

# For a Political Economy of Indymedia Practice

Bob Hanke  
York University

*Abstract:* This article develops a political economy of Indymedia practice. After reviewing other current approaches to the Indymedia phenomenon, democratic media activism, and traditions of dissent, I draw upon Pierre Bourdieu's unique sociological perspective to offer an analysis of the Ontario Independent Media Centre as a website of social struggles against neo-liberalism. This study reveals that Indymedia practice is a simultaneously structured and spontaneous form of collective media work on the margins of the political and journalistic fields. Whether such experiments in democratic communication will survive and develop will depend on whether Indymedia centres can become more central to the educational field.

*Résumé :* Cet article développe une économie politique des pratiques propres aux « Indymedia » (médias indépendants en ligne). Après avoir passé en revue d'autres approches courantes de ce phénomène, du militantisme médiatique démocratique et des traditions de contestation, j'utilise la perspective sociologique singulière de Pierre Bourdieu pour analyser comment le site Internet du Centre de média indépendant d'Ontario aide à lutter contre le néolibéralisme. Cette étude montre que les pratiques Indymedia sont une forme de travail médiatique collectif à la fois structuré et spontané qui existe à la lisière des champs politiques et journalistiques. La survie et le développement de ces expériences en communication démocratique ne sont pas assurées, cependant, et dépendront de la capacité des centres Indymedia à occuper une place plus centrale dans le domaine éducatif.

*Keywords:* Pierre Bourdieu; Political economy of practice; Media activism; Ontario Independent Media Centre

*There is no genuine democracy without genuine opposing powers.*

Pierre Bourdieu

*The work of independent media is to tell the history of social struggle in the world...*

Subcomandante Marcos

In March 2002, two weeks before the Ontario Tory leadership convention, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) executive sent school superintendents a

---

Bob Hanke is Sessional Assistant Professor in the Communication Studies Program, York University, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3. E-mail: bhanke@yorku.ca.

**Canadian Journal of Communication, Vol 30 (2005) 41-64**

©2005 Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation

memo. It stated that police had been in contact with the board and had advised it of possible student involvement in upcoming protests. The board's superintendent of student and community services had been informed by Toronto Police Service Intelligence that the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) was planning to protest the provincial Conservative Leadership Convention by organizing two days of demonstrations and "snake marches" in downtown Toronto. Of particular concern was the OCAP website and the six-page high-school student organizer's manual encouraging students to "cause a lot of ruckus with a large amount of students" by protesting at corporate headquarters, government offices, or schools. This information was shared with secondary-school administrators who, in turn, passed it on to teachers. One teacher was concerned enough about civil rights to file a human rights complaint with the TDSB after her school principal brought up the memo with his staff. But the complaint was rejected on the grounds that the TDSB human-rights policy does not explicitly prohibit harassment based on political activities (Zwarenstein, 2002).

This story illustrates the degree to which those in power attempted to enlist the help of teachers to put a stop to social activism dedicated to reversing the definition of "political" activities. This teacher found herself being treated as an extension of the Toronto Police Service Intelligence in a school system whose superintendent of student and community services had already become a kind of police superintendent. But to understand how this memo could be written and circulated in the first place, one has to take account of one of the symbolic effects of the mainstream media—the stigmatization and criminalization of OCAP—which makes it possible to forge a chain of authority running from the Ontario provincial government to the police to the schools. Elsewhere, this authority has been backed up by different degrees of violence: the tear-gas cylinders and rubber bullets used in Québec City in April 2001, the extreme violence of the July 2001 police raids on the Italian Independent Media Center in Genoa. As John Downing (2002) has pointed out, such episodes demonstrate "the degree to which powers that be instruct their police forces how dangerous non-violent protest and peaceful counterhegemonic communication are" (p. 11). The story of OCAP and the TDSB also demonstrates a more subtle kind of repression—a school board's human-rights policy did not prevent the police from trying to pre-empt acts of resistance by extending their authority through student and community services.

Today, technocratic control over citizens extends from local school boards to the decision-making processes of the World Trade Organization and other international forums for liberalization, deregulation, and privatization. In *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, Pierre Bourdieu wrote:

What is at stake now is winning back democracy from technocracy. We must put an end to the reign of 'experts' in the style of the World Bank or the IMF, who impose without discussion the verdicts of the new Leviathan, the 'financial markets,' and who do not seek to negotiate but to 'explain': we must break with the new faith in historical inevitability professed by the theorists of liberalism; we must invent new forms of collective political work capable of taking note of necessities, especially economic ones (that can be the task of

experts), but in order to fight against them and, where possible, to neutralize them. (1998, pp. 25-26)

In Bourdieu's view, "globalization" is not only a myth or powerful discourse; it is one of the "main weapons in the battles against the gains of the welfare state" (p. 34). He argues that neo-liberal *doxa* is the "result of a prolonged and continual work by an immense intellectual workforce, concentrated and organized in what are effectively enterprises of production, dissemination, and intervention" (2003, p. 12). Their rhetoric is circulated by "think tanks," the public relations industry, and the corporate-owned media, first in newspaper columns, then in business news, followed by the entire field of journalism and media intellectuals who provide a steady "symbolic drip feed" of neo-liberal buzz words that imply that the "neoliberal message is a universalist message of liberation" (p. 31). As a modernized conservative revolution, neo-liberalism sets up the market as the norm of all practices in the name of progress, reason, and science. Through the science of "economics" and its mathematical equations, as well as through the ownership and control of the major media, neo-liberalism "has become the supreme form of conservative sociodicy which started to appear some thirty years ago as 'the end of ideology', or more recently, as 'the end of history'" (p. 35). While the media are not the direct producers of neo-liberal *doxa*, "the major communication companies play a decisive role in the quasi-universal circulation of the pervasive and rampant doxa of neoliberalism, whose *rhetoric* calls for detailed analysis" (p. 79). With the ascendancy of a neo-liberal political and economic orthodoxy, social movements must either have a strategy for influencing media or invent new forms of collective media work. "Those who undertake to fight it can count, within the fields of cultural production themselves, neither on the support of journalism...nor on that of 'media intellectuals'" (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 80).

In this context, Indymedia practice may be understood as a strategy to conserve the traditions of dissent and radical media by taking advantage of new communication technologies to create a "new critical medium of independent news and commentary" (Kidd, 2003, p. 49). The Independent Media Center (IMC) network is one site of social struggle against the market and the technocratic, autocratic state and the cynicism they cultivate as the norm of all social and political practices. While Bourdieu observed successive waves of struggle against neo-liberal imperialism, and was aware of the need to "unify international information and enable it to circulate," his life and work ended before he could take stock of new transnational media activism (Bourdieu, 2003, pp. 58-59). The "empty space" of transnational struggles that he observed in 1996 in the European context is no longer "practically" or "theoretically empty" (p. 59). Bourdieu was involved in founding the International ATTAC Movement in Paris in December 1998 (see <http://www.attac.org/indexfla.htm>). Speaking by video conference to the MLA meetings in Chicago in December 1999, he reflected upon what had happened in Seattle in these optimistic terms:

I believe that, without overestimating its importance, we can see in this event a first and exemplary experiment that needs to be analyzed up close in order to

uncover the principles of what could be the means and ends of a new form of political action able to transform the achievements of research into successful political demonstrations; what could be, more generally, the strategies of political struggle of a new nongovernmental organization defined by total commitment to internationalism and full adherence to scholarship. (Bourdieu, 2003, p.25).

We have yet to see the emergence of a new NGO linking researchers, writers, artists, and activists.<sup>1</sup> What has emerged is a new environment: the same “real time” hypermedia environment that is a precondition for the transpolitical empire of speed has also given rise to transnational campaigns, alliances of activists across borders, and a “new communications ‘internationalism’” (Redden, 2001, p. 68).

If our goal is to go beyond speculating about the theoretical “multitude” in order to account for Indymedia practice, then a Bourdieusian unified political economy of practice can make a contribution to our efforts. In this article, I argue for the relevance of Bourdieu’s unique sociological perspective for studying media activism. In the first part, I review relevant macro- and micro-level approaches, as well as approaches rooted in critical theory and history, that we might draw upon to understand the Indymedia phenomenon. Rather than calling for a multiperspectival approach to extend and overcome the limitations of any one of these approaches, I agree with Roger Keil and Rianne Mahon’s assessment that, in spite of many differences between European and Canadian experiences, bringing Bourdieu’s recent writings into communication studies will help us rethink and renew political-economy scholarship (Keil & Mahon, 2002). I argue that a unified political economy of Indymedia practice offers a method of analysis that responds to Bourdieu’s call for a “scholarship of commitment” against the neo-liberal “policy of depoliticization” (Bourdieu, 2003). I then apply this method to an analysis of research materials gathered on the Ontario IMC.

While there is enormous risk of misrepresenting Bourdieu’s work by extracting concepts that were developed and used in relational terms, what I find valuable is his methodological call for a “double” reading or analysis of structures, as well as an analysis of practice as a “product of a practical sense, of a socially constituted ‘sense of the game’” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 120-121). While Bourdieu was mainly interested in accounting for everyday, mundane, ritual practices and the strategies that tend, without anyone intending it, to conserve the social order, the practical sense does not exclude “forms of resistance, either passive or internal, or active or sometimes collective...” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 185). Further to this point, “Political struggle is a (practical and theoretical) cognitive struggle for the power to impose the legitimate vision of the social world, or, more precisely, for the recognition, accumulated in the form of a symbolic capital of notoriety and respectability, which gives the authority to impose legitimate knowledge of the sense of the social world, its present meaning and direction in which it is going and should go” (p. 185).

A double reading must account for both the objective and subjective dimensions of social structure, as a bidimensional relation of power and relation of

meaning. From an “objectivist” political-economic perspective on structure, the Internet is undoubtedly linked to transformations in the capitalist mode of production and the logic of capital accumulation. Ownership, infrastructure, and network topology determine content, but only if we consider institutionalized actors, professional media practice, and business, marketing, and consumer uses of ICTs. But what if we did not limit our political economy of practices to those practices socially recognized as economic? What if our political economy of practices emphasized instead marginal actors who take up, as a material condition of their symbolic work, the instruments of expression and criticism? What if capital, as Bourdieu suggests, presents itself in different forms: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic? Different kinds of capital may propel some agents toward a strategy of conservation, others toward a strategy of indifference, while others, based on solidarity or alliance with the dominated, may take up a strategy of subversion.

Thus, from a Bourdieusian perspective, one cannot fully account for what happens in the old or new media by political-economic analysis of institutions, corporate decision-making, or the distribution of hardware and software. Nor is it adequate to avoid the deficiencies of macroanalysis by turning to the microanalysis of media organizations, cultures of production, and cyber-politics to describe an autonomous space of creative conduct or new types of political agency. To sidestep the debate between macro and micro perspectives, one must delineate the economic and political conditions of production and distribution, but at the same time, take account of institutions, such as the media, the state, or the WTO, as they exist in people’s minds, as well as the reality of their media practice. This is the subjective dimension of media practice that is missing from “objectivist” approaches. A subjectivist point of view, however, does not supersede objectivist analysis, since people’s points of view are viewpoints from particular positions within social space. Instead of focusing upon media “strategy”—defined as the preplanned and purposive pursuit of calculated goals—the focus is upon people and how they are “motivated, driven by, torn from a state of indifference and moved by stimuli sent by certain fields—and not others” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 26). Instead of describing, as W. Lance Bennett (2003) has done, general “elements” of the “human context” that shape “the power of personal digital media in global activism,” and then seeing these as “correlates of globalization itself,” the emphasis is on the relationship between practical sense or reason and the various fields that make up social space (p. 26).

The conceptualization of technology in any adequate analysis of Indymedia is also a critical issue. Current explorations of the field of Internet activism describe the Internet as “an increasingly crucial part of broader media activism—a new tool in the box, but not the only one” (Meikle, 2002, p. 4). As a technology, the Internet is not a “given;” its development and uses are fraught with tensions between open and closed systems. What is more, “Technologies are socially shaped along with their meanings, functions, and domains and use. Thus, they cannot come into existence simply to fill a pre-existing role, since the role itself is

co-created with the technology by its makers and users” (Sterne, 2003, p. 373). As Sterne goes on to argue, Bourdieu’s sociology can also be applied to technology studies in order to “understand how a technology becomes a technology through social practices (rather than through logical deduction)...” (p. 375). As he sums up: “A technology is always, at any given moment, socially located. It is always implicated in social struggle” (p. 383).

In a Bourdieusian approach, the dualisms of constraint versus creativity, objective reaction versus subjective action, submission versus resistance, would be dissolved by accounting for both the structural and spontaneous aspects of social action. We must not only consider people’s practices (including their shaping of technology), but also the microcosms within which people are positioned, the fields they react to, the capital they can draw upon, their conceptions of media and politics, and so on. In order to understand any democratic tendencies within networked global political culture and to be in solidarity with those who are challenging autocratic technocracy, we must avoid falling into the trap of communication populism, where talk of a new “internationalism” obscures the economic and social effects of the new international division of labour, or, on the other hand, the trap of positive technological determinism, which regards any democratic possibility as an inherent property of digital, networked media. Our challenge is not simply to pronounce what is new about new media or media activism, or to describe how new media are being instrumentally used, with what advantages or disadvantages, and for what political purposes. We need to begin to account for both the sense, and the reality, of radical media practice as one front in the struggle against neo-liberalism as the only legitimate vision of the social world.

Within political economy, the distribution of resources defines the external constraints that bear upon interactions and representations. The use of the Internet is likely to be determined, and extremely limited, by the economics of production and distribution in the first instance. The Internet is a “commodified medium: the exchange value of on-line communication is prioritized over its other values” (Patelis, 2000, p. 91). Through the notion of a “new economy,” “the market and the Internet are constructed as essentially similar entities...” (p. 87). Because Internet industries are rooted in older industries, the Internet is “inevitably determined by older economies and industries” (p. 92). If the Internet has a tree-like structure, the way the branches grow is “dictated by international political-economic structures” (p. 93). Such a traditional macro-level political-economic perspective on media convergence and economic integration leads us back to the model of domination and control, dependency and monopoly. But as Vincent Mosco and Dan Schiller acknowledge in the conclusion to their recent analysis of the North American integration of information, entertainment, and telecommunications industries, “Cultural practices do not always follow the structure of markets and incentives...” (Mosco & Schiller, 2001, p. 29). Moreover, as Mosco (2003) has argued, media concentration is a powerful but not a “singular force propelling communication in one direction alone” (p. 288). “Digitization,” he adds, “is not a flawless technical process” and “commodification is under attack” by

defenders of the private and public spheres (p. 288). There are developments, contradictions, and limitations in the global expansion of capitalism to account for, and new directions in political economy must encompass “the use of communication and information technology for opposition and resistance (p. 305).

Micro-level approaches to the culture of alternative media production have also argued that private ownership of the Internet’s infrastructure, corporate synergies, and e-commerce entrepreneurship does not mean complete control over the content of a new medium. As the Goldsmiths Media Group has suggested, “the media, as forms of communication at a distance, raise issues of participation which are simply not reducible to questions of consumer choice” (Curran, 2000, p. 54). We have seen a whole body of literature on alternative media evolve that has focused on the “emancipatory possibilities of organizational and technological innovation in the media” (Hesmondhalgh, 2000, pp. 107-108).

Between macro- and micro-level approaches, the relationship between social-movement organizations (SMOs) and media organizations has been of particular interest. According to Carroll and Ratner (1999), drawing from Gamson and Wolfsfeld, the movements/media relation is one of “asymmetrical dependency”—movements need media more than media need movements. Different organizations, however, have different strategies for coping with, or overcoming, this dependency. In order to comprehend a social-movement organization’s distinctive media strategies, Carroll and Ratner argue that one must understand a particular SMO’s media strategies relationally—in relation to a group’s political project, in relation to other organizations within the movement, and in relation to the overall terrain of politics and culture. However, there is more to a social-movement organization’s political strategy than a media strategy. In the case of OCAP, for example, James Porter has shown how this social-movement organization is focused upon issues of political economy, which “suggests a variety of commitments to and practices of forms of life that cannot be reduced to political economy” (2001, p. 175). His ethnographic perspective reveals how this organization is dedicated to overcoming the crises of its members’ practical lives and how they have fashioned a particular style of direct action in their struggle against the local political representatives of global neo-liberalism.

Reading the literature of alternative media and recent political-economy, sociological, and ethnographic accounts together, we can begin to better understand the dynamics of the macro process of globalization from above and the micro process of mobilization for an alternative globalization and global justice from below. In 1983, Raymond Williams wrote that “one of the major benefits of new technologies could be a significant improvement in the practicability of every kind of voluntary association: the fibres of civil society as distinct from the market and the state” (Williams, 1983, p. 150). By 1997, Manuel Castells would claim that “the revolutionary cells of the information age are built on the flows of electrons” (Castells, 1997, p. 107). The democratic potential Williams foresaw has been realized in a new era of offline local social insurgency and online global oppositional politics. The empirical proof appears in the Zapatista uprising in

Chiapas in 1994, in the anti-MAI campaign in 1997-98, and in protests against the WTO in Seattle in November 1999 and against the G-8 summit in Genoa in July 2001.

Scholars have responded to these historic events from a variety of perspectives. In their research on media activists, William Carroll and Robert Hackett focus on “democratic media activism as emergent movement praxis” in order to problematize and revise social-movement theory (2004, p. 2). They see two paradigms for interpreting Indymedia: the meso-level American-based resource-mobilization approach and macro-level European-based theories of new social movements. After appropriating insights from these theories, they develop their analysis of media activism by returning to the critical theory of Habermas and his followers. Within the Enlightenment project of reason and justice as the foundation for modern social movements, media activism presents “a challenge to the system of symbolic production—a critique of the political economy of mass communication...” (p. 12). Media activism is defined as an emancipatory practice that can be elaborated in relation to Nancy Fraser’s reworking of Habermas’ ideal model of communicative action to allow for subaltern counterpublics and their counterdiscourses. While Carroll and Hackett note that democratic media activists have difficulty building counterpublics, Bourdieu’s critique of Habermas’ thought has yet to be addressed; counterpublics, like publics, appear to be based on relations of “dialogue” which have the power relations removed from them (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 66).

Media activism has also been approached from an “autonomous Marxist” perspective on the capital-labour relation and the creative power of labour to escape the capital-labour dialectic. According to autonomous Marxists, workers express their latent autonomy by taking flight from capitalist accumulation and control: “They do so through negative and positive moments of self valorization. With regard to communication technologies, autonomists point to alternative, democratic or ‘dissident’ media as one terrain of struggle made possible by a capitalism increasingly reliant on flows of information” (Uzelman, n.d., p. 17). Through the reappropriation of technology and technological knowledge, the dominated working class can use the Internet to “creatively resist and subvert structures of domination” (p. 20). An autonomous-Marxist perspective is valuable for enabling us to see labour, in the context of post-Fordist “factory-ization,” as both forced and free, externally constrained and creative. Accordingly, “Indymedia activists have created spaces in which knowledge, skills and technology can be shared and created collectively, where the logic of accumulation and social control are replaced by the logic of mutual aid and collective action” (p. 21). Thus, an autonomous Marxist views Indymedia practice within a situation of total control over one’s work situation, and interprets these practices as a strategy of “direct action” that do not “aim at taking, transforming or even eliminating state or corporate power, but instead seek to render them ‘redundant’” (p. 13).

As co-operative “direct action,” Indymedia practice aims to “fulfill local needs directly without the help or permission of powerful institutions” (p. 13).



While this approach promises a much-needed alternative to the neo-liberal politics of depoliticization, it defines Indymedia practice in terms of needs-directed “strategy.” But “needs” are socioculturally defined and always an open political question (Slater, 1997). Furthermore, in this approach, IMCs appear as microcosms of practice that abandon not only institutions of the state as sites of struggle, but other social-democratic institutions (such as trade unions) or public institutions (such as public-service media or public universities) that are the legacy of past democratic social struggles.

The major strength of a neo-Marxist approach is that it emphasizes the capital-labour dialectic and its transcendence. But other perspectives on the relevant prehistory of Indymedia are possible. We might consider the Indymedia phenomenon in terms of a long history of everyday global resistance and direct action from the Renaissance to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Following Foucault and de Certeau, Roland Bleiker (2000) has mapped out global politics as a site of transversal struggles by emphasizing the concepts of discourse and strategies/tactics. While the tension between Enlightenment and Romanticism is still within our consciousness, discourses simultaneously provide us with frameworks to view the world and express ways of life that shape our practices. Bleiker attempts to move the structure-agency debate onto the terrain of discourse by taking into account how “ideas and practices mutually influence each other” (p. 17). Foucauldian discourse analysis, coupled with de Certeau’s distinction between strategy and tactics, is productive for representing political life in non-essentialist ways, but it encases politics, as well as tactical action, within discourses that overdetermine the social order and understandings of agency. This approach proceeds from the position that language is a form of social practice to show that such practices are not limited to a localized target and may come to have, over time, cross-territorial effects. Focusing on avant-garde writing, Bleiker illuminates the potential and limits of literature and apolitical poetry as dissident practices. Yet, by his own account, it was the global TV images, not poetry, that amplified the “transversal information dynamic” between East and West Germany. So while artistic practices of dissent are part of our modernist legacy, a major discontinuity has been introduced by the advent of global, “real-time” media. Despite this discontinuity, he rejects pessimism about the possibility of dissent and finds grounds for the optimism of the dissenting will: “Dissent operates at least as much in the virtuality of speed, the instantaneity of globalized communication” (p. 113).

In terms of this historical narrative, the global Indymedia network has sought to take advantage of the “real-time” bias of the Internet and multimedia-distribution capabilities to “amplify” local protests to a global level. However, while global Indymedia may appear as a transversal political phenomenon, we are never placeless, nor do we have the ubiquity to be everywhere simultaneously. We are more exposed to the world and global politics, and we must engage with issues on an international level, but we are socialized bodies each occupying a particular place, defined as “a site where a thing or an agent ‘takes place,’ exists, in short, as

a localization, or relationally, topologically, as a position, a rank in an order” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 131).

Alternatively, Dorothy Kidd has shown how the IMC emerged out of a historical continuum of “radical activist media” that has “challenged the enclosure of the communications commons” (2003, p. 51). Based on the fifteenth-century principle upholding the English feudal commons, she claims that the IMC “constitutes a new commons regime, relatively autonomous from the direction of corporate and state media, in which unpaid workers share cyber and real territories, labor time, and communication technologies, techniques, and techne” (p. 51). This historical perspective posits an analogy between a past age of English labour and the new commoners—a “new class of knowledge workers.” But not all the individuals deemed to be included in this social category are acting in solidarity, or even partial solidarity, with the open-source movement, nor do the majority of knowledge workers exist outside the state, its agencies, or its laws and regulations, or outside private corporations and businesses. Despite the limitations of this analogy, and the problems with the conceptualization of this new class, what is clear is that the “story” emerged and circulated internationally during the 1990s in order to critique the enclosures of national commons, common regimes of knowledge and resources, and common lands. Kidd claims that it is this “discourse” of commons and enclosures that participants in the first IMC used in their critique of globalization. At the same time, she sees a resemblance between their practice and the “early commoners.” In this way, Indymedia agents have been construed by an imaginary historical anthropology and we are left with the impression that this “discourse” provided the first Indymedia practitioners with their point of view on the social world. We must account for “discourse,” and the relation between ideas and practices, but without an account of agents’ experience of their own practice, we have no way of knowing whether this represents the truth of their practice or whether this is a projection of a historical model onto their practice.

What is at stake here is not only what the relevant prehistory of Indymedia would be, but also media activists’ practical mobilizations of the past. Since few participants describe themselves as “commoners,” we cannot conclude that Indymedia activists have “identified” with “commoners” from the past. How is the past relevant to how activists temporalize themselves and anticipate a better future? According to Downing (2002), IMCs were not as technically or socially new as they first appeared to be; their “novelty was the combination of technology with a reflection on organizational strategies and organizing pitfalls” (p. 7). The use of ICTs as “radical media” promised to “reinstate a collective memory of accumulated political movement experience...” (p. 7). The new interactive technology not only facilitated dialogue to mobilize people, it reactivated memories of past struggles and it allowed users to reappropriate the social stock of “shared experience and insight on organizing strategies and tactics...” (p. 7).

#### **Ontario.indymedia.org**

Before proceeding with a discussion of the Ontario IMC, we must note the importance of locale. As Redden (2001) notes, the “Net lends itself to associational

forms of political community which both interconnect and ‘intraconnect’ communities at different spatial scales, allowing networks of activists to pursue both local and internationalist agendas” (p. 63). To proclaim open networks as a precondition for global social capital or to insist that the struggle against neo-liberal imperialism must be international places too much emphasis on deterritorialization and the transnational. In social reality, IMCs have emerged “as a result of a particular protest in a particular locale against corporate power and its abuses” (Downing, 2002, p. 17). What is more, the “locale has never, obviously, been chosen by the movements, but by the powers that be...” (p. 17). Just as government and corporate leaders continue to meet face to face in particular times and places, so too have media activists met face to face in specific locales to produce Indymedia.

In 2000, 31-year-old Kevin Smith encountered the IMC that was set up to cover the Washington, DC protests against the World Bank and the IMF. Two months later, he and a technical team launched the IMC Ontario website (<http://ontario.indymedia.org>) to cover the OCAP march against homelessness in Toronto. By this time, the Ontario provincial government’s neo-liberal policies had led to great desperation and suffering, including the deaths of several homeless people. OCAP demanded that a delegation of poor people be allowed to address the legislature, but their moral appeals and social demands went unheard. The June 15, 2000 action at Queen’s Park, the site of the Ontario Provincial Legislature, involved 1500 OCAP members, homeless people, and supporters. Denied entry to the legislative building by the Toronto Riot Police, a physical confrontation ensued, resulting in injuries on both sides. This action brought activists together “as part of a broader and hopefully sustained mobilization against the local agents of global capital. It gave the battle against global institutions up to that point in Seattle, Washington and Windsor a specifically local and ongoing focus” (Shantz, 2002, p. 26). In contrast to the August 1999 occupation of the Allan Gardens park to erect a “Safe Park” tent city for the homeless, an action that symbolized mutual aid in practice, but ended in arrests and a sense of futility about symbolic actions aimed primarily at raising awareness, this action shifted what James Porter called the “grammar of action...from ‘protest’ toward ‘resistance’” (Porter, 2001, p. 190). Framed as a Queen’s Park “riot” by mainstream journalism, this event also displayed a shift in police-demonstrator relations from pacification to violence against protestors. The provincial government led by Premier Mike Harris was prepared to treat the grievances of homeless people as a police, rather than a policy, matter. Three OCAP activists—Stefan Pilipa, John Clarke, and Gaetan Heroux—were identified as “leaders” of the action and were charged with “participating in a riot” and “counselling to participate in a riot.” The subsequent trials of the June 15th defendants became a continuing story on the IMC Ontario website.<sup>2</sup>

On September 22, 2001, an Independent Media Conference took place at the University of Toronto, and more than 100 activists met to make plans to co-ordinate coverage of future actions. People attended workshops on the “Common Front,” upcoming protests against the IMF, World Bank, NATO, and WTO,

“Countering the Mainstream Media,” and “Representing Our Communities,” legal and medical issues, “Reaching a Broad Audience,” “Getting the Story,” and “Organizing for a Toronto IMC.” The conference was also a forum to discuss the role of mainstream and independent media after the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States. By September 2003, the IMC Ontario homepage featured stories about the provincial election, demonstrations to end the occupation of Iraq and Palestine, WTO talks in Cancun, the Hamilton Red-Hill Expressway, and the August electrical blackout, as well as local squat news from the Kitchener-Waterloo Youth Collective.

Obviously, the Ontario IMC is a local echo of the original Seattle IMC. The global IMC network also includes 10 other IMCs in Canada: Alberta, Hamilton, Maritimes, Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec, Thunder Bay, Vancouver, Victoria, and Windsor. As of November 2003, among the 30 sites still being hosted on the original “Stallman” server, the Ontario IMC was second in the webpage “hit count” parade:

www.indymedia.org	1017381 page requests in 2 weeks	25.4% of Stallman total
ontario.indymedia.org	446579 page requests in 2 weeks	11.2% of Stallman total
nyc.indymedia.org	324122 page requests in 2 weeks	8.1% of Stallman total
bolivia.indymedia.org	316053 page requests in 2 weeks	7.9% of Stallman total
seattle.indymedia.org	261911 page requests in 2 weeks	6.5% of Stallman total

(Kevin Smith, IMC Ontario, Email, November 6, 2003)

While thinking globally, the Ontario IMC has acted “locally” in the Kitchener-Waterloo area and at the provincial level, with contributions from Toronto-based sources like OCAP (<http://www.ocap.ca>) and the Toronto Video Activist Collective (<http://tvac.ca>). Among its “allies” are *The ACTivist*, an independent magazine and website based in Oakville, CFRU 93.3 FM and *The Peak* (an alternative magazine) in Guelph, and CKMS 100.3 FM Radio and *Imprint*, the University of Waterloo’s radio station and newspaper. Special projects have included Peace, Media Empowerment, and Arts and Culture pages, as well as two print projects, the Kitchener-Waterloo *Blind Spot* and IMC Ontario *Raw News*.

The geo-economic conditions of production and distribution of the Ontario IMC are dependent upon the existing global Internet industry and infrastructure, such as the computer hardware industry, Internet service providers (ISPs), and Web-browser software. This technological field constrains media practice; for example, the one-sided nature of cable technology makes it harder and more expensive for anyone to access a server. The protocol for downloading content is

much faster than for uploading. Since the 1990s, the centripetal forces enclosing the Internet and the World Wide Web within e-capitalism have been challenged by the centrifugal force of the open-source movement. The use of ICTs for Indymedia is predicated upon this social shaping of the Internet. IMC Ontario was originally hosted on a Web server based in Seattle, named after Richard Stallman, creator of the GNU system, a free UNIX-like operating system. It was run on Active software developed by Australian cyber-activists who wanted to encourage electronic networking with a newswire and event calendar, among other tools. When the Seattle IMC started using the software for the 1999 WTO protest, they used the newswire, changed the format of the front page from two to three columns, and added software to handle multimedia uploads. Since then Indymedia collectives have added their own enhancements or built their own code bases. The IMC Ontario collective has shaped the technology in specific ways to allow Web editing of static pages, which can be named and stored in the database like articles; to provide separate passwords for each static page and for each editor; to create a more reasonably sized image to display on uploads (with links to a larger image); to modify the electronic volunteer forms; and to permit editors easy editing right from the article-display screen.

More recently, the global Indymedia network has been decentralizing. The original server ceased hosting IMC websites on December 1, 2003, so local IMCs have been changing locations and software. IMC Ontario moved to a server with an ISP in Kitchener-Waterloo, replacing the original Active software with a TWiki Web-based collaboration platform to allow for optional user logins and self-editing; collaborative editing by editorial collective, with version tracking and easy-to-make homepages for each city and topic; and better categorization of articles, by locale, type, and topic. As a shared, multimedia platform, each local IMC strikes a blow against the orthodoxy of private intellectual property guaranteed by the state in the form of copyright law. Instead of copyright protection for intellectual property, "copyleft" spells out distribution terms that give people the right to use, modify, and redistribute software programs as long as the use-value of software is not transformed into exchange values.

With the commercialization of the Internet, Indymedia production finds itself in the same position that offline cultural production in the artistic or literary field finds itself. As Bourdieu observes, "the hard won independence of cultural production and circulation from the necessities of the economy is being threatened, in its very principal, by the intrusion of the commercial logic at every stage of the production and circulation of cultural goods" (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 67). Like these fields, the microcosm of Indymedia production does not ensure the production of producers. The members of the IMC Ontario core group are not, in the first instance, producers of Indymedia; they are producers and consumers of goods and services in the neo-liberal economy. However, just as economic globalization is not mechanically determined by laws of technology or economics, but by policies, people's political practices are not mechanically determined by the constraints of their work situations, or by having a professional conscience that misrecognizes

exploitation of labour. IMC Ontario founder Kevin Smith, who earned a Bachelor of Math degree in computer science from the University of Waterloo, has a job in “software quality assurance” and writes programs in various languages—PERL, C, C++, and test scripting language, among others.

Nowhere is the integration between globalizing industry and university education more apparent than in computer science, where computer programmers and software developers are central to the whole category of information/knowledge workers within a neo-Fordist mode of production. While his university education prepared Smith for his high-paying job, his disposition does not conform to the collective expectations of his job. His present media actions are rooted in a disposition whose original social conditions are to be found in his family: he was raised with a “strong sense of the need for justice.” Moreover, even though he works in the so-called “information sector” of the new economy, he does not conceive of information, especially the news, as a commodity made by professionals and subject to the law of profit. What excites him is the idea of “ordinary, everyday people doing interviews and making news” (Smith, quoted in Hayhoe, 2002, p. 7).

Another core member of IMC Ontario—52-year-old researcher, writer, and editor Gloria Bergen—works for an occupational health and safety consulting company (<http://www.globerg.biz/index.htm>). Her company has assisted various industries with occupational health and safety, as well as environmental protection. While her website promotes the idea that the “ability to communicate via the Internet makes communications and business truly global,” she also writes articles critiquing imperialism and the global ruling class for the U.S. political newsletter *CounterPunch* (<http://www.counterpunch.org>). Rather than taking the scope of manoeuvre that agents win for themselves as evidence of resistance or proof of inventiveness, the logic of her media practice can be traced to more original social conditions. Raised as a “Mennonite, a pacifist, in small town Ontario,” IMC Ontario affords her the opportunity to act locally and think globally, to “stir things up, to fight for the rights of all people without using arms and weapons of mass destruction” (Gloria Bergen, IMC Ontario, personal communication, September 3, 2003).

In addition to the economic conditions of production, the degrees of discrepancy between the “activist” disposition of social agents and their current occupational role, and the characteristics of their work that enable them to make a commitment to Indymedia, the particularities of local political conditions of production are also significant. The election of Mike Harris as provincial premier, labour strikes, and the crisis in public education gave impetus to people’s commitment to political change. From 1995 until 2003, under successive Tory governments, Ontario classrooms were a site of class war. Twenty-five-year-old Greg MacDougall, another member of the core group, graduated from high school in 1996, and obtained mathematics and education degrees from the University of Waterloo and Queen’s University in 2001. As a certified Intermediate/Senior Math and Computers teacher, he has made a living teaching secondary school in

Ottawa and Kingston and privately tutoring high-school and university students. His media activism is rooted in hip-hop music and its culture of entrepreneurship and media-making, as well as the English/writing education he received, which got him involved in *Imprint*, the University of Waterloo's student newspaper. His own writing has addressed a variety of topics, including Aboriginal awareness, peace/anti-war subjects, activism, social and environmental justice, media, health and athletics, and music (<http://www.grade13.ca>). The biggest "trigger/catalyst" for him was a "Teaching for Social Justice" course he took as part of his Bachelor of Education degree at Queen's University. Although he was from a "privileged background," and there is a structural discrepancy between the qualifications attained and the positions or jobs obtained, this educational experience also motivated a commitment to social change. Dispositions produced under one set of conditions can change in response to new experiences, and in a crisis, "agents often have difficulty in holding together the dispositions associated with different states or stages, and some of them, often those who were best adapted to the previous state of the game, have difficulty in adjusting to the new established order" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 161).

Media activists, as has often been pointed out, are critically disposed toward big, global media. But analysis must go beyond mentioning the general awareness media activists have of the limitations of corporate media and market-driven journalism. To begin with, members of the core group are cognizant of the concentrated structure and commercial imperatives of corporate media. While media, in a democracy, should "inform and educate," they function as the "propaganda arm for the dominant powers (government and business)" (Kevin Smith, IMC Ontario, personal communication, September 2, 2003). Media "'mediates' our experiences and realities. It is a shame that control of so much of it is dominated by money..." (Greg Macdougall, IMC Ontario, personal communication, September 9, 2003). The role of media "under capitalism is to uphold the views and ideologies of the ruling class. Therefore no real social discourse is allowed....A few powerful people own the bulk of the mass media and therefore the media and all information is controlled by them" (Bergen). These conceptualizations of "media" are remarkably congruent with elite and critical theory, which conceptualizes propaganda within democratic societies in relation to political-economic processes so as to provide an alternative to a liberal-pluralist way of making sense of media and politics.<sup>3</sup>

How does the Ontario IMC core group relate, and react to, the field of politics? With what conceptions of politics, the state, and international institutions do they operate? For Kevin, politics is about "acquiring and using power. A few people have lots of power, and the vast majority have little. The less they have, the more they are taken advantage of by the powerful." The G-8, WTO, and neo-liberalism are "attempts by dominant governments and corporate power to gain more power for themselves on the international stage..." According to Gloria, politics is "everything. Life, death, birth, work, the environment, relationships, social welfare systems and even sex." Her commitment is to "overthrow the capitalist

state,” to build a “workers state where workers make democratic decisions...” Politics, in Greg’s view, is “about taking control of something and influencing how it happens. It’s about exercising power, sharing power or giving power to others.” National governments are “quite unaccountable to the people” and “should be restructured to allow meaningful popular participation in decision-making” (Smith). “The election system is not democratic. People need to take back their autonomy and...decide to govern themselves...” (Macdougall). “A government ruled by a minority of wealthy, privileged people can never be expected to create the rules nor social benefits that benefit the majority. All governments must be dismantled...societies and communities can build their own organizations, their own form of government, with their own rules that suit their particular needs and desires. The state cannot be reformed” (Bergen). Transnational corporate interests are the visible hand at work in international organizations, associations, and forums. The G-8, the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF, and their many regional and bilateral agreements, are “attempts by dominant governments and corporate power to gain more power for themselves on an international stage” (Smith). The G-8 is a “criminal organization that maintains power through state terror. Their intent, to globalize wealth in the hands of the richest people in the richest countries, creates poverty, inequality, and criminalizes dissent” (Bergen). The WTO is a “non-democratic, non-transparent organization that sets its agenda based upon corporate greed” (Bergen). To sum up, they are non-democratic institutions “representative of the profit principle” (Macdougall).

These quotations begin to reveal a space of coexisting and compatible—if not identical—points of view. One risk of quoting in this way is that the quotations may be read as expressions of “opinions” or, even worse, as artefacts of my questions. Instead, these quotations should be read as revealing a perspectivism based on the family, education, career, and Indymedia experiences that have been disclosed to me, even though much of their experience remains hidden. Thus, what might be regarded as their mistaken analysis of journalism—one that conflates news and propaganda—can be seen in the light of social reason. If they think of the role of corporate media giants and the harmful effects of globalization in terms resembling elite or critical theory, and view power as a zero-sum game, this is no less one-dimensional or simplistic, and no more precise, than the utopian neo-liberal views that appear in mainstream news every day.

As Todd Gitlin pointed out twenty-five years ago, opposition movements must “probe to discover *in practice* how far the principles of ‘objectivity’ can be severed both from the disparaging codes and from corporate and State interests that sustain and delimit them” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 283). Whereas mainstream political news likes to avoid events that politicians cannot control, unless there is scandal in the air, the Indymedia’s regular beat is popular dissent, and the typical story has been the “protest” or “demo” story. Locally, OCAP’s activist work has been a big, ongoing story from the beginning. From the “Safe Park” action in Allan Gardens, to the “Fight to Win” action at Queen’s Park, to the Ontario Common Front’s October 16, 2001, economic disruption in downtown Toronto,



one theme has been police-protester confrontations from the perspective of protestors, or victims of “police brutality.” Through such a journalistic practice, the Ontario IMC frames OCAP’s direct actions for a wider audience. But as readers’ comments to news stories like “016: A Smashing Victory for the OCF” indicate, the success or reasonableness of direct actions is often met with antagonistic, hostile responses. Nonetheless, activists who are not regarded as primary sources of political news because they operate outside of official channels for political action are given a voice. The Ontario IMC has scrambled to report on one local protest event after another, but they are also aware that they have paid scant attention to activities that take place between protests, such as OCAP’s direct-action casework.

Some of the constraints and pressures acting upon Indymedia makers have already been well documented. Limited resources, dependence on volunteers, and police surveillance are typically mentioned. What has yet to be examined is how Indymedia practices are both enabled and disabled by the broader journalistic field. On the one hand, there is a “fast growing awareness that non-traditional news sources are possibly as legitimate, and maybe even more legitimate than the ‘official’ ones. They might not be held to as high standards of ‘quality,’ but at the same time they’re not held hostage by the implicit biases that exists in all corporate journalism” (Macdougall). On the other hand, “the way that corporate media just blankets everything with the stories they tell, kind of makes Indymedia seem less official and less legitimate in delivering news. And many people won’t trust ‘non-official’ sources—there’s a huge tradition of these ‘official’ people delivering the news and many people will cling to that” (Macdougall). Whereas the mainstream media represent a concentration of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, Indymedia not only lacks economic capital, it also suffers from negative symbolic capital.

The journalistic field holds the symbolic power to confer status, to construct social problems, to represent social movements, and to frame their activities. Protests and demonstrations produce a flood of coverage in the mainstream media, especially television news, in which the logic of competition “pushes journalists to work ‘live’ and to go ‘where things are happening’” (Champagne, 1999, p. 50). But the social problem of poverty, and the situations and policies that produced it, gets lost in the intense media coverage of a Queen’s Park “riot” and subsequent court cases. Mainstream media coverage becomes an occasion for the resurgence of stereotypes, and people come away with an image of violence and with opinion-editorial pieces that say more about the working of the journalistic field than the social group of workers and poor people. Analysis of the *Washington Post*’s coverage of the WTO meetings and demonstrations in Seattle reveals how street protests were framed as misguided efforts and unnecessary disturbances, while economic globalization was framed as democratic (Goeddertz & Kraidy, 2003). During the Québec City protests against the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement (FTAA) in April 2001, considerations of deviance and violence also came to dominate event coverage, as well as post-event debates. Mainstream journalists constructed a dichotomy between good, law-abiding citizens and bad,

violent anarchists, shaping “common-sense” understandings of participants’ actions for the public. But even though they are caught within this cycle of collective, dichotomous representations, IMC journalist-activists are not fooled into thinking they can overcome them by influencing the mainstream media. If the failure of the mainstream media is that they do not know how to illustrate the social existence of poor people except when they are a “problem,” the challenge for Indymedia is to tell the background, or issue-oriented, story, before and after protests or demonstrations. Like their mainstream counterparts, Indymedia journalists have also tended to focus on the extraordinary and the spectacular, even if their social reasons for doing so are very different.

Indymedia does allow for the expression of views not conditioned by market censorship, the media, public relations of politicians and police, or the need to “balance” stories by offering opposing viewpoints. Unlike their mainstream counterparts, Indymedia journalists do not have to fear losing their jobs as journalists if they challenge corporate prerogatives or advertisers’ sensibilities. They do, however, have to fear being tear-gassed or clubbed, detained without any charges being laid, and having their equipment confiscated and their videotape and photographs seized and used by police to identify “criminal” suspects. As media activists, they sometimes pay a price for dissenting viewpoints, ranging from enduring negative flak and censorship by editors in the university student press, to lost jobs, hate posts, harassing phone calls, and being tear-gassed, yelled at, ostracized, and spit upon.

In its editorial practice, the Ontario IMC follows the strategy of “open publishing.” Multimedia material posted to the site becomes available to read, view, or hear, and it can be commented on by anyone accessing the site. But this does not mean that anything goes: there are criteria for “hiding” postings, but any postings that violate editorial criteria are still accessible through a link.<sup>4</sup> This kind of website moderation has been used to “hide” articles ranging from analysis of the Israel-Palestine conflict to photographs of police lined up to buy donuts at Tim Hortons during an OCAP “squat” action. Contrary to its own policy on hiding articles, the reasons for hiding posts are specified in some cases but not in others. In reality, “open publishing” has been a “blessing and a curse, allowing people to post timely reports but also giving way too much space for our detractors to post nonsense on our site” (Smith). The steady growth in site viewership has been accompanied by the growth in “off-topic and problematic postings.” Editorial-policy discussion has centred on how to address these postings, and this has led to familiar debates over freedom of speech versus libellous or “otherwise objectionable” postings. Volunteer editors have also had to contend with disinformation or hate posts, and there have been too few volunteers to implement editorial policy. Another issue is the way articles are displayed on the website. Articles of different types and quality have been given “equal precedence, whether they’re an intelligent article or some bullshit, they effectively disappear from the newswire within a couple of days, and a notice for an upcoming event is in the same stack as a report on what happened is in the same stack as an analytical essay” (Macdou-

gall). The IMC Ontario website has been criticized because “legitimate work gets drowned out by off-the-cuff rants and asinine comments,” as well as for having no “coherent message,” so that “analysis loses out to sensationalism (just like the corporate media)” (IMC Ontario Workshop Feedback, October 2002). Policy changes that aim to strike a better balance between “open publishing and comfortable Web space for environmental and social justice movements” are linked to changes to the software and the website redesign (IMC Ontario Workshop Feedback, October 2002).

In addition to ongoing internal discussion about how to achieve easier access and greater accountability, the open-publishing model has also been subject to external criticism from media columnists who see the open approach to publishing as an invitation to amateurs. Indymedia has been criticized for lack of editorial “quality” and “ethical standards” based on presumption that mainstream media professionals follow traditional rules of method and ethical conduct (Boyd Bell, quoted in Hayhoe, 2002, p. 21). Such criticisms forget the history of the professionalization of journalists and spring from a modernist paradigm of journalistic “objectivity.” These external criticisms express a viewpoint on Indymedia practice from a particular position within a hierarchized journalistic field that is now in flux. They can be read as an appeal to professionalism in the context of the Web culture’s flow of “informational news,” where news is only a subset of information to be “hunted and gathered” by users who circumvent former patterns of editing and gatekeeping (Burnett & Marshall, 2003). Rejecting journalistic “objectivity” and redefining “balance,” Indymedia journalists are participant, rather than detached, observers of the movement scene and direct actions. Their perspectivism is based on their social position and experience of the world, as well as their political commitments. The argument that “[W]e would be poorer in terms of knowledge if we didn’t have the high standards that have come to be expected of what is called the mainstream media: balance and caution about reporting rumours” prevents us from seeing the practical ethics that govern Indymedia practice. During an Indymedia workshop on video, Jonathan Culp of TVAC was asked if there was anything that shouldn’t be videotaped at demonstrations. He replied, “Well, it’s probably not a good idea to tape things like people destroying bank machines. Remember, you are working in solidarity with the protesters” (Culp, quoted in Hayhoe, 2002, p. 27). Instead of being “embedded” with the U.S. military or police forces and filing stories to editors embedded in market-driven news organizations, Indymedia makers are embedded in the “multitude,” and their net work is to document and evaluate social struggles.

The Ontario IMC’s existence depends on the use of new technology to accrue some social capital and the desire to express solidarity with direct action against the symbols of the globalization movement that excludes them from participating and from decision-making. To be sure, true believers in Indymedia may couch their actions in absolute terms: filtered versus unfiltered, “raw” news, truth against lies, Indymedia against media monopolies. But a double reading suggests that such dichotomies will not do. As part of the flow of informational news that is

transforming journalism, Indymedia journalist-activists must continually engage with the dominant discourse of neo-liberalism and its institutions. The practical experience of the Ontario IMC suggests that participants know the media field is important, so rather than becoming cynical or incredulous, they want to democratize it. We could say that each IMC wants to beat the neo-liberal media at their own game by publishing stories that frame protests and demonstrations as democratic. In this game, they use whatever resources, media knowledge, and skills they have in the most advantageous way possible. Their distance from economic “bottom lines” allows them to take risks, but this does not mean that they do not face other kinds of risks, challenges, or stumbling blocks.

**Conclusion: By any Indymedia necessary**

The Ontario IMC is a present website of social struggles against neo-liberalism. Based on her research into the original IMC in Seattle, Kidd concludes that Indymedia represent a “major step forward in the tactical use of autonomous media” (Kidd, 2003, p. 62). But an Indymedia platform and a “do it yourself” media aesthetic do not make for a radical media organization. Some observers believe that IMC Ontario lacks organization (to present content, to deal with issues, to train volunteers), such as a collective based in Toronto, where most potential volunteers are located. Others have expressed the view that if the Ontario IMC were to become an organization, it would lose its independence as a small, amorphous collective dedicated to a consensus model of decision-making. The organizational form of IMC Ontario is still in formation. Despite the lack of economic capital to finance its activities or pay for staff, there is continuing talk of “collaborative efforts,” “partnerships,” and “outreach” to minority groups. At the same time, the scope of manoeuvre is limited by fundraising and by “outside pressures” that limit the number of volunteers and what they are able to contribute. The volunteers who become involved bring enthusiasm and passion, but they do not have “all the necessary skills to build a successful movement—media skills, meeting skills, group skills, coordination skills, [and] skills to organize people...” (Macdougall).

The case of IMC Ontario, as I have constructed it, describes both the sense, and the reality, of Indymedia practice as a strategy of subversion, without overlooking how relations of power underpin both resistance to domination and resistance to subversion. The inclination and ability to play the Indymedia game did not spring from the Seattle IMC in November 1999, but from a long prehistory. The present state of historical work offers us contending narratives of popular dissent, struggles for the commons, radical media, and anarchist tradition.<sup>5</sup> This case study helps foreground how core members are motivated and moved, not only by Enlightenment or Romantic consciousness, or by a general willingness to take on more flexible political identities, but by technological, political, educational, and journalistic fields. My analysis reveals the twofold truth of Indymedia practice as a simultaneously structured and spontaneous form of collective media work on the margins of all these fields.

If the global information infrastructure has been “characterized as the combination of a *democratic* mechanism and an *oligopolistic* mechanism, which operate

along different models of network systems,” then open networks are the precondition for circulation, co-operation, and global social capital (Hardt & Negri, 2000, pp. 298-299, italics in original). Indymedia.org represents a model that opens the way for the reappropriation of ICTs, but Indymedia practice is not completely deterritorialized; each local IMC provides a platform for informational news and views within particular geo-political circumstances. Moreover, an open network or platform is not the only precondition for further development. The Ontario IMC is a node in a global network that lacks skilled users of technology for collecting, posting, and critically analyzing information, and for building up networks of exchange between disconnected independent media projects. In addition to syndication and hyperlinks, there must also be new forms of decentralized co-operation with other social-movement organizations, citizens’ watchdog organizations like the Council of Canadians, trade unions, artists, writers, media-literacy educators and their students, and university-based scholars. Beyond the microcosm of the IMC Ontario collective, there lies the field of education. There must be media education that makes it possible for agents to acquire media-activism skills that are not present in their habitus. Through a process of habituation, people can develop an activist habitus so that it becomes “second nature” to invest one’s competencies in media activism.<sup>6</sup> Another precondition for the development of this new critical medium would be the formation of what Bourdieu calls “collective intellectuals.” This refers to scholars who are less invested in the academic microcosm and its “politics” and more committed to helping working groups “in their effort to express, and thereby discover, what they are and what they could or should be,” and “with the reappropriation and accumulation of the immense social stock of knowledge on the social world...” (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 21). In our own academic field of communication studies, it is time for an “academic pro bono movement” that would “push beyond policy research and ‘applied’ scholarship as it is currently conceived” (Sterne, 2004, p. 220). Unless these preconditions are met, and until media scholars tackle the problem of how media studies and media activism can be articulated to produce not only more media analysis or cultural policy, but more connectivity and cohesion between academics and activists, the Ontario IMC could turn out to be another short-lived experiment in democratic communication.

### **Acknowledgment**

I wish to thank Jody Berland and Maureen Gillis for their editorial assistance, and Kevin Smith, Gloria Bergen, and Greg MacDougall for responding to my e-interview questions.

### **Notes**

1. What has emerged is an assessment of Bourdieu’s work on politics and the state, and his relation, as a social scientist and activist, to democratic politics. See Wacquant (2004).
2. The first fourth-month trial was declared a mistrial on the fourth day of jury deliberation, after jurors could not agree on whether prosecutors had proven there had been a “riot.” More than three years later, during a second trial, the charges against OCAP organizer John Clark were stayed

- because he had not been tried in a reasonable amount of time. The prosecution of Clark's militant speeches as part of a de facto criminal conspiracy is estimated to have cost more than \$1 million.
3. For further discussion, see Robins & Webster, 1999; and Nesbitt-Larking, 2001.
  4. According to IMC Ontario editorial policy, the editorial collective will "hide" postings that:
    - have been requested hidden by the poster;
    - have been posted by someone who is found to be impersonating someone else;
    - have been posted by someone who claims a false affiliation with an organization;
    - are duplicates;
    - have no content other than advertising a business or another website;
    - in the opinion of the collective, directly or indirectly (via Web link) incite hatred against an oppressed group of people;
    - in the opinion of the collective, directly or indirectly (via Web link) constitute an explicit or implied physical threat against any individual or group of people;
    - in the opinion of the collective, contain unsubstantiated and very damaging information about an individual or group (such as false event info);
    - are garbage (e.g., pictures submitted as text);
    - are relevant mainly to a jurisdiction outside Ontario (e.g., *Radio Georgia's 25th anniversary*). These posts should go to another IMC, or to the Global page;
    - are comments that are unrelated to the article being commented on;
    - are organizing specific illegal acts (e.g., saying to meet at a certain place and time to go do something illegal).
  5. For discussion of Indymedia and the anarchist socialist tradition, see Downing, 2003.
  6. As a modest step in this direction, this year I am teaching "Resistance and Subversion on the Internet," a fourth-year undergraduate seminar course. The syllabus is available on request.

## References

- Bennett, W. Lance. (2003). *New Media Power: The Internet and Global Activism*. In Nick Couldry and James Curran (Eds.), *Contesting media power: Alternative media in a networked world* (pp. 17-37). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bleiker, Roland. (2000). *Popular dissent, human agency and global politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1998). *Acts of resistance: Against the tyranny of the market*. New York: The New Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (2000). *Pascalian mediations*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (2003). *Firing back: Against the tyranny of the market 2*. New York: The New Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, & Wacquant, Loic J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Burnett, Robert & Marshall, P. David. (2003). *Web theory: An introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Carroll, William K. & Hackett, Robert. (August 2004). *Democratic media activism through the lens of social movement theory*. Paper presented at the International Association for Media Communication Research, Porto Alegre.
- Carroll, William K., & Ratner, R. S. (1999). Media strategies and political projects: A comparative study of social movements. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 24(1), 1-34.
- Castells, Manuel. (1997). *The power of identity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Champagne, Patrick. (1999). The view from the media. In Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The weight of the world: Social suffering in contemporary society* (pp. 45-59). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Curran, James (Ed.). (2000). *Media organizations in society*. London: Arnold.
- Downing, John. (2002). *The INDYMEDIA phenomenon: space-place-democracy and the new Independent Media Centers*. URL: <http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/gricis/actes/bogues/Downing.pdf>.
- Downing, John. (2003). The independent media center movement and the anarchist socialist tradition. In Nick Couldry and James Curran (Eds.), *Contesting media power: Alternative media in a networked world* (pp. 243-257). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gitlin, Todd. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Goeddertz, Tamara & Kraidy, Marwan M. (2003). The 'battle of Seattle': U.S. prestige press framing of resistance to globalization. In Lee Artz & Yahya R. Kamalipour (Eds.), *The globalization of corporate media hegemony* (pp. 79-92). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hardt, Michael & Negri, Antonio. (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hayhoe, Anita. (2002, Summer). *Fuck corporate media. We want the truth*. URL: <http://www.ryerson.ca/rj/archives/2002/hayhoesmr.html>
- Hesmondhalgh, David. (2000). Alternative media, alternative texts: Rethinking democratization in the cultural industries. In James Curran (Ed.), *Media organizations in society* (pp. 107-125). London: Arnold.
- Keil, Roger & Rianne Mahon. (2002). Bourdieu in Canada: An invitation for debate. *Studies in Political Economy*, 69, 7-14.
- Kidd, Dorothy. (2003). Indymedia.org: A new communications commons. In Martha McCaughey and Michael Ayers (Eds.), *Cyberactivism: Online activism in theory and practice* (pp. 47-69). New York: Routledge.
- Meikle, Graham. (2002). *Future active: Media activism and the internet*. New York: Routledge.
- Mosco, Vincent. (2003). The transformation of communication in Canada. In Wallace Clement & Leah Vosko (Eds.), *Changing Canada: Political economy in transformation* (pp. 207-308). Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Mosco, Vincent & Schiller, Dan (Eds.). (2001). *Continental order? Integrating North America for cybercapitalism*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Nesbitt-Larking, Paul. (2001). 'The good, the bad, and the ugly': Culture, ideology and the media. In *Politics, society and the media: Canadian perspectives* (pp. 83-108). Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- Patelis, Korinna. (2000). The political economy of the internet. In James Curran (Ed.), *Media organizations and society* (pp. 84-106). London: Arnold.
- Porter, James. (2001). Intentional disturbances, making the Toronto movement scene. *Public*, 22/23, 175-193.
- Redden, Guy. (2001). Grassroots and digital branches in the age of transversal politics. In Hugh Brown, Geert Lovink, Helen Merrick, Ned Rossiter, David The & Michele Wilson (Eds.), *Politics of a digital present: An inventory of Australian net culture criticism and theory* (pp. 61-68). Melbourne: Fibreculture Publications.
- Robins, Kevin & Webster, Frank. (1999). Propaganda: The hidden face of information. In *Times of the technoculture: From the information society to the virtual life* (pp. 131-146). New York: Routledge.
- Shantz, Jeff. (2002). *Fighting to win!: Anarchists and the Ontario coalition against poverty*. URL: [http://ontario.indymedia.org/front.php3?article\\_id=9485](http://ontario.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=9485).

- Slater, Don. (1997). Consumer culture and the politics of need. In Mica Nava, Andrew Blake, Iain MacRury & Barry Richards (Eds.), *Buy this book: Studies in advertising and consumption* (pp. 51-63). New York: Routledge.
- Sterne, Jonathan. (2003). Bourdieu, technique and technology. *Cultural Studies*, 17(3-4), 367-389.
- Sterne, Jonathan. (2004). Academic pro bono. *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies* 4(2), 219-222.
- Uzelman, Scott. (n.d.). *Participatory-communication@indymedia.org*. Unpublished paper.
- Wacquant, Loic (Ed.). (2004). Bourdieu and democratic politics. In *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, 11(1), pp. 1-101.
- Williams, Raymond. (1983). *The year 2000*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Zwarenstein, Carlyn. (2002, May 16). School board spying on student politics. *Eye*, p. 12.