the summit complex itself. Protests were citywide and numerous; both peaceful resistance and active confrontation occurred with the single intent to “shut down the IMF, shut down the World Bank!,” as was chanted along the streets of Prague.

While these actions were taking place in Prague, scores of simultaneous solidarity protests occurred worldwide. Solidarity demonstrations occurred in, but were not limited to: Berkeley, Boise, Boston, Boulder, Bristol UK, Brussels, Burlington, Buffalo, Chicago, Calcutta, Dakka, Delhi, Denver,
Dresden, Duluth, Gainesville, Geneva, Hadley, Hartford, Los Angeles, Lisbon, Madrid, Malmo, Melbourne, Mumbai, Netherlands, New Brunswick, New York, Pittsburgh, Providence, Portland, San Francisco, San Paulo, Seattle, South Africa, Stockholm, Stavanger, Sydney, Tacoma, Tel-Aviv, Toronto, Turkey, Tucson, Psalla Sweden, Washington D.C., Wellington and Warsaw. The participants in these actions shared a common goal with the protesters in Prague: to shut down these institutions, and provide world citizens a more democratic future in the globalization process. The long list of cities worldwide testifies to the fact that this movement is highly decentralized—not simply decentralized in terms of its overall organization, but also in the locations of protest. Even if the police in Prague had been successful in quelling the protests, the protests would have gone on in all these other cities. This gives a new dimension to the phrase, “We are everywhere”—we are everywhere at once.

**praha.indymedia.org**

During the protests against the IMF and World Bank in Prague, media activists from indymedia established a collective that produced news information and networking distributed through the website praha.indymedia.org. Over 500 journalists registered to work with
indymedia and distributed information through this site. The website received over one million hits in the week surrounding these activities.

The Prague website carried print articles, photos, audio clips, video clips and responses to them. Free Radio Praha provided streaming radio programming that included live interviews with activists in the streets for instant updates on the situation in Prague, broadcasted around the world. There were several public access terminals set up around the city for demonstrators to write narratives about the protests and upload them directly from the street. Email listservs and chat rooms added to the electronic sharing of information and networking qualities of this website. Run on a shoestring budget (the Prague IMC spent about $4,000 gathered mostly through registration payments), the center ran through the in-kind work of organizers, volunteers and material donations they provided. Much of the information presented in this forum was recycled in other Internet venues, other listservs, news programs, and other free radio sites. The website’s servers, the workstations for journalists and technicians working on the maintenance of the site were located in a decentralized network of different workspaces, which included a bar, a café, a hotel and a meeting space in Prague, as well as being supported, technically by a global network of volunteers. These various
physical spaces in Prague gave the IMC the ability to collaborate and share resources with different Czech groups such as Café 9 and Radio Jeleni.

Despite all the seeming impossibilities, the Prague IMC became a living, breathing, thriving temporary autonomous organization for the days surrounding the September 26 protest. Over 500 journalists from at least thirty countries were included in the formation and operation of the IMC. There were over 2000 news items posted to the website in the three days surrounding S26, and the site has received almost a million hits from people both around the world and in Prague who were able to look there for literally up-to-the-minute reports about what was happening...in Prague, the indymedia phenomenon truly became global (Jay, 2000).

A20

April 20-22, 2001, the heads of state from thirty-four countries in the western hemisphere gathered in Quebec City, Canada, for the Summit of the Americas to negotiate the terms of the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). This agreement would create a free trade zone encompassing all of North and South America. Activists describe the FTAA as “NAFTA19 on Steroids.” This treaty is a part of a larger globalization trend of the increasing liberalization and transnationalization of trade and commerce. The summit, and the corresponding free trade zone, resembles a supra-nation state apparatus that would govern economic activities, not unlike the WTO, World Bank or IMF.
Coming one and a half years after Seattle and following several other large scale demonstrations of this emergent global movement, the police in Quebec and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) prepared long in advance for the arrival of demonstrators. The local commanding police officers went on a tour to interview police captains in cities that had previously been the location of anti-globalization protests to find out what worked and what did not in attempts to restrain the protesters and reduce potential damage. The CSIS infiltrated protest-organizing groups and conducted extensive research into the movement, its goals and tactics. The border between the U.S. and Canada became less permeable, with hundreds of demonstrators being denied entry into Canada. Video surveillance equipment was installed outdoors in Quebec. A database was compiled of all of the persons arrested at previous anti-globalization protests and those people were denied entry into Canada. A law was passed to criminalize the wearing of scarves and masks within the province. A two and a half mile long, ten-foot high security perimeter built from chain link fencing and cast concrete was erected to create a security zone within the old part of the city. Local police forces purchased new equipment including specialized guns that could fire tear gas canisters and plastic bullets, water cannons, and armored vehicles with a specialized arm that could lift a car. The security
costs related to the Quebec Summit ran over 100 million dollars. Three months before the Summit took place, the mayor of Quebec City declared he was sorry he had ever agreed to hold it there.

Opponents to the FTAA gathered in Quebec City employed a diversity of tactics to educate and disrupt the summit. There was an alternate summit held called the “Second People’s Summit of the Americas: Resisting Proposing Together.” The People’s Summit was a gathering of activists, experts and concerned citizens from around the world to present information, discuss strategies and prepare plans for further action. The People’s Summit also held a march on April 21. Several groups organized direct actions against the summit including La Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes (CLAC), who organized a “Carnival Against Capitalism.” CLAC held two marches during the summit and teach-ins and strategy sessions before and during the meetings. CLAC made it clear that they respected a “diversity of tactics.” Canadian and U.S. labor unions organized a march that was estimated to be 50,000 people strong. A women’s solidarity network organized a march and direct actions against the security perimeter. The Center for Media Alternatives Quebec (CMAQ) organized a media center in conjunction with the IMC, providing resources for more than 600 journalists from all over the world to work on print, photo, video
and audio content for the Internet and to provide independent reporting on the events for a worldwide audience.

quebec.indymedia.org

In Quebec, the IMC ran quite a bit differently than in Seattle or Prague. The media center was run by another group working collectively with indymedia, The Center for Media Alternatives Quebec (CMAQ), which organized and ran the media center. The center was funded by several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including a large Canadian NGO called Alternatives.

From April 20-22, 2001, Quebec City will host the third Summit of the Heads of State of the Americas. The summit will principally deal with the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Realizing that coverage of the event will contain the habitual slants of the mainstream media, and that Canadians have a right to know the entire story, the Center for Media Alternatives—Quebec 2001 (CMAQ) was created as an alternative to the misinformation that will most likely surround the event.

By accommodating a plurality of views on the FTAA and globalisation, and by providing Canadians and people around the world access to alternative information on what is being organized for Quebec 2001 (including demonstrating the links that exist concerning the impacts of Free Trade between the North and the South), the CMAQ will generate debate, serve as a catalyst for reflection and contribute to increased citizen engagement through its coverage of the various events that will surround Quebec City 2001 (CMAQ, 2001).
Through much collaboration and apparent frustration between indymedia activists and CMAQ organizers, a peace was negotiated, and a working relationship was established. As the week went on, media activists began streaming into the center from all over the world. From 75 registered journalists on Tuesday to 600 on Saturday. There were definitely tensions at the nightly spokes-meetings between CMAQ people and IMC people.

Numbers of journalists and people attended nightly general meetings started to rapidly increase, many people having had the experience of working at an indymedia center at a big demonstration before, the consensus process struggled to keep up with rising tensions. When a question of how to run dispatch was brought up and suggestions were made, a woman said, “This is how it has worked at other IMCs in the past...” and then explained her suggestion. It appeared frustrating for the CMAQ organizers not to be able to go through their own learning curve and to be inundated with people (mainly Americans) who “knew how to do this.”

When the biggest news day, April 20, came around, I was in the media center uploading video to the Internet that was brought in to the center from videographers out shooting in the street. Early that day, the CMAQ website crashed and we were not able to access it even from there. Something
happened that I thought was very interesting: reporters started to post their news to whatever site, out of the 60 indymedia sites that they thought was appropriate. For example, I uploaded all the video to the Vermont site, as it seemed to be working the best and had special FTAA coverage, including streaming live audio that was attracting a lot of listeners. The outcome of all of this was decentralized publishing. The main indymedia site (indymedia.org) carried breaking news and links to sites with special coverage. This structure of coverage mirrored the interconnected yet decentralized nature of the movement. The demonstrations against the meeting in Quebec were located in Vermont, San Francisco, and Washington D.C.

The meeting of CMAQ and IMC attempted to bring together two decentralized cells. It was difficult, and many times it was fraught with tensions, but it did in fact work out and it produced amazingly rich reporting—reporting that happened, at times, under dire conditions. Late on Saturday April 21, police and protester skirmishes surrounded the media center. The media center was contaminated with tear gas. The medical center that had been located across the street was raided by police and the lobby of the media center then became the de-facto medical center.
Tensions ran high that night as lines of riot police marched in front of the media center doors, and yet, journalists who were effectively locked into the media center continued to hammer out content and distribute it around the world from the CMAQ press room.

For the past 30 or so minutes police have been spraying tear gas down the stairs toward the CMAQ. As people have run into the office from the streets they have brought the gas with them. It is miserable, but we continue to work. There is something truly unique about the dedication of the peeps at the CMAQ. The room reeks of gas. Everyone is coughing and blowing their noses. People are calling for medics in a variety of spaces. Outside in the hallway, people escaping the gas are standing. It is impossible to get to the restroom to clean the gas off, without inhaling more. My lungs are so damaged from the past two days, that I am having a terrible time breathing and I am only in the office. I can’t go outside. My face is also itching again and I feel terrible...To be perfectly honest, I can’t really think right now. I’m writing it to tell all of you, that we will continue producing coverage. Even when it is really difficult to, even when what’s going down in the streets—what’s going down upstairs, or in the building itself. We have to, because the corporate media won’t (Mitchell, 2001).

I write this section in the first person because in Quebec I learned an important lesson about indymedia. Indymedia is not only a website of news as I had been thinking of it; but also is a physical place, the media center. A pressroom full of people and computers pieced together—bought, borrowed, begged. Radio reporters with tape recorders and mini-discs uploading audio, producing radio programming for web and broadcast. Videographers with all
variety of gear and experience creating video for web and documentaries. Print reporters who produced online articles as well as a daily broadsheet of news for distribution throughout the city. Photographers, who had set up a dark room and slide scanners. Technicians struggling to keep the workstations and website running at the incredibly demanding capacity of the production and reception of rich media content. Technicians around the globe were busy maintaining the websites and managing the flow of information. Dispatchers on cell phones, walkie-talkies, phones, intercoms, and loud voices, communicating updates of action on the street passing it along, to ensure the safety of journalists and that news got coverage. At times there were others—security officers, medics, patients, other journalists covering journalists, friends, lovers, children. People from all over, working to make media and distribute it.

These examples are intended to convey a sense of what it is like at a large-scale indymedia center located at a major protest. These experiences are, as I said, the exemplary moments for the success and growth of the indymedia network. More and more, they do not resemble the daily practice of indymedia, as local collectives work in ongoing relationships with their local communities. This dichotomy—the global and the local—is straddled by
indymedia, but not resolved. Often times, founding members of a local indymedia collective cut their teeth at one of these large-scale centers and return home full of viral enthusiasm to spread the excitement and start a local center. The fast-paced, multimedia coverage of a large demonstration that demands differences be smoothed out quickly, as was the case in Quebec, cannot be mirrored in an ongoing way in a local setting and this produces challenges.

Indymedia coverage is often criticized both by readers and by collective members for being too focused on protests, missing the important long-term work of campaigns. A vein of this critique also finds fault for highlighting large protests in other countries rather than local struggles. A local indymedia site is potentially more likely to have a center column story about protests against the WTO in Hong Kong than to have one about low-income citizens’ right to health care issues in its own community. Because of this trend, I have heard local community organizers comment that the coverage that indymedia provides is not relevant to their communities, their struggles. One woman I spoke with about this issue agrees but still thinks indymedia is important and valuable for its community. But what community is that?
There is really no way to talk about the “indymedia community” without making generalizations that obviously cannot always be true all the way across the network; South Africa’s IMC, Brasil’s IMC and Portland, Oregon’s IMC are obviously going to differ extremely in character. However, there are some trends in the indymedia population that constitute a “typical” case and are important to point out, especially in the U.S. and European collectives. Indymedia collective members, people who do significant amounts of labor for indymedia, have the ability to donate time to a cause. These people are not desperate for money to eat or to live, but also don’t have the high overhead to maintain a family on a big budget. In other words they tend to be middle class, young and without children. Also, they must have free time to do the work, so they are not spending all their time toiling at a paid job, or if they do have full time jobs, they can squeeze off time to devote to IMC. Examples of the individuals with the ability to have flexible time include: students, part-time workers, technology workers, people without work permits and the unemployed. Indymedia activists tend to be educated, literate and comfortable with technology. They have knowledge of and access to computer and media technology and to the Internet. Like in other highly technical arenas, men typically dominate these spaces. Predominately they are English speaking, something which presents
real issues in international forums, on email lists, chat and websites.

Indymedia has tried to address these thorny issues of diversity in a couple of ways. Indymedia has a translation workgroup for feature stories on the global site and other translation needs and encourages people to publish stories and post email to listservs in more than one language. Indymedia also tries to address issues of local plurality by having a diversity statement all new IMCs have to address in the formation of their collectives:

How does the makeup of your collective reflect the diversity of the local community (e.g., in relation to gender-, sexual-, spiritual-, and/or cultural-identity)? If your group currently does not represent the diversity of the local community, particularly in relation to groups who are underrepresented in mainstream society and denied access to vehicles of expression, what steps will be taken to address this on an ongoing basis? What steps will be taken to involve individuals in workfields new to them? What measures will be taken to overcome a gendered work division?

By having new IMCs think through these issues at the outset of organizing a local collective, indymedia wants to insure diverse participation, but for the reasons I outlined above, the majority of indymedia producers have been and remain a certain, privileged, subset of potential participants.
Looking Back To Look Forward

I started this chapter by describing the steps this dream of a communication network walked from the Lacondon Jungle to the streets of Seattle to become indymedia. Andrew Flood, who wrote a report back from the media table at the Barcelona *encuentro*, listed some of the goals for the new intercontinental alternative media network outlined by the Zapatistas and wrote an extensive list of questions and concerns raised by participants in those meetings. Here are some of the main points, so that we may consider how indymedia has fared as an experiment in being such a network:

- How do we minimize language and cultural barriers?
- How do we prevent a flood of useless information which drowns the useful content in a sea of words?
- Can we have different layers of information so more information can always be obtained from summaries?
- What sort of feedback mechanisms are possible?
- How can we show solidarity between the different nodes of communication?
- How can we develop the many media forms?
- Can we construct a network of exchange of people so those traveling can come into contact with local activists?
- How do we prepare to defend the nodes of our network and the network itself from the repression which will inevitably follow success? (Flood, 1997).

I do not think it is appropriate to forward my opinion on each one of these items about the level to which indymedia has or has not addressed these questions. Rather I leave them as open-ended questions and list them here as a reminder of the forward thinking about difficult issues that could arise.
with such a network that was done at the beginning of the construction of this intercontinental alternative media network made for us—all of us who speak and listen.
Intersection Two

“Trading Freedom: The Secret Life of the FTAA”
Produced by indymedia
2003, digital video, 58 minutes

Quebec City, Canada, April, 2001—A close-up shot of a woman’s face singing. She has FTAA written on her cheek with a red circle around and a line through it. The camera pulls out and we see a group of demonstrators sitting on the ground in an alleyway on Rue St Jean. A shot of a line of riot police, with shields and batons pans across to the sitting demonstrators, so close to the police with their fingers raised in the air in peace signs. A man in a gas mask sits in front of the line of police. Slow, steady music plays in the background. A shot taken from a different angle up high and across the street shows police lines across the entrance to the alley and the protesters sitting in a semicircle in front of them. In front of the frame, a bubble floats by. A close up shot from yet another angle of a group of police, one officer holds a megaphone in the air. His voice above the music says, “Please clear St. Jean St. We are asking you to move.” The protesters reply, “pour quoi, pour quoi?” The back and forth continues with the audio becoming muddled. Fade to black.

An older woman protestor sitting near the police lines along a wall explains why she is there “to protest the deficiencies of the trade agreement being
negotiated in secrecy.” Camera shot from within the group of demonstrators pans across them to the police lines. Back to the woman; “It won’t be to anyone’s benefit, except the people that have money.”

The slow, methodical music continues. A police officer adjusts his gas mask, scratching at his chin; a young male demonstrator wears goggles on his head and a Keffiyeh scarf around his shoulders. His fingers are draped across his mouth as he waits. A long shot from behind the demonstrators shows many people, some walk around, several are carrying video or still cameras. Tension in the scene mounts.

A young woman with long black hair and red eyes tells us full frame that, “my face is burning, my heart is racing.” We see the front line of the demonstrators as a young woman in a gas mask carrying a video camera walks to the front, turns her back to us and takes some footage. “My legs are getting a bit weak.” She is shooting someone’s cardboard sign that reads, “Democracy is not a wall.” The shot zooms in on the sign. “Grenades like this, they’ll throw these into crowds of people of 20, 30 people.” A young man holds up what appears to be a tear gas canister, about 6 inches in length. We see him only for a moment, standing in the street. He has a bandana around his neck and a NO ZLEA (French for FTAA) button on his sweatshirt. Back to the alleyway, the shot is from above, the footage is gritty, played in slow motion, someone is waving no at the police. “They try to disperse crowds by throwing explosive devices into them.” Something shoots forward and hits a demonstrator in the knee. The explosion is the loudest thing in the scene so far, but its audio is warped out.

Lines of riot police advance banging on their shields together. The shot is very close-up, right along the front of the shields. The air is smoky. The shot is skewed, confusing. The previous music has stopped. The soundtrack here is layered sounds of the police batons, synchronized with the image of them beating their shields and someone shouting “Move!” very deeply. A cacophony of explosions rings out. Even though it is clearly not the live sound of the event, the rhythmic beating of the batons and the explosions are timed perfectly with the police hitting their shields and firing large cloudy bursts of tear gas into the air.

The crowd quickly turns and moves out of the area. Shots from different cameras are quickly intercut showing various perspectives: from right in
front of the police to up high at the end of the block, from the side of the lines, from the middle of the intersection and from the middle of the group. But always, on the demonstrators' side of police lines. A protester's hand in the peace sign is shown in front of the lines. An explosion from the police guns hits it. What are they firing? Tear gas, concussion grenades, rubber bullets? It looks like all three. The soundtrack gets really layered and disorienting as the gas clouds fill the intersection. A shot from next to the police front line shows an older man in the fore of the frame taking a photo of them. A final loud explosion—a shot from across the street shows the same protestors getting his hand hit by the explosive. Fade to black.

Text screen:
Severe traumatic injury from exploding tear gas bombs as well as lethal toxic injury have been documented... in vitro tests have shown o-chlorobenxylidenemalononitrile to be both clastogenic and mutagenic.
—Journal of the American Medical Association

The music from before the chaos begins again, a little more upbeat and with drumming this time. An overview shot from above of the intersection. From street level, we see a drum corps enter the intersection with a bass drum and few snares and several white bucket drums. They are all wearing goggles and have white and black checked bandanas on, some around their faces. Their drumming seems to match the soundtrack playing. Extreme close-up light reflecting of riot cop's helmet's visor, you can see his gas mask eyeholes inside, but not really his eyes. We see again in slow motion, the projectile that ended the first section of this scene. It clearly flies in low, hits one demonstrator in the knee, and then hits the ground, spinning around and exploding further, sending out sparks like a blooming ground flower firework. The video artifacts, evidence of signal noise from the loud explosion. People in the frame are running away. A walking close-up of a young man and woman as they walk quickly away in reverse, he has his hand on her back and his other hand in the air, palm out. She is in tears, sobbing, her left hand up in a peace sign. He is shaking his head no; another explosion goes off, she screams. Cut to three men running from one side of the street towards the camera. The one to the far left is wearing a red jacket, a red helmet and a gas mask, he is holding a camera and wearing some kind of credential, the one on the right dressed all in black, a black bandana across his face. The one in the middle
is dressed in a very large furry pink suit and is carrying a oversized, furry pink elephant head in one hand and an orange helmet in the other with him as he runs. This is a very elaborate elephant costume. They run to the camera’s side of the street, stop and the man in black pours water from a bottle into the eyes of the man in the elephant suit, to wash away tear gas. There is anti-capitalist graffiti all over the wall behind them. We audibly hear the man having his eyes treated groan above the soundtrack as he shakes his head to rinse his eyes.

Cut to extreme close up pan across the shields of riot police wearing helmets with visors down, gas masks and carrying large batons held up in the air. The camera walks around and we see it is a whole group of these police assembled in a square, fade to text screen:

Security costs:
5148 Canisters of o-chlorobenzylidene malononitile (CS) gas were used on protesters during the Summit of the Americas.

900 rubber bullets were fired.

6000 police and additional armed forces were deployed.

452 arrests were made.

Security costs were in excess of $100 million.

***

This scene lasts less than four minutes.

The most compelling aspect of this sequence is the use of multiple camera angles. There are at least 10 different camera angles on the baton beating part of the scene. This attests to the fact there were that many videographers who contributed footage to this collective film project on the
scene. In the footage itself, lots of cameras are visible, especially on the front line of the demonstrators. Even as they back away, cameras are held high in the air, pointed at the police lines. More cameras than could ever be mobilized by a corporate news crew, in places corporate media would never go. A more complete picture. A thicker texture. Cameras on the front lines. Cameras as demonstrators. I was interviewed for an article on indymedia video activism in Quebec for *Lip Magazine* where I describe this experience:

LAST SPRING, tens of thousands of anti-capitalist activists descended on the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. They came from all across North and South America to protest the intended formation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), a multilateral agreement critics argued would bolster trade at the expense of democracy. They wore the usual gas masks and goggles and brandished banners. But amid the chants of protesters in the city’s narrow streets, other sounds could be heard: the beeps of hundreds of hand-held video cameras. “In Quebec, so many people in the crowd had cameras that it appeared that groups of journalists were getting tear-gassed instead of groups of demonstrators,” said Tish Stringer, a Houston-based video activist who attended the Summit.

In the year and half since the Battle in Seattle, protests have erupted everywhere global trade zealots have tried to assemble, be it the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Prague or the World Economic Forum in Melbourne. These events also mark a resurgence of video activism, and they may well have been the most widely disseminated protests ever. That fact is due, in part, to the creation of the Independent Media Centers (IMCs), a global network of activist websites and alternative media spaces, which allow any self-proclaimed journalist to
post articles, photos, audio, and digital video footage. With indymedia sites multiplying, the proliferation of video cameras in Quebec City came as no surprise to some. As Stringer puts it, “a video camera has become one of those objects you pack for a protest” (Rinaldo, 2001).

Is this the camcorder revolution suggested in the introduction to this dissertation? Thousands of activists now armed with video cameras will now be able to change the world? A video camera has become an effective tool for protest along with gas masks and placards?

It may not be a revolution in the historical sense, but it has changed the landscape of political action. The video camera seen as a tool for protest has also given us these movies that are different. Exactly how they are different is this abundance of perspectives, a thicker texture. This echoes anthropological notions of thick versus thin ethnographic description. In thick ethnography, an anthropologist has spent extended time deeply embedded with his or her field site and is able to describe events “thickly” with lots of detail and related analysis. In these films, many people are present for a short amount of time, but weave their related and sometimes contradictory stories together. It would be impossible to spend extended time inside this moment as the anthropologist because it is a moment; these are temporary experiences, which could only be thickly captured by a
multiplicity of voices. I will discuss in much greater detail how these movies are made and how the production process also marks them as different in the following chapter.

This four-minute scene is doing many jobs at once. It’s letting demonstrators on the street explain to you in their own words why they are there and how it feels. It is documenting police brutality. It is showing people’s willingness to stand ground against formidable police presence. It is using research to show facts on text screens. It shows the jovial, carnivalesque atmosphere on the streets even under harsh conditions: the bubbles, the drummers, even a gassed giant pink elephant. The interesting uses of audio and rapid editing style convey a sense of the chaos of the moment. The collaborative production process was made visual in “Trading Freedom” by using footage from multiple cameras creating a multi-vocal story. A multi-vocal story that echoes the political aims and values of the movement itself.
Chapter Three
This is What Democracy Looks Like

We are not filmmakers producing and distributing our work. We are rebels, crystallizing radical community and weaving a network of skin and images, of dreams and bone, of solidarity and connection against the isolation, alienation and cynicism of capitalist decomposition.
—Big Noise

It was nearly dawn at the end of our last night working on the film “Trading Freedom.” I was laying half-asleep on the floor, waking every few minutes to preview another connection, another sequence, making a little change here or there. We were editing the final timeline of video segments together and had to finish in time to turn out a hard copy before four of us left to drive for six hours to the Bay Area to catch planes back to our respective homes. We were in an outbuilding nicknamed ‘the dojo,’ on two hundred acres of land at the highest point of Interstate 5 in southern Oregon. We had temporarily taken over the dojo and a series of computers connected through a handmade wireless network. Families of shrews lived off our chips and coffee remains and just miles away the largest wildfire America had seen in years burned, sometimes turning the sky apocalyptic shades of orange and purple.
Eight of us—the “Trading Freedom” editorial collective—had gathered in Oregon. The collective possessed a unique set of skills: hotshot editor, software jockey, mental encyclopedia, anarchogeek, global networker, convivial comedian, audio wizard, hardware tamer and wireless prodigy. We had come to that two-week *encuentro*\(^24\) to attempt to finish the film. (I still can’t say it’s finished, or that it ever will be, even though we have distributed hundreds of copies.) Most of us had been in Quebec City in 2001, challenging a state establishment that was trying to push a Free Trade Agenda at the Summit of the Americas. I had spent most of my time there in the indymedia center working on one of the video terminals, where we uploaded breaking news to the Internet while gathering contact information and log sheets—the raw material of “Trading Freedom”—from video activists. Tear-gas-clouded memories still loomed large in our minds a year later as we struggled, far away in Oregon, to tell that history to the outside world. Those memories offered us a reckoning and gave us the drive to make the project effective—because we had time to try and stop the Free Trade Area of the Americas.\(^25\)

In Oregon, we were engaging in a process that turned out to be far more significant than the film could ever be: collective production. We were
working to turn an unruly archive of tapes from the far corners of the Americas—Akwesasne, Chiapas, Quebec City, Sao Paulo, and Tijuana—into something coherent, inspirational and important. It seemed a crazy, impossible dream at the outset. We felt as if we were stumbling through a dense wood, only occasionally coming into the odd moonlit clearing. Yet our project managed to fall into place. We used and made fun of the consensus process, struggled with the desire to push our own agendas, shared common resources, felt tensions, had successes. What we did might simply be called 'learning to work together' and is, of course, practiced all over the world, but through our collective labor we challenged established notions of film authorship and tried to forge what we believe to be a better world. Many people have asked me to explain exactly what I mean by collective production; this chapter provides an overview of some collective modes of production, distribution and reception practiced within the indymedia video team.

My particular focus is on a collective media project—the indymedia video team—where I investigate the collective mode of production, distribution, reception and representation used by IMC video activists. The films produced by indymedia are oppositional in their content, but it is the
production process itself—an embodiment of direct democracy through collective action—that distinguishes them. I use the term ‘direct democracy’ to describe a method of taking control of forces affecting one’s life through action, as opposed to electoral politics. In the case of IMC film production, the action involves assembling information and introducing it into the media, rather than passively accepting what is produced for consumption.

The title of this chapter is taken from the film of that name, co-produced by the Seattle Independent Media Center and Big Noise Films, which documents the demonstrations that shut down the ministerial meetings of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, Washington, in November 1999. The film ushered in an important, new transnational production process and was made from over 350 hours of footage captured by 100 video activists, a happening described by Rick Rowley, a founder of Big Noise Films and co-director of “This is What Democracy Looks Like” says, “We had more cameras in the street than any corporate news agency could possibly mobilize. This amazing collection of activist video footage gives the film a scope and intimacy that the corporate media could never achieve” (Democracy, 2000). The film documents a watershed event in contemporary politics and purports to evidence a new kind of democracy afoot in America.
I believe that it also heralds a new kind of democracy in media-making, one that allows multiple insiders to share their perspectives without a corporate filter, working collectively to weave together the stories of our time.

In *An Accented Cinema* (2001), Hamid Naficy describes media collectives and their work, investigating their collective modes of production, distribution and reception. While Naficy’s book focuses primarily on ethnic filmmakers and collectives, I believe his analysis can be applied to the IMC video collective as well. In the case of Naficy’s research, the common element in the collectives is an ethnic identity. In the case of indymedia, the common thread is oppositional politics. Cinema is *accented* when it is differentiated from mainstream cinema by content, process or reception. Naficy follows Walter Benjamin in arguing that it is not sufficient to have oppositional politics or content, one must also have oppositional production practices. The work of film collectives is *accented* because the production process differentiates it from a mainstream studio-oriented production model. The IMC video team has an accented process because it utilizes a collective mode of production, which Naficy defines as:

> Working collectively and considering filmmaking to be a type of ‘collective enunciation’ in which filmmakers and audiences are conjoined by their membership in communities of address ... if the postindustrial mode tends to situate the directors as
manufacturers and the spectators as consumers, the accented mode's collective enunciation and reception potentially blur the line that separates producers from consumers (2001).

By using collective modes of production to make films, IMC is able to critique the mainstream media's production process by "inserting politics at the point of origination" (ibid.) of the work through the modalities used to create the films.

Corporate media attempts to dehistoricize and depoliticize its production and distribution processes. It conceals its political and economic location, presenting itself as an impartial professional observer. This posture of distance and objectivity is the aesthetic counterpart to centralized and hierarchical corporate production process. Against this model, IMC video is conscious of itself as part of the political moments it documents. It imagines its production, distribution, style and content to be extensions of broader movements for cultural, political and economic democratization. The result is a non-hierarchical production process, a decentralized distribution process, an intimate style and polyvocal content.
Collective Modes of Production

In opposition to the highly centralized and hierarchical production model of corporate media, IMC video production is built around massively parallel collaborative storytelling. Indymedia videos usually involve hundreds of loosely coordinated, autonomous camerapersons and dozens of editors sharing directorial decisions. This collaborative process produces a form and content very different from corporate news media. IMC cameras are not positioned as impartial outside observers, they are passionate participants in the events they document and their perspective is intimate and engaged instead of distant and objective. In place of the monotonal voice of corporate news, collaborative editing produces polyvocal, textured videos employing many different styles, ideological shades and forms of address.

These high tech activists use video to challenge the mainstream media, to disseminate information and news about events that are otherwise marginalized or not covered, to propagandize, and to document police abuse. They produce everything from agitprop shorts and news-style stories to documentaries and experimental works (Rinaldo, 2001).

An IMC video team at a major mobilization has three main functions: to provide a modicum of safety for demonstrators by documenting police brutality and creating a legal archive; to provide coverage of breaking news
by uploading content to the Internet and perhaps creating daily programs for satellite uplink; and to produce feature-length video documentaries of the events. In one approach to collective production, small groups work together and are responsible for taping and editing a discrete segment of a particular event. This model can be thought of as an affinity group, a term borrowed from the direct action wing of the social movement. Production by an affinity group model mirrors the social organization of the overall global justice movement: a horizontally articulated, decentralized, dispersed network of autonomous, small-scale cells. Small-scale groups gather footage from the streets, interviews and background material. An IMC video team would have several of these cells operating as a swarm to cover a large event.

In this next section, I weave together voices of indymedia videographers and observers to tell the story of the video production process. This method perhaps conveys a sense of the differing perspectives and processes used at different events. Every indymedia video production experience has followed its own path, by putting together multiple stories from different events, I hope to present a more complete version than a single story can convey. First, Jeff describes his experience with Whispered Media, a small
group of videographers he worked with in Seattle:

It was humbling to take on the task of covering such a great event as the shutdown of the WTO meetings and to feel like you had done the subject any justice. With your manual focus, your microphone, your headphones and your hand-held camera—you did the best you could. Some were more focused on witnessing what the police were doing for legal purposes. Some were gathering footage for their own projects. We in Whispered Media were trying to do both (Jeff, 2001).

At a protest, the local IMC will generally have an established video team; if it does not, one will be developed during the events. To ensure coverage of simultaneous events and to accomplish diverse goals, communication must be established between members of the team. This is done through face-to-face meetings:

What ended up happening was we started to have some meetings, trying to get it together. They were in this really small, cramped garage space. Everybody was smoking cigarettes, it was full of smoke and this sweaty, European-sort-of-everybody-and-their-own-ego, ‘I’m going to shoot the revolution’ kind of thing (Luther, 2002).

Meetings are conducted with varying degrees of formality, using consensus decision-making models, a facilitator and a specified agenda. For instance, items on the agenda may be: make plans to assign coverage of events, inventory the technical status of the equipment, review material gathered for
the day and delineate tasks to accomplish the main objectives of the video team:

Like all things at the center, the process has been precarious, democracy teetering on the edge of anarchy. There are some rules—people raise their hand to speak—but the collective believes everyone should have his or her say. An open, representative form of media may be a worthy ideal, but in reality is often a messy thing (Beckerman, 2003).

When people come into the IMC with video footage, certain steps are, ideally, followed: gather contact information, make a duplicate of select excerpts from the footage, log a detailed description of all the footage captured, plug people into working on daily segments, and upload important breaking news footage to the Internet site. The difficulty of this process is exemplified here:

What we did to make dubs of tapes was set up a couple of camcorders strung together. There are plenty of issues on the ground with different kinds of formats used: 8mm, Hi-8, Digi 8, PAL, NTSC, Mini DV, or DV-Cam. It was complicated to find ways to make dubs. Also the environment was really hectic, so asking someone to sit down for three hours to make select tapes was kind of difficult (Kali, 2002).

Accomplishing these tasks requires a space in which to meet, the technology and tape stock to make the duplicate tapes, a system for maintaining records, access to editing equipment and to the Internet, a board listing events that
need coverage, coordinators and staff. IMCs tend to be strong on some of these points and weak on others. Staffing is probably the most difficult problem, especially when people are drawn away from the media center when the protests are very active. When no one is willing to stay on, some of the important tasks mentioned above, such as uploading breaking news segments, are not accomplished.

At some large-scale IMCs there has been collaboration between the IMC video team and a satellite broadcast network. This allows for daily news segments from the demonstrations to be aired via satellite around the world:

**During the 2001 political conventions in Philadelphia and Los Angeles, thirty-five hours of programs were transmitted live, using roll-in tapes from the day’s events... In diversity, in depth of content, in exposing the contradictions of the Republican convention, the IMC Programming far surpassed anything either commercial networks or Jim Lehrer could offer. The entire operation is done with a small grant from Free Speech TV and money from a few private donors, even though the production is on a scale that would cost mainstream news outlets millions (Halleck, 2002).**

Groups that have helped IMC air its footage on satellite include Deep Dish TV, America’s first public access satellite network, and Free Speech TV, a progressive station on the dish network. Free Speech TV and Deep Dish also serve as distributors to public access TV stations that, in turn, pick up
and re-broadcast the feed on their local station. Free Speech TV also offers the option of watching IMC films on their streaming video server via the Internet. Both groups regularly air socially progressive material and political documentaries. Collaboration of this sort strengthens both groups by sharing content and distribution of materials, which decreases reliance on corporate access or the need to purchase airtime.

The production of daily shows can also be accomplished through the affinity group model. Whispered Media’s work in Seattle exemplifies this approach: three videographers plan what to cover, work together to capture the footage and at the end of each day edit a four-to-five-minute segment. This segment is put together with others made by different groups, beginning and end credits are added, and a half-hour show results. During the World Economic Forum meetings in New York City, a staffer from Free Speech TV was on site at the IMC to do the technical work of getting the show on to the satellite. Each evening most of the videographers would meet at the IMC to discuss the footage they had shot and what they thought would create a good segment. Using a consensus approach, the group would decide what the show would be and the small groups would edit their respective segments to put the show together for broadcast the following morning. Work on the
production of a full-length film, utilizing the vast archive of footage
gathered during a mobilization, is generally carried out by the hosting IMC,
when most videographers have gone home.

Although the segment model outlined above greatly enhances the ability to
decentralize the editing process and complete the project in a timely manner,
it is not universal. Each project proceeds in its own unique fashion, as did
the “Trading Freedom” project mentioned at the outset of this chapter. We
were a decentralized group unified by interest rather than locale, and did
most of our work online before meeting up in person in Oregon. However,
the editing team always fully agrees upon the finished product agreed upon
by the editing team; it is imperative that everyone agrees on all aspects of
the film. This is the most difficult stage of IMC video production, as it is
messy and antithetical to traditional notions of filmmaking:

> We would edit our segment and then gather everyone around to
look at it and get feedback on it. Then we would try to
incorporate that feedback, making draft after draft. Consensus
is difficult because just one person saying, ‘I really don’t
approve of this’ can take it out of the project altogether. There
is definitely a letting go of the filmmaker’s ego, your own
vision of the project, for the collective vision (Kali, 2002).

It is important to note that all this is accomplished without any substantial
financial resources. This is something most readers will find difficult to
believe: indymedia has no real budget apart from the occasional small grant, resources and materials coming from the in-kind donations of individual media activists. In general, IMC activists pay their own transportation expenses, bring their own equipment, buy their own tape stock and pay the shipping expenses to get materials to the IMC editing team. Running on a minimal budget has advantages and disadvantages. It is an advantage that films and shows are produced without the drain on creativity known as ‘searching for funding.’ Among the disadvantages is the constant need for more and better facilities and complete reliance on a volunteer workforce. Volunteers tend to be erratic; no matter how much passion there is for the project; most producers have to juggle their media endeavors with work, school and family obligations. There is a discriminatory element in this structure; only those with the time and means are able to participate in the project:

The micro example of this film project is a good one. We are all about making everybody the media and we did make a hundred people the media … but who didn’t we make the media in this project is really the question to be asking I think. It is hard when there is so much work being done by volunteers who are overworked to have extra time, not only finding those other people but also training them. It is so much easier to just do the work than it is to go out and find those communities that aren’t already participating and empower them to get involved (Kali, 2002).
Nevertheless, some participants come to the project without previous skills, secure in the belief that they can work successfully in the IMC, learning as they go, fuelled by the passion for getting out the message:

I had never done something like this before so I wasn’t really sure what to expect. Even something like showing up in Quebec City—I had never done anything like that before either. Running video streams live out of a media center that five hundred people were using and trying to get as much footage as we could out, I had never done something like that either. I guess I tend to just throw myself into these kinds of situations and just hope that as long as you do a lot of hard work it is just going to work out. And for the most part I think that has been true (Yossarian, 2002).

Collective Modes of Distribution

Distribution of a finished IMC feature is also accomplished through collective means. Indymedia produced five hundred VHS copies of the film “Praha 2000: IMF and World Bank Under Siege.” They were shipped in small batches to local IMCs, individuals, producers and co-operating media organizations, which then sold the tapes. Local IMCs screened the film and sold copies at their events. The funds raised by these sales directly supported the media makers as well as the local groups who sold the tapes: “Ultimately you can make it break even and pay for the next project without being a horrible capitalist” (Luther, 2002). The “Praha 2000” video is
distributed through IMC video and Free Speech TV websites. Distribution is often the major obstacle for independent video producers and collectivization of distribution reduces dependence on commercial distributors, enabling these films to be circulated sometimes greatly surpassing what would be possible in a commercial distribution deal.

Tapes and DVDs are not the only IMC distribution media; several emergent technologies shape collaborative modes of distribution. On 15 February 2003, the New York City IMC spearheaded an international video file sharing program when millions gathered in the streets around the world in a globally coordinated day of action against the United States invasion of Iraq. The IMC ran a server for videographers to upload and download video content using file transfer protocol (ftp). This project utilized an open source video codec that allowed for high-resolution playback after download. With all participants using the same codec, material could easily be shared and seamlessly put together. This project’s material was used by Democracy Now!, Free Speech TV and displayed using a giant video projection unit at the demonstrations in New York City. Material came into the server from several countries and video could have been downloaded and used in other locations as well, yet considering the amount of material that must have been produced that day, I believe the server was underutilized.
The configuration was used for this one event only.

Another online strategy for video file sharing was developed for an IMC video stream during the G8 meetings in Evian, France, in June 2003. Using the same open source video codec as for the f15 project, but this time coupling it with an open source peer-to-peer (p2p) file-sharing protocol, participants could share video materials on a series of distributed servers running a p2p client called BitTorrent. This configuration is an ongoing project now called IndyTorrents. Among the strengths of a peer-to-peer network are a decentralized and flexible set of servers. Multiple server locations that cross international borders can protect participants from repressive state laws such as censorship regimes. A large number of available machines also makes possible robust hosting of large files of rich media content. Although the manifesto of the indymedia Video Sharing Syndicate Conspiracy website is laced with cautions against hailing new technologies as agents for potential liberation, the authors offer this thought about the aims of the project:

We believe in images with open sources: Reaccessing the cinematic heritage of other generations, broadcasting the general intellect, empowering collective story-telling, changing the views, fast sharing of content, skills and resources, enabling multiple connections between creative nodes and networks. Production and distribution will finally merge into a process of
sharing your images with others. Virtual images that everyone can edit, change, forward, rewind and PLAY (v2v, 2003).

Collective Modes of Reception

Film screenings sponsored by local collectives furnish a current model for the collective mode of off-line reception within the IMC. For example, I help to organize a monthly IMC video screening at the Rice University Media Center in Houston. These screenings usually feature a multi-authored documentary on topics such as anti-corporate globalization protests, gentrification, privatized prisons or organizing labor. They may also include the monthly edition of indymedia Newsreal and there is always a panel and/or audience discussion. The screenings have been successful for the Houston IMC in terms of community outreach, publicity, non-web distribution of information and fundraising. Several other IMCs and a burgeoning network of microcinemas similarly screen alternative films. IMC videos are rarely, if ever, shown at mainstream venues. The mode of reception that is experienced is more active than watching a film at the corporate multiplex. The audience at an IMC screening is encouraged to engage actively with the material, to enter into discussion about it, to make and screen new work. Screenings provide an opportunity for activists to discuss their campaigns, distribute materials and gain support for their
causes. Through IMC screenings, the films have life inside of a movement. This aspect of active screenings blurs the boundaries between producer and consumer (Naficy, 2001), in accordance with the documentary practices of the IMC. Screenings of this type also serve to create what Naficy referred to as ‘collective enunciation’ *(ibid.)*—filmmakers and audiences that share common understandings, experience and commitments. This idea of commonality amongst filmmakers is well conveyed here:

> Our films will never be broadcast on NBC or CBS, they will never be rented out in Blockbuster, sold on the shelves of WalMart or tour in SONY theaters. We have all been systematically excluded from corporate channels of media production and distribution and so we are inventing our own. Around the world, in anarchist squats in Rome, in union halls in Seoul, universities in Bogotá and Buenos Aires, in living rooms in Des Moines, churches in Mobile and underground cinemas in New York, hundreds of thousands of people are using radical media to enact their global interconnection and feel their voices ring together with the voices of movements around the world (Big Noise 2003).

All indymedia material is free of copyright and open for use by anyone as long as it is not for profit. Recently, indymedia works—for example, all the material available on the video-sharing system—are being explicitly licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike License,\(^{34}\) which makes it possible for anyone to copy, exhibit and distribute the item and to make derivative works from it but only on
condition that the user gives attribution to indymedia and does not make any profit. These licenses safeguard indymedia’s intentions for the material far more effectively than the previous, commonly used system of stating ‘copyleft’ on the tape box. Indymedia’s conviction that information should be freely shared and its disdain for intellectual property regimes preclude any of these films from being picked up by a major distributor or receiving funding which would require exclusive rights over the materials.

The availability of strong distribution and reception networks is perhaps the greatest strength of indymedia. Incoming media activists know when they produce something that it will be seen. This runs directly counter to the popular misconceptions that only a select group of professionalized journalists have access to the media or that filmmakers are famous and rich. This do-it-yourself media revolution, by providing the distribution and reception outlets for the work of thousands of independent journalists, leaves little scope for complaint without then turning this disapproval into production.

**Problems of Representation**

Indymedia does not escape from critiques of representation, both external
and internal, which level charges similar to those directed against the corporate media. Viewers comment that the indymedia video team, like the corporate media, sensationalizes protest violence, focusing on ‘black-clad anarchists’ destroying property and battling with state security forces. Some use the terms ‘protest-ploitation’ or ‘Riot Porn’ for this style, which focuses solely on the demonstration. Craig Baldwin suggests that IMC filmmakers should strive to engage the criticism by including more background about organization, more analysis and tactical suggestions for change (Baldwin, 2002). Indymedia films are shaped partly by the constraints of time and money. Materials have to be timely: the film “How the WEF Was Won” (2001) was completed in two weeks and the original version of “Praha 2000” screened at the Net Congestion conference in Amsterdam just one week after the events in Prague. Most of the footage used in these films is collected from videographers who are on site for only a few days.

IMC video teams are accused of preaching to the converted, making feel-good, one-sided, activist videos. Yet IMC activists openly declare that there is no attempt at balanced reporting, as there is no belief in a foundation of objectivity. Many local IMC mission statements clearly state that the role of the IMC is to cover stories that are not being addressed by the mainstream
press. The so-called other side 'missing' from indymedia films is often the
one getting airtime on the corporate media networks:

Indymedia’s reporter-activists believe that no journalism is
without bias. They criticize the mainstream media not simply
because, in their eyes, the networks and newspapers work to
maintain the status quo, but because they believe the
mainstream claims neutrality to mask these biases. Indymedia
journalists say they are not afraid to admit their own bias:
journalism in the service of upending the status quo
(Beckerman, 2003).

Another set of critiques centers on the unprofessionalism of the material,
claiming it lacks the polished feel of a studio-produced film. Eschewing
these standards is part of what has allowed the films to be made without the
obstacles experienced by other independent filmmakers. Some activists
argue that this style renders the project undigestible by the corporate media
machine, always looking to swallow up the next cool thing and co-opt it. As
it turns out, this is probably not the case. A video activist aesthetic has
become increasingly popular. In mid-2002, several indymedia videographers
were contacted by Dog Eat Dog films, Michael Moore’s production group,
seeking what they called, ‘gritty street footage’ for a new music video.
While Moore by no means represents the mainstream Hollywood system,
this may mark the beginning of a trend towards increasing co-optation to
which activists will no doubt be alert.
If the audience is made up primarily of activists, these films can give them a sense of seeing themselves represented in the media in a positive way; minority groups rarely have that opportunity. In a significant way, the IMC is the autobiographer of the movement for global justice. These are insider videos, not unlike the ethnic film collectives described by Naficy, and as such face similar challenges of the ‘burden of representation’ (2001). Most of the media makers involved in indymedia are primarily anti-corporate activists, not filmmakers:

Some viewers of recent activist video criticize it for being aesthetically conservative, repetitive, and lengthy. Ironically, these issues rarely cropped up with older video activist work, which was often unconventional and quite engaging. Part of the problem is that video activism used to be much more strongly connected to video art and media arts. Much video activism from the 1970s through the mid 1990s was as much about artistic experimentation as about politics. These days, video activists most often emerge from the ranks of political activists and journalists, rather than from art schools (Rinaldo, 2001).

Perhaps the most important impact these films can have is to impart courage to would-be activists by clearly showing the passion, creativity and courage of other demonstrators. The sympathy these films can invoke also serves as an effective tool for recruitment and continued commitment. We cannot deny we live in an era when dissent is increasingly criminalized. Direct
media action is a particularly powerful way of combating this control. Images of people rising up and resisting provide a sense of possibility and counter the prevailing media-generated belief that the views of demonstrators are those of the minority. Finally, the films provide a means of introducing novel tactical experiments to new communities. It is not in the interest of the corporate media to show these images. It is up to the direct action of independent media makers to produce and distribute them and to show that ‘another world is possible.’

IMC collective authorship works on several levels: it is harmonious with the broader social movement’s goal of direct democracy; it deals with issues of authenticity in a palpable way, as multiple insiders tell their own stories, creating collective enunciations; and it gives media access to a broad group of producers. On these and on technical and organizational levels, indymedia activists are creating, through today’s practices, the world in which they want to live tomorrow:

‘I think video activism means becoming a kind of modern-day Prometheus’, Eric Galatas from Free Speech TV says. ‘And you don’t have to have any particular set of hero credentials to take part. TV is controlled by six global corporations—they control economies, governments, cultures, and can wreak havoc on individual lives. Media is their fire, but we can steal it, and use it’ (Rinaldo, 2001).
In an era of increasing media monopolization, indymedia seeks to build and protect public spaces to send and receive information not easily available through corporate-owned networks, studio systems and distributors. Indymedia, the product of the collectivization of many efforts, has an advantage over the corporate model. As long as producers and viewers accept the ideals of the auteur it will be difficult to break through the simulacra of corporate news; but when attention is turned to content and people work together, it is not only possible, but also probable. Working together out of passion revitalizes us and eases alienation through processes of collective efforts infused with conviviality:

The revolution will be televised. It will be online, on the airwaves and in print. But it will not be produced by them. It will be produced by us. The first rule is the one on the doors of the [IMC]: Don’t hate the media, become the media … We will change the rules. When everyone is the media then the whole world is always watching. In 100 years we will look back and scoff at the idea that only those with special training could work for the media. The concept will be preposterous, in-league with the idea that only rich men with property can vote (FTAA Diary, 2001).
Intersection Three

“Off the Pig!” (Black Panther)
Produced by Newsreel
1968, 16 mm B/W, 20 minutes

Newsreel poster made by Allan Siegel.37

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1968, Oakland, California—A Black Panther protest on the stairs of the Oakland Courthouse demanding the release of Black Panther political prisoner Huey Newton from jail. There are hundreds of people on the stairs and below, some have climbed up onto where the flagpole is and take down the flag. On the stairs there are hundreds of black men, in black berets and leather jackets, some hold flags that read, “Free Huey” and are emblazoned with the panther logo or a fist.

On the top of the stairs, women stand in a line behind the men, rhythmically clapping and chanting,

No more brothers in jail.
Off the pig!
The pigs are gonna catch hell.
Off the pig!

It's a call and response, the women chant the first lines in a singsong fashion, and the men respond, “off the pig!” with fists raised. The chants seem occasionally to be sync sound, and others not at all. The chanting and clapping speed up.

No more pigs in our community.
Off the pig!
No more pigs in our community.
Off the pig!

Police come out in a large block with batons, and push their way through the crowd assembled on the stairs apparently rushing for the people near the flag pole. They arrive below and stand on guard around the pole. They don’t stop the demonstration; they just guard the flagpole. Marchers stream by; Black Panthers in uniform all chanting, “off the pig!”

The revolution has come.
Off the pig!
Time to pick up the gun.
Off the pig!

A block of Panthers and this time a line of women in front of them, the women say, “the revolution has come” the block of soldiers replies “off the pig!” with fists pumping up in unison. Picket lines march by chanting along. Three tall men with flags stand on the stairs. Police linger around the edges.

Just before this sequence in the film there were images of Black Panthers—some men, some women wearing berets, black leather jackets, Panther buttons and often sunglasses. They were training, practicing marching in formation, sometimes carrying flags together raising them up into the air, standing in formation raising fists in unison. They look serious, strong.

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Throughout the film, the only voiceover is that of three Black Panther party members.
Hewy P. Newton, minister of defense is interviewed in Alameda county jail. As he speaks, the camera pans from his face over to police behind thick jail windows. In another shot the camera pans from him to the table where he is seated, we see the book *Venceremos! Writings And Speeches Of Ché Guevara* leaning on the window and a cigarette burning in an ashtray. Hewy P. Newton, minister of defense, speaks on the similarities between the Panthers and what Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara did in Cuba. He says that Castro’s brigades basically considered themselves an educational unit, educating the people. They were showing the people that the government wasn’t invincible, wasn’t impenetrable. That is what the Panthers are doing; they are exposing the system and standing up to it.

Eldridge Cleaver, minister of information, is interviewed in the Oakland Black Panther party office. He leans back in his chair, chewing a toothpick. A shot of the front windows of the office shows party posters, one with Hewy Newton and close ups of bullet holes through the windows and the posters. The walls in the office are covered in posters and stickers; stacks of papers sit on the tables.
Chairman Bobby Seale reads aloud the Black Panther party 10-point platform as a voiceover. While he reads, a continuous driving scene, images of the ghetto, of schools and playgrounds, and images of power, the county courthouse plays on the screen.

By using the narratives of the Panther Party Members, Newsreel, a group of mostly white radical students, let the Panthers to speak on their own behalf rather than having an all-knowing narrator explain to the viewers who these people were as is still the tradition in documentary film. This approach is common today in different disciplinary circles where collaboration and co-authorship is foregrounded and may seem common sense, but if a night is spent watching documentaries on broadcast television it becomes clear how rare it really is. I have tried to use this strategy throughout this dissertation by including the “voices” of media makers directly from transcripts and conversations rather than my presentation of them.

This film circulated throughout America, screening in communities both black and white, showing an American guerrilla-inspired organization in their own words, standing up for self determination in communities of color. There were chapters in cities across America with Oakland, New York and
Chicago having large chapters and community programs. Panthers were
even organizing chapters in prisons.

The purpose of every guerrilla action is not merely to defeat the
enemy on the field. It is to open up political universes that did
not exist before. Ché tells us that guerrilla warfare does this in
two concrete ways. First, it forces the system to reveal the
violence behind its quiet bureaucratic smile—to show how
quickly it will abandon the appearance of civility and put tanks
and soldiers in the street when it feels its power threatened.
Second, and more importantly, it reveals to people their own
power. It demonstrates that the system is not invincible and not
inevitable, that we can resist, and that when we come together
we can win.

By this definition this film is a guerilla action. The film shows us the
violence of the state as well as the power of the people to resist. The purpose
of films as guerilla actions is to have a political effect. Through guerilla
films' production and circulation they are used as tools to mobilize and
recruit, to circulate tactics and hope amongst friends and to scare the
enemies. This film makes no pretense as serving any function but to have
this political effect. It is propaganda—straight, no chaser.

The very end of the film returns to the stairs at the rally. Several Panther
men in the frame are chanting but we don’t hear them, we hear the
voiceover. The shots get progressively tighter until we see only one man’s
face. He is standing silently wearing sunglasses and a beret, a flag flutters
across his face, both filling the screen. The last words of the film are the voiceover for this image of a strong young man in the Black Panther Party:

So the concept is this basically.
The whole black nation has to be put together as a black army
And we gonna walk on this nation, we gonna walk on this racist power structure and we gonna say to the whole damn government stick 'em up motherfucker, this is a hold up!
We've come for what's ours.
Chapter 4
Guerrilla Film

The cinema of the revolution is at the same time one of deconstruction and construction: deconstruction of the image that neocolonialism has created of itself and of us, and construction of a throbbing, living reality that recaptures truth in any of its expressions.
– Fernando Solanis and Octovio Gettino

I have shown that are aspects of Indymedia video production that are new, for example having one hundred coordinated cameras covering a demonstration or using the Internet and peer to peer networks for worldwide distribution and sharing of content. Nevertheless, the aesthetics, the production process and the relationship of the media collective to the social movement are not new and have been practiced by radical media makers for decades. This chapter offers historical and contemporary examples to give a wider context in which to consider the work of the indymedia video collective, so that we do not consider indymedia video as something entirely novel and without history.

I and other voices in this dissertation have stressed that radical media comes from, is inside of and supports social movements, even that it belongs to the movements. What it means to be “inside” the movement varies between
examples of media makers and their relationship to social movements and needs to be more fully detailed when we extend our gaze beyond one example. The desire to make media, the production process, the content and the aesthetics of such films are strongly influenced by the organization, goals and character of each movement, as well as the relationship of the media group to the movement. John Downing breaks radical media groups into two main types of organizations: the Leninist model and the self-management model (2001). The Leninist model is communist party media and the self-management model is a media organization that is not run by the party, union, owner, state or church but where media producers run the outlet themselves. The self-management model is characteristic of media groups working within social movements, which focus more on democracy and horizontality than the Leninist model. Indymedia is, obviously, a media group of the self-organized type, as is each example I explore in this chapter.

This chapter focuses on radical cinemas within social movements that are relevant answers to the question, what other examples can tell us more about where indymedia came from and what it is doing. I pose questions to this history about filmmakers’ relationships to movements, their aesthetic forms and technical apparatus. The examples used in this chapter are 1930s era
film trains in the Soviet Union, 1960s and 1970s agit-prop cinema of revolutionary non-aligned movements, particularly the group Newsreel in the United States, and the “riot porn” style of contemporary video activism. I will conclude with a few words about digital videos of attacks on U.S. troops and private contractors in Iraq which are distributed on the Internet and are importantly similar yet very different than media made within social movements. For each example there are, of course, hundreds more that could be mentioned, but I chose examples that each operate under different technological apparatuses and particularly illuminate specific questions or have direct relationships with indymedia. The connecting thread to these examples is their function as guerrilla film as defined in the previous intersection.

**Film trains**

*"Die, but shoot!"* – Dziga Vertov

It is possible for any reading of aesthetic relationships in radical cinema to return to the Soviet school of agit-prop, because of their pioneering work in which revolutionary action is celebrated. In fact, if we disregard particular ideological leanings, all the examples of radical media in this chapter fall under this definition.
Agit-prop—an abbreviation for the combination of short-term information tactics to bring immediate abuses and problems to public notice (agitation) and longer-term political communication strategies (propaganda) to shape the hearts and minds of the public in a coherently Marxist-Leninist direction (Downing, 2001).

However, for reasons of production process and relationship to social movements, traditional Soviet cinema does not constitute a good historical predecessor to indymedia video activism because it was not a self-organized group, but of the Leninist type of party-controlled media.

When the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1917, and then became the Communist Party in 1921, they did not have majority support in the country. To bolster support they became masters of modern propaganda. In one technique, trains were dispatched throughout the country to spread the message of an optimistic future with the party to the people. These agit-prop
trains carried books, records, posters and leaflets. They featured live theatrical performances of political dramas and screenings of films. On one of these trains, many Russians saw their first film. During this period, the Moscow-based film editor for the agit-prop trains was Dziga Vertov. Vertov was a pioneer in documentary filmmaking and he had strong ideas about the role of the documentary as an instrument of revolution, calling documentaries the “truth of life” and declaring fiction the enemy (Michelson, 1984). The films shown on the trains were critiqued as being films made by cinema elites and then shown to the people, instead of being a medium of the people. The films made during this period conform to the Leninist Model laid out by Downing. The production of the films happened in Moscow under the control of the party, made by specialists in the state film factory and therefore do not represent an insider social movement position.

The agit-prop train concept was revived in 1931 under the direction of Alexander Medvedkin who wanted to change this top-down dynamic in favor of a more grassroots approach. He and his comrades created a “film train.” The train had three carriages. Half a car was the film laboratory, the other half the editing room with an animation table. One car carried a truck
for driving to locations, there were sleeping quarters and a screening room (Marker, 1992). The train, as large and cumbersome as it seems to us today, was a complete mobile film studio and theater, as compact as it could be for its time, a totally radical concept of process. By freeing the technical apparatus from the studio, Medvedkin was able to displace the centrality of Moscow in favor of the dispersed locations of the people, as well as move the film production away from the watchful eye and strict controls of the party.

Medvedkin describes the group of 32 that staffed the trains as enthusiasts and romantics. This group would travel in the train to a location for a film, shoot the footage, develop the film, edit it in the train and show it to the people whose stories were recorded in the film while still on location. Immediate cinema. They traveled to newly collectivized places such as a train works, farms or mines to talk with and film the workers. Films were made fast, under the slogan, “Today we do, tomorrow we show.” The films were critical of the system, saying that in the end the newly collectivized places weren’t as productive as the previous systems, or were rife with starvation and thievery. Medvedkin’s satirically styled, critical films were
ultimately censored by the state and never released broadly. They were lost until being discovered in an archive in Moscow during the 1960s (ibid.).

The films made on Medvedkin's film train were not of the Leninist Model laid out by Downing even though they were produced under the Soviet system and the party supported the project. Through technological invention he was able to literally free the studio from Moscow, which produced films unique in style for the time and critical of the party and the changes being instituted around the country. If Medvedkin was an insider, his insiderness lay with the people and the precepts of Communism, but not with the party or the state.

Truth

The 1960s and 70s saw radical liberation movements erupt worldwide, demanding independence from colonialism, an end to the Vietnam War and pushing an agenda of new identity politics and self-determination. A belief in the power of the truth to bring about social change swept across academic disciplines in the 60s and 70s as a consequence of the work of identity and liberation movements. It expressed itself in forms such as: people's history projects, co-authored ethnographies, and in collaborative projects of cinema.
Movements for identity politics and non-aligned third world socialist movements of the 60s and 70s have distinct yet interrelated cinematic representational practices. There are two distinct types of radical cinema from this period, both aiming to show viewers the truth. The first type is projects aimed at exposing audiences to truth through documentary forms coming from the direct cinema tradition; and the second type is revolutionary agit-prop style cinema, which fights for a contested truth.

Direct cinema attempts to expose obscured or unavailable truths through techniques of being, as much as possible, a fly on the wall. Cinema “truth-telling” techniques coming out of the direct cinema tradition successively did away with filmic conventions that were thought to stand in the way of the truth—tripods, lights, scripts, actors, soundstages, soundtracks, narration, even the director, in favor of film collectives. This impulse follows a trajectory that ultimately leads to removing the filmmaker entirely from the process so the people whose story is being told can tell it themselves, rather than having an outsider tell the story on their behalf.39 There is a continuum—work with the subjects to find the story, work together with the subjects to write the screenplay, teach them to use the film or video technology and make the film collaboratively with you—that leads
ultimately to finally giving technology directly to the people to make their own film. This approach is informed by the belief that there is a pure truth out there, and by remaining faithful to difference and removing obstacles to that truth, it will be shown, and by the very virtue of it being shown, it will effect change.

Filmmakers also used direct cinema techniques in partially scripted works by blurring the genres of fiction and documentary. Strictly speaking, a scripted work would be counter to the ‘letting life unfold in front of you’ school of thought of direct cinema, but the techniques of this school have been and continue to be taken up and used in unexpected ways by others. An example of this style is “The Battle of Algiers,” a film produced in 1966 and directed by Gillo Pontecorvo. “The Battle of Algiers” is partially based on the prison memoirs of Sadi Yacef, a military commander of the Algerian National Liberation Front, who appears in the film. In making this film Pontecorvo used several techniques from direct cinema documentary practices to mark it as “real.” For example, almost all the shots are handheld, there is very little artificial lighting used, all characters except one were non-actors. Also, Pontecorvo tried to emulate a “newsreel” style so that viewers would read it as true.
Because he was so successful, a statement was attached to the beginning of the film testifying that, “not one foot of newsreel or documentary film has been used.” Pontecorvo’s aim was to achieve a granular effect in the film to give people the feeling that they were viewing an actual document rather than a facsimile, thus claiming that his fictionalized representation of the Battle of Algiers was true to life (Mellan, 1973).

In describing the use of voice from a supposed radio program as the narrator, Joan Mellan describes “The Battle of Algiers” as having, “The tone and the atmosphere of a documentary, a historical cinema vérité.”

The example of *The Battle of Algiers* shows that it is possible to infuse even a scripted, historical reenactment as being “true” by marking it as such through the use of documentary and direct cinema conventions.

**The New Agit-Prop**

Agit-prop, another type of radical film production from this period, attempts, like direct cinema, to get at truth, but in a radically different way. Unlike the direct cinema filmmakers discussed above, agit-prop filmmakers believed that truth is contested. Their films aimed to interrupt, disrupt and challenge what they considered to be mainstream capitalist culture’s false consciousness, fighting for the future with images as their weapon.
In the late 1960s in New York City, a group of young activists started a political film collective called Newsreel.

The catalyst for Newsreel’s formation was the failure of the established media, especially TV, to report extensive police violence against a major anti-war demonstration at the Pentagon in late 1967. A number of individuals, overwhelmingly white and male, some with considerable means, some with experience in film-making, decided to form a politically committed film collective to service and expand the anti-war movement. About 50 people were involved in the project at that point, the leadership being largely from Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and representing both its wings, cultural radicalism and committed Marxism (Downing, 1984).

Newsreel’s beginnings are due to contested truth of police brutality at an anti-war demonstration. Their work as filmmakers challenged mainstream media’s truth by presenting an alternative truth. Their name in fact is a challenge to mainstream media by referring back to the way visual news was distributed in the United States in the era before television. News was watched on the screen at the movie theater in shorts before feature films. These shorts were called newsreels. These newsreels were marked as true, and objective with their news style; although they functioned much like the corporate news in this example in 1967 or still today, as corporate efforts to support the politics of the state. This is the field of contested truth which the films of the radical group newsreel fights for. On the one side corporate
media supporting the state agenda, on the other, political filmmakers supporting the agenda of social movements.

Newsreel produced scores of politically charged films throughout the 1960s and 70s, which were circulated through an innovative movement-based network of alternative screening venues. Newsreel spread, from the original collective in NYC to having collectives located in several other towns around the U.S. and England. Newsreel experienced two intense periods of ideological debate, which lead to splits in the organization, but it still exists today in parts as Third World Newsreel on the East Coast, California Newsreel on the West Coast and the Newsreel Archives in Vermont. Bill Nichols, in his master’s thesis on Newsreel describes them as, “the only truly collective filmmaking unit within the Movement” (Nichols, 1972). It is true that they released films only on consensus and had long marathon meetings to make decisions, but they also had, especially in the later years, a central committee based on Communist governance structures. Having a small group with more decision-making power than others is not true collective production. Newsreel emerged within a moment in the technological history of film equipment that coincides with the availability of lightweight, portable 16 mm film cameras with (though still very
expensive to use) sync-sound. This equipment made filming fast-breaking events such as demonstrations and occupations possible in a way that could not have been accomplished with more expensive film stock or heavy, cumbersome equipment.

What was Newsreel’s relationship with the movements they filmed? Was it collaborative, were they insiders? Let’s look at the case of the film “Columbia Revolt” about the anti-war movement at Columbia University, the occupation of several buildings on campus and the violent police response. Here is an excerpt from Roz Payne’s writing about her experiences working on “Columbia Revolt” followed by sections of a conversation I had with Norm, an early member of the Newsreel collective on September 8, 2004:

The first film I worked on was the 1968 student take over of Columbia University. The students had taken over 5 buildings. We had a film team in each building. We were shooting from the inside while the rest of the press were outside. We participated in the political negotiations and discussions. Our cameras were used as weapons as well as recording the events. Melvin had a W.W.II cast iron steel Bell and Howell camera that could take the shock of breaking plate glass windows (Payne, 2002).
Norm: When the Columbia strike happened, people from newsreel said we gotta get in there and people from the strike said we have to get newsreel inside, so literally, when the buildings were taken over, and also besieged from outside, people inside figured out ways to get us in, brought our cameras in.

SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] used the Columbia film on campuses nationwide to argue about that role campuses played or universities played in social reproduction, in perpetuating a war culture, and in the subjugation of communities of color that bordered the campuses. They also used the film to argue that when students rose up, this is the kind of repression that will be unleashed against them. So you need to learn from the Columbia film if you are going to do something on your campus, you need to think about what happened here, do it differently, do it better. And people who heard about the Columbia film who weren’t part of SDS or any campus movements but had local groupings would show it as well. The Columbia film tried to get a whole bunch of levels of analysis into an overarching narrative of a campus uprising. The Panther film, in a very different way, lots and lots of people used it to argue for what was going on in ghettos around the country. To argue for the possibility of a lumpen proletariat uprising, a black lumpen proletariat uprising.

Tish: So they were being used to inspire mass uprising?

Norm: Yes, or to at least raise consciousness towards that.
Newsreel had a very close relationship with the student anti-war movement as demonstrators themselves worked to get Newsreel and their cameras inside to document the demonstrations. Once inside, documenting was not the only task; the cameras were weapons, not just with images, but also literally as window-smashing devices. The films were used by the movement at screenings on college campuses to grow the movement and discuss tactical strategies. They were specifically made by, about and for a movement that was looking to inspire mass action against the war in Vietnam. Newsreel was able to use this campus network as a distribution network. Newsreel screenings were not like traditional movie house projections. They were more active, and this was achieved by having Newsreel collective members leading discussions at screenings.

Norm: There was always a presentation, which varied tremendously depending on who was doing it. Almost everybody saw that as a crucial part of the work. There was the propaganda value of the film itself and then there was what you could do to accompany it. To introduce and frame it and then to lead a discussion afterwards. Those were incredibly varied depending on the nature, the sophistication, the ideology and the presentational style of the people who did it. I think there was no effort to try to regularize that. Some folks were doing stuff that others of us thought was crazy to do. There were a number of occasions after Newsreel showings that people went out and actually torched buildings. I’m sure some newsreel folk actually suggested in very clear terms that this is the action...
that we should do. There was really a spectrum of opinion about whether you ought do that or not.

Newsreel’s films are documentaries, to be sure, capturing events of police brutality at anti-war demonstrations or showing the organization and political work of the Black Panthers in California and the Young Lords in New York. They are also “newsreels” in the tradition of Dziga Vertov’s cinema truth. But these aren’t detached, objective documentaries, rather they are structured as a revolutionary pamphlet, with theory, documentation, art and calls-to-action all working together. These are committed documentaries, with an insider’s position and an abrasive style, made specifically to effect change. Each Newsreel film opens with their logo accompanied by the rapid sound of a machine gun firing as if to incite the audience to wake up and pay attention.

They were not journalists in the conventional mechanistic sense—but advocates and activists who used the medium of film to bring the voices and the issues of their times to public attention. They saw film as a weapon at the service of movements and struggles... Some were agit-prop. Some captured important moments of history. Most were populist in spirit—while others were more intellectual but not in the sense of the “intellectual property” everyone talks about today. These film makers did not seek individual credit or promote themselves as Hollywood wanabees—although some did end up making commercial films. They preferred anonymity and a democratic approach to film making that may seem naive in world where production is characterized by craft unions and a star system (Schecter, 2002).
There are problems with this approach, often, as with indymedia films that some critics consider one-sided films that simply preach to the choir. Norm, an early member of Newsreel explains:

Norm: The films were, from my perspective, mostly cheerleading films. They were really analytical and they were really sophisticated, or presented sophisticated points of view.

Tish: What do you mean by cheerleading?

Norm: They celebrated movement action. We made a film about the community control struggle in New York City. I haven’t seen it in a while, but my memory of it is that you could watch that film and not understand anything about the nature of struggle other than the fact that there were good guys and bad guys. The union were the bad guys and the community control advocates were the good guys. A Newsreel film typically had a lot of fighting in the streets and a rock track which was very loud. And it was very clear about what the conflict was about in terms of who was on what side. I think they were essentially designed as youth culture tools, though we never said that to ourselves. The goal of the presentation was youth in action.

Cheerleading is a pejorative term and maybe not a fair one, I think there needs to be a role of celebration of what a movement actually consists of and what it can achieve there needs to be a way to affirm its roots and the source of its strength but I think what we didn’t take seriously enough is that there needs to be a constant source of critique as well. You are involved in a struggle that is so complex, you need to be a sophisticated as you can in the waging of it. I think we were never really willing to take the risk to be as analytically critical in our films as we were in our private conversations and in our meetings.
It is useful to follow the traces of the historical representational styles and film practices discussed in this chapter to indymedia to illuminate the historical continuity of radical cinema. I will offer two examples here, Kinopoezd and Newsreal.

**Kinopoezd**

In 2004 and 2005, indymedia Russia literally resurrected the film train model as they toured the country in a minivan giving workshops on video activism. The tour was called “Kinopoezd” (Cinetrain) and was a project developed by the Russian-Belarussian collective group, indyvideo (associated with indymedia). They were accompanied on this trip by media activists from Western European collectives as well. They took a white
minivan across the country, teaching workshops on how to produce video, holding screenings, giving talks and made short films of their trip to cities and towns across Russia. They spoke on multiple aspects of alternative video production, including: “filming in difficult and dangerous situations, mobile editing, distribution via digital media and computer networking using open source software. There were screenings of media activist clips and documentaries from around the world to inform and inspire” (DM, 2005). They took their inspiration for the film train to bring media production to the people of Russia, making it as grassroots as possible by giving people the tools and skills to make their own videos.

**Newsreal**

Indymedia is multidimensional, both global and local simultaneously. As new indymedias sprang up around the world, following the events in Seattle, indymedia struggled to become something more than a media network focused only on event-based mobilization coverage. Indymedia planned to be a lasting fixture in local communities with ongoing coverage of local and global movement news. In April 2001, Free Speech TV (FSTV), a station on the dish network, aired the pilot episode of a show originally conceived
of as “Indymedia, The Series.” This monthly series debuted as “Indymedia Newsreal” accompanied by grassroots screenings across the country.

Indymedia is brought to you by the same independents trained under the duress of riot police, tear gas and rubber bullets at anti-corporate globalization protests in Seattle, D.C., Philly, LA and more. This new breed of digital camcorder producers plan to bring revolutionary Independent Media Center (IMC) production back home to communities across the U.S. and around the world (Galatas, 2001).

The thirty-minute episodes are based around the segment production model. A series of short films about five minutes each composed the program. The segments are produced by individual video activists or collectives from across the country and submitted to the project’s workgroup. The workgroup was made up of video activists who had worked at large-scale mobilization events to produce daily shows for uplink to FSTV and Deep Dish TV. The final edit was done by FSTV.

The series is called “Newsreal.” similar to the Newsreel group of the 1960s not by accident, but with a purposeful nod to the past. In the early stages of developing the project, Dee Dee Halleck wrote to the organizing email list:

I think it would be a really great thing if indymedia video folks would look at some of the old newsreel films. ... I think it’s good to sort of connect with the history of all these struggles in alternative media... to be proud that we are part of a tradition (Halleck, 2001).
The opening sequence for the series begins with a slow shot of a police offer from an old Newsreel (the group, not the genre) film and then a filmstrip-looking insert on the screen frames a moving image of Angela Davis talking about freedom from a Newsreel film. A rock and roll soundtrack starts and next we see “Jello Biafra reporting for the Independent Media Center and the Camcorder Truth Jihad.” This is followed by a montage of images of demonstrations shot by IMC videographers and reporters introducing themselves as being with indymedia. Then a cut to more Newsreel footage of police violence at a demonstration. The filmstrip insert returns with Newsreel footage of demonstrations and then blends into IMC footage of demonstrations. There is a larger background image which also contains Newsreel footage that becomes indymedia footage, in this case the grainy black and white look of the Newsreel films is copied in images of Seattle that follow it. There is text overlaying this background image that reads, “Everyday in your home town, everyday people take action.” Then a cut to a black screen and the word real appears, followed by news, to make newsreal, then indymedia, so the screen reads “indymedia newsreal.”
In this opening sequence we can see that indymedia is clearly defining themselves in relationship to the previous work of Newsreel. Picking up the tradition of insider social movement media designed to inspire action. With the twist of the word reel to real, they also declare themselves descendents of the documentary truth school of thought, boldly declaring their work as getting you closer to the real than you would by watching corporate media.

**Riot Porn**

There is not simply a historical genealogy linking indymedia and its predecessors, but aesthetic styles also connect indymedia to the past. There is a style of contemporary agit-prop techniques in indymedia films that follow in the historical tradition. This particular style that I am referring to is often referred to, generally derogatorily, as "riot porn" and is what Norm referred to above as "cheerleading." The central content of riot porn is in sequences of police/protestor skirmishes or demonstrators smashing up a business or government institution. The goal of this content is to allow the viewer to feel the demonstrators winning, feel for a moment that the institutions they are fighting against aren’t invincible or impenetrable. Riot porn is not protests where demonstrators are getting badly beaten by police, although these types of scenes are common throughout history in radical
cinema. The most successful riot porn allows the audience to believe that they could do what they are watching too; it literally creates a new social possibility.  

When done well, riot porn’s style is aesthetic, attractive, sexy images of riots. What is sexy about these images, and why the comparison to porn works is the fact that they are intimate; they use intimacy to convey a vicarious experience to the viewer. Riot porn relies on point of view for their effect. The images are intimate because the camera is in the middle of the action, in the street, with the people. John Downing said that video is better than film at conveying a sense of presence in the frame (Downing, 2005). When the image produced by a hand-held camera operated by a person who is in the streets at a demonstration shakes, it is because the filmmaker has been jostled, and the audience can feel the jostling, can feel being there. These moments interrupt a viewer’s so-called suspension of disbelief experienced at a mainstream movie viewing because the audience realizes the presence of the cameraperson, realizes that this event is real. This ability for the viewer to have a vicarious experience is what makes riot porn work as a technique to engender emotional responses to political films.
There is another reason this style is compared to porn. Many viewers find this material a gratuitous and sensationalized focus on violence as climax, as pornography is sensationalized focus on sex and orgasm. This is due, in part, to an editing style in contemporary video activism often called, the “MTV aesthetic” (Gehr, 1983). Some components of the MTV aesthetic are a heavy rock soundtrack, very rapid cuts, multiple layered images and submission of the editing to the soundtrack. As Norm’s comments about Newsreel showed for their era, this technique functions as a youth-culture tool for today. Some critics find that this “glorification” is inappropriate for the content of the film. For example, is it appropriate as in the film “Zapatista” by Big Noise Films to show a montage of armed Zapatista fighters marching to a hard rock, English language Rage Against the Machine song? Would it be more appropriate to use indigenous/local music? This tension is reflective of the style of contemporary video activism; taking from the old and transforming it into something different, combining styles...repetition with difference.

Like the development of portable sync sound, which served in vérité filmmaking as the technological counterpart to the growth of new social movements and new conceptions of social and political reality, digital video is emerging now as part of broader cultural, political and theoretical shifts. A generation ago, the privileging of experience and subjectivity, the introduction of first person narrative, the ethnographic and filmic search for depth and darkness, were as much about
liberation from the monologue of power as they were about liberation of the camera from the tripod. Today, digital video is emerging before our eyes as the artistic counterpart to a politics based on shifted cultural terrain: a politics that replaces the metaphysics of depth with the play of surfaces, cultural nationalism with cyborg politics, personal testimony with collaborative mythmaking (Anonymous, 2006).

It is always tempting to see the relationships between emergent technologies, for example light-weight portable 16 mm cameras used by the Newsreel Collective, as causal relationships and it’s a familiar argument. But we must always be cautious about these arguments that slip easily into technological determinism. Technology is not the engine of history—that history is built through people’s struggles. Movements are ready to adapt the newest technology into their work, to augment organizing that is already in place.

Video activism is based on collective action. It originates from such diverse locations as the art world, community groups, media art centers and public access TV. Its distribution can be as simple as the regular passing of tapes hand-to-hand or as complex as the Deep Dish TV satellite network. All of these resources and organizations have been around a lot longer than Super VHS or Hi-8. The camcorder—like the mimeograph, the bullhorn and the photocopier before it—is just one more piece of industrial technology that has been pressed into the service of political activism and redefined by its use. Video activists weren’t created by the camcorder. They appropriated it. They have taken it from the home entertainment system and turned it into a weapon for change. (Walden, 1990)
**Insurgent media**

It may be useful at this point to explore a case that helps disentangle technology from use and innovation. The example of videos that are being produced by insurrectionary fighters in Iraq is a fruitful case to compare with indymedia production because they are both producing radical content using similar technology of digital video and distributing it on the Internet in an effort to counter corporate media reports. Yet it is contrastable when presented with questions of social movement insiderness and the role of media.

Since the beginning of the war in Iraq in 2003, armed insurgency groups have resisted occupation by attacking U.S. military and private contractors. These resistance fighters have sophisticated media strategies and produce various movement medias including texts, photos and videos. The videos are of differing types: those provided to television stations such as videos of persons taken hostage or statements by leaders, feature-length documentaries aimed at exposing the “lies of the occupiers” such as films about mass graves and, most abundantly, videos of actions against occupation targets shot and posted to the Internet. This last type, Internet videos documenting actions, are the focus of my discussion.
While videos of this type vary greatly, I will describe a typical case. A typical video of this type is downloaded from the Internet at one-quarter-screen size and viewed on a computer. It is usually highly compressed, meaning the image will look slightly “chunky” (technically this is done to keep the file size very small and make possible download by people using slower connections to the Internet). Because these videos show dangerous situations, these videos are shot from long distances, not right up on the action. The framing will remain constant throughout the video. There is likely a window burn on the screen that identifies the group responsible for the action. From a distance, we see a road. Slowly, a U.S. Army convoy crosses the screen, lead by a Humvee. We may hear voices of the people who are holding the camera and other on-location sounds. As the Humvee gets to the far side of the screen, an improvised explosive device (IED) explodes under it and a cloud of dust, fire and debris flies into the sky. Someone, presumably the cameraperson cries out, “Allah-u-Akbar” (God is great). The video ends.

These videos show up initially on international jihadist websites, mainly operated outside of Iraq, then move to sites, often U.S. based, that feature
them alongside other postings constituting a body of work best described as gore; for example: accidents, suicides, medical problems and other "bizarre" videos. There are literally thousands of these insurgency videos available, each one showing a single act. The video is an extension of the act, as important as the act itself. The centrality of the act is foregrounded by the lack of concern to quality of filmic style or any kind of heavy editing. The lack of sophistication in the filmmaking of these videos adds a more complete texture of reality, as opposed to the slickness of Hollywood or international news programs.

These videos are single stories, but together this body of material is meant as positivist evidence of the strength of the resistance, in direct contrast to mainstream media or U.S. coalition accounts.

While effective communication with the enemy and its potential allies is mostly confined to crude terror tactics, the insurgency's massive propaganda production serves other purposes. It seems to be intended mainly for the fighters and their sympathizers. And it reveals a dynamic network of groups that are following each other's activities, forming alliances or competing with each other in an economy centered on violence (Baran and Guidere, 2005).

Who are the intended audiences for these videos? Are they videos produced for the Iraqi insurgency to celebrate their victories? Are they recruitment
videos to be seen by “foreign fighters”? Are they meant to strike the fear into the hearts of American audience members?? Are they to show other anti-occupation movements around the world that seemingly unstoppable armies are not invincible and can be attacked using insurgent tactics? These videos are tactical in the same tradition as the IED shown in them. This is the aesthetics of insurgency. Tactical videos, made fast and dirty to show what is being done. Their rapid circulation on the Internet is reminiscent of the organization of insurgent warfare. Their circulation brings to light networks of resistance movements, channels of communication.

These videos—and their circulation mainly outside of Iraq attests to this—do not attempt to win over the Iraqi population at large who are conflicted about the use of violence, but rather to circulate within international jihadist groups. This is in contrast to the way similar insurgency videos are used for example in Palestine, where their main circulation is within Palestine on video CDs. These videos do provide background information and justification for the actions, where the Iraq videos rarely do. There is no attempt to tell a story, no background information, no narration, very little editing, with the exception of a window
burn of the group’s logo and perhaps some text telling you where the incident took place.

These videos share several characteristics with social movement videos discussed previously in this chapter. For a film to be a guerrilla film as defined in intersection three, it needs to simultaneously show the violence of the state and the power of the people to overcome it. These videos from Iraq are all about showing that a violent and unstoppable army is in fact stoppable. It is riot porn at its most minimal; it’s only the money shot. The purpose of these videos is to have a political effect, circulate tactics, function as videos for recruitment and to continue to commit sympathizers to the cause. What is very different about this case is returning to the question of insiderness. What movement are these filmmakers inside of? Are they representing the will of the people of Iraq? No, because the population at large is divided over the tactical uses of violence. Are they inside an international jihadist movement? No, the videos are, but the insurgent groups arguably are not, rather it is more appropriate to say the international movement has them inside of it. Do they represent a cohesive anti-occupation movement in Iraq? No, they are produced by a multitude of groups who are often opposed to one another.
This case of the Iraqi videos points out that different movements will use the same technology to different ends because the tactical work that the films must do is made distinct by the terrain they are made in and for. This case Iraqi resistance videos also point out difficulties with the concept of insiderness, because in this case, a body of work is made by multiple different cells operating autonomously from one another. It is the right tactical fit for the movement.

**Guerrilla Insiderness**

When closely observed, insiderness is a slippery object. On the surface, every group described in this chapter is an insider to his/her movement. But what movement? The Russian film-trains of Medvedkin and his group of enthusiasts were trying to make cinema for the people. But they were from the state film works. Was their movement the Leninist state? The Russian people? They were critical of the changes happening across the country on behalf of the communist government in the name of the people. Their people were the people, but the people were not a movement. Newsreel was shown to defiantly be insiders in the case of the Columbia Strike. But what about their films about the Black Panthers or the Young Lords; were these
predominantly white and middle-class students insiders in those movements? Or are the students and the Black Panthers different parts of the same movement? Where do they meet? Where do they overlap?

Even when the filmmakers are relative outsiders such as in the case of Newsreel and the Black Panthers, the media itself is inside movements. It is tactical, and it lives inside movements: at screenings, in the circulation of tapes, in the circulation of tactics and in mythmaking of victories. Media is a weapon, to challenge the so-called objectivity and distance of the mainstream media with intimate, committed films. Sometimes media works like insurgency, quick hit and run tactics produced by small groups inside a network. But at other times, the work is the like that of the guerrilla—it creates a movement, imagines a people that do not yet exist. The role of the guerrilla is not to participate within a mass movement but rather to imagine, create space and new subject positions for the revolutionaries that will come in the future. The guerrilla filmmaker does not imagine that they are representing their people; rather they are using images to create a people, to create, as the guerrilla does, a new social possibility.

In this moment after and before history, this time in which, as the Zapatistas say, we must walk as secrets among our own people, our struggle is not yet a war of fronts. It is a war of
images and of meaning—a media war, a guerrilla war. And we are not an army with a territory and a people and a real to represent. . . not yet (Anonymous, 2006).

What has looking across these examples offered to a fuller understanding indymedia's films and production practices? If treated as a group, these examples tell a story of similarity. We have established a group, or genre. All of the different examples are of self-organized, insider cinemas that use film tactically like a guerrilla. However, by looking across them, their distinctiveness stands out. We have learned that technology does not drive the production of media like this because it is made by all these groups using any available means. Each example is specific to its terrain. Each cinema develops textures and styles that make them deployable in their particular contexts. The specific instantiation of any of these groups, or the terrain of movements and history and place is so unique that to make generalizations about them appears as a kind of violence perpetrated against difference. Looking this way the material suggests new questions to pose: what is the texture of the terrain? What are the tactical needs of the movement? What job does this media need to be doing?
Intersection Five

"79 Primaveras"
Directed by: Santiago Alvarez
1969, 16mm B/W, 24 minutes

The title appears on the screen:

Que la división del campo socialista no ensombrezca el futuro.
[The fragmentation of the socialist field does not darken the future.]

The title card fractures and falls apart.
The next section is unlike anything I have ever seen in film. 79 Primaveras succeeds in literally being the feeling it hopes to evoke in the viewer. The incredible violence of war is reflected in the violence done to the film stock bearing those images. An assault on human beings is translated into an assault on the film and the viewer. The medium is made a physical object of art, or meaning. Taken outside of its normal path through the projector we see the physical reality of the material, sprocket holes and frame edges, magnetic soundtrack.

The assault of war

This scene is an action sequence of fighting between the Vietcong and American forces. Both sides are shown in intimate shots. Vietcong fight from canoes in the water and walk down the Ho-Chi Minh trail carrying anti-aircraft guns, firing guns and running. The Americans are also fighting but are running, crawling. The Vietcong are fighting strong. There are wounded, explosions. This content is familiar to us but the method of showing it is completely different.

The soundtrack is very loud and fast—sounds of bullets, rockets, screaming, the sound of planes, bombs, war—layered, erupting. Other sounds creep in on top of the relentless assault, like strange piano music. The film is not left to run normal, full-frame style ever in this section. Rather it is cut, torn, scratched, burned and shot. It never just sits in the frame; it is split in two, maybe the same continuous image, but likely not. Or if it is, perhaps one side is upside down, turned over or in negative. Up to four different films running, cut into pieces and layered across the frame. Sometimes slow motion is used, sometimes in contrast with regular speed film in the same frame. Shafts of light or black come through in between cuts or in holes in the frame. It seems to roughly correspond to when bullets fly but it may be more strictly related to intensity in the action. Sprocket holes across images, sometimes just the edge of a bit of film shows on an all-white screen. Scratches cut people from the screen entirely and seem to follow them across the frame to keep them hidden. A split screen shows both the Vietcong fighter and the American fighter who are presumably looking to shoot the other in close up. An American soldier’s face appears in freeze frame, the sound of machine gun fire and his face is shot away. Buildings burn. A Vietcong fighter’s face appears, fierce, determined, while he shoots an automatic weapon, we see it in freeze frame and it is literally burned away.
The title is reassembled from the torn parts to say:
Que la división del campo socialista no ensombrezca el futuro.
[The fragmentation of the socialist field does not darken the future.]

Classical music plays and we are back to normal screen film. Bombs blast, buildings burn, a dandelion blooms (a repeated motif through the film). Soldiers run, illuminated by a raging fire behind them. Then the closing titles:

Derrotados los yanquis.
Construiremos una patria diez veces mas hermosa.

[Once we defeat the Yankees, we shall build a homeland ten times more beautiful.]

The flower blooms.

***

This sequence comes at the end of a film dedicated to the life of Ho-Chi Minh. Starting when he was a young man, through his life and past his death. This scene comes after his death. Ho-Chi Minh is shown in very human close-up portraits in everyday scenes—smoking, reading, writing, walking, talking. Simple life. These are contrasted with days of official pomp and circumstance at home and abroad. His achievements are celebrated. When he dies, he is laid out in a glass coffin and scores and scores of people mourn his passing.
Santiago Alvarez became a filmmaker at age 40, by being put in charge of the Cuban Newsreel. They made one film a week for 30 years. He has directed more than 600 films. They had very little in the way of resources. They made films about the situation of social movements and cultural conditions in the United States even though the U.S. blockade prohibited them from gathering live footage. It forced them to improvise. They made films using whatever they had available to them, even using photos from magazines. A unique technique developed—layered, collaged, affected, urgent.

“I don’t believe in films for posterity, I make an urgent cinema.”

In 1966 Santiago Alvarez and Ivan Napoles went to Vietnam to film. They took only two handheld cameras, no sound recording device, and scraps of leftover film. They were in Hanoi on the first days of the American bombing and filmed what they saw there. There is devastation of course, but there are also close up portraits of Vietnamese people, tender, loving everyday portraits. Humanity. They saw terrible pain and destruction. What was shock became rage. Their rage found a way to express itself in cinema, as cinema.
“My style is the style of hatred for imperialism.”

In “79 Primaveras,” Alvarez brings us as close as possible to seeing the horrible reality of the violence perpetrated on the Vietnamese people by the Americans. There is an uncomfortably long slow-motion scene where an American soldier is kicking a bound and partially naked Vietnamese man in the stomach over and over again, first with his toe and then his heel. We can clearly see the man’s face as he vainly attempts to cover his stomach with his hands. His eyes stay open. He doesn’t scream. The soldier lifts him into a sitting position and holds him by his hair as he slams the butt of his rifle into the man’s collarbone. Either he does this over and over again or the strike is repeated in the editing. Then full screen text reads, “Y AHORA MATAN PORQUE NO PEUDEN VENCER” [And now they kill because they cannot win; caps original].

Other scenes show this same brutality. A soldier with an automatic weapon shoots a person bound on the ground in a field. He is within inches of the body, yet shoots him over and over again, many more times than would have been necessary to kill him. These images show the inhumanity, the
overwhelming disparity in force possessed by the U.S. soldiers. A smiling, smoking soldier poses with a dead Vietnamese. His helmet on, holding his gun, he puts his foot up near the body. His friend is taking a picture of him. He motions for the soldier to move closer. We see a close up of the naked, bloody, mutilated body. We see a close up of the soldier’s smiling face. Trophy picture. The scariest thing about these images is that they were not shot by Alvarez; this is U.S. footage that he has been able to get. These are the images we take of ourselves. So reminiscent of Abu Ghraib. Our vanity is our downfall when it is seen by the rest of the world.

But the portrayal of Americans is not unequivocally evil. There are lots of images, both still and moving, of demonstrations in the United States against the war. Riots, marches, young people burning draft cards. I can’t help thinking about the war today and if anti-war filmmakers around the world are seeing, are using any images of revolt within the United States, I can’t help wondering if there is revolt in the United States. I wonder about the role of the circulation of images of the war, and not just images in the press (which we don’t have either) but also committed images against the violence of war in inspiring revolt. Do we need a more urgent anti-imperialist cinema here and now?
Travis Wilkerson, who made the film “Accelerated Under-Development” about the work of Santiago Alvarez, said if he could have told the U.S. customs agent who interrogated him upon his return to the U.S. from Cuba about the films he had seen, he would have told him that:

They were always political and that they were often didactic. That they could be playful, or deadly serious, that they were born of rage, bitter irony and an almost limitless spirit of solidarity. That they could be raucous or silent, brief or monumental, laconic or verbose. They were prone to tangents but they could be as eloquent as poetry. They never sought perfection, they were never made with posterity in mind. They showed the world to be forever changing and changeable. And they were always made for the here and now.
Chapter Five
Transparency and Anonymity in a Surveillance Economy

We will treat the boxes as compromised.
—jebba

Paranoia is generally conceived of as an irrational discourse. What could easily be termed paranoia is ubiquitous within the groups I have circulated within while conducting research. What is going on however, is not as it appears on the surface as being irrational, but rather is an example of paranoia within reason (Marcus, 1999), a rationality that makes sense within the discourse of the group and operates as a type of native discourse. To illustrate this point, in this chapter I will present details of a case involving several national governments, two servers and one media organization. This chapter will also expand on the concept of openness in indymedia in chapter 2 to look closely at tensions with and reconfigurations of this concept with an understanding of the paranoia within reason operating in these circles. I propose a mediating concept, the mask, to describe the negotiation between openness and clandestinity at work in indymedia and other social movement groups. Finally, a first person account elucidates the situations and sensations, which characterize a paranoid mode within indymedia.
The case of the missing servers

In October of 2004, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation served a subpoena on a Texas-based Internet Service Provider (ISP), Rackspace Managed Hosting, regarding the servers of one of its clients. These two servers, which were housed in Rackspace’s facility in London, England were used by Indymedia. The Indymedia content was widely read, with the two servers transmitting over 3.2 terabytes or over 18 million page views a month. With very little information provided to their client about why the following actions were taken, Rackspace pulled the servers offline and turned them over to the FBI. In so doing, more than 20 Independent Media Centers around the world, which offered independent journalists a distribution outlet upon which to publish in a public forum, were effectively shut down.

The whole situation was shrouded in secrecy. No one knew where the subpoena came from or why it was served. Rackspace and the FBI made public statements that they were acting on behalf of another government using the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty, which is normally reserved for issues of terrorism and racketeering, but they refused to reveal any details. In the following days, the best guess as to the nature of the seizure by the
UK Indymedia collective who administered the servers, was that the hard drives were handed over in the UK, following an order by a U.S. federal agency which acted on the request of another country, possibly Italy and/or Switzerland, complaining about a website run by French volunteers. In the meantime, the servers that hosted websites including local IMCs from Western Massachusetts, Andorra, Brazil, the Czech Republic, the Basque area, Palestine, Italy, Poland, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, and multiple sites from France and Belgium, as well as popular indymedia Internet radio streams, remained offline.

Yossarian: Everybody was stunned that someone had taken down the server. We didn’t actually know, and we’re still not 100 percent, but we were about 95 percent sure that it was the FBI that took the servers. Though the only reason we say that is because there was one public statement by the FBI to Agence France-Presse, which was 3 days ago now, and there still has been no further confirmation that it was the FBI, and Rackspace won’t actually tell us anything about the server seizure. It’s quite an interesting thing. We’ve felt like there was a real catch-22, because it appears that Rackspace, the hosting service, is under some sort of court order, some kind of gag order that doesn’t allow them to tell us where our data is. At the same time, the FBI refuses to answer any questions. The UK government, various arms of it that we’ve contacted, have refused to confirm or deny whether they were involved in anything. The Italian and Swiss governments also, there’s [sic] rumors that they might be involved in this but they also are stonewalling everything. So, essentially, someone, some unknown force, which we assume is the FBI based on one press report, has taken down 20 Indymedia sites, which represent about one million articles of content from our calculations...
Tish: You folks in the UK have never actually seen a copy of any kind of subpoena, or court order or anything?

Yossarian: No. No, no, no, no. There was some back and forth over the past two or three weeks, between the server tech who was actually administering the server, who owns the server and the hosting provider Rackspace about complaints made, and this is again fairly strange, complaints made by the Swiss government, who were concerned that there were pictures of two of their police officers on a site in France. So there has been speculation that this has something to do with the server seizure, because I guess what happened is the Swiss government contacted the FBI in the United States, to deal with the server in the UK, about content in France. So, it’s really globalization in action I guess. So what’s actually happened, the only thing we know for sure, that we do have confirmation of, because its been repeated hundreds of times is Rackspace’s public statement... (Yossarian, 2004).

“In the present matter regarding Indymedia, Rackspace Managed Hosting, a U.S. based company with offices in London, is acting in compliance with a court order pursuant to a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT), which establishes procedures for countries to assist each other in investigations such as international terrorism, kidnapping and money laundering. Rackspace responded to a Commissioner’s subpoena, duly issued under Title 28, United States Code, Section 1782 in an investigation that did not arise in the United States. Rackspace is acting as a good corporate citizen and is cooperating with international law enforcement authorities. The court prohibits Rackspace from commenting further on this matter” (Drusch, 2004).

Yossarian: What we have appears to be, a request by the Swiss government at least, and the Italians, that’s another report, to the FBI to execute American law, but they’ve executed American law in the UK, in London. So, it’s all very, very complicated. We’re stunned, we’re also very, very angry
though, because they have taken down one million pieces of content and they’ve also, not all the sites had good back up, so for example Uruguay, IMC Uruguay, may have lost everything since last April, and that IMC Italy, we’re not sure but we think IMC Italy may have lost every thing since June.

Tish: What are the future plans for putting stuff back online?

Yossarian: I guess the response has to be both technical and political. Here in the UK, we are very lucky that we have a very paranoid server tech who was doing backups every hour, so we lost very little content. There are a few things we’ve lost. We may have lost about 100 hours of radio shows, which were on a different part of the server and weren’t being backed up in the same system. That’s one thing, everybody is scrambling, trying to find the backups. They’re scraping server caches, they’re going after Google caches, they’re trying to find all the stuff. But that is not the real issue here I don’t think. The real issue is that the FBI appears to be able, so far, with very little outcry and very little mainstream media coverage, to be able to censor a million pieces of content off the Internet without any backlash, without any kind of repercussions for them. I think that has to be, you know, addressed. I think that if people have any sort of feeling about indymedia, any feeling about the social movements that indymedia tries to support around the world, and also just people who are concerned about freedom of speech worldwide, how is it that the U.S. government can execute something that can cripple independent media outlets in 17 countries? It’s insane. People think its fine, they think, ‘well, they’re websites and some of them are backed up and probably the rest of them will come back.’ But think of it this way, if the U.S. government was able to shut down newspapers in 17 countries, well, how would you feel about that? (Yossarian, 2004)

The online legal advocacy group, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)

filed a motion to unseal the documents related to the seizure in United States
District Court for the Western District of Texas. In the motion, EFF attorneys argued that “The public and the press have a clear and compelling interest in discovering under what authority the government was able to unilaterally prevent Internet publishers from exercising their First Amendment rights.” EFF argued further that secret court orders circumvent due process, undermine confidence in the judicial system, and deny those affected by the order any way to challenge it.

Tish: What does this move signify for freedom of the press, or freedom of speech? What are the larger implications of this action?

Kurt: This has grave implications both for privacy and freedom of the press. As an initial matter this is 20 different websites which are offering independent news and information that are being shut down at the behest of a foreign government without a chance for indymedia or any of the other affected people to contest it, or to show why this is improper. As a second matter, they are getting all sorts of information that was stored upon these servers that is most likely beyond what the Swiss court was looking for. This has privacy implications for all the people whose information was stored on there. Fortunately, Indymedia does not log information so people’s rights to read anonymously are thereby preserved (Ospal, 2004).

On July 20, 2005, the court granted the motion, and ordered the majority of the underlying documents unsealed but with the specific URLs of the pages being investigated redacted. The unsealed documents confirm that the U.S. government served on Rackspace Managed Hosting a Commissioner’s
Subpoena issued pursuant to an April 2004 request from the Bologna Public Prosecutor’s Office. The Commissioner’s Subpoena was specifically seeking “log files in relation to the creation and updating of the web spaces corresponding to” particular URLs on the indymedia servers. Because the URLs weren’t included in these documents, no one can know exactly what information was sought or what article caused the investigation. But many other unknowns remain. It seemed, and still seems, that the defining characteristic of the server seizure case was not knowing anything for certain. At some point the important thing becomes not what did they know and when but rather what was the response to this situation both technically and socially.

Tish: What happened after the seizure; what have the responses been?

Yossarian: As far as I can tell, a) they got away with it so far and b) we are dead in the water politically as there was no effective response. Technically we are doing better but politically it stinks. We now have 12 mirrors of our site running. But we still don’t know anything and haven’t been able to force them to apologize, control themselves, pay compensation, fire somebody, etc. People came to us out of the blue and offered us servers, like ‘Hi, this sucks, you want a server?’ Which is an interesting backlash response that you maybe don’t know about. People that actually control the means of distribution themselves went out of their way to help us. We have made contacts with a broad range of civil-rights organizations like the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Liberty,
the ACLU and others, which we didn’t have before and that’s going to make our position much easier to defend in future. The interesting thing here I think, is that it’s not “Indymedia vs. State Governments”, it is “State vs. The Internet” because we have support, technically and propaganda-wise, from a lot of people, like The Register who did the best reporting on the whole thing and the people who offered us mirrors. Like any other sphere of political action, repression on the Internet generates a response, which is in itself interesting, I think (Yossarian, 2006).

Almost two years later, no one knows exactly who took the servers, where they were taken or why.

Paranoia Within Reason

I intentionally avoided the use of the term “paranoia” in this text, because of its derogatory connotations. I feel compelled whenever discussing the air of suspicion present in many of these circles to prove to a non-indymedia audience that activists are not “paranoid” in the sense of living with a “mental disorder characterized by systematized delusions of persecution or grandeur.” The reason I elaborate on examples such as the seizure of the servers is to show the justifiable concern about political repression experienced in these communities. I want to describe cultural logics that surround the use of technologies of anonymity and to do this would be impossible without a background of knowledge into instances of repression.

This hard-to-define “electrified” space, of whispered confidences and
encrypted emails, is pervasive and leaving it out of any text on a political movement or media group operating within a movement, would be a grave oversight. This case fits well within the “paranoia within reason” model laid out by George Marcus in his introduction to the volume of the same name (Marcus, 1999). Paranoia within reason describes a doubly inflected experience of contemporary paranoia. The first meaning of the term is a paranoid style that is a reasonable response to particular contemporary situations and historical legacies, a “‘reasonable’ component of rational and commonsensical thought and experience in certain contexts” (ibid.).

Indymedia activists are certainly paranoid within reason, in the sense that their paranoia is perfectly justified by the history and tradition of state surveillance, repression and oppression, both in America and elsewhere. Some degree of paranoia is necessary. Without it, activists would be naive.

I find three responses to this line of thought within Indymedia groups: one, everyone, everyone, has a story where they describe being “really paranoid” (nervous); two, most people want to vehemently argue with me that they are not paranoid (crazy) and that the issue is about the truth—they take our servers, they gas us and beat us in the streets, they subpoena us to grand
juries; three, others say it’s ridiculous if we aren’t all paranoid (cautious) and therefore extremely cautious—an issue that has repeatedly been able to drive a wedge into Indymedia local collectives and political organizing groups causing factioning and splintering; ironically, the very results sought by government disruption tactics such as COINTELPRO.

The phrase “paranoia within reason” refers to two objects. First, groups of people may share paranoid views, but their views exist within reasonable structures of explanation... but the second connotation of this phrase implies that paranoia emerges, at times, within practices and constructions of reason and rationality themselves. Conspiracy and paranoia are not just the predicament of those subject to or outside of institutional orders. Conspiracy and paranoia also constitute a predicament inherent in institutional orders (Marcus and Powell, 2003).

In the second sense of this term, the meaning of paranoia within reason is that within rational structures, the form and content of them are of the paranoid style. This is because of several factors, including the history of the cold war superpowers and their interventions, social theory of strategic thought influenced by that history and a broad crisis of representation in academia and its counterpart in larger society of a lack of metanarratives to effectively explain a rapidly changing world because of the full globalization of capital.
As I said above, the defining characteristic of the server case is the fact that no one knows anything for sure. In the released court documents, much information was withheld citing risks to an “ongoing investigation” as the reason that information had to be kept secret. It makes perfect rational sense why law enforcement authorities would need to keep this information secret; however, this secrecy is precisely what creates gaps in knowledge that demand mental leaps on the part of the indymedia activists to try and understand the situation while never being allowed a holistic view. In this sense, it is the state’s actions themselves that generate the paranoia, not the minds of the activists or simply a reasonable response to histories of repression.

In the domain of paranoia within reason that we are probing here, there is no question that there is something “out there.” The paranoia arises from expert desire or duty toward knowledge in the absence of compass (Marcus, 1999).

At this point, we may even ask, who is the more paranoid party? Is it paranoid to set up systems to mirror your server and do automatic backups in case your server is seized by the police (again), or to be the multinational constellation of law enforcement and private corporations that seize the server in the first place?
Surveillance, Provocation and Disruption

Political activists are very familiar with histories of repression of political organizers and movements. The use of surveillance and infiltration to provoke and divide movements, is considered common knowledge in most activist circles. In America, this history includes, among other things, the Pinkerton forces (founded in 1850, most well known for their union busting work at the Homestead strike of 1892), the Red Scares (from 1917-1920), McCarthyism (late 1940s through mid 1950s) and the FBI’s notorious counter intelligence program, COINTELPRO (1956-1971). Released documents and personal histories show that government and private agencies have kept tabs and files on activists – from Martin Luther King to Quaker peace groups - and continue to do so. Recent court cases\(^7\) have revealed that using provocateurs and undercover agents continues to be a commonplace strategy.

With new electronic means of communication and the growth of political organizing on the Internet, the very nature of surveillance has changed. Within a technoscape of surveillance, new “catch all” systems such as Echelon and Carnivore exist as an omnipresent eye. These systems work like a vacuum, sucking up all electronic information and caching it for later.
Echelon is not designed to eavesdrop on a particular individual’s email or fax link. Instead, it indiscriminately intercepts massive quantities of communications, using sophisticated computers to identify messages of interest from the vast majority of unwanted ones. Using 120 satellites and a chain of secret interception facilities around the world, Echelon automatically searches through millions of messages looking for ones containing key words or phrases. Every word of intercepted message is searched in ‘real time’ as they pour into the system’s computers (Hager, 1996-7).

This technical panopticon has important ramifications on the structure and effects of surveillance. One, the older corporate/state models moved first from suspicion of an individual to targeted surveillance; now the reverse is the case as information is first gathered and then tagged as being suspicious. Two, once someone has caused enough suspicion to warrant active surveillance, past records that have been stored for later use can be accessed.

Online surveillance has a secondary important impact to discuss. With sites like indymedia or other political organizations having a strong online presence, police and state investigators are conducting surveillance on groups through surfing the web. After the Halliburton Shareholder’s meeting in Houston in 2005, a local journalist and I made an open records request of the Houston Police Department (HPD) for any documents about preparations or surveillance. We asked for:

Information related to HPD surveillance and data gathering of the May 18th demonstrations of the Halliburton Shareholder’s
meeting in downtown Houston, as well as the HPD’s pre-demonstration preparations, surveillance and data gathering of the demonstrator’s organizing efforts. The information I am seeking includes, but is not limited to: official memos (including officer commendations for their work surrounding the demonstration and events leading up to the demonstration, surveillance information, undercover detective findings, and strategy formation documents), emails, surveillance documents, incident reports, press releases concerning arrests, photographs, notes, and any information (including emails, propaganda, and organizing materials) produced by the demonstrators that was collected and stored by HPD for surveillance purposes. Finally, I am seeking manuals and operating procedures used by HPD for dealing with public protests/demonstrations, as well as documents created to specifically deal with the May 18th demonstrations.

When we were finally able to pick up the documents, we received a manila envelope with a cover letter that said they would release only a portion of the documents to us and the rest of the documents were “excepted from required public disclosure pursuant to section 552.108 of the Texas government code.” This exception is for information or documents held by police departments if releasing them would interfere with ongoing investigations. They requested an opinion from the Texas attorney General to deny releasing the rest of the documents, which was ultimately upheld.

The manila envelope contained 149 pages, including: emails, commendation letters, two offense reports, an after action report, the public assembly
incident report and an HPD manual "Demonstrators guide to federal, state and local laws." The only HPD surveillance documents that we were given were print outs from websites. Roughly 80 pages of this material is from websites including: Houston Indymedia, Houston Global Awareness Collective, the Houston Indymedia calendar, Halliburton Watch and local corporate news coverage.

The lesson of the contents of the envelope is indymedia—with all of its concern about security culture—is providing surveillance to the state. We are doing their job for them, and doing it better because they don't even need informants; we are insiders, informing them.

**Balaclavas and Encryption**

Indymedia centers have experienced many facets of state repression ranging from grand jury subpoenas, FBI requests for IP logs, major corporate lawsuits, state censorship, police showing activists print outs of indymedia websites, newspaper stories about the monitoring of IMC sites by law enforcement agencies, police attacking demonstrators immediately outside of the doors of the Quebec indymedia center, police intimidation and raids at
Indymedia centers in Evian and Prague and horrific police brutality in Genoa that left pools of blood where sleeping media activists once lay.

In response to these events and a legacy of surveillance and disruption that destroyed radical movements in the 60s and 70s and continues to undermine progressive organizing, indymedia has developed practices of openness, leaderlessness and anonymity.

Indymedia, and the movements in which it functions, uses a set of social and technical practices to conceal and protect the identity of individuals. Technical practices include: use of encryption algorithms which work with sets of “keys” to make a text unreadable except to the person with the other key and used for verifying the sender of an email or encoding an email’s contents; web proxies, a proxy is a server in between a person using the Internet and the website they are visiting, so, if IP log files are being kept by the server the site is on, the IP address logged is the one of the boxes in the middle not the reader; secure protocols such as Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) which is a communications protocol for secure communications on the Internet and can be used, among other things, to obscure a user’s IP address when connecting to IRC. Social practices of anonymity include the use of pseudonyms or screen names, a guideline in the indymedia principles of
unity about respecting privacy when taking pictures or recording video or audio and the use of "security culture." Security culture is a system developed by activist communities as response to the disruption campaigns emanating from the corporate and state agencies. Security culture is a behavior-oriented plan that gives peace of mind to activists knowing that if it is being followed, disruption can be controlled and includes behaviors such as giving out any information only on a "need to know basis."

Another response to these same conditions is also one of complete openness, the "we have nothing to hide" school of thought. This is manifest in indymedia groups as practices of transparency, direct democracy, consensus, open publishing and open source software, the ideals I mentioned in the chapter on indymedia.

Contemporary activists navigate these two poles—anonymity and openness—as an opposition presented as two possible territorialized spaces to occupy; however, activists play the sign system to their advantage reterritorializing space with a mediating position, I call "the mask."
Masks are used by activists around the world to cover their faces. Whether the *pasamontanas* of the Zapatistas, the *balaclavas* of the Autonomen or the bandanas of the black bloc, the mask is a symbol of resistance. The mask is at once a refusal to participate in the accumulation of information in the surveillance economy by hiding; and, at the same time, boldly showing oneself, an over exposure into the sign system through semiotic subversion.

Indymedia techs engage in purposeful refusal to accumulate personal information as part of the anonymity approach I mentioned above. The use of pseudonyms for example, a regular and encouraged practice in the indymedia community, is a similar use of semiotic play as masking. By publicly participating but taking on a different name, activists are refusing to allow surveillance mechanisms to keep track of personal identity.
In the case of the seized indymedia server, what the Italian subpoena was ultimately seeking was personal identity information in the form of IP addresses of posters to the indymedia website, so an individual user or multiple users could be identified. An IP address is a unique number used by machines to refer to each other when sending information through the Internet and are normally automatically recorded by servers. While the indymedia servers logged website traffic information, because of the desire to protect privacy, they were configured never to log the specific IP address of computers that read or post news and information to IMC sites. This is why Kurt Opsal said readers' privacy had been protected by indymedia even though the server was in the hands of a government.

Is this policy of obscuring information such as personal identity in line with the ideal of openness and transparency held by indymedia? Indymedia is finding ways to negotiate the difficult paths of seemingly contradictory ideals of openness and transparency in an environment that is necessarily secretive. I would argue that ultimately it is but that it is a messy and tenuous relationship that ultimately must be constantly renegotiated.
Contemporary political and media activists know they are living in a surveillance economy that is potentially always watching them. This environment in and of itself can hinder free speech because of fear of government or institutional repression. Allowing people to participate in a way that they know their identity and privacy are protected can actually increase free expression for participants who are concerned about their activities being potentially monitored. Debates are ongoing within the global indymedia network to add a codified rule to the set of organizing principals that all collectives agree to which would restrict any indymedia website or server to collect personal information, such as IP addresses. In the past, local collectives were allowed to decide their own stance for themselves, but if this rule ultimately passes, which it most likely will, privacy would be able to trump another ideal in the community, autonomy.

It has been mentioned in numerous instances in this chapter that indymedia does not log IP addresses. So, if this were uniformly the case, why would such a rule be necessary? Because it is known that not logging IPs hasn’t always been the case. Again, we come to a situation where multiple factors must be taken into consideration. Open publishing makes “anyone the media” but also produces an environment where persons with nefarious
intent can abuse the sites with garbage, either ideological or simply through overuse. Local collectives have used IP logging when trying to thwart unwanted mass publication to their websites, otherwise known as spam. By logging IP addresses for a short while, administrators were able to discover the addresses of people “spamming” the websites and used various methods to try and stop their flood of publications based on knowledge of their IP address. This approach turned out to be an ineffectual way to deal with spammers because there are simple ways to get around this block, for example, disconnecting and reconnecting to the Internet to be assigned a new IP address, using a web proxy or emptying a browser’s cache file; however, novel ways—such as blocking publication with text strings, such as the name of the publisher or making it impossible to publish the same story within 15 minutes—have since been developed to deal with the spam problem when it comes up that are not being tried in other online communities. The main argument surrounding the problem with logging IP addresses is the fear that government agencies will be more likely to engage in subpoenas and seizures in an attempt to retrieve this information if they believe it is available rather than believing that all indymedia sites do not keep track of this information; therefore, searching for it on server logs would produce no result. This example illustrates the delicate balance
between openness and anonymity in that openness produces space for free
speech but must be protected by obscuring identities, and on the other hand,
openness produces an environment favorable to spammers, which must be
dealt with as well.

**The Miami Model**

In October of 2003, I was in an indymedia IRC (Internet relay chat) when an
Indymedia tech volunteer from the west coast messaged me.

Manuel: you going to Miami? [For the Free Trade Area of the
Americas Summit]
Tish: yeah, you?
Manuel: yes, perhaps we can meet up down there.
Tish: great! How are things going? sounds stressful from what I
hear.
Manuel: heh, we’ll have to talk when I see you in person

When I ran into him in Miami, we were on Biscayne Blvd, just leaving a
total enclosure by riot police who were beginning to shoot tear gas.
He was wearing a black police vest and carrying a Sidekick (a pocket web tool, which looks like a pager with a keyboard) and was running indymedia IRC. He was with a group of people that felt they were being targeted by plainclothes police and were about to be “snatched.”
The group I was with took a banner we were carrying and created a circular enclosure around them and walked together to a location where National Lawyers Guild observers could escort them away. Much later in the night, I made it to the hotel where they were staying so he and I could talk. Manuel reported that when they had arrived at the hotel, one of the plain-clothes officers from the morning was waiting in a car across the street from the hotel. Manuel was staying in a block of rooms crammed with people who had just come from the biggest day of action at the summit with the most militarized police show of force I have ever seen. They felt like they were being targeted and watched. Those that were awake were watching video footage of a protester who had “unarrested” another demonstrator by ninja kicking an arresting officer; they had both gotten away. We got some beer
from the corner market and took it back to one of the rooms. Most everyone
was asleep and we sat on the floor near the hotel room door to talk in low
tones.

Manuel is an indymedia tech volunteer. I asked him to tell me what is going
on with rumors of a split in his local indymedia group and these are some of
the stories he told me that night about the circumstances surrounding the
issues. An article had appeared in a local newspaper about recently released
police department documents that revealed what people already
suspected—the police were watching the website. A second article appeared
that charged the website with inciting anti-war demonstrations. Then, an
FBI investigation lead them to a suspect who was a sometimes indymedia
volunteer. Several indymedia volunteers from the collective received house
calls from FBI agents during the investigation looking for information about
the case. Then, to top it off, the indymedia collective’s ISP received a
“cease and desist” letter from a major corporation, demanding the site
remove links to leaked internal memos. He spoke to me under his breath,
yet, in an almost joking fashion.

Manuel: There is a phenomenon of vertigo you get when
dealing with situations like these because all these dramatic
things are happening and it’s happening so fast that you can’t
get a hold on things which maybe paranoia but really it’s just
the experience of having a brush with real power structures
(Manuel, 2006).

TechnoChubacabras

*If conspiracy is in the eye of the beholder, then writing about them immediately implies the acknowledgment of the writer’s situatedness.*
—Andrea Aureli

When I went to edit the film “Trading Freedom” in Oregon, a group of us stayed on Luther’s land. Luther, another member of the collective, and I had been friends for almost a decade by that point. I knew well Luther’s tendencies towards conspiracy. Years earlier we had taken a road trip across the country together, during which we would never stop for the evening because he would drive all night listening to “Coast to Coast with Art Bell,” a late-night AM radio show, which showcases conspiracy theories aplenty. Frequent topics on the show that summer included alien abductions, the Chupacabra, crop circles, remote viewing, and Art Bell’s personal Armageddon: The Reckoning. We had a photo of the Chupacabra from Art Bell’s website stuck on the dashboard of the truck we drove.
I knew as we all left for Oregon, Luther felt any location we went to was ultimately in danger because of a history of raids of locations where indymedia video project libraries were located.

Luther: [The film project] then went to Rome to do some more editing with M. He ultimately took on the task of bottom-lining it, and a couple of American folks went with him. And then his studio got busted into and everything stolen…

Tish: By whom?

Luther: No one knows. He lived in this squat for like 20 years in Rome. And then simultaneously in Prague a bunch of people’s apartments that were connected with it got broken into.

Tish: By whom?

Luther: No one knows, right, and some stuff stolen, computers, what not (Luther, 2000).

Now we were taking a project to his house. Paranoia was my companion on the plane out to Oregon because I was carrying the full video archive with
me. I was too nervous to let the gym bag of tapes out of my sight, let alone away from my body. When we arrived at the editing location, we started to work immediately, setting up our facilities with Internet connections and an internal network. This network was made in a haphazard, but ultimately successful fashion involving satellite dishes and Pringles cans. When the network occasionally went down, as it was bound to do, we made jokes about how our wireless signal was being disrupted by “operatives” with dishes on the hill across the valley from us. Just a few miles away, the largest wildfire America had seen in years was burning, sometimes, turning the sky apocalyptic shades of orange and purple. It added just the right tone of terror for a group of radicals, alone in the woods, watching endless hours of footage of police violence to steep us in an air of paranoid importance.

And then it happened... mutilated goats.

Luther woke me early in the morning and told me to grab a video camera and follow him to the animal corral where the goats and pigs were housed. There, we encountered two of his goats dead on the ground. We looked for a cause of death and found puncture holes in the goats’ necks. Additionally, one of them had the udder removed from her body. I stood there staunchly
taking close-up videotape of what looked like a clean surgical incision where the goat’s udder had been. Eventually, with no possible answer to what had happened, we wrapped the goats up and drove to a ravine where we left them. I recall standing by the truck under this eerie orange sky, watching my friend throw these mutilated goats off the back of the truck thinking that sometimes, these unexplainable things just happen that seem too fantastic to be even told to other people, but they happen. We were exhausted, underfed, working very hard on this project and all the joking about the operatives at work to undermine us suddenly became much less funny that morning. It was much less funny the next, when another goat was found in the same condition.
Intersection Four

"i: the film"
directed by Raphael Lyon and Andres Ingoglia
2006, Digital Video

Photo from Argentina indymedia.

***

(The following are the subtitles translated from the original Spanish dialogue.)

"There is a danger in the idea of the emergence of a global culture that is not
global, that only belongs to the ones that participate in the global circuit. The
people in Solano, or here or in a school or from MOCASE or the MST in
Brasil, or Chiapas or India are always hosting young people with cameras
who are eager to talk and tell things about Palestine, blah blah blah... But
they don't really participate in this circuit. They benefit from it. They are
in solidarity with it. They are informed by it. They want to see videos about
it. They promote the struggles. But there is a culture that is purely global
and very virtual, very Internet, that comes from a generation of activists who
go all over the place. And it creates a rift. It seems to me that the global
network is great because of the information, and the possibilities flow all
around and we all benefit from it. But there are things to be discussed. This
is one of them—the difference between the people that belong to the global network and the people at the extremes of the network, at the end of one of the links. It's very decontextualizing. It is dangerous in that. It destroys diversity.”

***

This segment is from a debate that runs throughout the film and offers the main source of critique. This conversation is happening in a room that is packed with books. The man speaking is Diego Sztulwark from the Colectivo Situaciones. On the couch next to him sits an indymedia volunteer from Italy. Several people, mostly younger, presumably indymedia activists, sit around. Diego makes complex hand gestures throughout, demonstrating the scope of the global network and the distinct levels, and the rift. Several times during the talk, he looks directly into the camera, directly at the indymedia videographer filming this discussion. At a couple of key moments in the discussion, the shot cuts to the other people in the room listening, showing close ups of eyes or hands touching.

“i: the film” is about the role of Argentina indymedia in the social movement that rose up in the wake of the economic collapse and the uprising in December of 2001. In this capacity, it details, through the work of indymedia, the social realities and movement action in Argentina. It shows how indymedia formed in Argentina during that period of uprising, in the
fire, from the inside of the protests and how it became a central force in the social movement that toppled four presidents in a week and developed amazing alternative democracies and economies. The film is very clear that it is the movement who is producing the media, the movement that is filming itself. People are involved with indymedia because they want to tell their own stories. At one point, a map is drawn that shows the centrality of indymedia to the movement, saying that if you removed indymedia, the whole thing would be a mess. It is a node of dense connections. In the film, a strong correlation is made between the movement and the media in a cinematic way—photos or indymedia videos are shown on screen being handled or watched just before a cut to a video of the action shown in the pictures. A small history of indymedia is offered, showing how the network was created, how it runs in different places and how Argentina is part of the global indymedia network. There are sections that reinforce the connections between nodes showing acts of translation, or the circulation of images, resources and motivation as they move between nodes. There are also sections that highlight the distinctiveness and local character of Argentina indymedia, including critiques of the northern nodes of the IMC network. As is shown in many other indymedia videos, people in the street talk about the struggle and make complex and lucid observations about their actions and
hopes. Indymedia activists echo the goals of the social movement, autonomy and self-determination. Indymedia has actively built alternative structures to support those goals.

Much of the material of this film is culled from other activist videos from Argentina and elsewhere. This move is done successfully to talk about indymedia videos by actually showing them. In “i: the film” we see clips of other peoples’ films, clips of films being screened, films being shot, clips of people dubbing video material for each other. At one point, the film points out that while half a dozen immediate documentaries about the December uprising came out around the same time, many of them were made using the same, shared footage. Exactly like the texture of “i: the film,” it is patchwork, fractured, multi-vocal, multi-local.

One of these clips in “i: the film” is from another film, “Compañero Cineasta Piquetero,” produced by Argentina indymedia. While produced by indymedia, it was filmed by a man living in one of the reclaimed land settlements on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. If you see the original version, his tape is left completely unedited and has a statement at the beginning of the film to that effect. He used a camera from one of the indymedia
activists who visited the squatted settlement. He takes the viewer on a tour of where he lives, shows the landscape, the neighbors, the children and the “famous scrap pile.” We hear him talking from behind the camera, obviously walking alone. He talks about the repression they suffer at the hands of the authorities, such as the police. We see people working hard to reclaim the land for their use and struggling for basic survival, living in houses made from any available material. Pablo Boido, an Argentina indymedia volunteer describes the film:

One of the members of the young unemployed workers movement with whom he had been at the activity, borrowed the camera and filmed for quite a while, without his knowledge, making a short film about his life. Off-camera, he recounts his experiences within the movement and how it was often attacked by the municipality. He introduces us to the different characters of his neighborhood, and shows us how he lives and how everything works in a truly educational image journey. The result is highly surprising since it is the very first time he takes a camera in his hands, a fact that is evident in the way he manages light and the close-ups allowed by the camera.

What can be produced from and with people immersed in the reality we seek to show is really important. They may have the tools, and we have the possibility of sharing knowledge that will lead to the construction of new means of expression. The goal is to create the possibility of a critical construction of their own media, and to generate formal innovations that somehow change the concept of “reception” in the fields of communication and art (Boido, 2004).
The filmmaking style of “Compañero Cineasta Piquetero” and the goal of the collaboration as told by Pablo comes directly out of the Direct Cinema movement discussed in chapter 5. As well, this film model attempts to blur the line between producer and consumer as discussed in chapter 2. In this film, the viewer is invited to inhabit a space closer to the truth, because “filmmakers” have been removed entirely from the project. It is left to the people to show and narrate their own stories; but, are the filmmakers ever totally out of the picture? Who are the filmmakers in this case, is it the *piquetero* who shot the footage or the indymedia video collective? Are indymedia members not the ones providing cameras, deciding this bit of tape is meaningful, engaging in international distribution of a packaged product? Does the technology in and of itself not carry its own ideological and political weight?

I want to return now to the critique made by Diego Sztulwark in the scene at the beginning of this intersection. In thinking about the use of some of the post-writing culture models in my work, and have been a little stumped by the almost exclusive description of these methods as being for the study of elites and elite institutional practices. I worried that as my research
population is not elite, those models do not fit with my fieldwork; however, Sztulwark’s critique brought something starkly home to me. Indymedia activists, of the typical type I described in chapter 2, are, in fact, elites. They have the ability to travel to far-flung locations to set up communications infrastructures and media centers; they have access to technology and the networks to distribute materials without any money backing the project. They are mobile subjects in the new global order, while many others, such as immigrants, are not. As such, with leisure time to devote, sufficient documentation and resources for travel and purchasing technologies to produce media about movements outside of their local communities, they are elites. Maybe they are not elites in the world system but elites of this social movement. My presence in that room in Brasil with Raphael marks me—and him—as being “people from the global network, not the extreme ends of the network.”

I contend throughout my dissertation that indymedia activists and practices defy neat categorization. It is such a large and complex network there is always an exception to every rule. While working in this same media center in Porto Allegre, I met a woman from the South Africa indymedia collective. She had been flown to Brasil to participate in the World Social Forum as a
representative of the anti-privatization movement in the townships of South Africa during this meeting of global civil society. While in Brasil, I first experimented with using a blog\textsuperscript{52} to keep field notes and make them available to outside readers. This blogging was secondary to materials I was producing and contributing to indymedia. One afternoon, as I was posting to my field notes blog, the woman from South Africa came up and sat down in a chair behind me. I turned to say hello and ask her if she needed any help. She replied, “If you don’t mind, I’d really like to just watch you as you are working.” I thought this was a strange request and told her what I was doing was not terribly interesting. She then told me she had never used a computer before and was interested in seeing how I was using it. I was there, Raphael was there and she was there. Even as an IMC activist inside a large-scale indymedia center in a country far from home, she cannot be constituted by this given framework as part of the elite global network. Anti-privatization activists working in the townships are a very similar organization as the types described by Sztulwark as being at one of the extreme ends of the network\textsuperscript{53} and her story represents a small window onto the larger diverse reality: indymedia cannot be accurately represented as a cohesive whole. Just as Argentina indymedia is uniquely characterized by its local conditions and movements, so are all instances of the network.
I met Raphael and Andres, the directors of “i: the film” in the IMC (or CMI – Centro de Mídia Independente, in Portuguese) in Porto Allegre, Brasil during the World Social Forum. They were working hard, shooting everything that happened in the media center, some of which shows up in “i: the film.” After the meeting and having conversations about our work, I reflected on Raphael, thinking our two projects were parallel, but not overlapping. I wrote about it in my field notes, an early discussion of my insider/outside research access issues:

Porto Allegre, Brasil January 2003
Wednesday
The man with the sweat socks nervously paces around the room, his visor slightly tipped at an angle. He carries a
clipboard in one hand and the string that holds the pen around his neck leaves the other hand free to push his oversized glasses up onto his nose. On the clipboard is a stack of identical papers that contains preprinted questions in English, multiple-choice answers and small areas for handwritten comments/suggestions.

The man with a feather behind his ear puts down his mate gourd and picks up a video camera. He is sitting in the middle of the floor surrounded by the first ever IMC Latina general meeting. He works smoothly with another man who is holding a wireless directional mic and pointing it at the speakers. He crouches on bare feet and records hours of meetings, getting intimate details about the success and pains of these individuals working in IMC collectives in Central and South America.

Sunday
The man with the clipboard has just run away from the hospital where he was admitted after suffering a stroke in front of the IMC.

The man with the feather hands out CD copies of the trailer for his upcoming documentary and boards a bus back to Buenos Aires with the Argentina IMC collective.

These two men represent two possible tracks for research on the IMC. The man with the clipboard was a sociology professor from Purdue University. The man with the feather is from Providence but has been in Argentina for several months working on a documentary on the IMC and is speaking predominantly in Spanish. The man in the socks is working in a framework he considers to be scientifically sound and objective. The man with the feather is making a documentary film about the Argentina IMC because he feels passionately about it. Both of these men asked people who were working in the IMC space for interviews. The filmmaker interviewed probably over 80 percent of the people who worked there, including me, in any language he could, beyond nearly constant filming of activities in the space. I am sure the sociologist got less than 10 interviews only in English, even I didn’t give him
one even though my traveling companion insisted it was my responsibility as a member of the academic community.

There was another researcher there—me. My road is neither awkward outsider nor total insider, but somewhere in the middle. I participate as an IMC activist, and yet, I analyze the organization, its practices, goals and tactics. I feel that my involvement in the IMC has allowed me a certain degree of acceptance and access to information that would be unavailable to me as an outsider. (Stringer, field notes, January 2003).

**Snitches Get Stitches**

*All snitches have one thing in common—access to inside information.*
—Jim Redden

The category of the snitch is operative for my work because I collect information in circles where paranoia is deep-seated. A snitch is someone who has access to a special type of information that other people do not have and are able to use it. The snitch is always circulating information vis-à-vis at least two other parties, for example, a political group and the police. My positions in activism and academia are similar to this mediating relationship where I circulate information. I am not an outsider of either group. What is the difference between the snitch and me?

I am a part of this movement. I believe in the liberatory possibilities of the indymedia project. I actively want to share with the outside world what I find important about indymedia and a global movement rising up and
communicating with each other. As an insider, I am sensitive to activists’ desire for privacy. I included the initial story about the goats in the previous chapter to situate myself within these same paranoid worlds, to offer a partial glimpse into the fabric of conspiracy as I have experienced it during this project. In my research I use privacy protecting techniques including: systems of pseudonyms and encryption to protect identities, never taking indymedia people’s pictures, making a PGP key available for encrypted email communication and a knowledge and use of security culture. Why do I go to all this effort? Without it, not only would I be potentially putting people’s security at risk, but also I believe it would be impossible for me to effectively and ethically conduct research in this community.

My use of these practices and involvement in indymedia has allowed me access to information that would be unavailable to an outsider. A researcher’s working knowledge and involvement with issues in this field will drastically affect his/her ability to access information. There are three main reasons for this. One, this group is composed primarily of activists and paranoia can be deep-seated. Trust of my intentions in the network garnered through time and commitment has allowed me to move with relative ease. Second, indymedia operates on volunteer labor; there is no money backing
it. Through labor, I can gain rapport unavailable to researchers who have
done nothing to “help out.” I have helped both locally and globally. Some
contributions I have made have been significant enough to the continued
operations of my local indymedia group that one of my colleagues accused
me of “creating my own field site.” Whether it is editing a film, writing
grants or cleaning bathrooms, work is the best way to interact with this
group. Third, indymedia uses, to a large degree, its own highly technical
language and referents. I had to acquire a new language of computer skills to
be able to talk with indymedia techies and to understand the details of online
communication practices.

Realizing the need of this second language began as I was looking into the
impact of an FBI subpoena on the indymedia network. The FBI was
requesting IP addresses of individuals that had posted classified government
documents to the Quebec indymedia website during the Free Trade Area of
the Americas summit. Indymedia was not, in the end, forced to turn over the
identities of the posters. However, at the time, IP addresses were being kept
in a log, something automatically done by the website server software,
Apache. A decision was made by indymedia techies to stop the logging of
IP addresses. This was accomplished through a simple subversion of the
Apache program, instead of writing the logs to a file, the software was set to send the logs to /dev/null. /dev/null is a device on the UNIX/Linux operating system like a CD or floppy drive, only representing nothing, no device, “the bit bucket.” I was fascinated by this; I had never heard of the bit bucket and found it a simple answer to escape the state’s ever-seeing eye. Information is still generated, and sent somewhere, but sent nowhere.

I conducted interviews with three techies from indymedia about /dev/null/. When I questioned them on this phenomenon, I got strangely cold responses. No interest, very bland, quick answers. It seemed I had found something exciting to me, which turned out to be so commonplace it was completely uninteresting. I realized I had to learn more about the open source software driving indymedia including the Linux operating system, to share a language with the tech community. I bought an old computer, installed Linux on it and set it up to learn on. I spent countless hours in a seemingly black hole of time on that machine, trying to adeptly navigate the obscure details of command line operations.

On a good day on the Web you can see forever; on a bad day you can enter a narrative madness, you can find yourself caught up, addicted, at once fixated and distorted, both manically focused and alienated, stuck in an endless loop; you can grow angry, skeptical, suspicious of that “lost time” inside the probe. A good day is a surge of open possibility, freedom, newness. A
bad day is abjection at the feet of obsession and the machine. One minute you’re lost in space, the next you’re the master of the universe. (Stewart, 1999)

Being There

Writing down information about a video activism film festival being held during the World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela, 2006.

During this project, I have been to literally tens of towns in different parts of the world, working with and/or talking about indymedia. I used indymedia research trips to interview people from other radical media collectives. I have had my time swallowed up by the Internet: reading articles, being in indymedia IRC, administering websites and learning to use open source/free software. I have participated in movements and projects from pirate radio to the more mainstream media reform movement. I have stood in front of TV
cameras, academic conferences and the Federal Communications
Commission to talk about indymedia. I have trained activists in non-violent
direct action techniques and I have interfaced between protesters and police
at demonstrations. I have marched, culture jammed, scaled buildings, run
wires, used walkie-talkies and done political video art installations. I have
watched indymedia films, published my films to indymedia, organized and
made an indymedia feature film, promoted and screened indymedia films,
been quoted in articles about indymedia films, toured with radical films,
written book chapters, given conference talks, given video activism
workshops, done indymedia trainings, and organized for an indymedia video
archive.

Teaching an indymedia workshop on video activism at the Radical Encuentro Camp in
Houston, Texas.\textsuperscript{55}

Indymedia is like a fraternal organization of yore—wherever you go, there it
is: ready, waiting, hosting and helping. It is easy sometimes to think of it as
a coherent whole, with shared values and similarities. Always scraping
together technology and building with open source, always listening to
Manu Chao with Zapatista posters on the walls, always working local and
talking about the global as if it were in the room. Talking about “friends”
whom they’ve never met in person with whom they’ve worked with in other
parts of the world, calling them by screen names. The ubiquitous (((i))), on
stickers, and wheatpasted, stenciled, on laptops, on walls, on office doors.
The ever-present fear of repression. Meeting in an open circle, loosely
structured on consensus decision-making, raising your hand to speak,
agendas, facilitators, meeting in bars. A general trend towards anarchism
and a distrust of newspaper-selling trotskists. It’s easy to think of
indymedia as a coherent whole, but, of course, that is ridiculous. It is always
locally specific; there are stark differences between the way things are done
in local collectives, directly informed by local politics and specific to local
social movements and access to resources.

Indymedia is not locatable geographically. It’s not in any one city or
country. It is not just in interpersonal relationships. Indymedia is a network
of people and locations all over the world. It also literally a network of
technology: built of wires and packets of information, made of computers,
cameras and videotapes. It swells with intensity, building temporary media
centers at large-scale demonstrations. It is in communications practices on the Internet. It is located in journalistic conventions and political subjectivities. It is in the flows and circulations of images and stories through wires and passed hand-to-hand around the globe. It is always possible to extend the connections in this network, to bring in more relationships. This always expanding network of connections and constant attempt to narrow my field of focus has left me unsettled, always feeling like I’m not saying enough, not describing all the connections I know are there. Kim Fortun, in her book *Advocacy After Bhopal*, describes a similar sensation when working in field sites that transcend the local, and the once bounded cultural group:

The confidence said to come with knowing your material well has been forever forestalled. Instead of cohering with time, my expertise has been increasingly dispersed. Working within such dispersion has often been frustrating and has always been overwhelming (Fortun, 2001).

**Paraethnography**

Contemporary anthropological fieldwork often involves contact with and necessary knowledge of forms which are supranational and emergent. Few anthropological methods are available to the researcher engaged with a culture that refuses to be located in physical, temporal or technological space. Emergent global phenomena are by their characteristics of dislocation
and obscufication difficult to map. And knowledge of the system is always partial. How are we to understand the “native point of view” when that point of view is dispersed globally in emergent forms?

Doug Holmes and George Marcus have posited study of the paraethnographic works of our collaborators in the field as a way to engage the “native point-of-view” in contemporary, multi-sited, globally inscribed field sites. Paraethnographies are works produced by our interlocutors about their social field that are produced through methods similar to ethnographic methods. This approach has been suggested for a means with which to unpack the difficult and ambiguous concept of globalization by means of the working details and social worldview the persons and institutions of global finance. In these newly conceived research locations, our interlocutors, as elite knowledge producers, are likely to be more like counterparts to anthropologists than traditional others. Anthropologists can engage these counterparts through the paraethnographic, as object, as social process and by its effects through collaboration and complicity.

The concept of paraethnography and its usefulness to anthropologists was designed with the study of elite knowledge producers inside institutions
responsible in concrete ways for the flows of global capital. My research into indymedia is not a study of elites engineering globalization; it is with a social movement of media producers located within a social movement critically engaging the institutions of global capital, which conceives of itself in global terms. This movement produces media that is paraethnographic and indymedia has been a major producer of those works.

Indymedia activists have produced compelling self-reflexive documents, such as the “blueprints” that have been written after large mobilizations such as Seattle (N30) and Washington D.C. (A16) describing exactly how the media centers were built and run, more theoretical essays such as Matthew Arnison’s “Open publishing is the same as free software” and even feature-length movies such as the soon-to-be-released “i: the film” that are all detailed accounts of indymedia practices. Aside from the reflexive material, indymedia is constantly producing paraethnographic media accounts of the social field indymedia is embedded within, namely the global justice movement. For this reason, study of the products of indymedia, in my case, films, how they circulate and are made, has elucidated aspects of this social movement: network connections, political subjectivities, material practices, in short the native’s point-of-view.
Not only are my interlocutors writing compelling descriptions of their practices and social field; they are reading and incorporating the same theoretical works as I. For example, a dense nine-page PDF pamphlet titled *Blur: How the Network Paradigm Gives Social Movements the Upper Hand* was circulated amongst activist groups and posted to indymedia. *Blur* describes a shift into the use of a network paradigm as lens to analyze society and argues that society itself has experienced an epistemological shift towards horizontality, crystallizing into two supernetwork clusters: the global administrative supernetwork (them) and a global social supernetwork (us). *Blur* uses the RAND School Netwar theory to specify characteristics and network analysis to model the anti-corporate globalization movement using the example of Seattle, 1999. *Blur*, unlike traditional objective theoretical analysis goes a step further and concludes with 19 ideas for how the anti-corporate globalization movement can use this research to strengthen organizational design to achieve the movement's aims.

Alternatively, other indymedia participants are researchers too, producing articles and theses on indymedia. This is well beyond a "when they read what we write" experience, this is a "when we write about what they write about themselves reading what we read" experience.
My project started, not unlike *Blur*, because I wanted to describe a flexible form of social organization operating within/because of a globally connected social movement. To keep up with what was happening on the "anti-globalization" front, I read indymedia websites, especially following live breaking reports of large-scale demonstrations at the summit meetings of institutions of global capital. By the time I started to visit these demonstration sites in person as a researcher, I was well into my interest in indymedia and saw in indymedia a potential to bring together film, observational and reporting practices and a useful way to bound what was already an uncontrollable borderless object. Following the Netwar analysis that states a dense and rapid communications infrastructure is key to supporting a decentralized network, it made perfect sense to focus on a communication forum for the movement. The more time I spent within indymedia, the more I realized it was itself a vast, complex web of practices and objects, which would constantly require pruning.

**Complicity**

In the article, "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scene of Anthropological Fieldwork," George Marcus discusses reformulations of
central anthropological concept of rapport in the ethnographic field (Marcus, 1998). His article engages Clifford Geertz’s conceptualization of the role of complicity in establishing rapport, and agrees with its useful importance but says it falls short of addressing fundamental levels of complicity related to colonialism or developmental apparatus. Couched within critiques of objectivity and attempting to reduce unequal power dynamics, rapport has been reformulated through two new concepts: collaboration and imperialist nostalgia, both with differing attempts to reinscribe the roles of scientist/subject. Collaboration á la James Clifford is described as a post 1960s utopian ideal that attempts to address concerns of a monologic power dynamic by replacing it conceptually with multi-authorship. Marcus comments on the collaborative model as ultimately still inscribing unequal power dynamics and not sufficiently taking the role of complicity into account. In addition, the imperialist nostalgia school of total awareness of colonial complicity left conscious ethnographers with an impasse, a paralysis, and inability to conduct “ethical” research.

Paul Rabinow, motivated by addressing connotations of “evil” he believes come with the notion of complicity, offers a different perspective on the changing nature of rapport. His approach, called adjacent discourses, is
appropriate he says in a contemporary field site rife with paraethnography.

Adjacent discourses speak about the same topics from different perspectives, such as those used by an ethnography, a magazine article or a technical manual. For Rabinow, the appropriate anthropological perspective is not speaking for them, or even with them. In adjacent discourses, they are close, but definitely not the same as. What differentiates the ethnographer is a spatial configuration composed of scientific distance, what Geertz has called a necessary vocational ethic. In reality, Rabinow’s new distinction is in many ways a return to Geertz’s distance, a way of reinvigorating ethnographies of the contemporary while avoiding a cancerous fatigue with reflexivity and an accompanying paralysis of not being able to do no harm.

The problems with complicity that were articulated in the 1980s were an appropriate reckoning with our disciplinary legacy as the handmaidens of colonialism and development projects. The complicity that is a part of my project is something very different. I am not complicit with the state or capital projects. I am complicit because I am inside. I am too close to be adjacent, although vocationally, I could be adjacent by imposing rhetorical distance in my writing. I am a conspirator alongside my collaborators; building institutions, throwing stones, eschewing the vocational distance
presented by Geertz. Being an anthropologist inside of movements necessarily puts me in the uncomfortable position of the snitch. Because I am circulating information, it is my job. I am able to function as a researcher within paranoid worlds and conspiracy theories to whom the snitch is the enemy because I am a conspirator. But being the conspirator marks me as unscientific in a field where snitching is the vocational norm. Most anthropologists I know secretly dream of becoming spies. I’m not considered fully committed because I snitch, I’m not fully a snitch because I’m committed.

The Hybrid

Doorway into the studio of the Katrina Alternate Media Project. Houston Indymedia broadcast information to people from New Orleans evacuated to the Houston Astrodome following Hurricane Katrina, 2005 under the name KAMP. We broadcast on FM from an Airstream trailer in the parking lot.61
My experiences being both a contributing member of indymedia and a social scientist have produced what sometimes feels like an inescapable double bind. The double bind manifests itself in speaking for the organization as an activist and speaking as an anthropologist about the organization. I both conduct and give interviews about indymedia. When I am the person giving the interview, I experience the same reservations stemming from a legacy of paranoia that others do. “What is this interview for? Who will see it? What can I tell this person? How are they going to identify me?” When I conduct interviews, I am sure to lay these issues on the table early on.

The double bind is not easy to negotiate. I have been providing my academic materials about indymedia to the network itself for “peer review,” in addition to submitting them to scholarly circles. I have also tried submitting articles and video works I have completed for indymedia to the academy. Both of these directions of circulation were part of an attempt to add a dialogic component to my project. One outcome of this has been feeling like neither an insider nor an outsider in either location. I am sometimes criticized by activists for academic elitism. For example, during the “Trading Freedom” film project I insisted we include reflexivity about our process; something I argued had been outlined by decades of oppositional
film theory as a necessary component to any radical work. I edited a segment for the film that described indymedia and the video process. The others working on the project deemed this "navel gazing" exercise as gratuitous and that section was pulled from the film. On the other hand, I am criticized by academics for a simplistic, untheoretical approach, getting such straightforward feedback such as, "Where is the anthropology?" A second strain of criticism from academics is the assumption I am not involved in my field site, and if I am, something is terribly wrong. During the question and answer period of my presentation at the 2002 American Anthropological Association meetings in New Orleans, a woman in the audience asked, "This is all so fascinating, how do you resist getting involved?" Or as a more direct line of questioning in this vein, one particularly cantankerous member of my Fulbright review panel boldly declared, "This isn't science! Perhaps you should go into public relations instead." I find a similar lack of available position in the film world. When I was nominated for the annual Rice film award for my documentary work, one of the Art History professors on the review panel was reported to have said, "This isn't art." Artists say my films are not art, anthropologists say my films are not ethnography; documentarians say they are not journalism. I find myself experiencing a difficult relationship to my material, and
sometimes when I try to change hats, I find that I have misplaced my other hat.

Performance artist and writer Guillermo Gómez Peña encourages people working in cross-cultural milieus to adopt an approach he terms the hybrid. The hybrid is a productive way to think of blurring boundaries. His description of the hybrid includes a veritable job description I think fits my in-between, or mediating position.

At times s/he can operate as a cross-cultural diplomat, as an intellectual coyote (smuggler of ideas) or a media pirate. At other times, s/he assumes the role of nomadic chronicler, intercultural translator, or political trickster. S/he speaks from more than one perspective, to more than one community, about more than one reality, his/her job is to trespass, bridge, interconnect, reinterpret, remap, and redefine; to find the outer limits of his/her culture and cross them (Gómez Peña, 1996).

The hybrid now joins the mask in my dissertation as the second way to negotiate tension in a seeming dichotomy. Thinking of myself, as Peña describes, as an intercultural translator moving between worlds, speaking from more than one perspective to more than one community makes sense to me. It is a more complete account than trying to occupy simply one position. It allows me honestly to inhabit my multiple subjectivity. The mask mediates between the poles of open and concealed and the hybrid blurs the boundaries between milieus, in this case activism and academia. Both
cross, transgress, take elements of each and weave them together into a new position.

Objectivity

Filming at an indymedia fundraiser concert, Houston, Texas, 2004.62

Indymedia activists are often asked, "Are you reporters or activists?" There are differing perspectives on this question, some agreeing they are trying to provide honest reporting to reveal obscured truths, others seeing nothing amiss in firmly declaring activism comes first and that media is made in service to the movement. The journalist or activist tension is no small issue in indymedia. Conventions of mainstream media with a purported objective stance too often pervade indymedia collectives and the media they produce. Without a critical awareness of both content and process, people unconsciously replicate the norms of traditional journalism in an effort to be considered more "authentic" in an attempt to be taken seriously as reporters.
There is also a false distinction being made by separating reporter from activist, in many examples of media produced, published on and distributed by indymedia this distinction simply does not hold.

It is much more common than one might expect for indymedia video activists to be shooting their own protest actions. Indymedia is within the movement; therefore, indymedia activists perform movement action and activists perform indymedia action. UK indymedia does not shy away from this potential conundrum—they distribute a bright orange sticker that advertises the website and reads, “Report on your own direct actions.”

Indymedia has always promoted the idea that insiders tell first-person accounts. Everyone is a journalist. Through time, this created a type of multilayered self-reflection, a third order observation. Actions are planned already thinking through what the photos will look like on indymedia.

Either direct action organizers and activists publish their own media of an event to indymedia or they team up through social networks with indymedia to bring media activists, often a videographer, to document actions. They then work to immediately package the material and distribute it rapidly through whatever channels possible, even dropping tapes to local news outlets for broadcast. I do not see this as collusion, because in this case the
activists control the images and sound bites, appropriating the corporate airwaves. This working relationship between indymedia and direct action groups has not only increased coverage of protests on corporate media but has added some balance to the reports. However, this position is not consistent throughout indymedia. The debate about whether or not to work with the corporate media on any level has been more heated in the global south, such as in Argentina, or in the following example, Brasil.

During the World Social Forum in Brasil in 2003, critics of Lula’s decision to attend the World Economic Forum meetings in Davos sent his party a message of just desserts when the president of the PT, or worker’s party, received a cream pie in the face at a forum meeting. The activist, claiming the action on behalf of the “Confeiteiros sem Fronteiras” or “bakers without borders” ran up to the table of party dignitaries at a press conference and
placed a cream pie in his face. The baker then told him “Parties don’t represent us in Davos; the people on the streets do!” An IMC photographer got the action on film and was able to sell his pictures to the corporate press several times, earning a substantial amount of money (estimated to have covered the expenses of running the media center). The selling of the photos created quite a controversy. On one side, people argued that he was collaborating with the corporate press, something that unequivocally should not be done. On the other side, people thought it was great that the money went to pay the bills of the media center—a kind of reappropriation of corporate media’s resources.

Relationships between indymedia and the social movement are so strong that it is absurd in most cases to draw a distinction between reporters and activists. I have shown throughout this dissertation that radical media is committed media. It takes a position; its purpose is to have a political effect.

I am an activist, I am not a journalist. We never call ourselves filmmakers, we are activists using cameras. I don’t think that is anything that should be shied away from. Inside the independent media center movement there are, and I think it is quite productive that there are, people who are approaching this as journalists without the corporate filter. But we are activists with cameras. We are using media as a weapon in the hands of movements, wherever they are, all around the world. We purposely shun the false objectivity of the corporate media because we believe that posture of objectivity is part of the
politics of distance that prevents you from ever feeling, or being able to really engage and feel solidarity with movements that are on the ground around the world. Our media is all about denying that, about putting the camera inside the movement, without apology. Hoping not to make an argument to you, but to allow you to feel, for a moment, what it is like to be in the middle of a people who organize themselves to take control of their world, to change their world (Stockwell, 2002).

Objectivity, as is said above, keeps us isolated from the stories we hear, doesn’t allow us to feel a human connection with the people the stories are about. Objectivity is distance. The same can be said of ethnography. If I were to use a distant, objective voice, I would leave myself completely out of the story. In cinematic terms, this would not give readers a way to imagine themselves as part of the act, not give them away to feel close. In her filmic critique of ethnography, Reassembledge, Trinh T. Minh-ha described her practice as, “not to speak about, simply to be near by.” Is this adjacent? No, because adjacency requires rhetorical scientific distance. Something Minh-ha did not do, speaking often in the first person in her musings about visits from ethnographers.

Zora Neal Hurston’s anthropological work expanded established ethnographic writing style by blending literary genres and challenged the authority of the ethnographer as objective scientist by inserting her own
subjectivity into the text. Hurston's field work on Hoodoo in the American south, written about in part three of *Mules and Men*, illustrates a direct confrontation with the tradition of objectivity on the part of the researcher as she herself becomes the subject, not just in literary positioning, but in bodily experience. I call this type of work corporeal research. As Hurston undergoes the ceremonies of a hoodoo novice, the feelings and experiences located in and on her body are conveyed through her storytelling in the text. She engages her ethnographic practice literally becoming the informant by using her body as data. In her writing, she displaces the authority of the distant observer by writing her experiences as herself into the text.

Me, Renee and Monica on the balcony of the Indymedia Center during the World Social Form in Porto Allegre, Brasil, 2003.
I have experienced what it is to be a globetrotting indymedia videographer, direct actionista weaving wisps of movements from across the globe into a digital story, a rhyme of reason, by experiencing it in my body. Corporeal research. Participant observation. I have experienced the waxing and waning, the joy and terror, the successes and defeats of this movement as my successes and defeats, as our successes and defeats.

I was not always as willing to engage in or describe affinity with my fieldwork. This was a gradual process for me. When I began this project, I had strong ideas about not having a position on my material. Ethnographers are reporters—I should describe, but not project myself or my feelings into the work. These reservations played themselves out in the field. Since I was at demonstrations mainly, I would feel like I could be there as an observer, but not as a participant, I could be there, but not chant, I could be there, but not wear a button. Working with indymedia helped me immensely in this regard, it gave me a reason to be there, working, filming, publishing, without organizing or marching or being a complete outsider. By the end of the project, I was organizing, was marching, was filming and publishing. Eventually I realized that the critiques I was making about traditional ethnography and traditional media practices were the same. Critiques
centered on the impossibility of an objective position and the distance between people that tone creates is true of both worlds. There is always already a position being occupied.

Much of my time researching indymedia has been spent trying to negotiate my way around two competing poles: activism—being inside of a movement; and academia—complete with a posture of objectivity. In an attempt to bridge this tension, I have tried to inhabit a different position, as the hybrid, which allows me to be in more than one position speaking to more than one community.

Demonstration at Fox Broadcasting during the Republican National Convention in NYC, 2004. I have just tossed cream pies at another demonstrator dressed as Bill O’Riley.

In the first intersection in this dissertation I posed the question, if these words are my weapons, what am I aiming at? The answer to that question is
as blurred as my identity. Tish, the anthropologist, is aiming at objectivity as a latent vocational ethic, objectivity that produces a narratives with the subject as the other. Tish, the filmmaker, is aiming at a style of representation that separates us from one another through distant filmmaking. As Patricia Zimmerman has said, “to shoot from the sky you have to fly with the state.” And this view from the sky is how we normally see our movements as well as seeing the wars we wage across the world. Shots from helicopters, or from the noses of bombs do not allow the viewer to have any connection or solidarity with the people on the ground, under the helicopters, under the bombs. As an activist film maker I argue now is not the time for paralysis or distance. Capital has inscribed us as global subjects and consumers, it is imperative that we learn to cognitively map our connections and solidarity as a global civil society. We need to see images from the ground level, we need to see ourselves on the street; inside the swelling movement, with the people being bombed to do this. Tish, the activist, is aiming stones, or as shown above, pies, at the system of neoliberalism and imperialism that is dominating our world, the system of alienation that keeps us divided, keeps us consuming, keeps us from building a new world wherever it may show up, be it as in the picture above a gigantic corporate media monopoly, part of the system in which more than
ninety percent of the world’s media is in the hands of six large corporations or a meeting of global capitalism’s institutions in another country or war profiteering in my backyard. Is there a way for all these Tishes to simply be Tish the activist filmmaker anthropologist and make a unified critique from each position to each target?

There are common threads in my multiple perspectives. I am looking to make connections, draw maps and inspire solidarity. I critique the systems that destroy those connections and moments of real solidarity, be they academic, representational or imperial. I have done this through participating with and talking about a group that engages in direct resistance to this system by producing close-up, street level films and distributing them broadly, challenging producer/consumer boundaries through the production process and fighting in the streets in places where the systems of domination surface. I have chosen to let the style of my dissertation provide a street-level view on challenging systems of distance. To provide this intimacy, I told it as I experienced it, as corporeal, and by doing, have challenged the academy’s distant lens of objectivity. As a hybrid, sometimes I fight with words as my weapon, sometimes I fight with my body in the street, but I am
always fighting for a better world where we are connected to each other, to our histories, to our future possibilities.
Intersection Six

“We interrupt this empire…”
Produced by: The Video Activist Network
52 minutes, digital video, 2003

Jennifer Jolly gets her just desserts.

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Fox News Channel 2 evening news broadcast reporting on protests in San Francisco the day the bombing started in Iraq. Anti-war activists had called for people to “Shut down San Francisco” and they were doing their best to do it. There is a creepy music undertone throughout this scene. The anchors in studio are talking live with reporters in the field.

Leslie: “Now to you Jennifer.”

Jennifer Jolly: “Well Leslie, Most of the protesters sat on car hoods, and hit the cars with their fists and even with some bottles, holding motorists hostage. One woman was stuck in her car at Market and 5th while protesters argued amongst themselves over what to do with her. Some of the protesters urged others to force her out of her car and send her walking home on foot.”

News images of people blocking cars, walking next to cars, sitting on hoods. This scene cuts back and forth between her reports on the news and a conversation with her and demonstrators on the street filmed by video activists.
Street conversation:
Jennifer (to protesters): “That poor woman was trapped and very frightened. There’s [sic] a couple of people out here that are really drunk and really stoned. And they’re causing...there are a couple of very bad ones causing a lot of problems.”

Cut back to news:
Jennifer: “Other emergency vehicles have also been trapped in these standoffs, so public safety continues to be a big concern out here. Also we did find out that these protesters are costing the city an estimated half a million dollars per day in police overtime.”
(Image overlay of the cost of the war in Iraq—as of June 8, 2003 $60,875,700,00...it keeps counting on the screen as a running tally.)

Cut back to street conversation:
Man (off camera): “Just keep it fair now, most of these people are…”
Jennifer: “Dude, I have been so fair, because I have seen so much shit I haven’t talked about. If I were not fair, I would have said a million things. I mean...these guys just want someone to be mad at.”

The cameraman is talking to the people gathered around them and says, “Look, if there is violence and destruction going on...it’s not like we can’t film it.”

Just then, a man in a black hooded sweatshirt (the onscreen image has a black bar over his face) walks up from Jennifer’s side. He says, “Pies for your lies!” and presses a cream pie into the side of her face.

The action is repeated in slow motion
“We can’t film it....”
Pie reaches in, also from the other side, a camera reaches in to snap a photo.
“Pies for your lies!”

Jennifer turns toward the camera, the look of shock plainly clear on her face. Her cameraman turns the camera light on her and presumably begins to film. The crowd around her goes wild, laughing in reaction.
“YOU DESERVE IT!”
“OH YES... LIVE AT FIVE!”
“SOMEBODY CALL THE POLICE.... DOES ANYONE KNOW THE NUMBER FOR 911?”
Jennifer’s shock turns to rage as she mops the pie off her face with her cameraman’s shirt.

Jennifer: “A bunch of crap…”

“WHO DID THAT...WHO’S THE COWARD THAT DID THAT? WHY DON’T YOU COME UP TO ME AND TALK TO MY FACE! COME HERE, I WANNA KNOW WHY! COME HERE! FUCKER!”

This last part comes out with spit and poison.

At this point we hear people on the scene discussing her. “She’s a news person,” and “What station is she from?”

Another man on the scene says, “Lady, the Iranians did it!”

Back to the studio,

“I understand you’ve had some tough moments out there today. You ok?”

Jennifer Jolly appears on the split screen, hair now pulled back, fresh lipstick.

“I’m alright, there have been some very violent pockets of protesters, and they did turn on several of us Channel 2 news crews tonight. I was the unfortunate victim of a pie attack. But that’s not quite as bad as it could have been.”

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In a communiqué, dated March 20, 2003, the Biotic Baking Brigade, who took responsibility for the Jolly pieing, declared the launch of their “Operation Shock and Awe” campaign with the Jolly incident. They state that she was targeted for her biased coverage, which focused on protestors violence. However, they note that Jolly was not the focus of the campaign, rather:

Jolly is just a cog in the corporate media machine. This phase of the BBB’s “Operation: Shock & Awe” is meant to address not an individual telling lies, but rather, an entire corporate-industrial complex. The directors governing the media
conglomerates also sit on the boards of the military weapons manufacturers and all of the other industries in an interlocking directorate of power. So, it is not really accurate or enough to just say, “the corporate media is biased.” In point of fact, the corporate media is the war, is the military, is the destruction of the environment, is the gentrification of our cities, is the criminalization of the poor and non-aryan and foreign-born...it is everything that we loath about this society.

It is common for video activist films to include a critique of mainstream media’s so-called objective position. This is usually done by contrasting mainstream media reports with independent reports of events. Near the start of this film, “We interrupt this empire...” is a montage that functions as such a critique of mainstream media. This well-edited segment shows clips from the first day of bombing in Iraq. Reporters in their “war rooms” are showing off military equipment, describing the new models, playing graphics of how the bombs work, talking with generals about “smart” versus “dumb” weapons systems. The reporters look like cheerleaders, whipping up support for war and reporting the official line. Anchors from different networks are cut together all repeating the same phrases, “surgical bombing,” “target of opportunity,” “decapitated” and especially “shock and awe.”

Shock and awe.
Shock and awe.
Is this shock and awe?

A Fox news reporter standing in the Pentagon briefing room emphatically declares, “If you have to ask ‘is this shock and awe?’ you’re not seeing it,
because when it happens there will be absolutely, positively no doubt of what you’re seeing. If you are saying, ‘Oh, that looks….could that possibly be it?’ No, it’s not. Because it will be so overwhelming, so ferocious in its scope and magnitude…”

-Cut-

Two CNN reporters talking on split screens, “It’s like a brief intermission in some terrible, but real movie.” The other replies, “Exactly the case.”

This whole section is cut back and forth between mainstream media reports and independent footage from Iraq, as are many other sections of the film, cutting back and forth between mainstream footage and video activist footage. This technique shows what is left out of reports, or more often incorrect or biased reporting about both the war and the protests. The effect is powerful, the reporters look ridiculous, like excited school children, just mouthpieces for the administration’s press releases. This sets up “We interrupt this empire...” as providing the viewer access to a truth unavailable to them through traditional news outlets. They specifically imply that it is the news outlet’s relationships with the Bush Administration and powerful corporate interests that prevent the truth from being broadcast. This critique ties in powerfully in the film with arguments that the war is being waged to line the pockets of large U.S. corporations such as Halliburton and Bechtel. The overall effect is a systemic critique of the nefarious acts of the administration carried out to positively support corporate interests.
Video activists engaged in a direct confrontation with mainstream media by critiquing the bias of their coverage in this film. The Biotic Baking Brigade critiques mainstream media coverage by tossing cream pies and issuing communiqués. Is one tactic more appropriate than the other?

Some people think pieing is violent, and feel sorry for people like Jennifer Jolly for being on the receiving end of a cream pie. I feel that pies are a creative symbol of resistance. They refer specifically to a tradition of comedy that harkens back not only to the Three Stooges and Keystone Cop movies, but farther back, to tricksters and clowns whose job it was to point out the ways in which we take ourselves too seriously, to reflect our worst qualities back to us and make us laugh about them. Pies are an especially good tactic when dealing with someone who has a big ego. No one can stand with pie dripping off his or her face and still feel really well put together. When a pie is thrown, no one gets hurt, only egos, and a great statement is made—you’ve gotten your just desserts.

To paraphrase William Shakespeare, “O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth, that I am meek and gentle with these butchers... Cry ‘Havoc,’ and let slip the pies of war.”
I feel I am supposed to use this space to make comments about the near future, present and near past of indymedia video production. At the same time, it seems ridiculous to try and say something about the near future of an emergent experience, trying to characterize in fixed text a situation still unfolding. Writing this dissertation has left me with the unsettling suspicion that it will be outdated before it gets printed. It becomes history as I write it. It is a moment frozen in time, and therefore not characteristic of the contemporary.
Of course, there are things I could say about the present moment. Things have changed and continue to do so. Two main factors have changed this media movement since the heady days of the post-Seattle glow. One, September 11 and the subsequent war in Iraq and two, the aftermath of the G8 meetings in Genoa. After September 11 (the one in America, not Chile), the political environment started to rapidly change as national security trumped personal liberty. Paranoia became perfectly justifiable as new legislation trampled achievements towards freedom made in the wake of revelations regarding the abuse of state power in the 1960s and 70s.

September 11 was a rupture in what they tell us is a seamless history, a potential crack to expand. New places to look, new stories to tell, new connections to make. As we went to war in Iraq, the movement’s focus changed. Fighting against going to war was much more immediate than working to alleviate third world debt or supporting fair trade policies.

There have not been large-scale indymedia centers in some time. The G8 in Edinburough and the Republican National Convention in NYC are the most recent examples. Why haven’t there been more? As I write this, the IMF and World Bank are scheduled to meet in Washington D.C. next week. There are no large-scale protests scheduled for this meeting. There are
several important reasons why this is the case. The biggest one, as I said, is the war in Iraq. Movement activists' attention is now spread between war and other issues. The second is an internal debate that was already running before September 11 about the usefulness of movement focus on “Summit Hopping” instead of focusing on building local alternatives to corporate globalization. But this is not to say that there isn’t movement action and media activism happening on the local and regional levels; rather there is, and new indymedia centers are still being set up and joining the network every week. Local indymedia video groups have started to specialize on regional issues, for example Arizona indymedia’s substantial contribution of films on border issues.

When the G8 meet in Scotland in 2005, an indymedia center was set up in Edinburgh. Video organizers from UK indymedia set up an email list and informal association leading up to the event. When they planned what kind of coverage to do, they specifically decided not to do a compilation video in the style of the previous indymedia summit videos. The reason they give as to why not is not because of the necessary effort or lack of resources; the reason is because they didn’t want to see what happened after the G8 met in Genoa happen in the UK. During the G8 in Genoa, more than 250,000
people demonstrated, hundreds were arrested, more than 500 were injured and one killed, the media center was raided and sleeping activists beaten into bloody pools. After the meetings, houses and social centers were raided repeatedly by authorities in a targeted search for video evidence for yet ongoing trials. The decision not to make such a video in Scotland was made in the immediate aftermath of the seizure of their servers described in chapter 5. This decision was consensed upon by activists making plans in an environment steeped in real state repression, finding ways to move forward yet maintain the safety of the collective. Nevertheless, the UK indymedia and Scotland indymedia sites featured compelling video documentation of the events as they happened.

To be perfectly clear, I do not mean to say the movement for global justice is dead, or that there has not been substantial resistance and victories. To do so would be a wholly U.S.-centric analysis. There is a victory story to tell. This victory does not lay with environmental and labor activists hitting the streets in Seattle, their images of resistance on morning papers across the country prompting citizens for the first time to ask themselves, “The World Trade who?” This victory was made by organizers in the global south, nations that have stood together and resisted at meetings of the WTO and
IMF. There hasn’t been a successful WTO ministerial since Seattle, despite their withdrawal to remote locals such as in Qatar, because the resistance is not just in the streets, it is inside. There is a wave of strong anti-neoliberal and anti-U.S.-imperialism sweeping the left into power in Central and South America. One by one, nations have elected leaders running on platforms of opposition to the FTAA and policies of the IMF: Brasil, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile and Bolivia to name a few. The Zapatistas are on the election trail with the Otra Compañía, gathering grassroots groups together to “move beyond politics;” in Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, president from 1984 to 1990 under the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN), is running again and moving up in the polls for the nation’s November 5 general election to replace outgoing President Enrique Bolanos; in Venezuela, Hugo Chavez has become revolutionary icon, his charismatic return to power after a failed coup attempt and social reforms under the name of the Bolivarian Revolution have prompted right wing U.S. leaders such as Pat Buchanan to suggest that the time has come to “take him out.” These nations are rising up and refusing to be subjugated, they are banding together as a unified force opposed to trade agreements like the FTAA and the institutions of the IMF. If the FTAA does not in fact pass, and I don’t think it will, it will not be due to the work of fair trade activists in the north,
but because of strong leftist governments in the south refusing it and creating alternatives with bilateral trade agreements and regional lending institutions. The recent election of Evo Morales to the presidency of Bolivia truly signals the reclamation of the government by people’s movements. Evo was a leader of the Cochabamba rebellion, which successfully kicked out multinational corporation Bechtel from their community after they had been granted privatization rights in the wake of IMF structural adjustment policies. One of his first acts as president was to sign a bilateral oil-for-soybeans trade agreements with Venezuela’s Chavez. These regional trade agreements are the beginnings of a real manifestation of alternatives which move beyond the rhetoric of the left, and provide a groundwork for the eventual of the eventual collapse of U.S.-led trade initiatives.

Throughout this dissertation, I have drawn comparisons between the work of video activists and my anthropological work in terms of content, methods and form. However, perhaps I have shied away from discussing one important comparison. The base characteristic of guerrilla films is that they are made to have a political effect, to do work in the world. I have to ask myself the same questions of my dissertation that I asked of the films. What job is it doing? To whom is it speaking? What is its terrain?
I imagined the audience and the terrain of my work as being multiple, within the academy and within social movements. I have always wanted my work to circulate within and be useful for the movement, not just to be confined to the academy as part of a dialogic model. For this reason, I insisted on using accessible language and paraethnographic materials to describe the scene. If this work is not useful in some way to the movement, does it cast a pale on my relationship to it as parasitic? Asking myself, is this dissertation be useful for the movement? I have to honestly answer, probably not. I would circulate it and I am sure it would generate some interest in my representation of indymedia and other radical media groups, but I would prefer to increase its usefulness by not circulating it without removing some of the trappings of the academy that were necessary for its production such as literature reviews and embarrassingly abundant self-reflection. This is the bind of the dialogic model between the worlds of the academy and activism, the forms are incommensurable. In either case, a different version would have to be produced, thereby involving my translation. That is why hybrids are important, as translation is a job of the hybrid. I take what I learn from both communities and pass it along to the other in a form that makes sense.
I want to return now to the question, "What change are you hoping to affect among academics?" described in intersection 1 that I had such a hard time answering. Looking at it again, is clearly a question posed by someone motivated by a belief that their personal intervention can change the world to someone who believes that her personal intervention can change the world.

This question presumes I can and desire to change the academy, that the job I would like my dissertation to do would be within the academy. The pursuit of science, including social science, is a collective endeavor. We work as a discipline knowing we cannot change it single handedly, that together we create its terrain. Even though it is terrain of the discipline itself that we most often focus our attention for change upon. Social movement action works in a similar way, believing only together can we change the world. I don't believe that in and of itself, this dissertation could or will change the world, or even the academy. This dissertation rather belongs to a large scale collective process of developing alternatives, alternatives to global institutions of supra state authority, alternatives to media production and representation and alternatives to a distant, separated tradition of ethnographic research.
To close this set of questions and again draw the connection between my work and that of activists, I would like to evoke the words of the great populist anthropologist, Margaret Mead from a lecture at the University of Iowa. She has always a great role model and inspiration to me. Her work was probably more useful for people than any other anthropologist before or since. She said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

At the end of the previous chapter, I answered the question what was I throwing rocks or pies at by talking about systems that destroy our solidarity and connection with others, with history and with the environment we live in. I wanted to produce work that returned to the old anthropological tradition of denaturalization. To show that the alienated corporate media-driven obsession with personal success at the expense of everything else was not the only possible space to inhabit. I did this by describing people building alternatives and cooperating with each other to produce for reasons other than money or fame. They control with the tools of fear and distance. We fight with courage and intimacy. If my dissertation is doing work, I hope it is a glimpse into a world that otherwise would not have been seen,
which expands possibilities and kindles dreams of a better world and faith
that it is possible.
Notes


2 In the early stages of this movement, it struggled to define itself. The tag “anti-globalization” was invented by the mainstream press when reporting on the demonstrations in Seattle and was even translated to Spanish as “globofobicos” when demonstrators converged in Cancun to protest the WTO meetings there. However, debates within the movement about what to call itself raged. One position argued, “We are not anti-globalization, we are against trade agreements that only benefit the wealthy.” This lead to a period where the movement was self-identifying as “anti-corporate globalization” in an attempt to be more specific about what they were opposed to. Finally, in a spirit to not just be against things, but to be for alternatives that infuses many aspects of the movement, the commonly used self-identified term today is “movement for global justice.”

3 A detailed description of the history of indymedia is provided in chapter 2.

4 Worldkit is an open-source mapping program available from worldkit.org. This map was retrieved online from http://manifestor.org/john/worldkit/. You can click any node go to the website of the local collective.

5 Someone has made a film about indymedia. For a description of “i: the film,” see intersection 4.

6 For more on paranoia in the activist world, see chapter 5.

7 IRC is Internet Relay Chat, a type of chat software that lives on a server that users log into to chat. IRC is used extensively by indymedia as a real-time group communications medium. There have even been global IMC meetings held in IRC.

8 Democracy has been so co-opted as a concept to mean imperial aggression and war, that it makes me wince to use it at all anymore. I really prefer the term autonomy, but it didn’t ring as true to the words of the movement to say, “This is what autonomy looks like.”
9 Launched in 1996, Al Jazeera is a satellite news agency based in Doha, Qatar that provides news about the Arab world around the globe. Al Jazeera is supported by funds from the Qatari government.

10 TeleSur is a satellite broadcast channel based in Caracas, Venezuela that provides news to Latin America made by Latin Americans in direct opposition to the importing of news about Latin America from news corporations based in other countries such as CNN en español. TeleSur also hopes to provide news produced by Latin Americans to North America. TeleSur began broadcasting in 2005 and is supported by the Venezuelan government.

11 Photo courtesy of Big Noise Films.


13 A term, meaning encounter, meeting or clash, used by the Zapatistas.

14 http://bak.spc.org/j18/.

15 Open publishing as described by New York City indymedia: “At the heart of Indymedia is the principle of “Open Publishing,” which allows anyone to self-publish their work on the IMC websites. The IMC Newswire encourages people to become the media by posting their articles, videos, audio clips, photos and artwork directly to the website using the “Publish” form. Indymedia relies on the people who post to present their information in a thorough, honest, accurate manner, but has no control over what people post. After an article has been posted, it can be hidden from the Newswire by the NYC IMC editorial collective.” Retrieved March 15, 2006 from http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/static/openpublishing.html [Accessed 7 April 2006]


See chapter 5 for more on these tools.

The North American Free Trade Agreement, passed by the United States, Canada and Mexico went into effect January 1, 1994, and creates a Free Trade Zone between the three countries.


For more on masks, see chapter 5.

Available from dangerousmedia.org.


A term, meaning encounter, meeting or clash, used by the Zapatistas.

On 1 January 2005, the establishment of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTTA) was rejected by Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil.


Codec is an abbreviation of ‘coder/decoder’, which describes a device or program capable of performing transformations on a data stream or signal; see http://wikipedia.org [Accessed 23 February 2005]. Codecs can both put the stream or signal into an encoded form (often for transmission, storage or encryption) and retrieve, or decode, that form for viewing or manipulation in a format more appropriate for these operations. In this case the codec is used to make the video file smaller for transfer. The open source codec used for f15 and the v2v service is called the OnVP3 software codec and is available at: http://www.vp3.com/ [Accessed 23 February 2005].


33 Available from http://torrents.indymedia.org or http://indytorrents.org

34 Available from http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/ [Accessed 23 February 2005].

35 Stating "copyleft" on the tape case simply made a statement against intellectual copyright regimes, but did nothing to protect materials from being used by corporate media or others since it was not based on copyright law.

36 Slogan of the World Social Forum, held each year concurrently with the World Economic Forum to create real alternatives to corporate globalization.


38 I saw images of agit-trains in action in the film, “Peoples Century Vol. 3” produced by the BBC. I watched this film in the basement of the British Film Institute in London with several others about this period in Russian history trying to learn about the film trains. There is very little information available about them or Medvedkin in books about Soviet Cinema except references to Medvedkin’s other films such as “Happiness.” The most comprehensive source on this material is the film “The Last Bolshevik” by Chris Marker.

39 For an example of this style, see “Compañero Cineaste Piquitero” in intersection 4.


41 For a good example of riot porn, see intersection 1.
42 See, for example, http://www.albasrah.net/.

43 See, for example, http://www.ogrish.com.


45 http://www.theregister.co.uk.


47 The nation-wide arrests of 17 environmentalists accused of being associated with the Earth Liberation Front in the United States in February of 2006, launched what is being termed the “Green Scare.” At court hearings in Eugene, Oregon it was revealed that the majority of the information being used by the prosecution was coming from a paid and planted informant named “Anna.” Anna was present at many antiglobalization and anarchist events for several years. She always carried a video camera saying she was filming as a “video activist.” She participated in indymedia centers and posted to websites and email lists.

48 Photo from ftaaimc.org.

49 Photo/video still from ftaaimc.org.

50 Photo from ftaaimc.org.

51 I screened “Compañero Cineasta Piquetero” in Houston and the audience had dramatically mixed reactions, some loved it for its extreme vérité style, while others were made uncomfortable by its lack of sophistication. I contend that when viewers are uncomfortable watching a film such as this, it is likely they are being confronted with cinematic expectations they did not realize they held when such expectations were not met. These are important moments that can create a rupture and lend themselves to a possibility of critical reflection into a now denaturalized belief in the seamless Hollywood aesthetic.
Blogs, or weblogs, are websites that are updateable by a user from a browser window and display entries with the newest at the top. Blogs are commonly used for journaling and collecting other stories on a particular topic, such as news reports, together in one place.

To see what the end of the globalization network at work in her community looks like, see intersection 1.

Photo by RoBlock.

Photo from http://houston.indymedia.org.

In some ways indymedia activists can be considered elites of the social movement with dense technology practices and globetrotting activism. See intersection 4.

Some of the first indymedias to get started wrote up descriptions of how they organized themselves that heavily impacted the way future event-based IMCs were organized. They also crystallized how an event-based IMC should perform. These documents are available at: http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/BluePrints.

This influential essay can be found at http://www.cat.org.au/maffew/cat/openpub.html.

For a similar response in filmmaking practices, see chapter 4. Marcus' critique of the dialogic model in anthropology is also applicable to documentarians who work on collaborative models of filmmaking. Even when documentary filmmakers feel they've left themselves out completely and simply given technology to people to tell their own stories, the technology itself is inscribed with and inscribes particular subjectivities and power dynamics.

At least as far as “subaltern” groups go. One approach to addressing this concern has been to study elites or to “study up” within institutions of power.

This story is, of course, more complicated than it appears here. In 2006, the WTO meet in Hong Kong. Activists from around the world fought in the streets to make their opposition known. South Korean labor activists even donned life vests in an attempt to swim to the location of the meetings, their fists raised and pumping in unison as they swam chanting, “Down, Down WTO.” However, inside the meetings, the nations of Brasil and India agreed to the terms of the so-called Doha round, a series of trade agreements that the WTO has been trying unsuccessfully to pass since 2000. There are still some months before these agreements become ratified, but if they do, it could be said that there has finally been a successful round of trade talks. Even so, the fact that India and Brasil have displaced nations traditionally central to WTO could also be viewed as a victory for the nations of the global south, a reformist versus revolutionary victory, but a victory nonetheless.
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