

10 - Nine Reflections on a Communications Internationalism in the Age of Seattle (2001)

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'Don't hate the media, be the media!'. Source:
<http://docs.indymedia.org/pub/Global/ImcDesign/redmovement.png>

1. A short history of the left, capitalism and communication: from wild utopianism to bottomless despair

Since the time of the French Revolution radical-democratic forces have tended to greet each new communications technology as the one that would make mass human emancipation possible, nationally or internationally. Print, railways (the *Communist Manifesto*), international telegraph (Marx again), the cheap and uncensored press, film (Lenin), radio (Bertold Brecht 1983), video have each in turn been greeted with enthusiasm as containing - at least potentially - the key to the kingdom. Yet each has been also condemned by the later (or another) Left as a means of state and/or capitalist manipulation and control.

2. 'A distaste for handling shit is a luxury a sewer worker can hardly afford'

Left suspicion of 'mass media manipulation' was dramatically revealed even at the beginning of our New Times, in Paris, 1968, when the students occupied not the TV and radio stations but the Opera, and when they ran off their (uniquely powerful) posters on the silk screen, rather than using the TV screen. Which led Hans Magnus Enzensberger to utter the immortal (and elegant) words above. He also reminded us that *all* media is 'manipulation' (handling, shaping), and that

The open secret of the electronic media, the decisive political factor, which has been waiting, suppressed or crippled, for its moment to come, is their mobilising power [...] When I say *mobilise* I mean *mobilise*...namely to make men more mobile than they are. As free as dancers, as aware as football players, as surprising as guerillas.'

(Enzensberger 1976).

However, even when the mother of all electronic media, the internet, took off in the 1970s-80s, the traditional Left syndrome recurred. The *Community Memory* project was sponsored in Bay Area, California, by Left computer specialists and utopians, in an attempt to create a new kind of democratic local arena. It was a public access community communication project. After a decade of experience, one of its founders declared that the very *idea* of a democratic electronic public arena was impossible (Athanasίου 1985). In the absence of empirical research, comparison with other such experiences and serious discussion, the pendulum had again swung from over-enthusiasm to excessive pessimism.

A quarter of a century later, radical communications specialists (at least in the North) still tend to concentrate on the *dominant* media and media *domination* rather than engaging with radical-democratic media activities and projects. What follows attempts to provide some more data and ideas on the latter as we enter the age of globalisation.

3. A globalised networked capitalism (GNC) is more than a globalised capitalist network...or a network for globalised capitalists¹

'Globalisation' refers to time/space compression on a world scale, the creation of societies beyond existing communities, economies, cultures or polities. This is something that has been taking place for tens, hundreds or even thousands of years, but that has now, with computerisation, taken a quantum leap forward. A GNC implies increasing interdependency of all social spheres, of all people and peoples. It simultaneously threatens multiple existing communities worldwide and provokes both reactionary and progressive movements of protest and counter-proposition. The radical-democratic ones responding to globalisation are themselves, however, increasingly allied and increasingly global (**Figure 1**).

'Networking', in the common sense of informal, horizontal relations between equals, has always been the predominant form of inter-relation between ordinary people in their everyday pursuits. It was increasingly marginalised by the formal, hierarchical organisation under the national/industrial/colonial (NIC) phase of capitalist development, when the new media were of the one-to-many or one-to-one kind. Networking is, however, becoming the privileged relational form for capitalists. Capitalism can now reproduce, transport and transform itself, along with the brutal divisions, destructive competition and political hierarchies inherent to it.

But the direct relations, feedback and creativity embodied in computer networking *do* provide a technical basis for old radical-democratic dreams of liberty, equality and solidarity - as well as for such newer ones as pluralism, sustainability, gender and sexual rights and options.

All media (writing, print, voice, music, painting, photography, radio, video, telephony) are now tending to merge, and to become available at ever-lower cost to ever-larger numbers. Thus do the dreams of the Left media optimists become, for the first time, possibilities (not *inevitabilities*).

The Web also tends to subvert the hierarchisation/opposition between the written and the audiovisual, introduced by the invention of writing thousands of years ago. It simply *is* the many-to-many medium Brecht thought radio would make possible. It is a means for the active production of information, ideas, images and sounds, as well as of their passive consumption.

And, as has been said of this new public sphere, the Web is not simply 'a hammer', it is also 'Germany' (Poster 1995). If the first of these refers to a tool or a means, the latter refers to a community or a place. And, if this is so, we must add a third element, that it is also 'Utopia' - both 'nowhere' and a 'good place', somewhere still to be invented/created.

¹ Revealed in the course of his monumental work on our new world by Manuel Castells (1996-8) to which I am much indebted. See Waterman (1998, 1999a).

Figure 1: Globalisation, its Discontents, Movements and Radical-Democratic Alternatives

	1. Aspects of high capitalist modernity: institutional/ (ideological)	2. Dimensions of contemporary globalisation	3. Social movements, global, national & local	4. Alternative global civilisation
A. Economy	Capitalism <i>(possessive individualism)</i>	Increasingly rapid movement, intensive penetration, restructuring, capital concentration	Labour, union, socialist	Socialised production, ownership, exchange
B. Production	Industrialisation <i>(industrialism, consumerism)</i>	Ecological manipulation & despoliation	Ecological & consumer	System of planetary care
C. Organisation	Administration & surveillance <i>(bureaucracy, technocracy)</i>	Hegemonic inter-state regimes	Democratic, political, civil & social rights	Co-ordinated multi-level order
D. Violence	Professional army <i>(militarism)</i>	Military/police repression & control	Peace, conflict-resolution, pacifist	Transcendence of war via exemplary disarmament
E. Culture	Computerisation of information & culture (computerism/informatism)	Informatisation of crucial international relations & culture	Democratisation & pluralisation of information & culture	Accessible & diverse alternative information & cultural order
F. Gender/ sexuality	Commoditisation & manipulation of gender, sexuality & reproduction <i>(patriarchy)</i>	Global gender, reproductive, sexual, family commoditisation & programming	Women's feminist, sexual rights	Egalitarian, sexually pluralistic & tolerant
G-Z. ???				

4. Beyond binary opposites: interpenetrating circles?

a) Binary opposites

Much Left and radical media criticism and activism has seen culture and communication with a binary logic (labour v. capital, popular v. elite, national v. imperial). This is a contemporary version of ancient and deeply-rooted binary thinking, in which the opposites are competitive and exclusive, and in which one is *positive and superior* (e.g. The West, Modernity, Man, Humanity, Socialism, the Local, the Silkscreen, the National), one *negative and inferior* (The South, Tradition, Woman, Nature, Capitalism, the International, Television, the Global). Without denying all mobilising value to such a model, it is of decreasing pertinence and effectivity under a complex and informatised capitalism.

b) Interpenetrating circles

I propose a marginally more complex model (**Figure 2**), of three overlapping circles:²

- the *Dominant* (capitalist, state or church produced/owned/controlled),
- the *Popular* (that which is either (re)produced by or preferred by the popular sectors), and
- the *Alternative/Radical-Democratic* (produced or proposed by avantguard radical-democratic intellectuals, artists, designers, technicians).

These ideal types combine economic, class, political and cultural elements. Each type itself, of course, consists of multiple constituents, themselves in conflict/co-operation with each other. Neither the Dominant, the Popular nor the Alternative/Radical Democratic (A/RD) is singular, none without its own internal contradictions. (**Figure 2** does not reveal the gigantic size of the Dominant nor the tiny one of the A/RD in terms of wealth, reach and power.)

One major implication of the figure is, obviously, that these are interpenetrating spheres. The Dominant cannot dominate without responding to/including the Popular, which is itself both a producer and a consumer of the Dominant; the Dominant cannot innovate without responding to the Alternative. The A/RD sphere interpenetrates the Popular and the Dominant. (On this model, for example, the low-budget, prize-winning Northern-English movie of working-class life under neoliberalism, *The Full Monty*, would be placed somewhere at the intersection of all three).

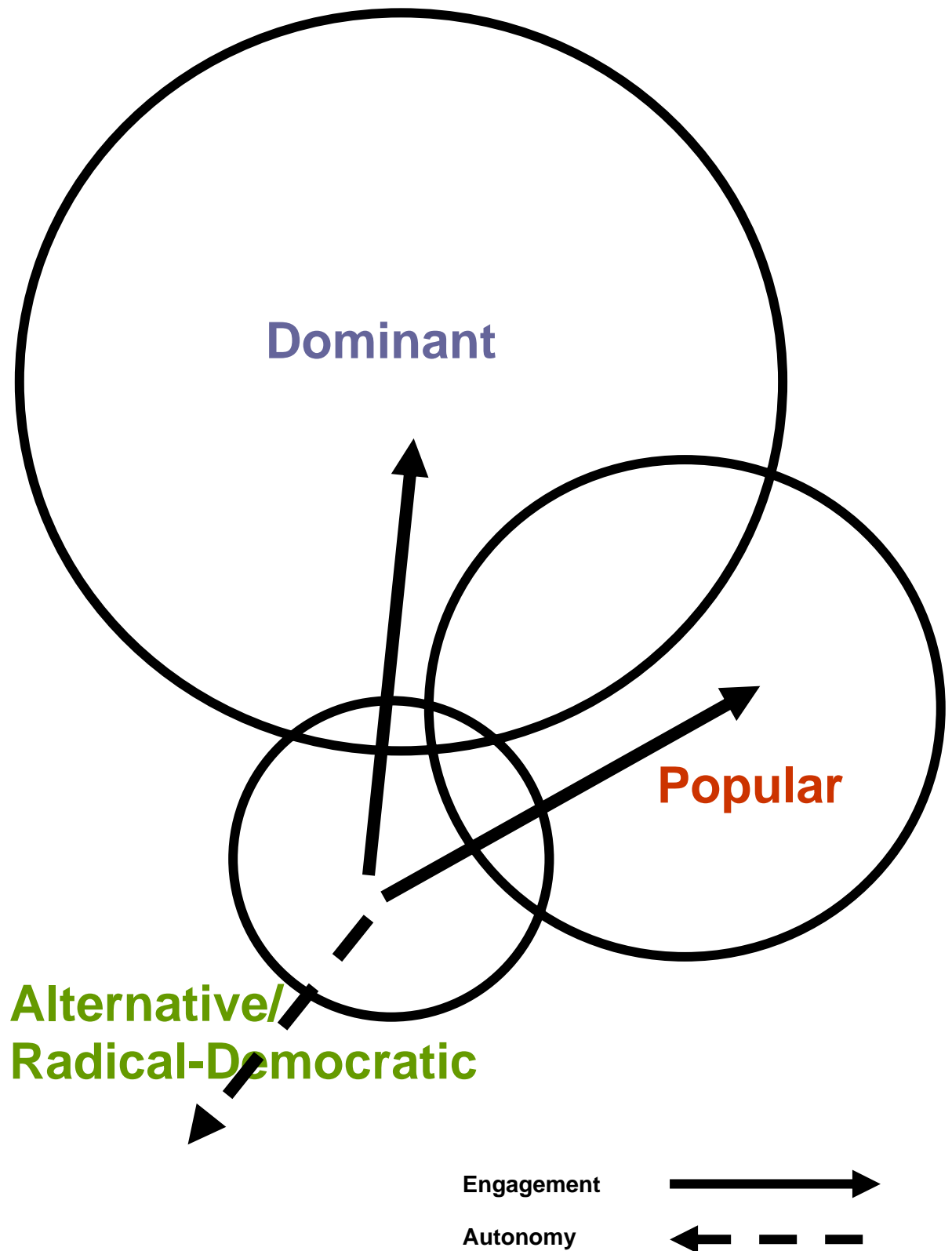
This is a politically *prescriptive* model, *positioned* within the Radical-Democratic, *premised* on the desire to subvert and transform both the Capitalist/State sphere and the Social one (civil society). It is also, however, a *descriptive* model, in so far as it is generalised or abstracted from the behaviour of increasing numbers of Radical-Democratic movements and projects under our GNC (as I hope to reveal).

The implications for an A/RD project is that one needs to be present and active (*engaged*) within and outside (*autonomous* from) the Dominant and the Popular. We can think of the relationship between engagement and autonomy in terms of a moment

² I know that all such models must simplify but I find this one tending toward the simplistic. It will do until I can find or develop a better one. All suggestions welcome.

in time, or in terms of different A/RD activities or even tendencies amongst those engaged in A/RD.

Figure 2: The Relation between Dominant, Popular and Alternative/Radical-Democratic Communication and Culture



Thus, some such activists consider that the *primary* activity of social movements should be to get themselves and their messages on peak-time local or national TV! (see Ryan 1991)

5. 'Communication is the nervous system of...internationalism and human solidarity'

This was the brilliant insight of Jose Carlos Mariátegui, the Peruvian nationalist, socialist and internationalist, writing on internationalism, 70 years ago!³ But internationalism (Left, Right, Centre) was actually at that time premised on organisations and institutions and, indeed, increasingly oriented toward or swallowed up by the very nation-states, blocs or state-nationalism, it was intended to surpass.

With the development of a GNC, we are increasingly seeing the parallel development of a 'communications internationalism'. This can mean simply looking at communication as a service for internationalism (an instrument, a channel, a means to an end). But it *should* mean looking at internationalism *in terms of* communication and culture (see cases later below).

In the absence of a) a self-pronounced truth (ideology, science), b) a self-appointed vanguard, c) a privileged organisational form and d) a concrete, pre-ordained, utopia, global social movements are concerning themselves increasingly with a) the provision and exchange of information that is not globally available, b) the critique and re-interpretation of that which is. They see the development of power in communicational terms: publicity, information, challenging images, new sounds, new models of political/personal behaviour, the identification/promotion of new iconic personalities,⁴ the creation of 'biodegradable' coalitions and alliances. This does not imply the disappearance of politics-as-we-have-known-it, simply its increasing movement from institutions to culture.⁵

³ He also said:

A new idea that blossoms in Britain is not a British idea except for the time that it takes for it to be printed. Once launched into space by the press, this idea, if it expresses some universal truth, can also be instantaneously transformed into an internationalist idea. (Mariátegui 1973:164-165, 1986:7)

As a British person and an internationalist, I find this a cheering notion, especially when accused - as occasionally still happens - of being White, Eurocentric, Patriarchal, and/or Universalist... It is not, however, my personal experience that my 'universal truths' are 'instantaneously transformed' into internationalist ideas, nor vice versa. In this essay of the 'Peruvian Gramsci', optimism of the will has clearly triumphed over scepticism of the intellect.

⁴ Whether or not iconic personalities still have a role to play in creating a critical/self-critical international solidarity movement, is a question recently raised in relation to Rigoberta Menchú (Waterman 1999b). Indeed, it was also raised, at least implicitly, at the time of the anti-war movement in the US, 1968, as shown in the later-mentioned work of Todd Gitlin (1980).

⁵ For a work arguing this in relation to social movements in Latin America, see Alvarez (1998)

6. Work, workers and labour movement under a GNC

a) Losing a world

The development of a GNC has so far been a disaster in terms of jobs, workers and the labour movement. Work, workplaces and the ownership and control of jobs are repeatedly changed and moved - and such new jobs as are created tend to be deskilled, contracted out, temporary, part-time - in a feminist word, *housewife-ised*. Workers find their jobs, workplaces, collectives, communities de- and re-structured. Trade unions - created against but within a NIC capitalism - find capital escaping their grasp or view and the state simultaneously hostile and disempowered. There has been a major disorientation of the male/industrial/national labour movement, which once thought it had 'a world to win', and which now finds itself limited in membership and weight (relative or absolute), in power and popular appeal.

b) 'Information Workers of the World, Communicate!'⁶

The transformation being wrought by a GNC creates new kinds of work and workers, implies one world of interdependent but differentiated workers - but makes possible a new kind of labour movement that is itself informatised, globalised and networked.

In (post-)industrialised capitalist countries, the majority of workers are now 'information workers' (if we include banks, schools, travel agencies, cultural industries, call centres, clerical work, data processing of all kinds, alongside those working directly for the computer industry).

This most advanced capitalist industry is pregnant with a post-capitalist future. Here both creative individuals and multinational corporations find it essential to *give* information ('freeware', 'shareware') if they want to get information back. Commercial and gift relations exist here in both symbiosis and contradiction (cf. Liverpool's Initiative Factory below).

Digital work can - and does for some - combine the finest artisan skills and initiative with the highest industrial productivity. It can - and does for many - divide the worst of Fordist industrialism from the new artisan skills - technical, aesthetic and relational. It certainly reproduces the old class, inter-worker and inter-national divisions. But in presenting the sharpest-yet contradictions between capitalist and libertarian-socialist principles, it is a provocation to its workers to respond in collective, co-operative and egalitarian ways. As with earlier capitalist industrial revolutions, this one requires a transformation in the form of 'collective worker self-articulation' (the word 'organisation' would be misleading here). The union of the national/industrial/colonial era is clearly inappropriate to the new kind of employer, employment, state and worker. The national, hierarchical, bureaucratic, collective-bargaining-fixated union, is increasingly outdated. Workers in the digital economy are already creating 'new principles of labour organisation: artisanal, networked and global'.⁷

⁶ My argument here is heavily dependent on those of the British libertarian-socialist hypermedia specialist, Richard Barbrook (1999a, b)

⁷ Well, actually two Richards, since the thoughts of Barbrook have been endorsed by Richard Hyman, a British socialist labour relations specialist of more cautious temperament:

But, In so far as this new model proposed appeals as much to values as to interests, is this a *union* or a *social movement* (I assume that the party, or at least The Party, is over)? And, in so far as it proposes a new principle of labour self-organisation, relevant to the new form of capitalism, is this only relevant to cyberworkers, or to *all workers*? And in so far as a globalised and networked capitalism requires a form of organisation that is artisanal, networked and global, is this relevant only to workers, or to *all radical-democratic social movements*? I would suggest that this latest capitalist industry, product, work and worker has emancipatory implications for *the union form, for all workers, for all radical-democratic forces, everywhere*.

Yet, the labour movement is the one that is having the greatest difficulty in coming to terms with a GNC. Offered the opportunity, by a friendly computer specialist, of creating an open-access computerised global labour information network in the early 1980s, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions turned it down! Most national and international trade union websites remain computerised union newspapers, with little or no interest in feedback, far less in discussion and debate. Some socialist internationalists have traded in the vanguard party for the vanguard netsite (with the customary in-built centralism, personality cults, factions and splits).

c) The international labournet

Yet we can nonetheless note the development of what some are calling an 'international labournet'. The energy, creativity and radical-democratic spirit behind this comes from individuals and groups at the base, periphery or from even outside the traditional national and international labour movement. Historically it comes largely from the 'international labour support organisations' (ILSOs - internationalist pro-labour NGOs) that were attempting, from around the mid-1970s, to create a 'new labour internationalism', consistent with a 'new social movement unionism', by building horizontal linkages between the bases of unions, or with non-unionised and even non-unionisable workers and movements. Today we have the customary 'network of networks', including both unions and LSOs, both complementary and competing, and growing rapidly in terms of sites, visitors, coverage and quality.

LabourStart (LS), based in London, may be the best of all such international labour sites. It is housed in the premises of an international union, and is closer to the traditional international institutions of labour than many others. Yet its form, activities and attitudes reveal the extent to which a new labour communications activism is coming from the periphery and requires autonomy (consider again **Figure 2**). It is run basically by one man, Eric Lee, whose own book actually argues for the *institutional* origins of international labour communication by computer! (Lee 1996). It is based on an independent LSO, Labour and Society International. LS now offers visitors a constantly updated global news service, an archive, solidarity appeals, photos,

new models of transnational solidarity and for enhanced capacity for transnational intervention...sustaining and enhancing the scope for initiative and mobilisation at the base, to develop both stronger centralised structures and the mechanisms for more vigorous grassroots participation [...] To be effective at international level...trade unionism must...reconstitute unions as discursive organisations which foster interactive international relationships and serve more as networks than as hierarchies. [...] Finally, modern information technologies offer the potential for labour movements to break out of the iron cage which for so long has trapped them in organisational structures which mimic those of capital...Forward to the 'virtual trade union of the future'. (Hyman 1997:29-30.)

discussions, a labour book-ordering service (linked to the US e-commerce multinational, Amazon.Com!), a campaign on the rights of information workers, links to unions regardless of affiliation or ideology, a growing list of collaborating correspondents, and other features. Technically advanced, it is also aesthetically appealing. And a Spanish-language version is hoped for. Lee is an energetic promoter of national and international union networking. But he is also one of the sharpest critics of its limitations (Dwyer 1999). Combining engagement with autonomy is good for *LabourStart*, good for the institutionalised international unions and good for the international labour movement of the future.

d) The internationalist labour video

There have always been labour, union, radical and internationalist films. But, between the 1930s and 1960s, these were largely marginalised by commercialisation, expensive technical developments and state control, as well as by the transformation of the labour movement into union and party organisations with limited cultural ambitions or impact. The continuing development of the video camera has brought down the costs and increased the quantity and quality of videos. It has even permitted conversion of video to the big screen and, most recently, is making possible the artisanal production of cinema films at a fraction of Hollywood costs. Two recent internationalist labour videos from the US can only suggest the range of possibilities.

Global Village or Global Pillage? is the video version of a pioneering work of the same name (Brecher and Costello 1994), the authors of which were involved in the production. This half-hour video is professionally produced and is being professionally distributed. It is being sold at \$25 (\$10 for students and the poor). It will appear on many community cable TV programmes, possibly on national ones, in the US and internationally. Combining documentary footage (some from amateur union videomakers) with animated cartoons and the 'talking heads' of internationalist specialists, it is a powerful appeal for combating MNCs and capitalist globalisation with the 'Lilliput Strategy' (of smaller bodies, linked by and using multiple threads). Most of it is devoted to showing ways in which, in the US and abroad (Mexico, Japan, Europe, India), the Lilliputians are fighting back against sweatshops, ecological destruction, the international financial institutions, the denial of human rights. The inter-relation between labour, ecological and human rights struggles is assumed and revealed.

The 40-minute video of Steve Zeltzer is entitled *Labour Battles the WTO in Seattle '99 - Workers of the World Unite*. It fills a major gap in either mass or alternative media coverage. Combining original footage with new and documentary clips from CNN and other commercial TV companies, it gives a vivid image of union participation, whilst revealing the new articulation of labour and other movements in the US. As a production by self-educated amateurs, this video reveals what can today be done using quite simple equipment and film techniques. Much of the video is given over to interviews with worker participants from the US itself, with occasional glimpses of participation (in the AFL-CIO's stadium rally and indoor meetings) of trade union leaders from Canada and Europe, as well as veteran Indian ecofeminist activist and writer, Vandana Shiva. One interview is with a Mexican activist who brought a group of others with him from the border area. The film also shows the extent of police violence. Although (as the title might suggest) celebratory in tone, the film is not didactic in style. Indeed, it lacks any commentary. It also reveals differences in worker or union attitudes, and provides a basis for educational work - and political or media analysis. The video has been shown successfully in Europe and a version with Spanish voice-over is promised.

e) Liverpool: the last proletarians discover the latest technology

The dockworkers of Liverpool, in England, carried out a prolonged strike, 1995-8, confronting neo-liberal policies, at a time when the national and international trade union movements were still largely adapting themselves to such. Failing to get support, either nationally or internationally, from higher levels in the union hierarchy, they revived a longstanding tradition of waterfront internationalism - and discovered the power of the Web. Whilst failing to tame capital and state, locally or globally, their use of the internet to create an effective international network at waterfront level, certainly opened the eyes of the institutionalised international trade union movement.

This computer-aided and internationalist effort, moreover, seems to have had a dramatic empowering effect on the dockers themselves. Instead of individually using the considerable redundancy payments many (not all) received, they have, in collaboration with friends in the university, the arts and the community, set up a worker self-managed enterprise called the *Initiative Factory*. This has several different areas of activity: 1) the *Akademie*, to train themselves and others in the new information technologies, 2) *Liverpool Dockers and Stevedores*, a labour-supply co-operative, 3) *ArtsFusion*, to produce and sell cultural goods (they are already selling a music CD and the script of a TV film - both about the strike) and 4) *TransNeeds*, providing fork-lift driver training. A fifth, unlisted activity, is revealed by the website - a continuing involvement in dockworker internationalism.⁸

These low-skilled workers, from an isolated part of the UK, have been considered the 'Last of the Proletarian Mohicans', and the 'Industrial Zapatistas of Western Europe'. Criticised, or written-off, by many on the reformist and the revolutionary Left in the UK (for not adapting to neoliberalism, or for not concentrating on the national class struggle), they are themselves actually living mixed times, and simultaneously contesting different terrains.⁹ Like the pathbreaking strike itself, this is - win or lose - a project of great imagination and significance.

7. The mediation of Seattle: the 'battle of' or the 'battle over'?

a) Really bringing anti-globalism together virtually

The 'Battle of Seattle', December, 1999, not only demonstrates much of what has been argued above: it also represents a political point of reference, and a rich experience for analysis, from which new conclusions will eventually be drawn. Here, in one place, at one moment, we could see capitalist globalisation as a political project/provocation (and its internal contradictions); an international alliance of radical-democratic movements opposing/proposing (and its contradictions); a computer-linked communications internationalism at work; the presence of the A/RD both within and outside the Dominant (the Popular contribution/impact requires research). Most important, and most problematic, perhaps, was the most novel element - the 'real' presence but 'virtual' absence of labour in this historic event!

⁸ This should certainly appeal to the Brazilian working-class and landless movements, in so far as they, also have been moving beyond traditional strategies.

⁹ The notion that Latin America is living 'mixed times' comes from Calderón (1988). That of the labour-capital conflict as a matter of 'contesting terrain' within and over the capitalist means of production, from Edwards (1979). Both notions are subversive of the binary Left. The first undermines the tendency to see society primarily in terms of (r)evolutionary stages (tradition v. modernity, modernity v. postmodernity), the second of seeing worker struggles in terms of apocalyptic transformation rather than encroachment.

b) Organising the new global solidarity on-line

By now many people on the Left (and on the Right), know about the communications internationalism surrounding the Zapatistas,¹⁰ or the successful computer-linked campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. The 'Battle of Seattle' was organised by an international network, again using the Web as its primary means of communication:

Throughout 1999, thanks primarily to the Internet, tens of thousands of people opposed to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) united in a great national and international effort of organisation. Anyone could have a front seat, anyone could take part in the advance on Seattle. All you needed was a computer and a rough knowledge of English.
(George 2000)¹¹

There was one major electronic list. But dozens of groups and organisations in North America, Europe, Asia and other world areas made active contributions and ran their own lists and sites. Anti-WTO protests were reported from India, Latin America, Asia and elsewhere. So this event was occurring in local place as well as in global space, with the information process involving thousands of self-educated militants, using leaflets and courses as well as electronic means. All of this work was done by and could only be done thanks to the privileged means for alternative international communication, the Web.

c) Mediating Seattle: where does the truth lie?

For most people in the world who are aware of it, the successful mass movement in Seattle, against the World Trade Organisation in particular and capitalist globalisation in general, has to have been a 'mediated experience'. But whether this mediation was by the 'mass media imperialists' or the 'alternative internationalist computer communicators', we are today required to ourselves mediate their mediations.

The international (mostly US-owned) mass media dramatised and simplified in predictable ways, and obviously concentrated on the violence against property (by two hundred self-proclaimed anarchists or, possibly provocateurs or petty-criminals) and people (mostly by the 'forces of law and order'). Although customarily including neoliberal apologists, the international mass media actually provided extensive, varied - even sympathetic and insightful - coverage of the protests. They certainly did neoliberalism and the US government no special favours.

¹⁰ For a sophisticated analysis of the implications of internet solidarity around the Zapatistas, see Cleaver (1999). For 'alternative' computer communication more generally, Ribeiro (1998).

¹¹ Susan George (2000). I am indebted to George's account. For those who believe that the Alternative is one varied but complementary whole, comparison may be made with the account of the radical journalist Alex Cockburn (1999). Cockburn sets up the movements involved in the Battle of Seattle in binary terms, of hypocritical liberals and heroic radicals. Whilst his personalised denunciations of some NGO organisations and activists provoked forceful web reactions, Cockburn does raise major questions about the AFL-CIO role, and the possible meaning of Seattle.

And *Newsweek* even gave an introductory page to radical cultural specialist, Todd Gitlin, to make points about the difference between '1968' and '1999' - including the presence, this time, of the unions. The paradox beneath this paradox is that Gitlin is the author of the seminal Left work on mass movements and the mass media, in which he argues that the latter had both made and broken the US New Left of 1968! Now here he is *in* an archetypical globalised capitalist medium, which is presenting a varied if problematic account of '1999'. And, to add one more layer to the paradox, one could hear, in one internationally broadcast report, demonstrators chanting 'The Whole World is Watching!' - the slogan of 1968 and the subtitle of Gitlin's book. The difference this time is that much more of the 'whole world' was watching - and that many more of this whole world were able to participate before and interpret after the event.

According to various accounts, union-organised workers represented the largest single contingent in Seattle, some 20-25,000 out of some 40,000. Although this presence was recorded and discussed in both the Dominant and Alternative media, neither the one nor the other gave it the importance it would seem to have deserved (imagine if they had been *women*, or *Latin@s!*).¹² In part this must have been because the protest was an *initiative* of the new social movements. In part it was because the AFL-CIO channelled most workers away from direct-action street protests.¹³ In part it must have been because the unions still seem to believe that a march of 20,000 workers, respectably dressed and carrying posters or banners, is media-worthy, a subversive or visually exciting cultural statement!¹⁴ As for the Alternative media, it may be that it does not itself know how to understand and come to terms with this weighty new partner - and one that may still have protectionist motives and views abhorrent to the older partners. But, whatever the case here, it is quite difficult, without a careful web search to find an Alternative media product that *prioritises* the labour presence at Seattle (see 5c above).

8. Women@Internet

This is actually the title of one of a number of important works about women, feminism, women's movements media and cyberspace (Banks 1997, Eisenstein 1997, 1998, Harcourt 1999, Sollfrank 1999). The importance of looking at the international women's movement here is because the women's movement is one of the *new* radical-democratic ones, because of the continuing marginality of women within even the

¹² Out of approximately six pages of illustrations (including the front cover) in *Newsweek*, December 13, 1999, one half page shows the unionists. This amounts to under 10 percent of total photo coverage. Out of some 3.5 pages of photos in its issue of the same date (again including the front cover), *Time* devoted maybe 1/6th of a page to labour. This amounts to some four percent of total photo coverage. An earlier front cover of *Newsweek*, on November 13, was devoted to Seattle. Showing a tug of war for the world, it has blue-suited corporate executives at one side, and 1968-style hippies on the other. And this despite the front cover text which prominently lists 'Workers' Rights' amongst three or four issues in dispute.

¹³ Indeed, the AFL-CIO, which has a special web page concerned to 'Make the Global Economy Work for Working Families', seems not to have known quite what to do with its own participation, containing, when I searched on February 4, 2000, speeches and declarations but no detailed report, far less celebration, of this pioneering mobilisation.

¹⁴ Interviewing computer activist Eric Lee, at the end of 1999, Michael Dwyer made a related point. Under the title "'What do want?" "A new chant!" "When do want it?" "Now!'", we can find these words:

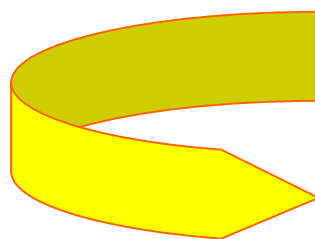
Creativity doesn't seem to be the strongest suit of the Left, at least not with those members of the Left charged with organising rallies. I enjoy a good rally - I'm out in the sunshine, marching down the street, and meeting like-minded people. But it would be nice to have a change now and then. (Dwyer 1999)

developing International LabourNet, because it is much more communication/culture-sensitive than labour has been, and because its new internationalism has been basically one of networking (there is no International Confederation of Free Women's Organisations). Moreover, as Seattle suggests, an increasingly global cyberspace makes both possible and necessary a dialogue of all radical-democratic subjects, movements and places if emancipation is to occur.

In [Women@Internet](#) (the book), a Mexican case study reflects on: 1) a Mexican girl from the popular classes receiving a computer at her coming-of-age party; 2) the exclusion or subordination of indigenous women's issues and voices from the international and internationalist Zapatista networks. In similar style, voice and mood, another piece speculates on the relationship between 1) information technology, 2) feminist activists and Third World women sexworkers in Northern cities. The case concerns the relationship between a coerced prostitute, a friendly client, his cellular phone and her family at home, the hero is...*the cellular phone*. The speculation concerns the possibility of creating local, mobile, on-street, information resource centres, providing such women with the appropriate IT to tell their own stories their own way, to receive and send in their own idiom. Both cases bring cyberspace down to earth and to labouring people. This is a relationship stressed in the same collection by Arturo Escobar, as we will shortly see.

I earlier expressed diffidence about my overlapping circles. Pilar Riaño, in a work on women and grassroots communication (Riaño 1994), suggests how one needs to, and can, produce more refined typologies, here concerning the Popular-Alternative area alone. Her typology concerns women, participation and communication, and identifies as significant types, **Development Communication** (women as subjects of information), **Participatory Communication** (women as participants), **Alternative Communication** (women as subjects of change), and **Feminist Communication** (women as producers of meaning). This is a thought-provoking typology and I only wish I had the time to re-think my own in relation to it. I do not recall such a sophisticated model being applied to labour communication (international or national). Which is a way of inviting others with time and capacity to do so...

9. On the Necessary Dialectic Between Cyberspace and Local Place



Networks - such as women's, environmental, ethnic and other social movements networks - are the location of new political actors and the source of promising cultural practices and possibilities. It is thus possible to speak of a cultural politics of cyberspace and the production of cybercultures that resist, transform or present alternatives to the dominant virtual and real worlds. This cybercultural politics can be most effective if it fulfils two conditions: awareness of the dominant worlds that are being created by the same technologies on which the progressive networks rely (including awareness of how power works in

the world of transnational networks and flows); and an ongoing tacking back and forth between cyberpolitics (political activism of the Internet) and what I call place politics, or political activism in the physical locations at which the networker sits and lives.
(Arturo Escobar 1999:32)

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Resources:

For electronic inter/national labour media listings, see:

LabourStart <http://www.labourstart.org/>
Congress of South African Trade Unions <http://cosatu.org.za>

Videos mentioned:

Global Village or Global Pillage? 26:46 mins, VHS, NTSC. \$US 25, Low Income \$US 10. World Economy Project, Preamble Center, 1737 21st St., NW, Washington, DC 20009, USA. Email: wep@preamble.org. Global Village website: www.villageorpillage.org

Labour Battles the WTO in Seattle '99 - Workers of the World Unite. 38 min. VHS, NTSC. \$US 25. Labour Video Project, POB 425584, San Francisco, CA 94142, USA. Email: lvpsf@labornet.org.