



Indymedia – Journalistic Anarchy on the WWW

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ABSTRACT

As with all new media technologies, the establishment and growth of the World Wide Web in the 1990s sparked optimism in civil society. Instead of solely relying on their marginalised existence in mainstream media and/or expensive analogue production and distribution technologies, many of the new direct action orientated groups in the global justice movement formed their own cheap and efficient Web-based news outlets to tell their side of the globalisation story.

Indymedia (Independent Media Center – IMC) have since they started in Seattle in 1999 – covering the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) – grown to become the largest of these new social movement media projects. The global IMC-network consists of hundreds of volunteers – organisers, activist journalists, and “techies” – in approximately 150 editorial collectives (some of which are inactive) in 48 countries. In addition to this, all collectives’ homepages have an open publishing section (Newswire) which enables everyone with access “to become the media”. From their anarchist point of departure Indymedia question the distinction between journalist and citizen by allowing people to use their homepages as a tool for social change.

In order to assess what consequences this strategy has had on Indymedia’s organisational and journalistic praxis, the thesis firstly introduces its four theoretical approaches: globalisation and the network society, media ownership and Internet as an arena to challenge corporate control, the public sphere, and journalism. The discussion of the last two concludes with new normative theories: Publicity for Empowerment and Journalism of Radical Engagement. Secondly, the descriptive part of the thesis introduces Indymedia’s ideological and practical sources of inspiration. This includes socialism, computer hackers, and the Mexican Zapatistas. The next chapter uses Indymedia’s coverage of the protests in Seattle against the elite network WTO as a case study of their focus on events. Finally, sparked by their achievements in Seattle, the development of a global network of autonomous IMC-collectives is evaluated.

The first part of the analysis trace the journalistic conventions of Indymedia by evaluating extracts from interviews with Indymedia activists in relation to the ideals set forth in Journalism of Radical Engagement. Based on a short fieldwork, the second part of the analysis is a case study of Indymedia’s coverage of the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004. Using several theoretical approaches (amongst others Publicity for Empowerment) on this coverage of a pro-active global justice movement, the chapter asserts that the international collective produced counter information, which unlike the IMC coverage of Seattle did not manage to break through the infosphere. The thesis concludes that Indymedia for several reasons mostly enable computer literate political activist “to become the media”. Thus, as a participatory media experiment, IMC have a long way to go before they constitute a truly global and democratic network of public spheres.

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FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS:

ADSL	Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAT	Community Activist Technology
CNN	Cable News Network
CNT	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo
DAN	Direct Action Network
DIY	Do It Yourself
EU	European Union
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FTAA/ALCA	Free Trade Area of the Americas/Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas
FZLN	Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional
G8	Group of 8 (formerly G7)
G20	Group of 20
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
G.B	Great Britain
GNU	GNU is not Unix
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
IMC	Independent Media Center
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITN	Independent Television Network
IP	Internet Protocol
IRC	Internet Relay Chat
J18	international day of protest and carnival against capitalism – 18 June 1999
ML	Marxist-Leninist
MR	Mumbai Resistance
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NJ	Norsk Journalistlag
PBS	Public Broadcasting System
PDF	Portable Document Format
PR	Public Relations
Techie	Technician
TNC	Transnational Corporation
WEF	World Economic Forum
WHO	World Health Organization
WSF	World Social Forum
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWW/Web	World Wide Web

1 INTRODUCTION

This time the revolution is not only televised, but digitized and streamed.¹

In liberal democracies, most mediated news reports have been produced by professional journalists within a hierarchically organised media corporation, which have situated themselves between the citizens and the state. There is also a long tradition for grassroots media² which both oppose the corporate organisational structure, and their editorial content. Due to the cost of production and/or distribution, grassroots media have not had a big potential before new and affordable digital production equipment was developed, and almost free distribution through the Internet became available in the early 1990s. Independent Media Center (IMC) – Indymedia³ – have used the Internet technology both as medium, distribution channel, and organising tool to become one of the largest and most influential activist media outlets in the world.⁴ Based in some of the social movements which constitute the broad global justice movement (Halleck, 2002), they question the legitimacy of mainstream media by organising a network of non-hierarchical collectives to enable people “to become the media”.⁵ They describe themselves as “a democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of truth”.⁶ Their progressive political rhetoric, their intension to democratise the media, and their journalistic achievements, particularly in the movement’s protests against the international networks of wealth and power, inspired me to start exploring this multifaceted phenomenon, which started as a collaborative effort to cover the protests against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle in 1999. I have consequently formulated this overarching research question:

What consequences does Indymedia’s goal: to enable people to “become the media”, which implies breaking down the division between journalist and citizen, have for their organisational and journalistic praxis?

¹ (Halleck, 2002: unnumbered).

² According to Traber, grassroots media offer the most thorough version of alternative news values. They are produced by the same people whose concerns they represents, from a position of engagement and direct participation (Atton, 2002: 16).

³ www.indymedia.org is their network site which has links to the sites run by approximately 150 local collectives (5 May 2005). Indymedia are referred to in plural (see chapter 1.7).

⁴ According to Couldry and Curran many media researchers and commentators have regarded the Independent Media Center (IMC) movement “as one of the most significant alternative media developments at the end of the twentieth century” (Curran and Couldry, 2003: 13).

⁵ docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/FrequentlyAskedQuestionEn#goals [7 May 2005].

⁶ docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/FrequentlyAskedQuestionEn#what [7 May 2005].

To operationalise this, I will address these research questions:

- To what extent are Indymedia both a reaction and an adaptation to the globalisation process (in the media specifically, and society generally), and the development of a new dominant network structure, with fluent power relations?
- How do Indymedia relate to the global justice movement?
- Which ideologies, philosophies, social movements, and independent media projects are Indymedia inspired by?
- How do they organise to create an open space for covering the movement's protests and meetings journalistically?
- How do Indymedia organise as a global network of local collectives?
- What is Indymedia's news journalistic convention?
- Indymedia's open publishing section "Newswire" is their main tool for enabling everybody to "become the media". To what extent do they succeed in this?
- What kind of public sphere do Indymedia constitute at the WWW?

1.1 Existing Publications on Indymedia

Chris Atton has assessed that "Whilst there is no shortage of writing on the [social] movements themselves, their media are largely untouched" (Atton, 2002: 3). As this seems to be the case for Indymedia as well, my research questions are (as presented above) open and explorative. Existing research focus on for example how Indymedia have used the Internet to express their opposition and alternatives to mainstream media.⁷ Scott Uzelman's master thesis introduces some general aspects of Indymedia as open publishing,⁸ their direct action strategies, and online organising, and uses his own experiences (as both an IMC activist and researcher) in the local collective Vancouver IMC (Uzelman, 2002). The paper "The Seattle IMC and the Socialist Anarchist Tradition" (Downing, 2001) briefly examines the pretext for Indymedia's involvement in the anti-WTO protests in Seattle as a contributor of "radical counter information", their ideology,⁹ and

⁷ (Curran and Couldry, 2003, Hyde, 2001, Kidd, 2003b).

⁸ Also on this subject: "Open Publishing is the Same as Free Software" (Arnison, 2001-2003) by IMC techie Matthew Arnison, (Meikle, 2002, Beckerman, 2003).

⁹ While Indymedia techie/organiser Evan Henshaw-Plath's article connects their independence rhetoric with anarchistic ideology (Henshaw-Plath, 2003), Richard J.F Day argues that Indymedia must be understood as an

some of the evolving network's¹⁰ activities in 2000. Finally, the Our Media conferences have been a place for discussions on Indymedia amongst both researchers and practitioners.¹¹

Although I study some of the same areas which have been covered earlier, my point of entry to Indymedia (as presented above) is new. Furthermore, the areas of my analysis: their journalistic conventions and how an *ad hoc* collective works throughout a large global justice movement-event have not been analysed as extensively before. My ambition is therefore to contribute with some new insights to this dynamic phenomenon.

1.2 Theoretical Approaches

Chapter 2 presents the four theoretical approaches applied in this thesis. Including all four perspectives is bothersome but necessary in order to adequately apply an inter-disciplinary perspective which captures both the journalistic and social movement aspects of Indymedia. Firstly, I discuss Manuel Castells' theory about the network society,¹² critical approaches to this theory (Dijk, 1999b), and other social movement theories. This discussion focuses on the marginalisation effects the globalisation of powerful networks of managerial elites have had on the nation-state, individuals, and social movements, and how ICT-technology is used in this power struggle. Then the globalisation process is connected to a discussion on concentration of media ownership and the consequences of this. This is followed by a discussion about Internet as an area for challenging media power (Couldry, 2003 et al.).

The last two sections of the theory chapter are attempts to develop new normative theory. While my normative public sphere theory Publicity for Empowerment is based on "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" (Habermas, 1989 [1962]), critical remarks (Thompson, 1995, Calhoun, 1992), some of Habermas' later adjustments, counter publicity theory (Hemánus, 1988), and democracy theory, my normative theory for journalism Journalism of Radical

anarchist direct action tactic associated with a shift in new radical social movements from counter-hegemony to affinity (Day, 2004).

¹⁰ While Sheri Herndron, one of the founders of Indymedia, claim they are a non-hierarchical network participating in a "globalization from below" (Herndron, 2003), Chris Atton claims Herndron and the rest of Seattle IMC remains Indymedia's power centre (Atton, 2003).

¹¹ In addition to Downing and Hendron's papers, the papers from the conferences are both general assessment of Indymedia (Halleck, 2002, Kidd, 2003a), and on more specific themes such as Argentina IMC (Boido, 2003), and earlier media experiments which has inspired Indymedia (Kidd, 2002). In addition to this, several researchers mention Indymedia in passing. They focus on Indymedia's role in the global justice movement's protests (Gillmor, 2004, Castells, 2001, De Armond, 2001, Liestøl and Rasmussen, 2003, Rasmussen, 2002, Giuffo, 2001), their coverage of the war in Iraq (Knightly, 2004), and their counter information strategy (Slaatta, 2002).

¹² (Castells, 1996, Castells, 1997, Castells, 1998, Castells, 2001).

Engagement is based on a discussion of theory about the ideal of objectivity (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, Haraway, 1991 et al.), the press as the fourth estate (Harcup, 2004 et al.), Civic and Public Journalism (Rosen, 1993 et al.), Journalism of Attachment (McLaughlin, 2002 et al.), alternative journalism (Atton, 2001 et al.), and Web journalism (Jensen, 1998, Meikle, 2002 et al.). These normative theories are new in the sense that existing theories are combined in a new way.

1.3 Methodological Approaches

Chapter 3 presents my methodological approaches, and critically evaluates the qualitative method I have applied to collect the empirical data material for the analysis. Other approaches could have been applied, but the focus on semi-structured interviews with, and fieldwork observation of experts and information rich contributors¹³ to Indymedia, is justified because an open and explorative approach seems most valuable to the scientifically underexposed phenomenon Indymedia. The chapter furthermore evaluates my role as researcher, my position in relation to Indymedia, and the process of gathering and analysing the data.

1.4 Descriptive Chapters

Chapter 4 examines the influence the open source and free software movements, the Mexican Zapatistas, the Internet coordinated global day of protest and carnival against capitalism J18, anarchist and socialist ideology, and post modern philosophy have had on Indymedia, both in terms of how they organise, their use of technology, and their journalistic project. It also examines how Indymedia grew out of (amongst others) the Public Access movement, and Indymedia's ambivalent view on the traditional alternative press in the US.

Chapter 5 is a case study of Indymedia's first operation in Seattle during protests against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1999. Seattle is used as a case for several reasons: it was the first IMC operation and it was a success both for the movement as a whole since the WTO meeting broke down, and for Indymedia as an independent news channel because they managed to direct the critical eyes of the world towards the WTO and its policies. Chapter 5.3 explores

¹³ Appendix 1 contains a comprehensive list of my informants. Indymedia's articles and documents on themselves (particularly their FAQ) have also been used.

how their “flying start” sparked the development of a world wide network which today¹⁴ consists of approximately 150 collectives in 48 countries, and how they organise and coordinate internationally, and in the local collectives.

1.5 Analytical Chapters

Chapter 6 is an evaluation of how IMC activists’ view on Indymedia’s journalistic praxis adheres to my normative journalism theory Journalism of Radical Engagement. Chapter 6.8 and 6.9 furthermore examine to what extent the open publishing section “Newswire” works as intended: to enable people to “become the media”. As the selection of informants is not representative, and there are major differences also between the collectives and individual activist journalists, the findings only give tentative answers.

Chapter 7 discusses some of my findings from my fieldwork in the international *ad hoc* WSF Indymedia India collective, during the World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai, India (15–22 January, 2004). This analysis focuses on the WSF, Indymedia's relation to the forum, their strategy for their presence, how they both in Mumbai and internationally prepared the operation, how they organised their effort in terms of promoting IMC, sharing skills, making the operation participatory, building the network during the forum, and the activist journalist's journalistic approaches. Finally, I evaluate how WSF Indymedia India’s website relates to my normative public sphere theory Publicity for Empowerment. I chose to do a case study of Mumbai because the global justice movement (contrary to the anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle) is explicitly pro-active during the WSF. My goal has been to explore some of the differences between the Indymedia operations during two such different events. In addition, the span in time between the two cases, do to some extent reflect the development of Indymedia from the start in Seattle.

Chapter 8 includes a summary of how my findings in the analysis relates to the research questions, an evaluation of the method and possible modifications of theory which can be deduced from my findings, a conclusion (which relates to the thesis’ overarching research question), and a discussion of further research which can be done on alternative/ independent media, and Indymedia.

¹⁴ 7 May 2005. Some of the collectives listed on Indymedia.org are inactive.

1.6 Delimitations

Resourceful Indymedia collectives go beyond the obligatory website and use “old” (analogue) media like newspapers, magazines, posters, FM radio, and television to mediate their message. Due to limited space, this thesis does not cover this to any extent.¹⁵ Instead I focus on Indymedia’s Web operation which is the network’s largest operation, and has had the biggest impact. In this discussion, the World Wide Web is treated as a medium (even though there is not a consensus that it is). As indicated above, in addition to the two case studies of Indymedia’s operations at large events covering international issues, the focus is on the more general developments and aspects of Indymedia (like their journalistic conventions), and not how local collectives work as meeting places and public spheres.

Due to lack of space, some of my initial ideas are either only briefly addressed or left out completely.¹⁶ I wanted to include more theory on technology,¹⁷ and a broad analysis on how Indymedia use the Internet technology and the medium Web to get into a dialog with their users. I furthermore wanted to analyse Indymedia’s rhetoric more extensively. It is also worth mentioning that Castells’ macro theory on the network society is at such a high level of abstraction that it is difficult to use it on the micro level of Indymedia’s operations. Furthermore, his stance on the relation between technology and social processes is not clear. I have nevertheless chosen to use some aspects of his theory, as he himself uses network theory on Indymedia, and as it seem to capture essential aspects of the process of globalisation. Habermas’ “Structural Transformation” is, as the discussion in chapter 2.3 partly shows, in many ways problematic. It is, instead of his later works as “The Theory of Communicative Action” (Habermas, 1984 [1981]), used as a point of departure for a debate, which concludes rather differently than he did in his PhD dissertation from 1962.

Instead of defining Indymedia’s news stories as journalism or not, this thesis suggests that their approach can be described as a hybrid between journalism and social movement. It is referred to as either activist journalism, or only journalism throughout this thesis because this is what most

¹⁵ Scholar and IMC-activist Pablo Ortellado discusses how they combine the use of both digital and analogue media in Brazil (Ortellado, 2003). Researcher and IMC-activist Kate Coyer has studied IMC Radio in Seattle, Los Angeles, and London (Coyer, 2003).

¹⁶ Amongst other things, the idea was to provide more context in chapter 2.4.2.2 about Journalism of Attachment, by including a discussion about findings from empirical studies of the war in Iraq in 2003: Some of this material is included in an article (Skogseth, 2005). Furthermore, the thesis does not cover Indymedia’s problems with infiltrations and police raids. This is discussed in (Halleck, 2002, Skogseth, 2004).

¹⁷ This includes a discussion between technological optimists (Negroponte, 1995, Gore, 1994) and technological pessimists/socially grounded scholars (Robins, 1997, Williams, 2003 [1974]).

of the activist journalists claim it is. As a consequence of this priority, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the journalistic field is not applied to any greater degree.¹⁸ Moreover, I could have used John Downing, the leading writer on nonmainstream media (Curran and Couldry, 2003), more than I have. However, I chose this approach partly because I wanted to include a wide range of theory on journalism in the discussion which ends up in my normative journalism theory, and partly because I in most cases found Chris Atton's theory on alternative media sufficient here.

1.7 Clarifications

The notions independent and institutionalised media are used in compliance with Indymedia's own understanding. While Indymedia and other independent network based media have (at least in theory) a horizontal structure where everybody can participate, institutionalised media have a hierarchical structure where the media texts are produced by professional journalists. The last mentioned is also the way many traditional alternative media outlets organise. As Indymedia are a hybrid between social movement and journalism, the term activist journalism is used to describe Indymedia's news journalistic convention.¹⁹ Indymedia's activists are referred to as either organisers, techies (technicians) or activist journalist (or a combination of two of these). The latter term have been applied on Indymedia before (Beckerman, 2003), and seems to fit as Indymedia have always had close ties with the global justice movement,²⁰ both as a source of ideas and recruits. One of Indymedia's goals is to break down the division between journalist (members of the collective) and citizen (users). To vary this: active users who do not consider themselves as part of a collective are referred to as contributors. Indymedia activists might not agree with this division. Some of them might say that they are all contributors, and that there are no journalists in Indymedia, only some organisers/facilitators. Still, as they keep a division between the features column (edited by the collective), and the Newswire (where everybody can contribute), it seems meaningful to use these two categories. Indymedia's emphasis on the collective in news production is nevertheless acknowledged in the sense that I refer to IMC in plural (them). To avoid confusion it is also worth mentioning that some of the informants use singular form in extracts used from interviews. When I use the word quality in conjunction with journalism, this refers to the ideals described in chapter 2.4.5 Journalism of Radical Engagement.

¹⁸ Atton finds it difficult to see how Bourdieu's field theory can be applied on alternative and radical media, apart if one recognises these forms as a separate field (Atton, 2002: 30). I do not discuss whether Indymedia is a part of such an alternative journalistic field or not.

¹⁹ This term have been used before do describe (amongst others) Public and Civic Journalism (Knapskog, 2001: 121).

²⁰ This named is applied instead of the anti-globalisation movement. It is taken from Tarrow (cited in Bennett, 2003) The movement itself is defined in chapter 2.1.2.

Lastly, some technicalities: I have translated quotes from Norwegian and Danish to English, and put the original text/statements in footnotes throughout the thesis. Literature is referred in a slightly modified version of the Harvard style. Some of the homepages are only referred to in footnotes.

2 THEORETICAL APPROACHES

2.1 Castells and the Network Society

Towards the end of the second millennium of the Christian Era several events of historical significance have transformed the social landscape of human life. A technological revolution, centred around information technologies, is reshaping, at accelerated pace, the material basis of society (Castells, 1996: 1).

Manuel Castells' opening sentences in his three volumes about the information age seems to indicate that he maintains that it is the technology which is reshaping the material basis of society.²¹ Still, in addition to his technological determinist "tendencies", Castells certainly also takes social actors, and their strategies for developing the network society into account. Social actors are referred to as nodes that are either connected to wider networks in the economy, state, and society (*i.e.* globalised) or marginalised in their disconnected local communities. The networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies because they change the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture (Castells, 1996: 469).

In Castells' account, the new information and communication technologies of the network society have enabled the development of one global economy. This globalisation process has resulted in that we have, in effect, an economy which works as a unit in real time on planetary scale: "New technologies allow capital to be shuttled back and forth between economies in very short time, so that capital, and therefore savings and investment, are interconnected worldwide, from banks to pension funds, stock exchange markets, and currency exchange. Since currencies are interdependent, so are economies everywhere" (Castells, 1996: 93). However, unlike capital and information, labour, technology, goods, and services, are not fully integrated in the process of globalisation. These disparities are sources of conflict in the network society, where global capital uses information and its networks to get an advantage.²² The biggest, Castells seems to indicate, is the disparity between globalised capital, and locally fixed labour: "Informationalism, in its historical reality, leads to the concentration and globalisation of capital, precisely by using the decentralizing power of networks. Labor is disaggregated in its performance, fragmented in its

²¹ See for example (Dijk, 1999b).

²² Castells labels this informationalism.

organisation, diversified in its existence, divided in its collective action” (Castells, 1996: 475).²³

Castells identifies the Internet as the technological basis for the networks in the information society (Castells, 2001: 1). As with other networks, he first tries to assess empirically how socially relevant the Internet is. As with other networks, he acknowledges the (digital) divide between the connected and the disconnected. Still, he sees great potential in the Internet: “The potential integration of text, images, and sounds in the same system, interacting from multiple points, in chosen time (real or delayed) along a global network, in conditions of open and affordable access, does fundamentally change the character of communication. And communication decisively shapes culture [...]” (Castells, 1996: 328).

In order to explain this development (and his optimism), he argues that we are now living in a culture of *real virtuality*. This is a system where reality itself is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting, where appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience. Jan van Dijk finds this description of a disembodied “freely floating cyberspace” out of touch with reality. Quite reasonably, he argues that even on-line people’s identities are shaped by their off-line experiences (Dijk, 1999b: 134). Castells more convincingly argues that because communication nowadays is only perceived as technologically mediated communication, those who want to be included in the network have to adapt to the communication technology’s logic, its language, its points of entry, and its encoding and decoding. He furthermore maintains that instead of a centrally dispatched media system, a multimodal and horizontal network of communication is needed to be able to adequately criticise this globalisation based on marginalisation (Castells, 1996: 327-375). In “The Internet Galaxy”, Castells describes Indymedia as a network which has adapted to the logic of signs, and created a horizontal network for communication for social change (Castells, 2001: 142).²⁴ He puts so much emphasis on this adaptation because he believes the dominant power in the network society is in the *space of flows*:

The space of flows is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows. By flows I understand purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political, and symbolic structures of society (Castells, 1996: 412).²⁵

²³ Among many others, Peter Waterman concludes similarly (Waterman, 2001).

²⁴ See also chapter 5.3.

²⁵ Castells argues that the three layers of material support that together constitute the space of flows is: “a) Circuit of electronic impulses (technological infrastructure) [...] b) Nodes and hubs [...], and c) The spatial organization of the dominant managerial elites (rather than classes) that exercise the directional functions around which such space is articulated” (Castells, 1996: 413-415).

Castells' theory starts off from the implicit assumption that societies are asymmetrically organised around the dominant interests specific to each social structure. Since elites are globalised and normal people are mostly stuck in their local communities, the more a social organisation is based upon this *space of flows*, superseding the logic of any specific place, the more the global power elites escapes the socio-political control of historically specific local and national societies (Castells, 1996: 415-416). As mentioned earlier, this results in individualisation of labour, but Castells claims it also leads to a "more fundamental opposition between the bare logic of capital flows and the cultural values of human experience" (Castells, 1996: 476).²⁶

2.1.1 A Powerless State?

The powerful corporate networks in the network society undermine state power. Furthermore, even the nation-states' intention when the supranational institutions are empowered is to reassert their own power, it actually further undermines their sovereignties. The World Trade Organization (WTO) reduces to a large extent state power over trade and related issues to bureaucratic dispute settlement, the G8 has appointed itself as the supervisor of the global economy, The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) instruct what economic policies governments in developing countries should pursue, and NATO²⁷ is aspiring to become the world's police force. The financial and currency markets are getting increasingly interdependent, and are now effectively one international market where US dollar, Yen, and Euro are the only really important currencies. This leads to a harmonisation of the monetary policies and to a far extent the ideologies at a supranational level. Since the networks of transnational corporations are controlling an ever increasing part of the production²⁸ (including the news), and these corporations can relocate their production, a downward spiral of social expenditure competition follows: "Overall, the intertwining of national economies, and the dependency of government finance on global markets and foreign lending, have created the conditions for an international fiscal crisis of the nation-state, including the wealthiest and most powerful nation-states" (Castells, 1997: 252). As the nation-state is forced by these developments to reduce its

²⁶ Van Dijk criticises Castells for ignoring the internal social conflicts in the networks. His assessment, that Castells "[...] denies the possibility of meaningful resistance within the system, assuming the externality of any resistance" (Dijk, 1999b: 136), bears merit.

²⁷ After the war in Yugoslavia in 1999, the US and its "alliance of the willing" (a network of states) have taken over some of NATO's former functions.

²⁸ Over half of the 100 largest economies in the world are TNCs.

welfare programs and sphere of authority – its legitimacy – it is gradually being reduced to a symbol marginalised people can look to in despair.²⁹ The nation-state's function as a democratic body where people can attain their political goals is thus undermined.

2.1.2 New Social Movements

According to Waterman, the increasing importance of the supranational level makes it both possible and necessary to develop a global civil society with strong social movements (Waterman, 2001: 227). Indeed, Richard J. F. Day maintains that “some of the most high profile and intense struggles in the 1990s and 2000s are characterized by currents that transcend the boundaries of the nation-state, and thus [...] should be considered as ‘transnational social movements’” (Day, 2004: 728). Castells recognises that the socio-economic division between capital and labour is still important in these new social movements, but argue that human cultural values are expressed increasingly in collectives based on identity in the network society (Castells, 1997). The new social movements come at a time when not only the nation-state, but also traditional civil society is being marginalised by the elite's networks. The movements may be socially conservative, socially revolutionary or both, or none, but they all represent reactions to people's loss of control over their lives, governments, countries, and the earth. Inspired by Alain Touraine's classic typology³⁰ Castells categorizes social movements in terms of:

Table 1: Castells' typology of social movements

1. Identity – Their self definition and on behalf of whom they speak
2. Adversary – Their enemy/ies
3. Societal goal – The movement's vision of the social order it wishes to achieve through its collective action (Castells, 1997: 71).

In Touraine's view: “The social movement is the organized collective behaviour of a class actor struggling against his class adversary for the social control of historicity in a concrete community” (Touraine, 1981 [1978]: 77). Although the radical sociologist's definition, to a further extent than Castells', is based on the division between capital and labour, he also includes culturally oriented forms of behaviour. The social movements in the global justice movement both arise from the

²⁹ The effect the marginalisation of the nation-state has had on public broadcasting is evaluated in appendix 4.

³⁰ (Touraine, 1965, Touraine, 1966).

identity-based collectives,³¹ and are class based movements³² which have worked for a long time to reduce or end capital and the elites' marginalising of individuals and nation-states. These social movements empower themselves and fight for another, more democratic form of globalisation in their local communities, and (if they have the resources) pursue the elites' power in *the space of flows*.³³ In this process, Indymedia is one of their supporters/tools to make the world aware of their protests and their alternatives. Castells has captured the complexity and the diversity of the global justice movement:

The anti-globalisation movement³⁴ does not have a permanent, professional organizer, does not have a center, a command structure, or a common program. There are hundreds, thousands of organizations, and individuals, around the world, converging in some symbolic protest, then dispersing to focus on their own specific issues [...]. The effectiveness of this movement comes precisely from its diversity, which reaches out as far as the violent enraged margins of society on one side, and to the heights of moral and religious authority on the other. Its influence [...] comes from the ability to raise issues, and force a debate, without entering into negotiation because no one can negotiate on behalf of the movement. [...] The novelty is their networking via the Internet, because it allows the movement to be diverse and coordinated at the same time, to engage in a continuing debate, and yet not be paralyzed by it, since each one of its nodes can reconfigure a network of its affinities and objectives, with partial overlappings and multiple connections (Castells, 2001: 142).

Castells' emphasis on identity is clearly reflected in his use of examples: feminist, local, and ethnic movements. Waterman argues that another new aspect is that contrary to the traditional labour movement which has used communication instrumentally to mobilise, organise, and control, the new global solidarity movements perceive it not simply as a technical mean, but as an ethical end to be valued (Waterman, 2001: 215).³⁵ This seems to be a value shared by Indymedia.

2.1.3 “The Network is the Message”

³¹ As Naomi Klein has shown, many of these fight in the realm of signs as anti-sweatshop activists, culture jammers and by reclaiming the public streets (Klein, 1999). Waterman labels these alternative social movements. While they both continue and break with the classical left, these social movements “point out more complex answers to our growing global concerns” (Waterman, 2001: 209).

³² Here, both the traditional labour movement and new and alternative identity-based movements will be referred to as social movements, but the focus will be on the global justice movement. The traditional labour movement seems to have lost some of its momentum, but not as much as Castells suggests. Although only parts of the traditional labour movement identifies with the global justice movement, Peter Waterman argues that there are signs of change there towards adapting to a new globalised reality (Waterman, 2001).

³³ In the conclusion of the Norwegian research project “Power and Democracy”, Østerud *et al.* calls this participatory democracy (deltakerdemokrati), and put it (together with other non-parliamentary forms of democracy) in the category additional democracy (tilleggsdemokrati). They argue that the transfer of power from formal decision process to these forms of additional democracy have consequences: it covers the decline of parliamentary power and makes the difference between democracy and non-democracy indistinct (Østerud *et al.*, 2003: 298).

³⁴ The name anti-globalisation however does not do the movement much justice, as it is not against globalisation *per se*, but corporate led globalisation. Quite reasonably George Monbiot and others argue that the name global justice movement is better (Monbiot, 2003: 2).

³⁵ Waterman argues that the new global solidarity movements are, in large part, communication internationalism.

As this thesis focuses on a new news channel in the relatively new medium Web, which is based on Internet technology,³⁶ a discussion about the role technology plays when patterns of communication are changing is essential. Castells claims that we have developed technologically from, what Marshall McLuhan labelled “the Gutenberg Galaxy” (where the printing press was the dominant medium) via “the McLuhan Galaxy” (where TV was the dominant medium), and have entered a new world of communication: “the Internet Galaxy” (Castells, 2001: 3). In “Understanding Media” (1964), McLuhan describes the development of new technology as a socially disconnected process, and technology as more powerful and determining for historical development, than socially initiated processes. He argues that media technology itself has become more important than media content: “The medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1987 [1964]: 7). McLuhan explains this by stating that in the electronic age “[...] it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (McLuhan, 1987 [1964]: 9). In McLuhan’s account, new technology is the central and neutral drive for societal development.

Although his position on technology might be somewhat contradictory, when turning McLuhan’s famous statement around, Castells is clear when he argues that this means that “the message is the medium. That is, the characteristics of the message will shape the characteristics of the medium” (Castells, 1996: 340).³⁷ In “The Internet Galaxy”, he relates this to Internet:

[...] three independent processes came together, ushering in a new social structure predominantly based on networks: the needs of the economy for management flexibility and for the globalization of capital, production, and trade; the demands of society in which the values of individual freedom and open communication became paramount; and the extraordinary advances in computing and telecommunications made possible by the micro-electronics revolution. Under these conditions, the Internet [...] became the lever for the transition to a new form of society – the network society – and with it to a new economy (Castells, 2001: 2).³⁸

Contrary to McLuhan, the development of ICT and Internet technology is not described as disconnected from, but as interconnected with social changes in society. Furthermore, Castells argues that the logic of the network has made McLuhan's original determinist slogan redundant:

While the audience received more and more diverse raw material from which to construct each person’s own image of the universe, the McLuhan Galaxy was a world of one-way communication, not of interaction. It was, and still is, the extension of mass production, industrial logic into the realm of signs, and it fell short, McLuhan’s

³⁶ As a socially relevant phenomenon, the Internet is also relatively new as it did not start to get widespread before the Web was established in the early 1990s.

³⁷ Castells’ notion of the network therefore includes information as well as actors and technology. See chapter 2.4.4 for a discussion on how information is processed on the Internet.

³⁸ Jan van Dijk’s point of departure in “The Network Society” is similar, but even more socially grounded: “modern capitalism, with its globalization, centralization of capital and decision making combined with decentralization of production, its growing number of financial transactions, and its emphasis on flexibility and logistics, has created the need for new means of communication” (Dijk, 1999a: 22).

genius notwithstanding, of expressing the culture of the information age. This is because information processing goes far beyond one-way communication (Castells, 1996: 341).

Although Castells only refers to economic organisation when he is claiming that “the unit is the network” (Castells, 1996: 198), van Dijk’s criticism (and claim that the individual still is the basic unit) is important (Dijk, 1999a: 24). Furthermore in a global perspective, the quote above from “The Internet Galaxy”, where the Internet is described as “the lever for the transition to a new form of society” reveals that Castells overestimates the social relevance of the Internet.

Castells acknowledges the dominant role of media corporations in the process of digitalisation, but at the same time seems to underestimate the role media have in politics. In addition, he could have focused more on the fact that development and use of all technology depends on the social conditions in a society. But while he optimistically claims that the social relevance of the Internet technology will increase enormously, and his position is at times contradictory, he also claims (although the quote in the title of the chapter seems to indicate it) that he is not a technological determinist. As this thesis relates to socially grounded theory on technology, and as Castells’ position is disputed, his theories are used critically in this thesis. Nevertheless, Castells’ theory about the network society, with its transfer of power from states and locally based people to networks of corporations and supranational organisations, seems relevant for an assessment of how Indymedia has adapted the same network structure and is using the same communication technology that capital is using to draw attention to the social struggles against the powerful networks (Kidd, 2003b: 64).³⁹ Moving on, since Indymedia have been described as an “experiment in media democracy” (Perlstein cited in Kidd, 2003a: 2), an elaboration of what Indymedia primarily is a reaction against is needed.

2.2 Contesting Media Power on the Internet

Ever since the early 19th century, when new technologies for producing and distributing newspapers were introduced, the resources in the media industry have gradually become ever more concentrated. The modern form of globalisation have accelerated this process in the last decades (Thompson, 1995: 238). James Curran and Nick Couldry share this perspective and assess that: “[...] media power (direct control over the means of media production) is an increasingly central dimension of power in contemporary societies” (Curran and Couldry, 2003:

³⁹ Chapter 5-5.2.3.2 and 7 are case studies of this.

4). In this respect, their view seems to be analogous with Indymedia's point of departure: a reaction to the globalisation and concentration of media ownership (by becoming the media themselves). While Appendix 4 is a discussion of to what extent ownership concentration results in that the interest of capital is setting the agenda,⁴⁰ the potential in Internet as an alternative distribution channel is discussed here.

Due to the low cost and distributive nature of the Internet technology digitized information can easily be distributed across national, organisational, and social boundaries on the World Wide Web. Tore Slaatta argues that the Internet has “turned the traditional power structure between sender and receiver, and the traditional media's power to interpret and edit, up side down” (Slaatta, 2002: 232).⁴¹ As the vast majority of the Web-pages the 700 million Internet users worldwide use their time on are owned by corporate media, which only to a limited degree allow democratic user participation, Slaatta, seems to be too optimistic. Couldry more moderately argues that creative use of the Internet *can* challenge media power. As this is not taking place on a large scale today, he suggests it is: “to new hybrid forms of media consumption-production that we must look for change, since they would challenge precisely the entrenched divisions of labor (producer of stories versus consumer of stories) that is the essence of media power” (Couldry, 2003: 45). He finds that Indymedia has managed to do this by successfully combining specialized production with an open invitation to nonspecialist contributors. Still, he is not sure if such hybrid practices can be sustained. And even if this is possible, he is unsure who else outside Indymedia's limited group of consumer-producers knows about, and can be influenced by, these new practices (Couldry, 2003: 45). Although Couldry's concerns about Indymedia are important, the main point here is that there is a potential for challenging media power on the Internet, and that this to a limited degree already has been fulfilled. Still, as the development of the Internet and the Web is a contested area, Web-based alternative and independent news providers are not something that must be taken for granted.⁴²

2.3 The Public Sphere

⁴⁰ Appendix 4 furthermore discusses if the claim that ownership concentration results in little (and then mostly bad), or none coverage of the global justice movement and their campaigns.

⁴¹ Norwegian original text: ”snudd opp ned på tradisjonelle maktforhold mellom avsender og mottaker og de redaksjonelle mediernes fortolknings- og redigeringsmakt”

⁴² According to Peter Dahlgren, for the Internet and the Web: “The emerging structure is aimed to address the needs of business and affluent customer” (Dahlgren, 2001: 49). This seems to be the pattern earlier electronic media technologies have followed.

Indymedia's aspiration is to be an open space for independent journalistic reports and discourse amongst politically interested people: a public sphere. Even though the notion public sphere is used in many different settings, it can be useful to distinguish between the *public* sphere, which includes all physical and virtual rooms where ideas and feelings related to politics (broadly defined) can be communicated freely and openly, and the *policy* sphere, which is a subset of the public sphere where ideas connected to policy change are communicated to government officials, parties, and politicians holding office, who may decide the outcome of the issue.⁴³ This thesis relates to both of them, but while most of the activity on Indymedia fits the former description, discourse of the latter kind is normally more influential. Throughout the thesis the word publicity is used in the same way as the notion public sphere is.

2.3.1 Habermas' Bourgeois Public Sphere

In "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere", Jürgen Habermas⁴⁴ defines the bourgeois public sphere as:

[...] the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason [...] (Habermas, 1989 [1962]: 27).

Habermas either gives an historical account or presents a normative ideal for (or both – he does not make this clear), amongst others, the development of political public spheres in Western-European countries. In the first, feudal period, the royals and the aristocracy had absolute power. Public discourse was conceived as unnecessary. Instead, power was displayed, not for but before the people, in ceremonies. Real political discourse took place behind closed doors. This changed when the trading, and industrial bourgeoisie attained dominance. While this developed gradually in Great Britain and Germany, the revolution marked the new era in France. The development of a bourgeois public sphere first started in Britain after the civil war when censorship was gradually lifted and the education system was improved (Calhoun, 1992: 14). In Germany however, the public's rational-critical debate of political matters took place predominantly in the private gatherings of the bourgeoisie. In the last decades of the eighteenth century, private debate

⁴³ The division between public and policy sphere is taken from (Bennett and Entman, 2001: 4).

⁴⁴ Even though Habermas does not write about the Internet, his theories are used here because they are useful for describing the notion public sphere. Although "Structural Transformation" has been criticized, Jacobson and Kolluri argues it can be used on participatory media such as Indymedia: "His analysis of the public sphere could provide the basis for an analysis of media institutions in so far as they facilitate democratic participation through public discourse" (Jacobson, 1999: 266).

centred on the content of different journals increased rapidly (Habermas, 1989 [1962]: 72). In Britain, the bourgeois public sphere was established in clubs and coffee houses where land owning men debated, and where, according to Habermas, the best argument won and affected policy decisions (the British political parties started as clubs). The discourse in the clubs was oral, but soon durable media like periodicals and newspapers were established.⁴⁵ With, among others, the democracies in ancient Greece as his practical and theoretical source of inspiration, Habermas emphasises the importance of high quality and lasting discourse, and that it affects wider public spheres and policy decision processes (Habermas, 1989 [1962]).

In Habermas' account, this ideal mode of discourse ended when the labour movement – the masses which did not own land – won the suffrage and their subsequent inclusion in the public sphere. According to Habermas, prior to this, the press had been loyal to its democratic function as the body for political discourse. Now it was commercialised, and this commercialisation transformed the citizens to a mass of consumers of political discourse instead of participants. The public sphere was re-feudalised because the power, once again, was only displayed, and the public discourse no longer had an effect on policy decisions. Although he is not as pessimistic, Habermas was inspired by Adorno and Horkheimer, who in “Dialectic of Enlightenment” describe how culture and media developed to become an industry which pacifies the people and undermines democracy (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972 [1944]).

2.3.2 Criticism and Adjustments

Habermas' theory has been criticised substantially for its scientific weaknesses. It therefore seems useful to take some of this criticism, Habermas' later adjustments, and new theory into account to get a theoretical framework for assessing Indymedia. Although John B. Thompson focuses on one-to-many media as television (Thompson, 1995),⁴⁶ his approach to Habermas and his own contributions discusses principles which are applicable on Web-based public spheres.

Since Habermas' focus is on the bourgeois public sphere, he neglects other forms of public discourse. In Habermas' ideal period, the relationship between the working class' social movements and the bourgeois was tense. This tension was often discussed in working class public spheres, and often in a manner which diverged from the “gentleman approach” of the

⁴⁵ See examples in chapter 2.4.1.2.

⁴⁶ The arguments used here are taken from the pages 69-74 and 235-265.

bourgeois. Habermas has later acknowledged that the period was not so harmonic as initially stated in “Structural Transformation” (Habermas, 1992: 425).⁴⁷ Furthermore Habermas’ idea of an ideal discourse where the best argument wins is valid as long as all interest groups have the same goal. When contradictory and incompatible interests enter the same public sphere, their positions are locked and the discussion is often more like a competition than open and honest discourse.⁴⁸ This distinction is made clear in the notions communicative/strategic action, which Habermas also uses. Communicative action is an honest, non-manipulative approach, of the ideal public sphere. Strategic action is dishonest, goal driven communication, which is what many participants in today’s mediated public sphere are criticized for. The question then remains: is it possible to have an including, well functioning public sphere?

Habermas has recognised that a weakness in his original description is its lack of openness. Although the bourgeois public sphere was based on the principle of universal access, women were excluded, and only educated land owning men had the financial means to participate. Habermas has later recognised that: “[...] unlike the institutionalisation of class conflict, the transformation of the relationship between the sexes affects not only the economic system but has an impact on the private core area of the conjugal family. [...] Unlike the exclusion of underprivileged men, the exclusion of women had structuring significance” (Habermas, 1992: 428). This adjustment is however not substantial enough, as even though bourgeois women would have been included, Habermas’ public sphere would still have been undemocratic.⁴⁹

Looking further, if the bourgeois public sphere is treated as an empirical notion, it is clear that the historical changes from one phase to another were not as absolute as Habermas’ describes them as. In his ideal era, the media are also described as ideal. Historical research has revealed that there were some political periodicals which represented a cultivated critique and debate,⁵⁰ but these were by no means the first or the most common of the early forms of printed material. Habermas does not include the publications of that era which had a more commercial and/or

⁴⁷ Habermas has been convinced by (amongst others) a study by Günter Lottes of the radical group the London Jacobins in the late eighteenth century, which “shows how under the influence of radical intellectuals and under the conditions of modern communication, the traditional culture of the common people brought forth a new political culture with organizational forms and practices of its own” (Habermas, 1992: 426).

⁴⁸ This is what Habermas thought happens when “the masses” are included in democracy. Whether he is right or wrong here, the interests in the bourgeois public sphere must have been contradictory at times as well.

⁴⁹ That is if his “Structural Transformation” is interpreted as a normative public sphere theory.

⁵⁰ See examples in chapter 2.4.1.2.

sensational profile in his account.⁵¹ His lack of trust in the people, or “the masses”, is also problematic, as his presentation of the fall of the public sphere and the following process of re-feudalisation reveals his conception of the media users as passive and easily deceivable.

Media research have for the most part developed a more nuanced and optimistic view on the media user in the last decades. Thompson argues that Habermas’ parallel between the feudal ruling system of the middle ages and the “re-feudalised” liberal democracies of our time is the theory’s most prominent flaw: “[...] the development of communication media has created new forms of interaction, new kinds of visibility and new networks of information diffusion in the modern world, all of which have altered the symbolic character of social life so profoundly that any comparison between mediated politics today and the theatrical practices of feudal courts is superficial at best” (Thompson, 1995: 74). Habermas has recognised that he underestimated “the positive influence of formal schooling [...] on cultural mobilization and the promotion of critical attitudes”, and that his account of the transformation from “a ‘culture-debating to a culture-consuming public’ is too simplistic” (Habermas, 1992: 438). Habermas also distances himself from the individualist-behaviourist approach of Lazerfeld which he was influenced by at the time he wrote “Structural Transformation”, and recognises the more nuanced approach of later ideological-critical scholars like Stuart Hall (Habermas, 1992: 439).

Thompson is particularly critical of the close connection of Habermas’ theory to its ancient Greek sources of inspiration. There, the public sphere was a spatial and dialogical notion, and worked as an agora where all free men who were physically present, could participate in the discussion. This, of course, only works with an extremely restricted view of who is included in the democratic fellowship. Today, it is more or less impossible to include everyone who is affected by a political decision in a discussion about it. Particularly if the participants in the decision have to be at the same place at the same time (this is particularly the case for the global problems of our time.) The public sphere today normally exists/is mediated independently of space and time and is often non-dialogical.⁵² Although Internet can be an arena for political discussions, Colin Sparks argues that it, as Habermas’ Greek ideals, has its limitations:

As an enabling technology that permits citizens to know more about the world, to put forward their views, to listen to discussions, and to reach an informed decision, the Internet is unrivalled since the agora of classical antiquity [...] But, despite their international nature, despite their riches of information, and despite

⁵¹ Nicholas Garnham argues that “the viciously competitive structure of the early print market, controlled not by freely discoursing intellectuals in search of public enlightenment but by booty capitalists in search of a quick profit” (Garnham, 1992: 359-360).

⁵² This is the case in one-way-communication mediated public spheres such as radio and television.

the glorious abundance of debate, the global media, both old and new, fall a very long way short of the ideal notion of a public sphere. They have clear limits that exclude the voices and interests of a majority of the world's population. These exclusions operate every bit as completely and permanently as did the laws of Athenian citizenship. Unless and until these limits are overcome, there will be no sign of a global public sphere (Sparks, 2001: 89).

One can therefore argue that representation and the quality of public discourse is more important than participation. Furthermore, it has been argued that at least in Western countries, commercialisation is a more prominent threat to the quality of the public sphere than censorship. In this approach to the public sphere the ideal is media independence of both the government and the market.⁵³ The process of globalisation also forces any reinvention of the public sphere to go beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. *Independent Media Center* recognise both these points. They facilitate a public sphere where ideally everybody who want to can participate rather than being represented by a politician or the like. They do not seem to mind if the quality standard is reduced if that means that more people can participate. This approach relates to theory about alternative journalism as counter publicity.

2.3.3 Counter Publicity

Both alternative and independent media⁵⁴ are reactions to what is perceived as shortcomings in mainstream media journalism. Although IMC relate to a media tradition which started with the protest movement of the new left in the 60s, the new left in turn received substantial inspiration from the original proletarian/labour movement's public spheres (Negt and Kluge, 1974). These movements and their media projects were and still are in opposition. Pertti Hemánus therefore emphasises the need for a counter publicity, as an important aspect of alternative journalism: "The need for counter publicity arises largely from the one-sidedness of the dominating press. [...] New social movements needed and continue to need a possibility of 'communicative participation.' The typical features of counter publicity are:

[Table 2: Hemánus' typology of alternative journalism as counter publicity]

- 1) the self-identification of the audience as belonging to a certain subculture,
- 2) the idea of democratizing the production of the media, and
- 3) combining communication and action.

⁵³ (Thompson, 1995, Keane, 1991) and chapter 2.2.

⁵⁴ Since the two don't differ in this respect, they will be differentiated here.

Further, one of the key concepts in counter publicity is that of personal experience: communication must be based on personal experience. Even here we can see a certain protest against Western rationalism which, according to one interpretation belittles the value and meaning of personal experience also in journalism, in the name of, say ‘objectivism’ (Hemánus, 1988: 2-3).⁵⁵

2.3.4 Connecting the Public Sphere and Democracy

The public sphere and democracy are often mentioned in the same sentence. There is however not necessarily an immediate connection between them. This is for example the case in Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere: “The classical bourgeois sphere that Habermas identified in eighteenth-century England was only tenuously connected even to the most minimal forms of democratic politics” (Sparks, 2001: 76). Different views on what democracy is and should be result in different ways of evaluating to what extent mediated public spheres fulfil their responsibilities to society (to the extent that they have any). There are four main theoretical models for democracy: elite, market, participatory, and discourse/deliberal/communitarian⁵⁶ democracy. The new normative public sphere theory is closely related to particularly the participatory and deliberative models. This is because they seem to be the most democratic (in the sense of people ruling the political unit), they appear to be a good analytical tool for assessing Indymedia,⁵⁷ and because they seem to fit Indymedia both in terms of sources of inspiration, their rhetoric, and praxis.

The participatory democracy tradition emphasises the citizens’ ability to present their views. The citizen is not just a voter, but also a co-producer of the democratic processes. Gamson argues that: “A common normative thread is the desirability of maximizing the participation of citizens in the public decision that affects their lives. To do this, they should, to the extent feasible, be active participants in the public sphere as part of an ongoing process” (Gamson, 2001: 57). In a discussion, all who are affected should be able to express their view. It should furthermore be room for everybody to express themselves by making for example TV programs and homepages.

⁵⁵ The discussion in chapter 8 summarises how Hemánus’ notion of counter publicity fits Indymedia.

⁵⁶ The last three have of course differences but share some common values.

⁵⁷ Stanley Deetz is among those who advocates the use of participatory democracy as a normative foundation for communication studies (Deetz, 1999).

The discourse model promotes the idea of the media as a forum/meeting place for dialog. In discussions, citizens should be treated equally, and decisions should be based on the best argument. The idea is derived from liberal ideologists like John Stuart Mill. One of his main arguments was that the truth would come forward as long as everything was discussed openly with no censorship (Mill, 2001 [1859]). The deliberative tradition also focuses on rational debate (deliberation) as a process to reach democratic decisions. But whereas the discourse model (at least the way Habermas describes it) has received much influence from the ancient Greek *spatial* agora conception of a public sphere, Thompson stresses that as much as the deliberative conception of democracy is dialogical, unlike the discourse model, it promotes that “[...] mediated quasi-interaction can stimulate deliberation just as much as, if not more than face-to-face interaction in a shared locale” (Thompson, 1995: 256). Indymedia seems to be inspired by this approach to democracy. At the same time, as an offspring from the global justice movement, they also have traits of communitarianism – a democratic theory which emphasises the individual’s need for social and cultural fellowships (Kappell, 1997).⁵⁸

The deliberative model has been accused of being utopian. Critics have questioned whether it is possible to reach consensus through dialog, or if the interests of those involved debates in our times are too far removed from each other. The participatory democracy model has also been accused of being naïve.⁵⁹ Media production is a trade which demands competence. This is probably one of the reasons why Thompson and others have argued that representation is more important than participation. Traditionally, media “space” has been a limited resource. This does not apply to the same extent on the Internet, where a qualitatively new feature is that there is enough room for everybody (who has access and the technical skills) to express themselves. So, although there are limitations in both the models, the ideas they represent are valuable. The conclusion is therefore that communication should ideally be both deliberative and participatory.

2.3.5 Publicity for Empowerment

Based on the discussion in this chapter, and as a synthesis of some of the points, this thesis therefore introduces a new⁶⁰ normative public sphere theory – Publicity for Empowerment. The theory promotes a deliberation which is: (i) open for as many as possible (both users and

⁵⁸ See chapter 4.1 for a discussion on Indymedia as a virtual communitarian culture.

⁵⁹ See for example the discussion on local television in Norway (Skogerbø, 1996).

⁶⁰ Publicity for Empowerment is new in the sense that existing values from public sphere and democracy theory are combined in a new way.

producers); (ii) varied thematically; (iii) constructive and of high quality (with cooperative dialog); (iv) independent of the market and the state; and (v) instructive for larger public spheres and policy decisions.

2.4 Journalism Theory

As long as journalism has existed, actors from within and outside the field have been struggling to define what Bourdieu describes as the journalistic field (Bourdieu, 1993: 45, 60, Bourdieu et al., 1993: 86-87). This is therefore not an attempt to define journalism. Instead, based on a discussion of different theoretical traditions about both the middle and periphery of mainstream journalism, alternative journalism, and Web journalism, a new normative journalism theory is suggested.

2.4.1 The Middle of the Mainstream

2.4.1.1 Objectivity Revisited

Robert A. Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao describe the ideal of objectivity as: “[...] a set of rules or rituals, an attitude or state of mind, a convenient ideology to ward off critics, or a desirable or contestable ideal” (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 83). Amongst mainstream journalists, especially in the US, objective journalism has been perceived as the same as telling the truth. Still, this was not the point of departure for the hard news tradition in the US, as its “founder”, the journalist and writer Walter Lippmann approached it rather differently in “Public Opinion”. Lippmann’s thesis was that the news and the truth are not the same, and that the two therefore must be kept strictly apart (Lippmann, 1957 [1922]: 358). This implies that even central figures in this tradition did not believe in the notion of an informal contract between the audience/people and the journalists, where the latter were given their professional “licence” by the former, on the condition that they should provide objective truths.

In fact, the ideal of objectivity and unbiasedness did not enter the canonical texts before the turn of the 19th century, partly as a strategy to meet the commercial need for a standardised product (Dahlgren, 1992: 9, Schudson, 1978). Hackett and Zhao argue that mainstream journalistic “objectivity” in North-America has not only always supported liberal-democratic capitalism, but since 1980 “greased the wheels” for the major ideological shift towards market liberalism. They

use media's "objective" acceptance of the market's demands for low inflation, lower taxes, and reduced deficit as examples of this (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 150-153). Despite this, there are those who believe mainstream journalism is neutral. Bengt Nerman calls this "the doctrine of the journalistic guild, the conception of journalists as some sort of the guild of truth in society, with common judgements and experiences and a code of honour [...]" (cited in Eide, 1992: 36).⁶¹

In our time, scholars as Hemánus have criticised the use of the word objectivity in both research on and journalism in practice, because it does not make sense to only relate either to the objective or the subjective. As he quite reasonably points out, the two have to be seen in relation to each other (Hemánus, 1988: 3). If the notion objective journalism should be taken seriously, Hackett and Zhao claims, it must be possible to separate the observer from the observed in a way where the journalist stands apart from events without influencing them, and transfer the truth or meaning of the events through the use of neutral language. Furthermore, it suggests that news can be presented from a universalistic perspective (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 84). As many others, Mark Pedelty finds this impossible, and has therefore criticised "objective" journalists for denying their subjectivities, rather than acknowledging them and critically challenge them (McLaughlin, 2002: 163).

Donna J. Haraway elaborates this criticism in her project to give academic objectivity a new meaning – away from the traditional, which is scientific, universal, disembodied, and transcendental, and reinstate a doctrine of embodied objectivity that focus on situated knowledge in a manner which accommodates otherness (Haraway, 1991: 188). These situated knowledges are based on each individual's subjective experiences, which in turn are presented and then disputed over rhetorically. Haraway's approach to scientific research also seems useful for assessing journalism. In consequence, this thesis uses the notion of intersubjectivity in its approach to any interpretation of reality (including news journalism and scientific research). This implies that objectivity is used in the same way as in classical rhetoric, which points out that one can only substantiate something in the field of culture and society, never present absolute truths (Andersen, 1995). Since everybody interprets the world from their point of view, a more realistic ideal is that "[...] those descriptions given of real incidents and situations, should give an as truthful and comprehensive description as possible" (Engebretsen, 2002: 108).⁶²

⁶¹ Translated from Norwegian: "doktrinen om journalistlauget, forestillingen om at journalister skal være et slags samfunnets sannhetslaug, med felles vurderinger og erfaringer, med hederlighetskodeks [...]"

⁶² Norwegian original text: "[...] de beskrivelsene man gir av virkelighetens hendelser og tilstander, skal gi et mest mulig sant og helhetlig bilde av det som beskrives".

The ideal of objectivity furthermore promotes that the journalist should be independent. This is for example reflected in the International Federation of Journalist's (IFJ) constitution which states that one of their objectives is: "To respect and defend freedom of information, media freedom and the independence of journalism [...]" (2004). The press in Norway have found this increasingly more important after they cut their ideological bonds to the parties and organisations. This has led to the development of the profession ideology of *journalism*.⁶³ Odd Raaum describes the "ethical cleansing"⁶⁴ which Norsk Journalistlag (NJ)⁶⁵ has gone through to secure the integrity and the trustworthiness of the journalists. "Those who expose can not be exposed, and must therefore seek integrity and stay off potential conflict of interest and dual roles" (Raaum, 2001: 67).⁶⁶ In Norway, the debate about competence has included everything from political positions to socializing with potential sources in the evening.

Despite this effort, both Raaum and Slaatta stress that journalists' independence is put under pressure by the increasing profit demands capital dictates in the age of globalisation (Slaatta, 2002: 137-9). Pierre Bourdieu argues that economical considerations often control (or cohere with) the ideological point of departure for the reporting: "The degree of autonomy of a news medium is no doubt measured by the percentage of income that it derivates from advertising and state subsidies (whether indirectly through program promotion or direct subvention), and also by the degree of concentration of its advertisers" (Bourdieu, 1998: 69). Since Bourdieu wrote his pamphlet, media ownership has become even more concentrated.⁶⁷ Although being truly independent of all economic and political actors has traditionally been and is getting increasingly more difficult, it is still a valuable ideal.

Sigurd Allern emphasises that journalists should not be controlled by their sources. He maintains that if the source, either if it is with a political- or economic (or both) motive, directs the journalist, it should be labelled PR rather than journalism. He defines PR as, "communication

⁶³ Although there has not been such an intimate connection between parties/organisations and the press in many other countries, the profession ideology of journalism seems to be growing in strength worldwide. The IFJ Constitution supports this as they state as their object (c): "To uphold and improve professionalism [...]" (2004, 1986 [1954]).

⁶⁴ Their principles have led to that information and PR workers were excluded in 1997. In other countries, like Denmark, the journalist unions still accept information and PR workers as members. Still, the IFJ Principles states that: "Within the general law of each country the journalist shall recognize in professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of every kind of interference by governments or others" (1986 [1954]).

⁶⁵ Norwegian journalists' trade union

⁶⁶ Norwegian original text: "Avsløringen må ikke selv kunne avsløres, og må derfor søke integritet og sky interessekonflikter og dobbeltroller".

⁶⁷ See chapter 2.2 and appendix 4.

which aims at changing attitude and behaviour” (Allern, 2001: 276).⁶⁸ This includes everything from PR spin to black military propaganda. According to Allern, PR-strategies differ from advertising because the goal of PR “is to get a positive review of a product, service or organisation on news and editorial pages/programs, filtrated and presented like a journalistic product”. Advertising “is paid and open marketing” (Allern, 2001: 276).⁶⁹ This distinction is pointed out in an article about private companies’ use of PR agencies to get positive reviews of their products. In Indymedia, where the journalists often are political activists, it is more relevant to assess whether political agitation⁷⁰ (rather than product placement) turns news stories into PR or propaganda, and whether system sources are adequately used to balance the stories.

According to Michael Schudson “[...] the belief in objectivity is just this: the belief that one can and should separate facts from values” (Schudson, 1978: 5). Gunnar Sand finds this belief particularly strong in the US-American journalistic tradition: “In the American tradition, opinions and facts are separated as the first are found in the editorials, while the latter are found in the news stories, leaving it to the reader to connect the two” (cited in Eide, 1992: 39).⁷¹ Even though these demands are more important in the US than elsewhere, it is an important journalistic value from the objectivity tradition that has become grounded in institutionalised media world wide.

2.4.1.2 The Press as the Fourth Estate

Originating from the British press' fight against censorship and taxation in the 18th century, the term the press as the fourth estate⁷² referred to the parliamentary press gallery which was thought of as a quasi-constitutional watchdog (Harcup, 2004: 3). The notion that the press was a mirror, reflecting the right and wrong doings of government, soon became central in liberal theory of press freedom. In addition to critically monitor power institutions, this tradition promotes the idea that a diverse press helps to inform the public of relevant issues, and that it represents public opinion in a way the other three estates are not able to. According to Tom O'Malley, liberal theory of press freedom claims that: “The press could only fulfil this function if it were free from

⁶⁸ Norwegian original text: ”kommunikasjon med sikte på å påvirke holdninger og atferd”.

⁶⁹ Norwegian original text: ”er å få produktet, tjenesten eller organisasjonen positivt omtalt på nyhets- eller reportasjeplass, filtrert og presentert som et journalistisk vurdert produkt. (...) reklame er betalt og åpen markedføring”.

⁷⁰ Agitation is a conscious strategy of influencing/instigating the opinion/readers with the aim of getting them to take a certain political stance.

⁷¹ Norwegian original text: ”Den amerikanske tradisjonen streber også etter å skille meninger fra fakta, ved å plassere den første i lederspaltene og den andre i nyhetsspaltene. Så er det opp til leseren å koble dem sammen”.

⁷² The three other estates were the Lords, Church, and Commons. Although the practice of all three should be examined, the parliament (Commons) was the most important.

pre-publication censorship and were independent of the government” (O'Malley and Bromley, 1997: 127). In practice however, O'Malley stresses that newspapers and journalists in Britain remained linked to the political establishment through control of their economic situation.

Although there was a lack of real independence, it was some of the early British publications, such as Nicholas Amhurst's *Craftsman* (1726) and Edward Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731), which in Habermas' account (see chapter 2.3.1), signalled that “the press was for the first time established as a genuinely critical organ of a public engaged in critical debate: as a fourth estate” (Habermas cited in Hall, 1997: 299). This ideal of the press as an independent examiner of not only the government, but all powerful institutions in society, and as a medium for critical debate, has been and still is an important value amongst journalists internationally. Although it has only been applied in varying degrees by the media, it is nevertheless important because it promotes critical and politically relevant news journalism.

2.4.2 The Fringe of Mainstream

This section is a discussion about Civic and Public Journalism and Journalism of Attachment. Although the practices of both traditions were developed (with some help from academics), and are used by journalists in the mainstream media, they have received heavy criticism from many journalists in mainstream media. They nevertheless represent an interesting diversification of mainstream journalism.

2.4.2.1 Civic and Public Journalism

Civic and Public Journalism grew out of a concern amongst editors, journalists, and academics in the US in the late 80s and early 90s for citizen's withdrawal from public life, both locally and nationally. As this led to a decline in newspaper readership, their concerns were both for democracy and the media corporations. Journalism researcher Jay Rosen is one of the foremost proponents of the idea that: “[...] journalists must play an active role in supporting civic involvement, improving discourse and debate, and creating a climate in which the affairs of the community earn their claim on citizen's time and attention” (Rosen, 1993: 3). Several regional and local newspapers in the US, especially in the Mid-west, have tried out what Rosen calls community connectedness. The programs they engaged in include chairing meetings about issues

a local community worries about, asking readers what issues they should cover in an electoral campaign, becoming activists themselves, and arbitrate in social conflicts. As newspapers are normally not influential enough to do this on their own, Rosen stresses that these engagements should be partnerships with other agencies like foundations, broadcasters, universities, and civic groups. The goal of this brand of journalism is to create a plurality of public spaces where citizens can engage with the affairs of the community (Rosen, 1993). The new role for journalists, as activists intervening in political issues in both the media and in town hall meetings broke radically with the traditional journalistic values in the US of detachment and “objectivity”. Rosen answers his critics by claiming that the word credibility should get a new meaning in journalism where caring about democracy is the central issue.

Although they seemed new and radical when Rosen proposed them, the ideas emerged in an important debate in the US in the 1920s. Rosen’s PhD dissertation is about the debate between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey about the role of media, politicians, and citizens in society. While Lippmann in “Public Opinion” argues that the press should be a transmission agency for expert generated truths (although it should work as a counter weight to the political elites as well) (Lippmann, 1957 [1922]), Rosen tries to revitalize Dewey’s ideas. In “The Public and its Problems”, Dewey shares Lippmann’s pessimism about the role of citizens, but argues that a broad and democratic dialog is at least as important as an efficient result (Dewey, 1927). The foremost mission for the press was therefore to create a public discourse between citizens and politicians. Dewey’s rejection of objectivism, and his plea for journalists to start taking the initiative, countered the ideal of the passive and independent journalist which had been championed by many scholars and journalists since the start of the century. This is the major reason why Lippmann’s, not his, view became dominant in US-American journalism. Based on Dewey, Rosen has claimed that the ideal for journalists is: “to be an activist on behalf of the society” (cited in Bro, 1998: 83).⁷³

Karl Knapskog believes the increasing prominence of deliberative democracy theory has inspired the Civic and Public Journalism projects. While he recognises some positive aspects, he criticizes these projects for being populist, lacking a structural analysis of society and therefore becoming moralist: “[...] [it] is a journalistic practice which leans towards ‘absorbing the vocabulary of communicative politics’, which at the same time does not promote understanding of actual

⁷³ Translated from Danish: ”At være aktivist på vegne av samfunnet”.

institutional and judicial conditions for solving political issues” (Knapskog, 2001: 129).⁷⁴ As Bro, he points out that the project has been criticized because it is too easy for journalists to become activists, and by that threatening the press as an independent institution. Although this can be perceived as a weakness, the idea of reducing the distance between journalists and other citizens by relating to the issues they care about is a constructive ideal.

2.4.2.2 Journalism of Attachment

The journalistic practice this tradition⁷⁵ encourages is old, but it was not articulated as an approach before the Bosnian war (1992–1995). According to Mark Urban, it was impossible for reporters to portray “someone with a gun in their hand” as a hero there (cited in McLaughlin, 2002: 173). Alike other modern wars, it had plenty of civilian victims. This led the BBC reporter Martin Bell to report in accordance with, and theoretically formulate a Journalism of Attachment, “that cares as well as knows”. For him, traditional “objective” reports from Bosnia were just an empty spectacle with no moral content. Bell argues that this does not meet the needs of a good war reporter, and that they should instead ask themselves what they can do to make a difference (McLaughlin, 2002: 155). In practice, proponents of this tradition like Michael Nicholson of ITN have argued that this means that while seeking the truth, the reporter should get emotionally involved in order to engage the audience. In an interview about her coverage of the genocide in Rwanda, Christiane Amanpour of CNN argued that this implies that although reporters should be fair, they should not treat the perpetrators on an equal basis with their victims or “insisting on drawing a balance when no balance exists” (cited in McLaughlin, 2002: 169). While she does not reject the concept objective reporting, she claims it should always be related to morality.

Amongst the many critics of Journalism of Attachment is Mick Hume, who argues the approach neglects the historical and political context of a conflict, and instead merely portrays it as a metaphysical struggle between good and evil. Hume argues that these journalists' mission are not to explain and contextualise but to promulgate the morally correct line (McLaughlin, 2002: 166). While his critique, that the method *per sé* suppresses the facts seems exaggerated, even Bell admits that there has been plenty of bad Journalism of Attachment which deserves Hume's critique. Furthermore, although Bell has argued that it was not meant for covering domestic politics, in

⁷⁴ Norwegian original text: “[...] [det] er ein journalistisk praksis som tenderer mot ei ‘absorbering av den kommunikative politikks vokabular’, som ikkje fremjer forståing for faktiske institusjonelle og rettslege vilkår for politisk løysing av konflikter”.

⁷⁵ In the US, this tradition has been labelled advocacy journalism.

the age of “the war on terrorism”, a crude version of Journalism of Attachment is being used extensively on domestic issues.⁷⁶ According to Howard Tumber and Marina Prentoulis, the change came after 11 September 2001: “The traditional ideological framework of journalism is breaking down as a new culture of journalism, one that embraces emotion and trauma develops” (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2003: 227). They claim that this shift has unsettled the distinction between the public and journalists to such an extent (“from detachment to involvement, from verification to assertion, from objectivity to subjectivity”) that we might be witnessing a paradigmatic shift in mainstream journalism (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2003: 228). Although mainstream journalism was more subjective before 9/11 than Tumber and Prentoulis describes it as, and while we still have to wait a little further to see if the changes constitute a paradigmatic shift, their analysis is interesting.

But although there are crude forms of Journalism of Attachment, the ideals the tradition promotes are valuable. Its focus on victims, damage, and trauma caused by war and conflicts is far more important than detached reports about troop movement and guns. Furthermore the Journalism of Attachment has enlarged the field of mainstream journalism to the extent that subjective approaches which have earlier not been considered as journalism (coming from both the political right and left), are now more easily accepted. Indeed, while Indymedia and embedded, emotional, and “patriotic” war correspondents are both (more or less) openly biased, their approaches, both in terms of their ideology, how they are organised, and their impact and legitimacy, are very different.

2.4.3 Alternative Journalism Theory

While Civic and Public Journalism is about reconnecting the people and the elites, and the Journalism of Attachment is engaged (and both are based within the mainstream), alternative journalism more often challenges (either directly, or by encouraging people) the elites. John Downing has written that “if ... alternative media have one thing in common, it is that they break somebody's rules, although rarely all of them in every respect” (cited in Atton, 2003: 41). These are rules governing form, organisation and production. According to Atton, James

⁷⁶ Although Bell and other advocates of Journalism of Attachment might dispute it, the US-American patriotic journalism (a somewhat misleadingly term - as the meaning of the word is disputed) is one of the crude versions which have increased its prominence after 9/11. While Eric Klinenberg has shown how Fox TV and Clear Channel have turned them selves into “patriotic” activists in the US (Klinenberg, 2004 (a)), the anthology “Tell me lies” superbly reveals what consequences “patriotic journalism” had for the coverage of the invasion in Iraq in 2003 (Miller, 2004).

Hamilton has, inspired by Raymond Williams' focus on “skills, capitalization and controls” (Williams, 1980: 54), emphasised the processes of deprofessionalisation, deinstitutionalisation, and decapitalisation as distinct for alternative journalism. He argues that this means that alternative media must be “available to ordinary people without the necessity of professional training, without excessive capital outlay and they must take place in settings other than media institutions or similar systems” (cited in Atton, 2002: 25). Couldry and Curran focus on media power in their definition of alternative media: “media production that challenges, at least implicitly actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations” (Curran and Couldry, 2003: 7). In his theoretical approach, Chris Atton operationalises this to zines, hybrid forms of electronic communication, and traditional political resistance media. The main thing is, according to Atton, that it gives a voice to “the Others” - those who are not normally heard. Alternative media is therefore considered to be a “heteroglossic (multiple-voiced) text” (Atton, 2001: 3). They are furthermore normally more interested in the free flow of ideas than profit. Atton presents a typology of alternative and radical media which seems to be quite useful:

Table 3. Atton’s typology of alternative and radical media⁷⁷

1. Content (politically radical, socially/culturally radical); news values
2. Form – graphics, visual language; varieties of presentation and binding; aesthetics
3. Reprographic innovations/adaptations – use of mimeographs, IBM typesetting, offset litho, photocopiers
4. ‘Distributive use’ – alternative sites for distribution, clandestine/invisible distribution networks, anti-copyright
5. Transformed social relations, roles and responsibilities – reader-writers, collective organisation, de-professionalisation of e.g., journalism, printing, publishing
6. Transformed communication processes – horizontal linkages, networks (Atton, 2002: 27).

An assessment of how Indymedia relates to this typology is included in chapter 5.3. In terms of the journalistic values this tradition promotes, including deprofessionalisation can work in a liberating way. Furthermore, the focus on the voices of “the Others” and the alternative news values are highly valuable contributions.

2.4.4 Digital Media and Web Journalism

⁷⁷ 1-3 indicate products and 4-6 processes.

As Indymedia to such a great extent relies on digital Web-based distribution of news, a discussion on Web journalism and how it is linked to advances in digital communication technology is relevant.⁷⁸ Developments in communication technology have changed the way we can perceive news. The seemingly simple transition from analogue to digital technology, has together with the spread of broadband (which has drastically increased capacity and transmission speed), made the process of convergence⁷⁹ possible. In terms of media content, several forms of mediated expressions and information (such as text, sound, photo) have converged into one medium, the World Wide Web, on the technological platform of the Internet. Van Dijk argues that these developments constitute a communication revolution because it signals the end of the distinction between media that are fixed in space and time and media that bridge these dimensions (Dijk, 1999a: 7).

But to what extent have the potential in this revolution been fulfilled? The low cost for publishing on the Web has rendered possible a vast number of new information channels. As for online newspapers, in addition to several thousand mainstream newspaper's Web editions, a wide range of alternative and independent online newspapers have been established the last decade. These have all adapted to the format of the computer screen (interface), and have to varying degrees started using the opportunities embedded in media convergence. While TV and other mass media are almost completely one way: "The birth of integrated networks implies a combination of allocation, consultation, registration and conversation in a single medium" (Dijk, 1999a: 14).⁸⁰ Interactivity is for the first time possible between many users or actors regardless of time and space. However, the potential has not been fulfilled. Van Dijk notes that (in the late 1990s) new media are sensory poor and users have little control over content. "The user does not

⁷⁸ Technically speaking: "Digitalized information is data which is represented, or converted, to a simple form which only consists of the distinction between two set values: 0 and 1, or on and off" (Liestøl and Rasmussen, 2003: 15). In other words, all sorts of data are coded and processed in the same way. Norwegian original text: "Digitalisert informasjon er data som er representert, eller konvertert, til en enkel tallform bestående av distinksjonen mellom kun to verdier: 0 og 1, eller av og på".

⁷⁹ The most important form of technological convergence is the integration of telecommunications, data communications, and mass communications in a single medium (Dijk, 1999a: 9).

⁸⁰ Van Dijk's definitions of the four idealised patterns of information flow (p. 13–14 – based on Bordewijk and Van Kaam: 1982): "Allocation: the simultaneous distribution of information to an audience of local units by a centre which serves as the source of, and decision agency for, the information [...]. Consultation is the selection of information by (primarily) local units, which decide upon the subject matter, time and speed, at a centre which remains its source. Registration is the collection of information by a centre which determines the subject matter, time and speed of information sent by a number of local units, who are the sources of the information and sometimes take the initiative for this collection themselves [...]. Conversation is an exchange of information by two or more local units, addressing a shared medium instead of a centre and determining the subject matter, time and speed of information and communication themselves."

(inter)act much; rather (s)he chooses from menus and reacts” (Dijk, 1999a: 19).⁸¹ Since there are far more passive readers than active participants on newsgroups and discussion groups, he concludes that the Web mainly function like traditional mass communication (Dijk, 1999a: 167).

New mobile and digital equipment has made news gathering and publishing a potentially quick endeavour. Furthermore, instead of one or two deadlines every day, a homepage can be updated continuously. This often increases the tempo compared to printed newspapers. The result is a slightly different language, and often shorter news stories (the latter is also due to the format of the screen). J. Christoph Nyíri’s point, that word processing is a synthesis of oral and literary writing, is also relevant for understanding Web journalism:

[...] the line of thought in word processing combines traits from both before and after the development of the alphabet. It is flowing, fragmented, based on formulas, lacks a uniform perspective and reduces the writer’s self-consciousness. At the same time, this mode of thought can be based on texts – an enormous amount of texts – which are already there for reference. These characteristics are made even stronger when the word processor is connected to a network (Nyíri, 1994: 13).⁸²

Through hypertext,⁸³ text can be spread over several pages replacing linear processing with hyperlinks, which organises text fragments in a network where the user chooses the path. However, a linear approach to text still dominate in Web journalism (Engebretsen, 2001: 14). Still, in those cases where hypertext is used widely, the consultation it enables reduces some of the shortcomings of many homepage’s total lack of interactivity.⁸⁴ Whereas mainstream online newspapers are often like analogue media, only with some response and consultation services, Indymedia’s goal is to be a next to fully interactive news channel. Jens F. Jensen defines interactive media as:

[...] media which goes beyond mainstream media’s output from media system to the user, and facilitate for different sorts of input from the user to the media system. This input should have consequences for the media text’s course, duration and content. The user shall be able to influence or shape the expressional side of the media text, which in turn should have consequences for it’s content (Jensen, 1998: 36).⁸⁵

⁸¹ For this use, the new technology has enabled the user to access services such as digital archives and personal services (The Daily Me etc.) (Rasmussen, 2002).

⁸² Norwegian original text: “[...] en tekstbehandler kombinerer kjennetegn ved både før-skriftlige og skriftlige tankemonstre. Det er flytende, fragmentarisk, formularisk, uten enhetlig perspektiv og med en minskende jeggbevissthet. På samme tid kan en slik tenking basere seg på tekster – på en enorm mengde av tekster – som allerede fins til å slå opp i.”

⁸³ Jens F. Jensen distinguishes between hypertext (linkages of text fragments) and hypermedia (linkages of all sorts of expressions) (Jensen, 1998: 33). Although this distinction can be useful in some cases, the former also covers the meaning of the latter in this thesis.

⁸⁴ In recent years many mainstream online newspapers have introduced discussion groups to meet the demand for dialog. Still, studies show that their journalists do not necessarily read or participate in these groups (Sultz cited in Rasmussen, 2002: 73).

⁸⁵ Danish original text: Interaktive medier er medier, der udover de konvensjonelle mediers output fra mediesystem til bruger også åbner for mulighed for forskellige grader af- og former for input fra bruger til mediesystem. Dette

Indymedia's rhetoric goes further than this though. Graham Meikle's distinction between interactive media and "unfinished" media is useful in this respect: "Interactivity assumes that the 'user' follows predetermined pathways to conclusions decided in advance ('finished'), and that media is just about commodification, about choice between equivalents. [...] The story that matters is the unfinished, open-ended one in which people collectively make up their future as they go towards it, facing it, as consciously as possible" (Wark in Meikle, 2002: ix-x). In a similar way as the advocates for Public and Civic Journalism (chapter 2.4.2), Meikle describes what he sees as the challenges for open publishing:

The opportunity – and the challenge – for open publishing is to find new ways of writing which bring audiences closer to solutions to the problems under discussion. Stories that address complexity rather than reducing it to a good guys/ bad guys schema. Stories that stimulate discussion and debate rather than constructing conflicts. Stories that go beyond a spurious objectivity and recognize their writer's responsibility to strengthen civic discourse and involve community members in coverage of issues which affect them (Meikle, 2002: 100).⁸⁶

Some will argue that the high tempo, the many subjective voices,⁸⁷ and the fragmented network structure of Web journalism result in more information, but often of poorer quality than in printed newspapers (Dijk, 1999a: 185). It is therefore worthwhile to ask if there has been a change in the journalistic ideology and praxis in the new medium WWW. Even though many journalists and scholars insist that news channels on the Web have to abide to the same set of journalistic virtues as ordinary news channels (Engebretsen, 2002: 103), the journalists' and other contributors' approach to reality are structured differently compared to old media. The readers have for example often access to primary sources. There are also signs of changes in the journalist's role – from text production to copying and editing.

In sum, Web journalism has these positive features (which are used to varying degrees): the converging of several media, cheap technology, and access for publicists, the extensive distribution network, fast updates, many voices, hypertext, links (which give the reader more control), and interactivity with functions such as discussion groups and open publishing.

input skal have konsekvenser for medietekstenes eller -meddelelsens forløb, varighed og indhold. Brugeren skal med andre ord have mulighed for at påvirke eller forme medietekstenes uttryksside, hvor denne påvirkning eller forming igen skal have konsekvenser for meddelelsens indholdsside.

⁸⁶ This constitute an ideal form of interactivity which Indymedia is assessed in relation to in chapter 7.

⁸⁷ According to Terje Rasmussen online journalists use the freedom of expression to a much further extent than other journalists, as they put engagement over objectivity (Rasmussen, 2002: 68).

2.4.5 Journalism of Radical Engagement

Based on the discussion of the different theoretical approaches to journalism, some of the most valuable and democratic traits from these approaches are synthesised in this thesis' normative journalism theory. None of the traits are new, and some are included in existing ethical charters for journalists.⁸⁸ The new aspect is the combination of theory on mainstream and alternative journalism. Journalism of Radical Engagement promotes journalism which is:

- seeking the truth
- independent of political and economical actors
- independent of its sources, helping readers get access to primary sources, and using several approaches to the subject covered
- separating facts from values
- relevant and is examining and revealing the power institutions in society and by that also the issues which are normally not covered
- in dialog with the readers and concerned about the issues they care about
- engaged in the conflicts it covers in a way that reveals who are assailants and who are victims, without reducing conflicts to dichotomies between good and evil
- turning the audience into participants in a way that gives a voice to “the Others”
- based on an ownership structure where there is not one or a few controlling the content⁸⁹

⁸⁸ See for example the Norwegian “Vær Varsom Plakaten” and the International Federation of Journalists’ “Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists”.

⁸⁹ This is thoroughly addressed in chapter 5.3, and is (unlike the other criterions) therefore not discussed separately in chapter 6. However, the discussion in chapter 6.2 is also related to ownership and economy.

3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The methodological approaches in this thesis are qualitative interviews, fieldwork, and desk study. The latter approach have included reading, analysing, and synthesising existing material about and by Indymedia and related topics, and combing this with my own empirical material. In this chapter, I will critically examine the two former approaches. The first part (3.1–3.2) is therefore a general evaluation of my role as researcher and the interviews. While the second part (3.3) evaluates the interviews in Oslo, the third (3.4) evaluates the fieldwork in Mumbai, and the fourth (3.5) evaluates the analysis of the collected data.

Empirically based science allows the researcher to test his or her ideas or hypotheses about a phenomenon against empirical findings. It is epistemological – which means that it has a potential for comprehension (Gentikow, 2002: 44). Personally, I initially had some but not much knowledge about Indymedia. In general, I would say that even though I have come across some studies and short assessments in the process of writing this thesis, one can not say that Indymedia is a thoroughly assessed phenomenon in Media Studies. I therefore found a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews and field observation best suited, because it enabled me to apply the theoretical approaches I have chosen in a thorough exploration of some central aspects⁹⁰ of Indymedia. The goal has been to contribute with what Clifford Geertz understands as the essence of Gilbert Ryles’s notion thick description – which goes in depth of the internal structures of the phenomenon studied (Geertz, 1973: 3-32). This qualitative method makes it possible for the researcher to develop new grounded theory based on the collected data (Gentikow, 2002: 253).⁹¹ The empirical data material I have collected and analysed includes my observation notes from my fieldwork at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai in January 2004, my interviews with 16 of the IMC organisers, activist journalists, and techies during the forum, and interviews with two Norwegian IMC organisers/activist journalists in Oslo in October 2003. The reliability and validity of these data are evaluated throughout this methodology chapter. The qualitative approach has enabled me to get near the informants as subjects, and thereby get their personal understanding of what Indymedia is from the producers’ point of view. However, as qualitative method focuses on few units which are explored in depth, it has been impossible to analyse all aspects of Indymedia.

⁹⁰ See research questions in chapter 1.

⁹¹ I assess my findings, and how it can contribute to moderate existing theory in chapter 8.

3.1 My Role as Researcher

As noted in chapter 2.4.1.1, Haraway argues that academic objectivity should be an embodied objectivity that focuses on situated knowledges. As all other researchers, I am situated in relation to the phenomenon I study, and my thesis about Indymedia is consequently based on the knowledge I have gained from that position. My initial interest in Indymedia comes from my own involvement in the global justice movement. I have been politically active in several organisations on the political left in Norway since I was 14–15 years old, but I became more involved in 2001 when Attac Norway⁹² was formed. The apolitical 90s were definitively over, and both old and new political activist gathered behind the critical, but open ended slogan “Another World is Possible”. As noted in chapter 2.1.2, 4.2, and 4.3, the new social movements were interested in finding new ways to organise, campaign, and express themselves. For this, Internet was perceived as an important tool with an enormous potential. I shared some of this optimism, and wanted to explore one of the most prominent expressions of this: Indymedia. I was also inspired to organise an alternative activist media project, and therefore started working to establish Attac Norway’s magazine *Utveier* in 2003. I have been a member of the editorial collective since the start.

Although my opinions about Indymedia are influenced by my political opinions, I do not feel that it has been problematic to both be active in Attac, and write about Indymedia. I have tried to keep the roles apart throughout my work with my thesis. I have downplayed my own opinions (and involvement in Attac) when I have interviewed Indymedia activists, and not expressed sympathy with their project explicitly. Apart from during one international Attac meeting, and on a few occasions when I took pictures for *Utveier*, I participated in the WSF as media student/researcher. I did not contribute to the IMC operation, and although I did socialise with my informants outside the office on a few occasions, I would say that I was what Helland calls “present as observer” (Helland, 1995). Having said that, my presence and particularly my critical interview questions most certainly affected how the activist journalists in Mumbai worked. One example is an interview I did with Benny Lang, which probably affected their decision to stop producing their print version. Still, I do not consider neither my political stance, nor influencing the activist journalists I interviewed on a few occasions poses a methodological problem for the

⁹² The international Attac movement is a relatively important movement in the global justice movement: www.attac.no – international site: www.attac.org [both last accessed 7 May 2005].

thesis as such. Instead of claiming objectivity, I have reflected on and tried to critically examine my subjective position and approaches. This has increased the reliability of the data.

3.2 General Remarks about the Interviews

I chose to use a Mini Disk Recorder for both my interviews in Oslo and most of the interviews in Mumbai. I took notes from some interviews in Mumbai where it would have been unnatural to tape the conversation. The length of the interviews in Oslo and to some extent in Mumbai, made it absolutely necessary to record them. As this made the analysis phase more accurate, recording the interviews also increased the reliability of the data. I always asked my informants for permission to record the interviews. Since most of them use recording equipment to do interviews themselves, and some had been interviewed by journalists and researchers before, none of them seemed uncomfortable with that. Østbye *et al.* argues that the researcher should inform the informant about the project, how the interview will be used, and if s/he will be anonymous before the interview starts (Østbye et al., 2002: 103). I tried to give all informants a short presentation of the project, and emphasised that they would get anonymity. I have given them all an alias even though most of them did not find it important. The IMC activists are referred to with this name throughout the thesis.⁹³

Although my informants are not employed in Indymedia, they are all treated as either experts⁹⁴ or information rich contributors to Indymedia. I have chosen to use these two categories since the experience with Indymedia, and other traditional and independent media varies tremendously from activist to activist.⁹⁵ Although their experience varies, all my informants are producers. Their approach to Indymedia and IMC's role in society are therefore primarily based on their experiences as participants in the Indymedia project. Some of these experiences bear similarities, but others are vastly different. Gentikow argues that it is normally not necessary to analyse expert interviews with a more complex theoretically founded methodology (Gentikow, 2005: 143). I have therefore chosen to treat their statements as facts in my documentation of the Indymedia project. I have checked their statements against other sources in a few instances where this has been possible. Still, as this has not been possible in most cases, I have trusted the reliability and validity in their answers. Although all the informants seemed honest and sincere, it is nevertheless

⁹³ See Appendix 1 for an overview of the informants.

⁹⁴ Many Indymedia activists do not like this description. As chapter 4.4 shows, some uses post modern philosophy and anarchist ideology to underline their egalitarian approach.

⁹⁵ This is briefly discussed in chapter 7.1 about the collective in Mumbai.

worth mentioning that some of them gave some answers which contradicted themselves and/or other informants or information on Indymedia's homepages. It has not been important for me to put emphasis on this, as (at least the latter) follows Indymedia's idea that nobody can speak on behalf of the network. This have however contributed to that I by no means claim that this is the official account about Indymedia.⁹⁶

Kvale argues plausibly that a qualitative interview should “[...] obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1996: 5-6). The idea is that knowledge about a phenomenon evolves in dialog with the informant. To achieve this however, the researcher needs an approach which prevents the dialog turning into a coffee klatsch. The two interviews in Oslo and some of the interviews in Mumbai are therefore based on a set of topics and questions. Gentikow argues that fully formulated questions easily make the researcher stick to their setup (Gentikow, 2002: 125). I tried to avoid this by being flexible and asking follow up questions when the informants gave valuable answers. I would therefore argue that the interviews had an open, semi-structured form. It was what is called “a conversation with a purpose” (Gentikow, 2002: 123). The interview guide I used in Mumbai⁹⁷ is a revised and extended version of the one I used in Oslo.⁹⁸ The rest of the interviews in Mumbai are based on my observations of the IMC activists, and some of the interesting things they said in for example editorial meetings. They were therefore less structured than those which were prepared. The interviews had generally an informal tone, but were (partly because I talked to people who are used to asking the questions) led (and structured) by me. Most of the informants were interested in talking to me about Indymedia. Although some of them had been interviewed by researchers and journalists before, it seemed like they appreciated “to be seen” – that their work were recognised by somebody from the outside.

3.3 Interviews in Oslo

Gentikow recommends a pilot study with interviews of a small group of informants to get an idea of which interview design might be the most suitable, and to get ideas to new questions (Gentikow, 2002: 153). The interviews I did with the Norwegian activist journalists Bendik Ås and Lars Andersen in November 2003 were to some extent a pilot study for the more extensive

⁹⁶ It is probably impossible to write an official account of this complex phenomenon.

⁹⁷ See Appendix 2.

⁹⁸ See Appendix 3.

fieldwork in Mumbai. I initially wanted to use the material from these interviews in a course⁹⁹ essay, but as the two interviews gave rewarding results, the data material is also used in this thesis. As my focus was different in Mumbai, and my interview guide is adjusted accordingly, I do not consider using the data from the interviews from Oslo a methodological problem. Still, to increase the validity of the data, I have triangulated the data through other researchers. Most of the data material from the interviews which is included in this thesis has been used in both the essay I submitted, and a paper which I presented at a media researchers' conference.¹⁰⁰ Constructive criticism from my tutor, course teacher, other researchers and students, and the participants in my conference working group, have given me the opportunity to revise the analysis of the data thoroughly, and thereby increase its validity.

3.3.1 Selection of Informants

I wanted to talk to both organisers and activist journalists. As all Indymedia discussion lists are open for everyone interested, I joined IMC-Norway in September 2003. I followed the discussions that took place there for about a month, and identified four individuals which seemed fairly active. I sent them an e-mail where I presented myself and my project and asked if two–three of them could participate in an interview. Bendik Ås replied and said that Lars Andersen and he were willing. Indymedia Norway is a fairly small collective where Ås and Andersen are two of the main organisers and contributors.

3.3.2 Reliability

The interviews in Oslo took place in Hausmania, a cultural centre which also hosts Indymedia Norway. As the fire department inspected the house when I arrived, and the police confiscated Indymedia's server halfway through the first interview, the atmosphere was a bit stressful. The second interview was postponed two days, because my other informant was responsible for handling the fire department. The atmosphere was calmer then, but we were interrupted by other

⁹⁹ The course "Digitale medier" ("Digital Media") was held at the Department for Media Studies at the University of Bergen, Autumn 2003. Parts of the course essay "Driver Indymedia Journalistikk?" ("Do Indymedia Activists do Journalism?"), are used in this thesis.

¹⁰⁰ The conference "Medieforskning i globaliseringens tidsalder" ("Media Research in the Age of Globalisation") in Trondheim, 21-22 October 2004, was organised by Norsk medieforskerlag (The Norwegian Media Researcher's Association). I also presented, and received constructive criticism on a presentation of an updated and extended version of the paper in the seminar "Kva er god kommunikasjon?" ("What is Good Communication") at Department of Information Science and Media Studies on 29 April 2005.

users of the house. Although all this might have affected the answers my informants gave, I would not say it poses a serious methodological problem. One can also turn it around and say that it gave interesting information about what conditions Indymedia are working under.

3.4 Fieldwork in Mumbai

The fieldwork is often an overwhelming experience for the researcher. The problems with staying focused which many researchers experience in qualitative interviews, gets even more severe because a new dimension – observing active informants and a phenomenon from what Gentikow calls a cultural ignorant position – is added (Gentikow, 2002: 53). This does to some extent mirror what I experienced in the transition from the two interviews in Oslo, to the hectic and often chaotic atmosphere in the *ad hoc* collective in Mumbai. I had decided to focus on their Web coverage, and I early on decided not to follow the IMC collective in the Youth Camp near the WSF venue. Still, there was so much going on which was potentially interesting, that observing the collective gave me a huge amount of information which I constantly had to evaluate the relevance of. The stressful situation made this evaluation process harder. I tried to solve this by collecting an extensive amount of data. However, as important aspects are probably nevertheless left out, this might be a methodological problem. But then again, I wanted to observe “a movement which is moving”, and when Indymedia roll, the chaos starts.

3.4.1 Preparation

The chaos and the stress did however not come as a surprise. Before I went to Mumbai, I had gained some knowledge about how a social forum works by participating in the Norwegian Social Forum (Globaliseringskonferansen) in Oslo in 2001 and 2002, and the European Social Forum in Paris in 2003. I had furthermore talked to friends in the Norwegian activist community about their experiences from previous world social forums in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In addition, I had read about the social forum movement both in newspapers, magazines, and books. My correspondence with the organisers in the collective had also given me an idea of how chaotic this would be.

3.4.2 Selection of Informants

I joined the imc-mumbai-news, IMC-INDIA, and imc-wsf discussion lists some time before the WSF started. It was mostly the latter which had traffic concerning organising a collective for the WSF. I therefore sent an email to the imc-wsf list where I presented myself and asked if they could contact me. I had to send several e-mails before Indymedia India organiser Rajiv Aram contacted me shortly before the forum started and said I could come. Contrary to mainstream media, Indymedia do not have any policies against admitting outsiders into their collective and editorial meetings.¹⁰¹ I therefore had the opportunity to sit in during the editorial meetings, and listen to their discussions about their strategy, and what issues they should cover and how. This gave me valuable information about how they prioritised and how their consensus approach to decision taking works. After the meetings, I normally asked one of the activist journalists if I could come along and observe how he or she covered an event, and interview him or her afterwards. Everybody accepted. I selected the activists I approached based on how interesting their ideas were, how positive they were about my presence, their skills in English,¹⁰² and based on an evaluation of what issues I could interview the person about. Some of the informants wanted to “know who they were talking to” before they were willing to talk to me.¹⁰³ When I presented myself and my project, they seemed content. I initially planned to only interview a few organisers, techies, and activist journalists, but I ended up interviewing 16 members of the collective (about 2/3 of those who were fairly active). This was a fairly representative selection of informants from the collective since it included a wide range of nationalities, both genders, different age groups, levels of experience, and both organisers, techies, and activist journalists.

3.4.3 The Location

The World Social Forum 2004 took place at the former industrial site Nesco Grounds in North Mumbai. Apart from a few locals, this was far from home for the collective. So both for me and my informants, the unfamiliar environment and the over 100 000 delegates (and the enormous city surrounding the forum¹⁰⁴), made it quite hectic. Those who had participated in large events like this before, seemed however (although they had to sort out several practicalities with the WSF organisers) to “adapt” fairly quickly. Still, as this was not the home environment for the

¹⁰¹ I brought a letter from my tutor which confirmed that I was a student writing about Indymedia. As it turned out, this was not necessary to get access. All discussions about editorial decisions which take place on their email lists are also available on their homepage: lists.indymedia.org.

¹⁰² Although these varied, it was only the activist journalist Jean-Paul Calabert from France who did not speak English at all.

¹⁰³ It seemed like they wanted to make sure I was not some sort of spy.

¹⁰⁴ I had to take three different local trains (which normally was packed) and a rickshaw walla to get to the WSF venue from where I stayed. This was quite exhausting, and took 1 ½-2 hours each way.

informants, it did probably affect how they behaved and answered my questions. As Indymedia often organise in this way, it is not unrepresentative.

3.4.4 Observing the Activist Journalists at Work

When I followed the activist journalists “in the field”, I was able to observe how they approached the forum journalistically. This included: how the hectic atmosphere with a vast amount of groups and individuals asking (at times shouting) for attention, affected them, how they related to their sources, what kind of questions they asked, to what extent they worried about keeping the roles as journalist and activist separated. This was very interesting, and gave me the basis for many of the questions I asked them in the interviews.

3.4.5 Interviews

Due to the hectic atmosphere in the collective at the start of the forum, I was not able to present myself and my project to everybody at the very start. Some had got some information about my project through the e-mail list, and as the editorial meetings started, I was able to present myself properly. I also talked to each informant before I interviewed them. Still, everybody was not informed about who I was and my project before I briefly presented myself in a meeting for all the IMC activists in Mumbai towards the end of the forum. Although the Indymedia office was visited by all sorts of people, some of the activist journalist might have been less sceptical if I had talked to them individually about my project. Still, as the collective as a whole was mostly positive, this was not a big problem.

The wide range between relatively inexperienced to highly experienced media activists gave different perspectives on their operation in Mumbai. Some of the more experienced organisers/activist journalists were a bit impatient, and the interviews were consequently shorter than I planned. Some of them did not seem all that interested in talking to me, while others gave much of their time, and offered interesting perspectives on the ideological basis for Indymedia, the start in Seattle, the further development of the network, and their journalistic conventions.¹⁰⁵ Generally, those interviews which were based on the interview guide lasted longer than those which did not. I obtained some interesting information from all interviews, but some of them

¹⁰⁵ Extracts from these interviews are included in the chapters which are covering these issues (chapters 4, 5, and 6).

were less rewarding than others. Although my informants did not always answer the question, they more or less always talked about issues which were related to Indymedia. Data from all interviews are not included due to limited space.

3.4.6 Reliability and Validity

Østbye *et al.* advise researchers to perform interviews in a quiet environment, where the informant can give honest answers (Østbye et al., 2002: 103). This can be interpreted as an implicit demand for “objective” research methods. Although I can see the value in establishing an interview setting where the informant feels calm, this is not always possible in real interview situations. At the WSF, it was often hard to find a quiet place. When it was not so hectic in the building where Indymedia had their office, I often managed to get hold of a meeting room for an interview. The atmosphere there were however never totally calm, as translators and activists would often open the door to see if the room was vacant. The techies and organisers were often busy. In some cases I therefore had to interview them while they were waiting for the next person who needed technical assistance, or when they were on their way to organise a workshop etc. Due to limited time, some of the activist journalists were interviewed in conference halls, when they were walking in the forum area, or when they were covering a march. The noise, stress, and the fact that others were occasionally within hearing range, probably affected how the informants answered. One could argue that this reduced the reliability of the data, but then again: these are activists in a dynamic movement who are engaged in their work. The atmosphere was hectic in Mumbai, and from what they were saying, that is how it normally is. It would therefore also have been problematic to operate with the scientific goal of getting a calm interview environment and as much distance as possible to the IMC activists.¹⁰⁶ I doubt it would have been possible to achieve this, but if it were, such an approach would probably have disconnected me from the entire collective.

Instead of evaluating this as very problematic, I would claim that the reliability of the data was more reduced by noise from the forum. The Indymedia office was situated right next to one of the major walking paths inside the WSF venue. In addition to a huge amount of activists walking past talking, protest marches (often with drums) regularly passed by, and cultural happenings took place nearby. Furthermore, most of the editorial meetings were held in a hallway where

¹⁰⁶ As mentioned earlier, I played down my own political opinions, but when one activist journalist asked me directly about my opinion about the political situation in Norway, I stated my opinion.

several people passed by and people were talking in the rooms next door. This occasionally made it difficult to communicate, or afterwards to hear what they were saying on the tape. Another reliability problem is that English is not the first language for both many of the activist journalists¹⁰⁷ and me. Although most of them spoke English reasonably well, communication is always easier in your mother tongue. It made it harder for them to “tell it for themselves”.

I have tried to increase the validity of the analysis of Indymedia at the WSF with triangulation through other researchers. I presented my fieldwork at a seminar for post-graduate media studies students¹⁰⁸ at my department, and received constructive criticism which gave me the opportunity to revise the analysis of the data.

3.5 The Analysis

All the recorded interviews (from both Oslo and Mumbai) were transcribed and coded. This gave me a fairly good overview of the data material. It also gave the data higher reliability than if I had only transcribed the data which seemed most relevant at the time. It did indeed turn out to be the best approach as some topics were left out, and new issues were included in the analysis.

Cato Wadel describes the typical analysis phase in a qualitative research as a “[...] round dance between theory, data, and methodology” (Wadel, 1991: 127)¹⁰⁹, where ideas and connections are gradually developed. This is, partly because I collected my data so early in the process, a good description of my approach. Even though I had an idea of what questions I wanted to ask, and an idea of what should be the theoretical foundation of the thesis, I had not decided how I should apply the theory in the analysis of the empirical data material. It took for example some time before I chose to develop a normative journalism theory (which is the theoretical basis for the assessment of Indymedia’s journalistic convention). To put the Indymedia operation in perspective, I initially wanted to do a short analysis of how the mainstream media outlet CNN.com covered the WSF. After enquiring both in Mumbai and on their website, it seems like

¹⁰⁷ This was not the case for activist journalists who were originally from the US and Great Britain.

¹⁰⁸ Seminar for post-graduate media students at Department for Information- and Media studies, University of Bergen, 16. March 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Norwegian original text: ”runddans mellom teori, data og metode”.

CNN did not do anything on the World Social Forum.¹¹⁰ But since the data material was so rich, it was not problematic to focus on the interviews with Indymedia activists.

The balance of power between researcher and informant during interviews is uneven, and this is drastically increased in the analysis phase. My theoretical approach (which highlighted some aspects) has of course limited the type of data which I could apply in the analysis. I have however, within these limits, tried to use those parts of the interviews which seemed representative for the informants' opinions. I have also tried to let them, in Indymedia's vocabulary, "tell it themselves", as I have used quite a few long extracts from the interviews.¹¹¹

3.5.1 Reliability, Triangulation, Validity, and Analytical Complexity

The data's reliability reflects their trustworthiness. Although qualitative research is "softer" than quantitative research, it is nevertheless necessary to have reliable instruments for evaluating the data. My instruments were myself, my notes, and the Mini Disc Recorder. The Mini Disc Recorder worked ok throughout both the interviews in Oslo and the fieldwork in Mumbai. In most cases, recording the interviews made it much easier to keep an overview of what the informants meant. This in turn increased the reliability of the data. As there were just a few interviews where I only took notes, this has not been a problem in the analysis phase. I used triangulation to evaluate how I worked as a "scientific instrument".

Besides the above-mentioned forms of triangulation through other researchers, I have worked to increase the quality of the analysis by data, theory, and self reflexive triangulation. Most of the data are from the expert interviews I did with people in Indymedia, but their statements are in some instances checked against what they have written on their homepages. Their FAQ have been a source of information, and in chapter 7.5 Indymedia India site's coverage of the WSF is briefly assessed. Furthermore, my theoretical approach to Indymedia is based on both globalisation/network theory, ownership theory, public sphere theory, and journalism theory. This implies that the data are (to some degree) evaluated from more than one perspective. I have

¹¹⁰ Although this prevented me from comparing them with Indymedia, it is itself interesting since other major networks like Rupert Murdoch's Asian Star TV chose to cover the forum. It does at least show that since international media like CNN, nor national media in many countries outside South Asia prioritised to cover the forum, independent and alternative media like Indymedia still play a role in distributing news about the discussions that take place on the WSF.

¹¹¹ I have also done this because I regard it as one of the strengths with qualitative method.

also used other researcher's work on Indymedia as a frame of reference. Finally, I have critically questioned and reevaluated my own work throughout the process of writing this thesis.

In terms of the validity of the data, the interviews in Oslo gave me most of the data I needed to analyse how Indymedia's journalistic convention relates to my normative ideal for news journalism (chapter 6). The interviews in Mumbai primarily focused on their operation during the WSF. The extensive amount of data (both from interviews and observation) I gathered there gave me a solid basis for analysing their operation in relation to the theoretical perspectives I had chosen for chapter 7. As the interviews also focused on other issues, some of the data enabled me to adequately address the remaining points in chapter 6, and add the experts' perspectives in the more descriptive chapters 4 and 5. In sum, my interview questions have given me enough interesting answers from my informants to answer the overarching research questions. The data material therefore seems valid.

Gentikow argues in favour of abandoning the demand that it should be possible to generalise the findings in qualitative research. Instead she introduces the more realistic ideal of analytical complexity (Gentikow, 2002: 249). I have followed this ideal by collecting, selecting, and presenting the IMC activists view on Indymedia and their role in society. It is not possible to generalise my findings, but then again, that has never been my ambition. The results should therefore not be seen upon as absolute truths, but rather as an interpretation of aspects of a phenomenon.

3.5.2 The Micro-Macro-Problem

Gentikow addresses the *micro-macro*-problem which has been discussed extensively in the Cultural Studies-tradition: applying a perspective/theory on macro level in an analysis of empirical data on micro level, to get local knowledge as a part of an overarching context. She argues that this seems to be a paradox, but that it is possible to overcome this if one sees each of these local knowledges in a holistic perspective, as a part of a larger unity (Gentikow, 2005: 41). I both share the concern for the *micro-macro*-problem and the need for a holistic perspective. So although it have at times been difficult to apply theory on macro level on qualitative data collected from individual IMC activists (micro level), the findings in my analytical chapters (6 and 7) have thus given me interesting insights in a limited empirical material. Still, as mentioned earlier: I do not claim that it is possible to generalise findings from research based on qualitative method in general, and

fieldwork in particular. This is in turn especially the case in my short fieldwork (eight days), and the additional interviews which does not constitute an extensive data material. It is nevertheless valid, and has answered my research questions. The explorative, qualitative, methodological approach has therefore been rewarding, particularly since there has not been done much research on Indymedia.

Lastly, although it is mentioned implicitly throughout the thesis, it is worth stressing that both Indymedia and my analysis have evolved from university (or university educated) milieus (Kidd, 2003a: 12). Therefore, although we have both to some extent tried to avoid it, our theories, values, and texts are elitist (with a small e). For my own part, (besides that this thesis is written in an inaccessible academic language) both my normative public sphere theory Publicity for Empowerment, and my normative journalism theory Journalism of Radical Engagement, are for a news channel which requires a competent user. Similarly, Indymedia's politically aware, highly educated activist journalists use a jargon which also requires a competent user (they explicitly expect this). These exclusion mechanisms make it elitist. This does not mean that it is problematic *per sé* to expect that media users should be competent, but that it is necessary to be aware of how and who you exclude, and to try to find strategies for becoming more inclusive.

4 SOURCES OF INSPIRATION – A BACKGROUND HISTORY

Social movements are not a new phenomenon, nor that the movements produce their own media. Indymedia are of course inspired by older (and analogous) social movement media projects, but in the following, the emphasis will be on what they have adopted from new network based social movements and their (mostly digital) media strategies, and their ideological and philosophical superstructure.

4.1 Technical Forefathers

Although Indymedia often organise face-to-face in local collectives and at conferences and protests, and the journalistic project is partly analogue and off line (print media, FM radio, posters, TV, VHS-video), a substantial part of their organising and a vast majority of their media texts are published exclusively on the Internet. Although this seems like a new way to work, it is not. The IMC activists are the first to acknowledge that they have received help with their software, and been influenced by principles such as openness in discussions from the open source¹¹² and free software¹¹³ movements.

Castells describes the development of these two as important strands in the hacker¹¹⁴ culture on the Internet: “It is arguably the nurturing milieu of breakthrough technological innovations through cooperation and free communication [...]” (Castells, 2001: 41). According to the hackers’ “jargon file”, “[...] it is an ethical duty of hackers to share their experience by writing free software and facilitating access to information and to computing resources wherever possible” (cited in Himanen, 2001: vii). Headed by people like Tim Berners-Lee, Richard Stallman, and Linus Torvalds, the hacker culture paved the way for Indymedia. Berners-Lee, by insisting on keeping his invention, the World Wide Web, open and transparent as a cultural common,¹¹⁵ Stallman, by working through his Free Software Foundation for free speech and

¹¹² According to Meikle: “The IMC philosophy of open publishing is, then, entirely consistent with its technical foundations in the open source movement. Both essentially argue that anyone should be trusted to be both creative and responsible.” (Meikle, 2002: 108).

¹¹³ See Richard Stallman's Free Software Foundation: www.gnu.org [7 May 2005].

¹¹⁴ The notion computer hacker is used in accordance with Himanen's definition which focuses on creativity. Hackers must not be confused with crackers which crack programming codes in software and illegally accesses ICT-systems.

¹¹⁵ Berners-Lee believes that the Web can improve the world: “The Web is more a social creation than a technical one. I designed it for a social effect – to help people work together – and not as a technological log. The ultimate goal of the Web is to support and improve our weblike existence in the world” (cited in Himanen, 2001: 184). He is still struggling to keep the Web a cultural common through his World Wide Web Consortium (3WC).

against copyright in the computer age,¹¹⁶ and Torvalds and all other contributors in the open source movement by developing software with an open source code. While hacker groups like the Dutch XS4ALL fight for an accessible and user-friendly public digital network, the Electronic Frontier Foundation¹¹⁷ has with more moderate demands continued Stallman's campaign for civil liberties like privacy, freedom of expression, and consumer rights.

In addition, Indymedia have also adopted (or share with) social aspects such as cooperation instead of competition, and unpaid work in a creative meritocratic¹¹⁸ environment based on peer review, and last but not least: passion, from these movements (Himanen, 2001). Indeed, Pekka Himanen has argued that these traits constitute a new work ethic – the hacker ethic (Himanen, 2001), which is challenging the dominant protestant work ethic, as it has been described by Max Weber (Weber, 1968 [1904-05]). Instead of seeing work and money as ends in themselves, both computer hackers and Indymedia activists passionately work to create something which is socially valuable for their communities (and beyond).

The hacker movements' influence is also more direct, as all of Indymedia's servers run on a version of Linux, and their software was developed by hackers like Matthew Arnison in the Australian hacker group CAT¹¹⁹. According to Bart Coogan, many of the techies in Indymedia are experienced hackers:

So there are Indymedia techies, who then do work within the straight Free Software Movement, and there is a fair amount of people who work within Debian, developing distribution of software, distribution of Linux to be used for Indymedia projects, and they are released to be used by everyone else as well. Indymedia, for the most part, most of the servers do not pay for bandwidth. It is almost all donated. It is donated by people who are techies. They want to support it. They think it is cool.

So, in many respects, as the software movements, Indymedia have taken the main traits of the hacker culture and developed themselves into what Castells calls a virtual communitarian culture. Although he includes everything from environmental groups to Nazi groups, he singles out two common cultural features:

¹¹⁶ Stallman has introduced the notion Copyleft "all rights reversed", whereby the programmer allows everybody to use and further develop the software non-commercially for free.

¹¹⁷ www.eff.org [7 May 2005].

¹¹⁸ As a hacker's reputation is based on his (or hers) previous programming, an Indymedia activist is assessed by her (or his) performance in previous projects.

¹¹⁹ Community Activist Technology : www.cat.org.au [7 May 2005]. See chapter 7.9 for Arnison's connection between free software and open publishing.

The first one is the value of horizontal free communication. The practice of virtual communities epitomizes the practice of global free speech, in an era, dominated by media conglomerates and censoring government bureaucracies. The second value [...] is what I would label self-directed networking. That is, the capacity for anyone to find his or her own destination on the Net, and, if not found, to create and post his or her own information, thus inducing a network (Castells, 2001: 54).

Later in his book, Castells seems to include Indymedia as a media branch of what he calls the “Networked Social Movements” – the social movements of the information age. Indymedia are therefore much more than a technical hacker community. Inspired by groups like the Zapatistas in Mexico, they also use the technology to promote their political agenda.

4.2 The Zapatistas’ Netwar

A paper by Sheri Herndron, one of the founders of Indymedia Seattle, both starts and ends with quotes from the famous spokesperson for the Zapatista movement in Mexico, Subcommandante Marcos: “By not having to answer to the monster media monopolies, the independent media have a life’s work, a political project, and a purpose to let the truth be known” (Marcos cited in Herndron, 2003). Her reference to what has become known as the first post modern information guerrilla movement¹²⁰ in the world, fighting with information as its prime weapon in “netwars”,¹²¹ is just one of many made by Indymedia activists. The whole Indymedia project is in other words heavily influenced by this (mostly) indigenous, Catholic Church-supported peasant movement.

The Zapatistas managed to attract the eyes of the world when they revolted against their underprivileged position in Chiapas and the Mexican state’s submission to the neo-liberal forces of economic globalisation, represented by their entry in to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)¹²² in 1994 (Castells, 1997: 72-83). There was a real war with real bullets during the first weeks of 1994 when the Zapatistas seized some villages in Chiapas, but the Zapatistas only fought to attract attention to their cause, and thereby force the Mexican government to negotiate about their demands. When the army showed up in great numbers, the Zapatista guerrilla was ordered by their political fraction (FZLN) to retreat to the jungle. The order came because they could not have won an armed war, but also because they do not believe it is necessary to conquer Mexico City in order to change national policy. With a cunning

120 See (Burbach, 1994, Gray, 1997). “Neo-gramscians” like Petras opposes this social constructive idea. Instead, he focus on the role of peasants in class conflicts in Latin America (Petras, 1997).

121 This term has been used by John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt in their report “The Advent of Netwar” (Arquilla, 1996).

122 This agreement is one of Castells’ examples of the networks of wealth, technology and power that is transforming our world.

information strategy, set up by Subcommandante Marcos and other urban intellectuals in the movement in collaboration with Western NGOs, activists, and hackers, they caught the attention of the media and politically minded people both nationally and internationally (Waterman, 2001: xiv). Castells has assessed that: “Essential in this strategy was the Zapatistas’ use of telecommunication, videos, and of computer mediated communications, both to diffuse their messages from Chiapas to the world [...], and to organize a worldwide network of solidarity groups that literally encircled the repressive intentions of the Mexican government” (Castells, 1997: 80).

Although this is essentially what happened, Castells seems to exaggerate the role of the Zapatistas in this. Because even though a local Internet network, La Neta, was set up in 1993, and did play a part in their information strategy, there were almost no computer literate Zapatista activists in the mid 90s. In fact as many as 75 percent of them could not read or write. This meant that after their leaders had written a decree and sent it to some key supporters, the Zapatistas did not control where most of the information went after that (Slaatta, 2002: 243). Roy Krøvel therefore stresses the importance of e-mail lists like Chiapas-L, and the international network which both supplied the technology and the means to keep Chiapas on the agenda internationally (Krøvel, 2004). It is true that the Zapatistas’ information strategy caught the attention of the mainstream media in Mexico, but Castells forgets the broader democracy movement when he claims that the Zapatistas transformed Mexico by inducing a crisis in the corrupt politics and unjust economy prevailing in the PRI state (Castells, 1997: 72-83).

In terms of the Zapatistas’ identity, adversaries, and goals, they did fight for the rights of Indians within the Mexican constitution, but the defence for ethnic identity was not a dominant element of the movement. Still, this part of the struggle hooked up to a global network based on a common understanding of identity, which uses symbols, values, and legislation to gain cultural and political rights for indigenous people (Krøvel, 2004: 5). However, for the Zapatistas, it was even more important to place themselves in historical continuity with five hundred years of struggle against colonisation, and as opponents of a newer form of oppression: neo-liberalism in general and NAFTA specifically. While Marcos and other urban Marxists initially also added their dream of a socialist revolution, most Zapatistas had the more moderate goal of democratizing Mexico, and to gain some social rights for the poor in Chiapas (Castells, 1997: 72-83).

Since many political activists and hackers in the US were involved in their campaign, either directly by posting Zapatista decrees on e-mail lists and their homepages, or indirectly, by facilitating space on the Web,¹²³ their struggle were well known within the activist – and alternative media communities in USA by the time the planning of the first Indymedia operation started in August 1999. These communities had received impulses from, and exchanged solidarity with many social movements in Latin-America and elsewhere in the third world before. The new aspect the Zapatistas introduced was effective use of information and communication technology as a bridge to the media and the opinion both nationally and internationally. As for the activist journalists in the US, the Zapatistas did not only inspire them to create Indymedia (Kidd, 2002: 1, Kidd, 2003a: 5), according to Bart Coogan, they quite directly asked them to:

There is a very good statement by Subcomandante Marcos to the Free the Media Conference in 96 or 97, where he lays out a plan where he says ‘you guys should create this network of organisations and communication network for global resistance’. And... and that plan did not take off then, but in 99, a couple of years later, it almost... You read that statement and it is what Indymedia is.

Indeed it goes further than that. Today the Zapatistas are connected to the Indymedia network through a node in Chiapas.¹²⁴ As for the guerrilla activity of the future, Ronfeldt in RAND Corp. have assessed that: “The revolutionary forces of the future may consist increasingly of widespread multi-organizational networks that have no particular national identity, claim arise from the civil society, and induce aggressive groups and individuals who are keenly adept at using advanced technology for communications, as well as munitions” (cited in Castells, 1997: 81). Based on Arquilla and Ronfeldt’s reports on netwar, Castells’ assesses that the Zapatistas have realised the worst nightmares of experts of the new global order. As the Zapatistas only gained a limited amount of social and political rights, and as Mexico continued their integration into the global economy through NAFTA and WTO under conservative president Fox, Castells’ assessment seems over optimistic. Their information and network strategies have nevertheless been important sources of inspiration for media activists internationally.

4.3 Network Coordination – The J18 Protests Hits the Streets

Before Indymedia started in late 1999, other groups had also received impulses from the Zapatistas and started their Internet based campaigns. One of the most well known is the global

¹²³ The Institute for Global Communication in San Francisco set up La Neta.

¹²⁴ The IMC Chiapas was initially established to cover the Zapatistas’ media staged journey across the country to Mexico city. The mobile IMC collective sent daily reports from the caravan, produced a one hour TV-report which was uplinked via satellite to the Free Speech network, and streamed on the Web (Halleck, 2002: unnumbered).

day of protest and carnival against capitalism J18,¹²⁵ held in financial districts in cities worldwide on 18 June 1999 when the G8 met in Cologne, Germany. The activists in Indymedia were inspired by how the Net was used to plan J18 generally, and especially the massive *Reclaim the Streets* party in The City of London (Downing, 2001: 4, Meikle, 2002: 95). Bart Coogan explains:¹²⁶

It had been done before. It had been done June the 18th. The June 18th protest, which were all over the world, but was largest in London, using the same software, had the exact same abilities.

- *But was that more explicitly a campaign and you are maybe more like a news outlet, which is not necessarily a coordination body for this campaign.*

There is definitely different... For June 18th you did not have local organisations. [...] None of the technology is new. All the stuff have been around and you could do it since like 1995 if you wanted to. What is different is Indymedia said: 'We have the social movement organisations and we have the media. We are going to create an organisation that merges the two, but is in some ways distinct from the social movements and distinct from traditional media. And that organisation is locally based, with real collectives, and face-to-face organising. Media centres where people can come in and collaborate'.

The ideas Indymedia received from J18 about using the Internet as a coordination tool, can be seen in their extensive use of Internet based communication.¹²⁷ As the Internet is a network itself, it was a communication tool which suited Indymedia's anarchist principles.

4.4 The Ideological and Philosophical Superstructure

Unlike many media projects in the Marxist-Leninist (ML) tradition, Indymedia shall not be a tool of one organisation or a party. They embrace the part of socialist tradition which maintains that the media must be an important part of the movements for change, but since a major ideological strand within Indymedia has always been anarchism, they do not believe in the concept of the elite which tells the masses what to think and do. This coincides with Downing who argues that: "[...] radical media, while they may be partisan, should never become a tool of a party or intelligentsia" (cited in Atton, 2001: 17). Indymedia techie/organiser Evan Henshaw-Plath elaborates:

Despite being founded by- and run on anarchist values we do not consider ourselves a capital A anarchist organisation. More useful than the label are the values. Some of those are participatory democracy, flexibility, decentralisation, personal participation, the right to communicate, horizontal non-hierarchical organizing, and the rejection of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of prejudice (Henshaw-Plath, 2003: 2).

¹²⁵ bak.spc.org/j18/site/english.html [7 May 2005].

¹²⁶ Ballpoints indicate my questions.

¹²⁷ There is a discussion on this in chapter 5.3.1.

The concept of an open and unrestricted space is important for the deliberation Indymedia would like to facilitate for.¹²⁸ According to Henshaw-Plath, Indymedia have taken this concept from the enlightenment era and liberalism. At the same time they use the space they have acquired to criticize liberalist ideology for not being concerned about capitalist ownership control of the media. Day highlight how IMC instead of only demanding change in mainstream media use an anarchist and productive direct action tactic: “IMC aims to combat corporate concentration in media ownership through the creation of alternative sources of information, and in so doing to participate directly in the negation and reconstruction of mass-mediated realities” (Day, 2004: 731). Socialist anarchism and Gandhian non-violence are other ideological and philosophical sources of inspiration that have been suggested (Downing, 2001: 9).¹²⁹ Although there are clear links to social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGO’s), and some places parties, no single group owns or controls Indymedia. Bart Coogan explains his approach to Indymedia (which also include post modern theory):

There is a phrase that is used more in Spanish than any media activist in English. “Nosotros, no somos, nosotros” – “We are not ourselves”.

- *What do you mean by that?*

We are simultaneously Indymedia, and no one is Indymedia. [...] It is sort of a post modern conception of openness; that we are here and we are doing the organising, but we don’t have a monopoly on the ideas, organisation and what goes out there. It is in some ways, depending on the context because you can talk about Indymedia in different places, you have different political histories. But it is a reaction, not in the US, because you don’t have a strong Marxist-Leninist tradition, but in other parts of the world, it is a reaction to the sort of Leninist perspective that the media being the medium by which the party’s ideology is imparted into the masses. And so Indymedia reverses that and says: Indymedia is the medium in by which people who are engaged in social change communicate with themselves. And what Indymedia does is trying give tools and encourage activists to participate in that dialog [...]. Because if we are talking about a dialog in media, you are not talking about the end product.

- *So relating that to post modern theory; it’s the process, and its many small stories instead of...*

There is no great narrative.

- *So that is one of the philosophies or ideologies that lie behind Indymedia?*

Yeah. [...] When I or anyone else speaks about Indymedia, you only speak for yourself. No one represents Indymedia. No one speaks for Indymedia. As much as we have these badges and other stuff: everybody is, but isn’t Indymedia. There are no offices, there are no presidents, there is no board of directors, and there is no central office. There is none of the trappings of power that can move an organisation in one specific direction. The organisation moves in many different directions, and if you want something done you have to inspire people to do it. And if you inspire enough people, you get a portion of the network to move in different directions.

¹²⁸ See chapter 2.2 for a discussion on the Web as a more open and unrestricted media technology than old media. It is also worth mentioning that it is to a far extent the Internet technology which enables “people who are engaged in social change [to] communicate with themselves” (as Bart Coogan mentions in the extract from the interview).

¹²⁹ Chapter 5.3 assesses to what extent this blend of ideologies and philosophies are effectuated on the local- and network level in Indymedia.

4.5 Independent – a Reaction and Collaboration

Since Indymedia started in the US, the alternative press and the Public Access movement (which both emerged in the 60s and 70s), were and are important sources of inspiration. In fact Indymedia partly started out as a coordination tool for them. Still, it is worth quoting a long excerpt from Bart Coogan where he explains Indymedia's ambiguous relation to the former:

In some ways, the fact that it is called Indymedia or independent media is a reaction to the term alternative media, especially the existence of the term alternative media in the American context. In the American context, alternative media is the media that developed in the 60s and the 70s. And that was mostly print. [...] There were a huge number of radical newspapers. And a portion of those radical newspapers became institutionalised into what is called the alternative weekly. And this dial of newspapers has progressive politics, but is corporate run, meaning there are chains of these newspapers. There are multinational corporations. And there are no volunteers. There is only paid staffs. They make most of their money from advertising, and mostly advertising personal and sex ads. The reason alternative is not used is to distinguish ourselves from that. And when you see that distinction it is clear that Indymedia is about participatory media. [...] We have a space to people to participate and create their own media, and people become the media and a blurring of the line between who is an activist and who is a journalist, and who is a participant and who is an observer. [...] If you look back that were a lot of the original ideas that was behind the radical press in the 60s and 70s too. [...] But you had a corporatisation off the alternative press. It was killed for the bottom line. So is it new or not? [...] Indymedia did not come out of anywhere. It came out of the existence of these different collectives that were making media.

Indymedia's use of the word independent is therefore by no means accidental. It also relates to Raymond Williams' distinction between alternative and oppositional practices: "Alternative culture seeks a place to coexist within the existing hegemony, whereas oppositional culture aims to replace it" (cited in Atton, 2001).¹³⁰ Although the content in publications like the alternative weeklies¹³¹ in the US are progressive from Indymedia's point of view, their way of organising (organisational structure, ownership, funding, and paid work) was a big enough reason to form a media outlet that was independent from what IMC calls the institutionalised media. So, unlike the institutionalised media: "In the world of Indymedia news, the relationship between the sources, journalists, and readers is all that matters [...] publishers, advertisers, and corporate interests are left out of the picture" (Hyde, 2001: 3). Indymedia's Evan Henshaw-Plath, says the word makes the claim that they are an independent part of the society or a community of their own, and that

¹³⁰ The alternative journalism theory discussed in chapter 2.4.3 must be regarded as what Williams calls oppositional, and not subjugated alternative. However, there are (as Indymedia stresses) real differences in the organisational structure between alternative and independent media.

¹³¹ In a study of four Californian alternative weeklies, Rodney Benson found that their news coverage is, although generally further to the left than mainstream newspapers, less progressive than Bart Coogan presents them as. US alternative weeklies are almost exclusively founded by advertising, but a 2001 survey shows that no more than two and ten percent of the advertising revenue respectively, comes from personal and sex ads. The 118 members of the Association of Alternative Newspapers today have a combined free circulation of 8 million and annual revenues of about \$ 500 million. 53 percent of them are owned by chains. Corporate ownership to some extent seems to remove weeklies from their activist left wing starting point. (Benson, 2003)

the press controlled by corporations are no longer part of civil society. This includes what he calls “alternative professional journalism with corporate structures” (Henshaw-Plath, 2003: 2).¹³²

Still, as Bart Coogan points out, Indymedia were established in a long tradition in the US of claiming the right to free communication, as stated in the First Amendment of the US Constitution.¹³³ Indymedia are particularly inspired by the Public Access movement which started as a protest against the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). Discontented with representation and the lack of interest to include community groups in public deliberation about the development of the PBS, the movement started their fight for a public stake in cable systems and communication satellites when this technology was introduced in the 60s and 70s. At the same time they fought for public television becoming a “participatory public sphere” (Zimmerman cited in Engelman, 1996: 180). The Public Telecommunications Financing Act (1978) gave some concessions in for these demands (it was all reversed by Reagan).

Contrary to 67 when public television was introduced due to the work of the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation, the public access activists were included in the legislative work, and the Act therefore recognised the principle of public access to satellite technology (Engelman, 1996: 183). Quite similarly to Indymedia “The drive for access stations was part of a large community television movement, which aspired to use TV as a means of communication and empowerment without interference from professional middlemen such as journalists, directors, and producers” (Engelman, 1996: 219). In the US, the Public Access movement was spearheaded by George Stoney and the Alternate Media Center at New York University, and Michael Shamberg and the other video activists of the new left, who contrary to the “old school”, inspired by McLuhan, saw media as a mean to bring people together, and not to enable one class to overthrow another (Engelman, 1996: 219-245). Both groups worked to get access and later to educate personnel, establish channels, and distribute tapes. The movement’s struggle resulted in

¹³² This includes both alternative media like the alternative weeklies and the mainstream media.

¹³³ This started in the 30s with the Broadcast Reform Movement, which demanded that the government should reserve parts of the AM and FM radio bands to civil society groups. Although this movement largely failed, the same principles were fought over when television was introduced, and this led to the creation of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in 1967. Initially, public meant that: “It should bring into the home meetings, now generally intelevised, where major public decisions are hammered out, and occasions where people of the community express their hopes, their protests, their enthusiasms, and their will. It should provide a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard” (The Carnegie Comission on Educational Television cited in Engelman, 1996: 2). Although this, initially non-commercial government funded TV network, has offered more and better public sphere programs than the commercial networks, continuous attacks from the right (especially during Nixon’s and Reagan’s presidencies) and commercial competitors, of both its content and public funding, have reduced it to an under funded actor with few controversial programs, which today “preview its primetime schedule for leading New York advertising agencies in a manner similar to the commercial networks” (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 46).

that in 1972 the “FCC¹³⁴ required all cable systems in the top 100 markets to reserve three non-commercial “access” channels: Educational, governmental and public” (Engelman, 1996: 253). While the two former should be available for at least five years, the latter was required to be set aside indefinitely. In this favourable climate successful public access channels and producers such as Paper Tiger TV¹³⁵ and Deep Dish TV emerged. These are still producing high quality dissident TV, but after the 1984 Cable Communication Policy Act, which rejected the FCC position in 1972 requiring the reservation of such channels on cable systems, access TV has been under relentless assault. By 1990, only 17 percent of cable systems had public access, 13 percent educational access, and 11 percent governmental access (Engelman, 1996: 257). At the same time the access movements initial foundation funding started to dry up. As a result activist journalists had to start looking for alternative communication channels and a better way to cooperate to coordinate their efforts. In 1996 the media centre Counter Media, was set up as a part of the explicitly anarchist protests against the US Democratic party’s national conference in Chicago. For the WTO protests in Seattle, a plan to make the politically broader Indymedia emerged at an alternative media conference.¹³⁶

[...] the main catalyst was the Grassroots Media Alliance conference in Austin in August 1999. That launched a conversation, a mailing list and the networking of many established media makers and organisations and geeks – from Free Speech TV to Paper Tiger and Deep Dish TV to Big Noise Films to Whispered Media and those who brought with them the ideals and practicalities of the open source movement (Herndron, 2003: 1).

So, from the very start, Indymedia has been a cooperative project, or “a collective of collectives” as IMC’ers like to call it. Although the most important task during the WTO meeting was to provide a space for anybody to produce and distribute media content, their success in Seattle showed that Indymedia had some new traits (or went further) compared to most existing alternative – and independent media:

- The innovative use of new (often handheld) digital equipment

¹³⁴ Federal Communications Commission.

¹³⁵ Paper Tiger TV, which also developed Deep Dish TV, is an open-ended collective of volunteer staff members, a structure which Indymedia have copied. Their Gulf Crisis TV Project was a “direct political intervention in an international crisis” where “material was submitted from more than 40 different states in collaboration with the peace movement” This “revealed the potential of public access to create a truly oppositional public sphere on a national and even international level” (Engelman, 1996: 264). Undoubtedly, their strategy has inspired the Indymedia project.

¹³⁶ Media activist and professor emeritus in communication studies DeeDee Halleck argues that the coalition of video activists, micro-radio pirates, hackers, ’zine makers and punk musicians that established Indymedia also were ignited by The Next Five Minuets gatherings in Amsterdam in the 1990s (Halleck, 2002: unnumbered).

- Network-based coordination of a swarm of volunteer activist journalists and techies who provide news stories (particularly during large protests)
- More readers than independent media projects normally have
- Some of the stories they produced influenced mainstream media and policy makers

The Indymedia activists used their experiences from organisations and other alternative and independent media to create a coordinating body, which turned out to be, arguably one of the most successful independent media projects to this date. The next chapter will look closer at their start in Seattle during the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) meeting in November and December 1999, and their consequent development into a global network.

5 FROM SEATTLE TO A WORLD WIDE WEB OF COLLECTIVES

*Seattle was where the protests broke through the infosphere and into the notice of the world.*¹³⁷

5.1 The Global Justice Movement and the WTO

Activists in the global justice movement generally perceive The World Trade Organization (WTO) as a tool the rich countries and transnational corporations use to implement a trading regime which fit their needs. “Shrink or Sink” is a common slogan used by critics such as Dot Keet.¹³⁸ As most parts of the movement, Keet recognises that there is a need for a supranational body to regulate international trade, but that this body should be facilitating fair trade in the interest of all people, not just the rich.¹³⁹ Since it was established in 1995, as a continuation of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), WTO has expanded its mandate on every summit. Before the Seattle summit started, it became apparent that the now bigger and more united global justice movement¹⁴⁰ had allies on the inside of the system – many governments in the South did not want new sectors to be included in the WTO agreements. This alliance stopped the meeting, and for two years the WTO from expanding its mandate.

5.1.1 Swarming as Tactic

In his RAND Corp. report, Paul de Armond singles out two major players amongst the opponents of the WTO. Together they have, in the folklore of the global justice movement, been called the new alliance of “Teamsters and Turtles” (American organised labour and environmentalist campaigning for sea turtles) (De Armond, 2001, Waterman, 2001: viii). De

¹³⁷ (De Armond, 2001: 202). According to Bennett, Internet-coordinated and synchronised demonstrations took place in an additional 82 cities around the world: “Demonstrations were linked by streamed Indymedia reports by activists themselves – reports that tied the activists together in a virtual political space. Mass media reports of the various local demonstrations put them in context of the global event that shut down the WTO meeting in Seattle” (Bennett, 2003: 31).

¹³⁸ Keet is a scholar in trade issues. She works in the Alternative Information and Development Centre in South-Africa. Some of her papers are available at: www.aidc.org.za [7 May 2004].

¹³⁹ George Monbiot has for example suggested that a Fair Trade Organisation should be developed. His idea is that this organisation could grant companies the licence to trade, given that they comply to a set of restrictions which would level out the disparities between the rich and the poor (Monbiot, 2003: 181-248).

¹⁴⁰ Kidd convincingly argues that Seattle was a culmination of two decades of mobilising against neo-liberalism (Kidd, 2003a: 6).

Armond recognises that some labour activist from the AFL-CIO¹⁴¹ did participate in the last wave of protest against the police, but that “AFL-CIO’s strategic target was supporting and legitimizing President Clinton’s actions at the conference through purely symbolic displays as a loyal opposition” (De Armond, 2001: 204). In his opinion the alliance was therefore more folklore than reality. The “turtles” however, organising groups like Rainforest Action Network, Art and Revolution, and the Rockus Society in the Direct Action Network (DAN), had the overall strategic goal of shutting down the meeting. Core activists in DAN had prepared the protest with training and had a direct action strategy de Armond identifies as swarming. Instead of having one bloc of protesters organised with a leadership giving orders to the rank and file activists (as AFL-CIO was organised), DAN activists were split into small cells without leaders who communicated with cell phones and face-to-face. They marched on the conference centre in waves. By using the favourable geography of downtown Seattle, they managed to occupy and to hold strategic road intersections around the conference centre. The police was not prepared for this tactic, and although they used tear gas, rubber bullets, and other forms of physical confrontation, they did not manage to stop the waves of protesters marching on the WTO meeting. De Armond identifies the police’s failure to stop the demonstrators as the major reason why DAN together with representatives from governments in the South (now more confident after receiving so powerful support from the civil society in the North), managed to shut down the meeting.

5.2 Indymedia in Seattle

After the alternative media conference in Austin in August 1999, the founders of Indymedia used most of their effort to get an office in downtown Seattle where activist journalists could write and edit their news stories during the WTO conference. With a budget of US \$ 75 000, partially raised in a support concert with Rage Against the Machine as the headliner, IMC organisers managed to get two separate locations just 6–7 blocks from the conference centre well ahead of the police’ security procedures. This meant that the newsrooms were easily accessible for activist journalists throughout the protests. Inspired by J18, the Internet was energetically used for debating and organising the Indymedia operation.

The aim was initially to make a popular newsroom where activist journalists could work with others with different perspectives on equipment facilitated by the different individuals and

¹⁴¹ American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations.

collectives involved. The idea of creating an open space for independent news production – a cultural common¹⁴² – was (and is) in opposition to the elite’s decision making in the *space of flows* (chapter 2.1). In Haraway’s terms, they created their counter information based on situated knowledge from their activist position (chapter 2.4.1.1). According to Bart Coogan, in addition to the space, Indymedia wanted a satellite uplink for television broadcast for half an hour a day, and to produce a printed paper that could be distributed on the streets, a pirate radio broadcast, and a website.¹⁴³ This was seen upon as very ambitious, but as the WTO meeting got closer, dozens of computers, video and radio editing equipment, servers, cell phones, and an ADSL line appeared in the IMC newsroom. They also managed to persuade local hi tech companies to donate funds and technical resources. Loudeye Technologies (then known as Encoding.Com), one of the world’s largest steaming media¹⁴⁴ companies, provided free server space to the IMC allowing more efficient distribution through the Internet.

With all the equipment on track, Mathew Arnison of the Australian tech collective CAT and the Web designers managed to set up a homepage three days prior to the WTO meeting (Meikle, 2002: 95). A local organiser commented on the technological aspect of the operation: “I mean, it’s Seattle – we’ve got all the techies you’d ever want and all these companies specializing in everything they need to stream these stories all over the world” (cited in Hyde, 2001: 4). So, quite contrary to what the WTO elite had imagined when they chose the “funky hi tech business” city of Seattle to host their meeting, the technology was turned against them. In total there were about 400 activist journalists participating in the first IMC. Some of them reported as IMC’ers, some as Paper Tiger TV or other independent media organisations.¹⁴⁵ They did however all share the same space, and in that sense they became a collective of collectives.

5.2.1 Editorial Strategy

According to Bart Coogan, the initial idea was to use Indymedia.org as a news agency where each article would have to be approved, and for the most part be used by other journalists who could publish the reports in their own publications.

¹⁴² This notion is used in both singular and plural throughout the thesis but refer to the same thing: a virtual or physical space which is owned and used by a community.

¹⁴³ Although it turned out to be quite significant, according to Opera Reinhold, Indymedia did not initially prioritise their open publishing-based homepage.

¹⁴⁴ Streaming is broadband distribution of video or sound. This relationships continued after the WTO-demonstration (Uzelman, 2002: 12).

¹⁴⁵ This includes Free Speech TV, Deep Dish TV, Radio for Peace International, Paper Tiger TV, Free Radio Berkeley, Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting, Media Island International and many others (Uzelman, 2002: 11).

There were originally two names to the website. There was Indymedia.org and there was rewire.org. And the idea is that it is rewiring syndicated news, rewiring how journalists work. And it very quickly became clear that as people were using it, as people were developing stuff, that it was not being used like that. It was being used like a primary news source.

So as it turned out, they concluded that facilitating a space for independent journalists, where they report what they wanted without an editorial hierarchy was a better idea. The only news agency feature which was left was that other media outlets could use their news stories for free. Although highly analogue technologies such as white board, oral communication, and analogue media was important in IMC in Seattle, the massive use of digital technology is important for how Indymedia's reporting turned out in the end: "[...] the ability to stream audio and video brought back to the IMC site from a mass of independent media activists ranging the streets of Seattle, and to edit together this material later into documentaries was indeed a coup. Webcasting this material simultaneously with the events was equally a powerful use of digital technology to convey the reality of the protestors' challenge" (Downing, 2001: 7).

5.2.2 The Reporting

Their cunning strategy, their prime locations, and the 400 activist journalists contributing gave Indymedia some advantages the mainstream media did not have. Opera Reinhold asserts that users trusted them to a further extent than corporate media: "[...] Indymedia, with no publicity or no connection to the organisations, because of the spontaneity, and because of the sense that it was so in tune with what was going on, [...] was able to respond [...] quickly, and gave accurate reports that became much more a place where people went". How did they achieve this?

Instead of staying behind the police line together with mainstream media, Indymedia activist journalists went into the streets together with the demonstrators, and came back to the Indymedia office, often with tears running from their eyes after the police' tear gas attacks, with reports from "the frontline". If any of them were arrested, their share number meant that it would not affect the coverage of the conference substantially. This tactic enabled them to see what the mainstream media overlooked: "[...] the advantage of physical vantage-point, enabled their pictures, sound and written reportage to dispute the mainstream media characterisation of the demonstrators as violent, disruptive, uninformed, and to give neo-liberalism's global opponents considerable heart and energy" (Downing, 2001: 8). However, their strategy went further than offering alternative accounts in their own media channels. As the police brutality

increased in the demonstrations, Indymedia developed a tactic of direct interference with the mainstream media's agenda. In an effort to downplay the police violence in the protests, the major US TV-networks quoted the Seattle police saying that rubber bullets had not been fired. Indymedia activist journalists published reports and pictures about police firing rubber bullets and flash bang grenades. They also went to police press briefings and showed their footage of the illegal police aggression. This forced mainstream media to include it in their reports. This tactic also shows that IMC activist journalists also recognised (they still do) the necessity in mainstream media coverage. A vast majority of the activist journalists in Seattle did reports from the demonstrations in the streets. Indymedia were therefore mostly "in the middle of the action", and as they favoured confrontation over dialog,¹⁴⁶ Downing's notion radical counter-information, seems accurate for the coverage (Downing, 2001). IMC activist journalists have in hindsight recognised that their coverage contained too little background analysis of the WTO.

5.2.3 The Importance of Indymedia in Seattle

De Armond argues that the WTO protests were the first to take full advantage of the alternative media networks on the Internet. He finds that Indymedia and other information outlets run by activist in Seattle were important because: "[...] in a netwar [...] the quality of information (not quantity) determines the final outcome" (De Armond, 2001: 223). Institutionalised media also recognised that the Web-based independent news providers had a major impact. The Christian Science Monitor wrote: "In an end run around traditional media, the Internet became the key player in dispersing information to a world hungry for details about the events in Seattle" (cited in Hyde, 2001: 1). Since there were so many other players (to use de Armond's word), it is hard to assess how important Indymedia were in making Seattle into a turning point for the movement. Castells seems certain that they were important: "The media linkage to worldwide public opinion was enhanced by the Seattle 'Independent Media Centre'" (Castells, 2001: 141). Downing assesses that the Independent Media Centre in Seattle was "the single most significant *enabling* communication centre, perhaps even more so after the event itself. It was its imaginative deployment of digital media technologies combined with its horizontal organisation that in turn captured the imagination of so many activists around the US and other nations. It was its ongoing operation after Seattle that fuelled and energized many further challenges to neo-liberal globalisation" (Downing, 2001: 6). This is a good point as Seattle quickly gained an almost

¹⁴⁶ Confrontation has been favoured over dialog with the system in the consequent IMC coverage of large demonstrations as well.

mythical status in the global justice movement. Still, the high amount of people watching, listening to, and reading the reports from IMC activist journalists during the protests also have to be recognised. Bart Coogan asserts that the quality of their coverage of Seattle was quite good:

The video group did an amazing job by producing ½ hour of protest for the program every day. And they got it up that day. [...] The website was ok. It was amazing at the time, because none of us had been in the experience where we could hear about a protest on the news, and then find all of the first hand accounts and news about it on the website. So it wasn't bad. So it was hard to organise. There were no comments categories. There was a lot of stuff that was missing. The print paper was quite good, that they passed out on the streets. Very nicely laid out, and reasonably well edited. [...] I know people were doing radio. So I think it was pretty good. I think that there have definitely been Indymedia centres which have done better coverage since then, but there has been plenty who has done worse.

The website (indymedia.org) was arguably the biggest success of Indymedia during the WTO demonstrations. According to Opera Reinhold it had about 1.5 million different visitors (not hits) during the WTO-protests.¹⁴⁷ Since Indymedia for security reasons do not keep a log of who visits their homepages, it is not possible to verify the numbers. Although Scott Uzelman (himself active in Indymedia) characterize the number as “IMC folklore” (Uzelman, 2002: 13), it is likely that they had at least one million hits. For a newly established website that was quite a lot in 1999, and it nevertheless gave Indymedia a “flying start”. So although they did not contribute as directly as the demonstrators in DAN did, it seems that Indymedia were important because the activist journalists made it possible to mediate the global justice movements’ illegitimizing of the WTO in almost real time.

5.2.3.1 Indymedia’s Impact on Mainstream Media

In addition to their direct actions towards mainstream media at police press briefings, Indymedia, both as a new phenomenon and their news stories, were quite quickly picked up by mainstream media. According to Uzelman, Reuters and other international news organisations picked up their daily satellite feeds (Uzelman, 2002: 13). Some journalist in mainstream media even praised their reports and their distribution network (Hyde, 2001). Undoubtedly, information from Indymedia was also used without IMC being quoted. In the US, many magazines and newspapers, surprised by the outcome of Seattle and the impact Indymedia had, became interested in Indymedia as a phenomenon. John Tarleton in Nieman Reports for example, reported that Indymedia “lay the infrastructure for a multimedia peoples’ newsroom, without having to go through the corporate

¹⁴⁷ On the Indymedia Frequently Asked Question page, it says nearly 1.5 million hits: docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/FrequentlyAskedQuestionEn#how [7 May 2005].

filter” (cited in Hyde, 2001: 4). Later, when Indymedia set up newsrooms in Washington (World Bank, IMF), Philadelphia, and Los Angeles (Republican and Democratic party conferences) during 2000, several more stories were written about what activist journalism is all about.¹⁴⁸

5.2.3.2 Indymedia’s Impact on WTO, Politicians, and the Police

The alliance of demonstrators and representatives from governments in the South’s successful shut down of the meeting took both the WTO and the elite’s in the North by surprise. For their next summit in 2001, WTO tactically retreated from the open democratic public sphere to the undemocratic middle-eastern oil state Qatar, where demonstrating is effectively illegal. During the meeting, some more concessions were made to developing countries than earlier. In 2003, in Cancun, Mexico, large developing countries formed the Group of 20 (G20), which, empowered by their experiences in Seattle, stopped the meeting. Politicians in the powerful developed countries understood that they could not do whatever they wanted in the WTO without reactions from the global civil society and developing countries. Still, in 2004 the WTO again managed to “set the train back on the tracks”, as more treaties were signed in Geneva. Indymedia’s information strategy was therefore successful in the sense that they contributed to attracting attention to and halting the WTO process.

Indymedia's coverage had a more immediate impact on the Seattle Police Department. Bart Coogan believes their strategy of bringing footage of police firing flash bang grenades and rubber bullets, to press briefings where Police Chief Norm Stamper had earlier refused that this had taken place, eventually led to his downfall. As the story about police lying spread in the mainstream media, resignations from Assistant Chief Ed Joiner, Civilian Director of the Community and Information Services Nancy McPherson, , and Assistant Chief of Investigations Harve Fergusson, followed suit. Officially they had decided to resign before the WTO conference, and Stamper claimed he resigned to “depoliticize” the investigations (De Armond, 2001: 231). Neither the demonstrators, nor Indymedia found this explanation particularly credible.

¹⁴⁸ See for example *Get me Download!* (Carr, 2000).

5.3 The Development of a Worldwide Network

The “flying start” in Seattle sparked the idea amongst the organisers to develop Indymedia into something more than a one off collaboration. Bart Coogan participated in Seattle, and experienced how ambitions were growing there:

Jeff Perlstein, who is one of the core people in founding Indymedia stood up [...] during the night, [...] like the first day of the WTO protest, [...] and there was teargas in the streets, and there were probably 200 people in the media centre [...]. Packed. Everybody was reeking with teargas. But the first day, the WTO had also been shut down, and no one expected it. [...] He stood up and he gave a speech, a very short speech that I remember very well. [...] it was just one line he said: “What we are doing here is making a model that we can replicate around the world”. And no one knew at that time how prophetic that statement would be.

Their idea developed into a permanent network of autonomous local collectives for news production and distribution. Castells has assessed their effort:

Its effective role in the Seattle protest has spawned a global network of temporary (event specific) or permanent ‘independent media centres’, which are the information backbone of the anti-globalization movement. This model of protest was re-enacted months later in Washington, DC, in Bangkok, in Melbourne, in Prague, in the Hague, in Nice, in Quebec, and may wander around the world in the coming years, closely shadowing the periodic landing of global flows of wealth and power in their meeting places (Castells, 2001: 141).

As Castells points out, many of the new IMC collectives were set up to cover the global justice movement pursuing capital’s networks in the *space of flows*. De Armond argues that Indymedia “has multiplied with every protest” in an “attempt to gain some sort of information parity with the corporate-controlled mass media” (De Armond, 2001: 233). As Indymedia has had the growth rate of a fierce transnational company,¹⁴⁹ and today¹⁵⁰ consists of approximately 150 national, regional and city based collectives, and one site about bio technology, De Armond’s assessment seems to be right. Although all collectives are not active, this is such a big achievement that it is worth studying how they have organised to “spawn” such a huge Web. As this chapter addresses many of the elements (mostly the second, fourth, fifth and sixth) in Atton’s typology of alternative and radical media (chapter 2.4.3), it is worthwhile to first assess how Indymedia relate to his typology:

Table 4: Atton’s typology of alternative and radical media applied on Indymedia

1. Independent and anti-mainstream news values result (for the most part) in politically radical news. Personal and passionate accounts rather than “sanitised” news.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ According to Bart Coogan this was not a planned strategy: “No one in the first six months would say ‘we are going to start a new organisation in a different country in the world every eleven days’”.

¹⁵⁰ 7 May 2005. These are the collectives listed on Indymedia.org.

¹⁵¹ (Jones, 2004).

2. In terms of determining the design on Indymedia sites, there is a tension between those who prefer user-friendliness (which dominates), and those who want a more complicated design to avoid the site coming across as corporate.¹⁵²
3. In some cases relatively simple pdf-documents consisting of some articles published on the Web are made available for Indymedia activist and others to print and distribute. Event specific print versions are also common. Some collectives regularly make their own print versions.¹⁵³
4. Indymedia work as a toolkit for distribution of radical/alternative news based on Stallman's notion of copyleft (see chapter 4.1) and the similar creative commons deed.¹⁵⁴ However, both internal and external communication on Indymedia is transparent. The distribution is clandestine in the sense that no users IP-addresses are logged (for security reasons). Analogue IMC print/video/radio has underground/alternative distribution channels.
5. As their slogan, "being the media", suggests, Indymedia wants to make everybody (who want to) into producers of media texts. People can either contribute individually on the open publishing service Newswire, or form/join collectives.
6. Indymedia have no main office and are organised as a network, where local collectives are organised along non-hierarchical principles.¹⁵⁵ Each collective elects one or more representative who participates in global coordination.

5.3.1 Global Coordination

Although decisions regarding the network should be taken by representatives from local collectives, Atton argues Indymedia Seattle and the techies who set up the first site still have a lot of informal power in the network: "The Seattle IMC remains the network's de facto centre, and it is from its collective that the bulk of technical information about uploading comes, as well as proposals for managing the substantial flow of information the network generates" (Atton, 2003: 52). At the same time as he emphasises that Indymedia are a network with no main office, official leaders or board of directors, Bart Coogan in Global Tech recognises that he and some other individuals have more informal power than the average IMC-activist: "Influence comes from having worked with people, knowing people, meeting people face-to-face, history of projects, consistent access to Internet, ability to read and speak English fluently, ability to write, ability to organise your ideas, ability to organise and talk to people". In terms of formal power in the network, he also acknowledges that the Global Tech group was powerful in the first two years when it set up all new IMCs. This was however recognised as a problem by the techies themselves. To change the situation the group had a strike demanding a new formal procedure – a process – that would reduce their power. To prevent the development of a hierarchy, anarchist ideology was yet again applied when the process of making an Indymedia constitution started in

¹⁵² (Coogan, 2004).

¹⁵³ The Independent of New York City IMC is considered as the best of these. However, as this thesis' prime concern is the websites and not the print versions of Indymedia, this point will not be elaborated to any great extent.

¹⁵⁴ creativecommons.org/licenses/by/1.0/ [7 May 2005].

¹⁵⁵ docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/FrequentlyAskedQuestionEn [7 May 2005].

2001. A member of the Los Angeles IMC wrote a draft based on the constitution of CNT, an anarchist trade union which existed in Spain in the 30s. In April 2001 a new IMC Process, including Principles of Unity, membership criteria, and a structure for financing international Indymedia operations, were agreed upon in a meeting in San Francisco.¹⁵⁶ The constitution as a whole was not approved because the delegates did not get the draft in time. This means that Indymedia have a procedure for accepting new collectives, but not for example shutting them down (if necessary).

Atton's assessment therefore seems valid only to certain extent. Still, even though Seattle may not be *the* centre, Seattle, and to some extent the other major US Indymedia collectives¹⁵⁷ seem to have more informal power than non-US Indymedia collectives over processes, editorial work, and decision making affecting the whole network. On the local level however, the editorial collectives are almost completely autonomous. As all local sites must have open publishing, this means that individual contributors to the Newswire have some editorial power as well. So, although Indymedia are not perfectly democratic, they are still much more democratic than institutionalised news organisations.

In addition to the odd face-to-face meeting, global coordination takes place via e-mail (both on lists and among smaller groups), Internet Relay Chat (IRC), and Wikis¹⁵⁸ for planning, discussing, and making decisions.¹⁵⁹ Most of these discussions are also open for anybody to participate. Still, Bart Coogan recognises that virtual communication has its limits:

Sometimes there are global meetings on chat on IRC where people participate. There are a hundred people or something, 150 people. It is quite difficult. But again no real decision making happens there.

Despite their heavy Net presence, Indymedia apply a spatial-oriented approach to democracy (chapter 2.3.4) for making formal decisions regarding the network. Nevertheless, Dorothy Kidd argues that Indymedia as a global network represent a new level of development of

¹⁵⁶ According to Bart Coogan, there were over 100 delegates from mainly the US, but also from Canada, Australia, Latin-America, Europe, and a few other places.

¹⁵⁷ A fair amount of Indymedia's activities are taking place in the US where the network has approximately 50 collectives in different states, regions and cities (as of May 2005). The US-American origin of the Indymedia project has resulted in that English is the dominant language for discussions and processes in the network, and in news stories on the international site Indymedia.org. However, diversity in the use of languages has been recognised as important, and many articles on the main page are featured in several languages. This also goes for international discussion lists.

¹⁵⁸ wiki.org/wiki.cgi?WhatIsWiki [7 May 2005]: Wiki is a piece of server software that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser. Wiki supports hyperlinks and has a simple text syntax for creating new pages and crosslinks between internal pages on the fly.

¹⁵⁹ Discussions range from issues such as finances and expanding the network to technical issues.

communication commons because they have (partly with the help of technology) been able to surmount the limits on the resources that faced her historical examples: English commons approach to land in the 15th century and traditional alternative media (Kidd, 2003b: 60-61). Although some of her enthusiasm is plausible, both international and local coordination in IMC do not always run as smoothly as Kidd argues.

In sum, Indymedia never coordinate their efforts in a way where the whole global network is participating.¹⁶⁰ The most important role of those who contribute to the global level of the network seems to be facilitating for new collectives, coordinate technical issues, finance, Indymedia.org, and taking some initiatives for establishing procedures and providing coverage of special events. Although that is quite a lot, the vast majority of IMC activities are taking place in the local collectives.

5.3.2 Organising a Local Collective

A collective normally consists of volunteers from the local activist community. Some of them have professional journalistic experience, but most are amateurs. An Indymedia collective must be organised in accordance to their non-hierarchical principles. This means that there are no editors or leaders of any kind. Instead, all the collective's decisions, including in issues such as what features they should publish on their homepage, should be based on consensus.¹⁶¹ Still, when it comes down to doing the facilitating, Bart Coogan highlights the role of the organisers:

So you have all these people doing media making, but the media centre just does not appear. The network, the computers, the knowledge of how to upload and maintain, the organising of space, does not just appear. All that stuff – relations with other groups. A tremendous amount of things does not just appear, and that is the role of the organiser. Most Indymedia centres do only have a few organisers. And they provide the infrastructure for work, so that everybody else can do media.

As Coogan, many organisers are also techies. Since skills on how to organise and maintain a technical infrastructure are essential for an Indymedia collective, the fact that this is concentrated in the hands of one or a few individuals in each IMC, often leads to a hierarchy of knowledge

¹⁶⁰ According to Uzelman, “[...] for the most part, local IMCs remain isolated from one another” (Uzelman, 2002: 29).

¹⁶¹ Glenn Foster explains: “In our Indymedia over in the UK we work on the same horizontal lines. Sometimes the meetings can be long and torturous, but we have to reach a consensus that everybody can agree to before we move forward.” According to Scott Uzelman, the approach in Vancouver IMC is to decide by a two-thirds majority vote if they can not reach consensus. His account about the substantial amount of time his collective used to discuss how they should work together democratically is probably representative for the network's collectives (Uzelman, 2002: 48).

(Uzelman, 2002: 56). While some collectives only facilitate for other contributors, others combine the two. Many of the collectives have been formed to cover a specific event, usually a meeting by a powerful organisation promoting neo-liberalism, and the consequent demonstrations. While some of these collectives became inactive after the protests were over, others have used the opportunity to get a viable local collective up and running. According to Kidd, 9/11 2001 marked a change for IMC: “[...] the network has added several new member sites and widened the scope of its coverage to include local, national, and international campaigns concerning anti-corporate globalization” (Kidd, 2003b: 50-51). Although they are part of a global network and in many respects are clones of the first IMC in Seattle, local IMCs in 48 countries preserve and develop their language¹⁶² and culture, and (as Kidd notes) focus on the political issues which are relevant for their area. Their approach closely relates to Castells’ emphasis on identities in the new social movements (chapter 2.1.2). While some of these permanent collectives maintain a steady stream of postings, many IMC sites have most of their traffic during big events. Indymedia Norway for example provided fast and substantial coverage of a World Bank meeting in Oslo in 2002, but is normally not so active.

Most collectives seem to be one group of people who regularly meet to create media texts. Bart Coogan explains that cities with many Indymedia activists apply a network model with media specific (TV, radio etc) sub collectives:

Now, as things have come there are a number of different kinds of Indymedia centres. So some of them are much more networks, some of them are just one solid collective, some are within their organisation many different sub collectives. So like New York is a great example. The New York IMC, a number of the different sub collectives have their own offices and they are separate. And they make sure they send one representative to rely communication with the N.Y IMC. But the bulk of the work and attendance is in the local IMC’s. So that way it is a collective of collectives, or network of networks.

Many of the collectives have an office with computers and journalistic equipment. Some also work to spread the concept and have workshops where people can improve their technical and journalistic skills. If a collective can not get an office for free, they usually rent it.¹⁶³ Some collectives do not have the means to do this, and instead organises online.

Since there is no editor, the individual activist journalist is responsible for that published news stories adhere to the local IMC editorial policy. Indymedia collectives (at least in Norway) are not

¹⁶² Most IMCs mainly use their national/local language.

¹⁶³ In the US, a few collectives have managed to raise sufficient money to buy an office.

members of official organisations dealing with media ethics,¹⁶⁴ and therefore only adhere to their own principles. Those who feel that Indymedia have covered them unfairly can only complain to the editorial collective, or (contrary to mainstream media) post their side of the story on the collective's Newswire. In terms of the Newswire, some collectives claim responsibility for the stories posted there, while most do not. Bendik Ås in Indymedia Norway explains why they have chosen the latter strategy¹⁶⁵:

I do not want to claim responsibility for that. I prefer not to. [...] It is open publishing. We can not check everything. If we find something that should not be there, we remove it, or rather, we hide it.¹⁶⁶

Ås points out that instead of censoring undesirable content as advertising and xenophobic hate messages,¹⁶⁷ many Indymedia collectives hide such posted articles on a separate page which is accessible for those who are interested. As Ås' mix of words (remove and hide) suggests, the policy nevertheless reduces the freedom of speech for those who experience that their articles are "hidden". W. Lance Bennet is among those who have pointed out that while Indymedia are committed to open publishing, this tendency towards "hierarchical editing" do not fully follow their anarchist ideal (Bennett, 2003: 24). While Sanjay Davu justify the practice by arguing that a more liberal approach would have destroyed many other people's right to speak, Scott Uzelman argues that the Newswire should be treated like a common instead of an open access regime.¹⁶⁸ He furthermore suggests that IMC should establish a rating system for news stories. Philadelphia IMC¹⁶⁹ has such a system, but it has not yet spread throughout the network (Uzelman, 2002: 28, 59).

¹⁶⁴ In Norway this would be the editor organisation's (Norsk Redaktørforening) which has an editorial standards charter (Redaktørplakaten). Furthermore, the Norwegian press association (Norsk presseforbund) has a complaint commission (Pressens Faglige Utvalg) which pass its judgements based on an ethical charter (Vær varsom-plakaten).

¹⁶⁵ In Norway, Web editors who are a member of the editors' association are responsible for all the content on their site (Rasmussen, 2002: 130).

¹⁶⁶ Norwegian original text: "Jeg har ikke lyst til å ta ansvar for det. Jeg vil helst slippe. [...] Det er open publishing. Dessuten kan vi ikke gå inn på alt. Ser vi noe som ikke burde være der så fjerner vi det, men vi kan ikke fjerne, så vi skjuler".

¹⁶⁷ Bart Coogan explains that policies for what content should be hidden varies from collective to collective. While the Australian IMC's lets everything through, IMC Germany moderate all messages before they are posted due to laws against anti-Semitic expressions. Furthermore, while activist from three political parties on the left in Ecuador are allowed to use Indymedia, all party political postings are removed from the Brazil IMC site.

¹⁶⁸ Uzelman explains that while an open access regime encourages competition between individuals as they struggle for access to necessarily limited resources, a commons is governed by rules established by a community of users. See Beckerman for a further discussion about moderation vs. free speech (Beckerman, 2003). The discussion about open publishing continues in chapter 6.9.

¹⁶⁹ www.phillyimc.org [7 May 2005].

6 INDYMEDIA'S NEWS JOURNALISTIC CONVENTIONS

This chapter explores Indymedia's news journalistic conventions by discussing to what degree Indymedia relates to the normative theory Journalism of Radical Engagement.¹⁷⁰ As the activists I interviewed¹⁷¹ are all active in collectives throughout the world, the focus will be on contributions to the editorial column in chapter 6.1–6.7. The Newswire is discussed in chapter 6.8 and 6.9. In both chapters 6 and 7 the tenses present and past are used interchangeably and somewhat chaotically. I hope the reader can bear over with this practice.

6.1 In Search of the Truth

As Hemánus and Nerman (chapter 2.4.1.1), Indymedia reject the notion objective journalism in their FAQ¹⁷². Instead, in line with Mark Pedelty (chapter 2.4.1.1), they rather emphasise that they are subjective actors in a counter publicity. Furthermore, they encourage their readers to be equally critical to what they read on Indymedia as in mainstream media.¹⁷³ Indymedia therefore seem to take the Cultural Studies tradition's notion of active critical readers seriously. In line with this tradition, they see readers as being in a bargaining position when they decode a news text, initially coded by the sender (Hall, 1980 (1973)). Furthermore, Indymedia aspire to create “radical, accurate and passionate tellings of truth”.¹⁷⁴ Rhetorically, they try to appeal with both *pathos* (radical, passionate) and *logos* (accurate). The question then remains if it is possible to combine the two. Bendik Ås asserts this is possible by replacing objectivity with intersubjectivity:

No, objectivity is totally outdated. Objectivity is what Chomsky refers to as ‘manufactured consent’ or Foucault's discourse, or Marcuse's ‘the one dimensional society’ or ‘our man’¹⁷⁵, where everything which is said, and what's written in the papers [is true] [...]. The truth is subjective, but in inter-human relations, yes. [...] But radicalism is not about being a communist or anything like that. Radicalism is about making up your own mind, to be critical,

¹⁷⁰ As discussed in chapter 2.4.5, Journalism of Radical Engagement promotes a journalism which is: seeking the truth (chapter 6.1); independence of political and economical actors (6.2); independent of its sources, helping readers get access to primary sources, and using several approaches to the subject covered (6.3); separating facts from values (6.4); relevant, and is examining and revealing the power institutions in society, and by that the issues that are normally not covered (6.5); in dialog with the readers and concerned about the issues they care about (6.6); engaged in conflicts it covers in a way that reveals who are assailants and who are victims, without reducing conflicts to dichotomies between good and evil (6.7); and which is turning the audience into participants by giving a voice to “the Others” (6.8).

¹⁷¹ Appendix 1 contains a comprehensive list of my informants.

¹⁷² docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/FrequentlyAskedQuestionEn [7 May 2005].

¹⁷³ docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/FrequentlyAskedQuestionEn#believe [7 May 2005].

¹⁷⁴ docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/FrequentlyAskedQuestionEn#what [7 May 2005].

¹⁷⁵ Ås most likely refers to “One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society” (Marcuse, 1964).

to try to find out what is behind the symptoms: the causes. [...] For me, being radical is to seek the truth.¹⁷⁶

When finding this radical, Ås goes to the Latin original meaning of the word: to seek the roots – the meaning of something¹⁷⁷ – which is what seeking the truth is all about. At the same time he acknowledges that not all postings on Indymedia are true. Lars Andersen's position is more relative:

What is truth? It is what each individual experiences. [...] All news stories are shaped by the bias of those who write them, and that applies equally to us as it does to VG.¹⁷⁸ But we don't try to hide it. The readers have to be critical, as they have to with all mass media. You might have to use your own sources to double check information. You should not blindly accept anything from any media.¹⁷⁹

Indymedia's angle of incidence is, as the slogan indicates, shaped by the activist journalist's emotions and subjective approach. The British activist journalist Glenn Foster explains:

[...] It is something about not being sanitised, not being edited in chop – you know, so not people become objects. In the UK, when you watch the BBC, it is another starving child, and another starving child, and there is nothing there. There is no substance, it just becomes imagery. For me – that demonstration there – the feeling, in the end I came up to you and I said: 'do you feel that?' And for me that is what it is about. It is about capturing that feeling. Not trying to sanitise it into 20 seconds so that somebody can talk over it. It is more about: Let's feel it. Try and feel that. [...] So yeah passion, it got to be about passion.

Although passionate news stories also can seek the truth, it is not an approach that is highly valued in traditional journalism. More importantly however: Andersen's relative approach to the truth, which seems to be widespread in Indymedia (Couldry, 2003: 47), and the fact that several articles on Indymedia are untrue, entails that they in part do not relate to the journalistic ideal of seeking the truth. Indymedia are at the same time open about this, and some activist journalists wish to improve. Furthermore, Ås' intension of going to the roots, and from where they are situated seek an intersubjective truth, is in accordance with Journalism of Radical Engagement. There seems to be different approaches here both in terms of how they argue it should be ideally and their practical approaches. They therefore only partly seem to be in search of the truth.

¹⁷⁶ Norwegian original text: Nei objektivitet har gått ut av moten. Hva som er objektivt er det Chomsky kaller 'manufactured consent' eller det Foucault kaller diskurs, eller det Marcuse kaller 'the one dimensional society' eller 'our man', hvor alt som blir sagt, og det som står i avisen [er sant] [...] Sannheten er subjektiv, men i mellommenneskelige relasjoner ja. [...] Men radikalitet handler ikke om å være kommunist eller noe sånt noe. Radikalitet handler om å tenke selv, om å være kritisk, om å forsøke å finne ut hva som, ligger bak symptomene: årsakene. [...] Å være radikal for meg er å søke sannheten.

¹⁷⁷ The Latin dictionary folk.uio.no/ebrenna/latinordliste.html#R has this entry for **radicitus**: *by the roots, utterly*.

¹⁷⁸ The tabloid Verdens Gang (VG) is the biggest daily newspaper in Norway.

¹⁷⁹ Norwegian original text: Hva er sant? Det er jo det en selv opplever. [...] Alle nyheter er jo farget av den som skriver dem, og det gjelder i like stor grad oss som VG. Men vi legger ikke skjul på det heller. Som med alt annet massemedia må man bruke sin kritiske sans. Man må kanskje bruke egne kilder og dobbeltsjekke det selv. Man skal ikke ta noe for god fisk fra noen kanter.

6.2 Independence from Political and Economical Actors

As Indymedia were founded – and are still run by activists in the global justice movement, are they, as Castells claims, “the information backbone” (Castells, 2001: 141) of this movement? Are they independent, also from the economical and political dispositions of the movements and organisations within this wider movement?¹⁸⁰ Indymedia emphasise that they are a network of autonomous local collectives. The collectives consist of activists who run the operation on a voluntarily basis, and donations come from many, not one controlling source. According to Bart Coogan, some IMC collectives do not even apply for grants from foundations, because they fear potential strings attached can reduce their independence. If Bourdieu's assessment that “the degree of autonomy of a news medium is [...] measured by the percentage of income that it derivate from advertising and state subsidies [...]” (chapter 2.4.1.1), is correct, Indymedia are quite autonomous.¹⁸¹ Contrary to mainstream media then,¹⁸² if a collective is controlled as a result of economical dependence, this would really be the exception in the network.

As many people in Indymedia are political activists, the political connections are often quite evident. After a procedure was created for how a new collective can be added to the network, it is now a criterion that those taking the initiative are in contact with, or are attached to local social movements and organisations. Techie/organiser Bart Coogan maintains that it is ideal when local IMC collectives are rooted in all the social movements in their area. He uses the Argentinean picketer-movement as an example:

The neighbourhood assemblies are a popular movement of people who have street assemblies. [...] they are mostly more urban people who coordinate protest activity horizontally based on each neighbourhood. They publish their decisions, and their events, and their festives and all their other stuff. Their primary

¹⁸⁰ I will not assess whether Indymedia might be dependent, either economically and/or politically, of actors outside the global justice movement. Although this is not very likely, this would be to a lesser extent to providers of technology and foundations etc. that give grants. The Indymedia network had a big dispute over whether they should accept funding from the Ford Foundation to hold a conference for developing an international democratic structure for Indymedia. While collectives in the US argued that there would be no strings attached to this, collectives in Argentina, Italy and Brazil disagreed. The network ended up not accepting the grant (Boido, 2003, Beckerman, 2003).

¹⁸¹ Uzelman believes that “Independent Media Centre [...] work to create spaces that are autonomous from capital and the state, where processes unfold according to logics dramatically opposed to the instrumentalist logics of accumulation and centralised decision making [...]” (Uzelman, 2002: 74).

¹⁸² See chapter 2.2 and appendix 4.

communication medium is Indymedia. So most of them don't participate in Indymedia, but they use it as a tool – as their own. Not as somebody else's. That is where it is ideal.¹⁸³

Glenn Foster shares this line of thought: “We want people to say it for themselves. In fact, ideally we want people to do it for themselves.”¹⁸⁴ As political activist who write about campaigns they are involved in are accepted, Foster (and large parts of Indymedia) is not interested in maintaining the division between journalist and citizen, which is essential in mainstream journalism. However, Indymedia normally do not want to be attached to political parties. Bart Coogan and Lars Andersen admit there are examples where communist parties in the tradition of Trotsky have taken over local IMC-collectives (“somewhere in Africa” and Belgium). Andersen maintains these are exceptional cases, and he does not like the comparison to the party press in Norway after the Second World War: “Indymedia are critical towards most of those on the left in politics, including ourselves. I hope we are different and something more than what the party press were in their relations to the parties and the government.”¹⁸⁵ Others, such as Chris Anderson in NYC IMC claims “Indymedia goes back to the partisan press of the nineteenth century” (cited in Beckerman, 2003). Lastly, due to their anarchistic network structure with no leaders who give orders (which is difficult to control), collectives as such rarely accepts directives from organisations or political parties. According to Lars Andersen:

[We can] criticise whoever we want to, because we have no ownership or advertisement interests which can stop us. We try to avoid all these filters which a news story has to go through before it is published. I think corporate media is heavily censored. It is not possible to criticise your own employer – those who provide the money.¹⁸⁶

However, individual activist journalists often mix the roles of activist and journalist. In cases where they cover an issue organisations they are members of are campaigning on, their independence are easily compromised. Indymedia therefore seem quite independent of the global justice movement in terms of economy, but only partly autonomous politically. They are therefore only partly in line with the Journalism of Radical Engagement here. Or to use Castells notion – they are the semi-autonomous information backbone of the global justice movement.

¹⁸³ See IMC-activist and academic Pablo Boido's account of Indymedia in Argentina (Boido, 2003).

¹⁸⁴ This idea relates to Traber's idea of grassroots media (see chapter 1).

¹⁸⁵ Norwegian original text: Indymedia er kritisk mot de fleste på venstresiden, også oss selv. Jeg håper vi er mer enn det pressen var ovenfor partiene og styresmaktene.

¹⁸⁶ Norwegian original text: [Vi kan] kritisere hvem som helst, for vi har ingen eier eller annonsørinteresser som kan stoppe oss. Vi prøver å unngå alle disse filtrene som en nyhet må igjennom før en nyhet kommer på trykk. Slik jeg ser det er corporate media sensurmedia til tusen. Man kan selvfølgelig ikke kritisere sin egen arbeidsgiver – dem som betaler dem penger.

6.3 Independence from Sources

As Indymedia to a large degree are an offspring of the global justice movement, most activist journalists express sympathy with the movement in their news stories.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, many also express their antipathy for those who control the globalisation process today (both on and between the lines): Transnational companies, the most powerful state elites, and supranational organisations such as G8, WTO, IMF, World Economic Forum (WEF), and the World Bank, and regional trade agreements such as EU and ALCA/FTAA.¹⁸⁸ In order to assess if, or to what extent, Indymedia are a PR or propaganda tool for the global justice movement against the political and economic establishment, the focus here is on how sources from the two opposing sides are used. According to Lars Andersen, hyperlinks to the websites of representatives of the system are not unusual¹⁸⁹:

We normally put in a direct link to the report. That often works best. I think we use the reports better than the mainstream press. When they write about how the WHO, as the result of the negotiations at a G8 meeting, are going to save the world from HIV and AIDS, we go straight to their website and put up a link to the conditions for how this is suppose to work, and then people can go in, and read, and see, 'hey this is only for those who are subjected to the iron hand of the IMF and the World Bank which are.... finally going to structure the whole thing, and then it turns out that this is not really an improvement.' So I would say that we use them better, because official sources provide a lot of high quality information. [...] We get direct access to these reports where everything is not wrapped up in ...PR language... where its straight forward. [...].

- But if you are doing critical journalism on for example the actions of the Norwegian Parliament, and some accusations are included in the article, is it common practice to call someone in the Government, if it is those you are criticising? That you confront them?

Well, no we have not done much of that. I've done it myself, but I can't remember what news story it was. We still have a long way to go before our journalistic standard is satisfactory.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Indymedia's FAQ: "While Indymedia is not a conscious mouthpiece of any particular point of view, many Indymedia organizers and people who post to the Indymedia newswires are supporters of the 'anti-globalization' (alternative globalization, anti-corporatization) movement."

docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/FrequentlyAskedQuestionEn#anti-global [7 May 2005]

¹⁸⁸ World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund, Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. In the following, all these powerful entities are referred to as system sources.

¹⁸⁹ Ballpoints indicate my questions. WHO is the World Health Organization

¹⁹⁰ Norwegian original text: Ja, som regel linker vi rett til rapporten. Det fungerer som oftest best. Jeg synes kanskje vi bruker dem bedre enn vanlig presse. For når vanlig presse skal skrive om WHO som skal redde verden fra HIV og AIDS som et resultat av forhandlingene på et G8-møte, så går vi inn og linker direkte til betingelsene til hvordan dette skal fungere, og folk kan gå inn og lese og se 'hey, dette er jo kun dem som er under IMF og Verdensbankens pisk som... skal strukturere hele greien, og til slutt viser det seg at dette er jo ingenting.' Så jeg vil si vi bruker dem bedre, for offisielle kilder kommer med masse god info. [...] Vi kommer rett inn til disse rapportene hvor ting ikke er pakket inn i salgsvennlig... tone.. hvor det er rett fram [...].

- Men hvis dere driver veldig kritisk journalistikk ovenfor for eksempel det norske Storting, og har en del konkrete påstander i artikkelen, vil dere da ta og ringe noen i Regjeringen, hvis det er de dere kritiserer. At de blir konfrontert med de konkrete tingene?

Ja, nei det har det vært for dårlig med. Jeg har gjort det selv, men husker ikke helt sammenhengen. Vi har fortsatt et stykke å gå for å heve den journalistiske standarden.

While Ehud Goldman is sceptical when it comes to using many different sources¹⁹¹ because it can confuse the reader, Sanjay Davu argues that quotes from a homepage are better than an interview. Bendik Ås agrees with Andersen and explains that it is often a question of resources. US-American activist journalist Al Longman's approach to a large news story about the long term effects of the Union Carbide-disaster in Bhopal in 1984 is similar to the Norwegian activist journalists' approach. He says the challenge in news stories where the activist journalist is not pressed for time, is to get comments from the system-sources. Lars Andersen argues that a possible counterweight for the limited use of system-sources is that they can write for themselves on the Newswire. Still, he recognises that this rarely happens. Although Indymedia's approach has its limitations, it also has some advantages over mainstream journalism. They are not so dependent on goodwill from system-sources in the government, police etc., and they often provide the user precise hyperlinks to primary sources.

In terms of Indymedia's approach to the global justice movement, Glenn Foster does not confront them with critical questions: "I tend to take a step back, and certainly from my Indymedia collective, that is very much our approach. We are not the opposition, we are not the... you understand?" At the same time, Foster "[...] think[s] the issue around the source controlling things is *the* issue." As Indymedia encourage everybody to contribute, Foster admits that he is not sure where source participation stops and source control starts. When in doubt, he asks other members of his collective for advice. Still, although some activist journalists will be critical of their own movement, Indymedia do not seem to be the best place for quality investigative journalism about the activities of the global justice movement. It is an alternative to most mainstream media, but it becomes at times so uncritical that users need more nuanced approaches.

Indymedia Norway have also promoted their own political campaigns. Bendik Ås argues it was legitimate to start a campaign against privatisation of hydro electric power in Norway during the power crisis in the Winter 2002/2003. He claims it was not enough to just cover it journalistically. Since Ås transforms Indymedia into a political actor in cases like this (IMC become the source), he is not so concerned about the ideal of independence from the source. He argues: "Indymedia is a fundamentally new way of organising our society – a new way to think and act".¹⁹² The Turkish organiser/activist journalist Hussein Patel's approach is based even more

¹⁹¹ In the mainstream news journalism, this is normally considered as a positive feature or even a necessity.

¹⁹² Norwegian original text: Indymedia er en helt ny måte å organisere samfunnet på – en måte å tenke på, en måte å handle på.

so on an ideological analysis of the division between the social classes, and a wish to overthrow the capitalistic system. For Patel, Indymedia are therefore not a politically independent news provider, but a tool the diverse global justice movement can use to achieve its objectives.¹⁹³ Based on this, it seems fair to say that those who use IMC as a tool for their political campaigns do not act as journalists.

Indymedia activist journalists seem to quite often hyperlink to quotes and reports by system-sources on their websites. However, they rarely contact them directly for comments. At the same time as Indymedia, by providing primary information, exploits one of the advantages of the new medium Web, their practice also has its limitations. Often, a hyperlink to the system-source's homepage is not enough to balance accusations from the activist journalist or sources from the global justice movement. A balanced approach to sources demands that the system-source is allowed to comment directly on such accusations when it is possible.¹⁹⁴ As sources within the global justice movement are rarely asked critical questions, the bias are often even more obvious. Furthermore, Ås' and Patel's statements show that, at times, Indymedia are used as a PR/propaganda tool to promote political campaigns. Their approaches might be alternative, but their attachments and lack of diversity of journalistic angles make it impossible to describe them as independent. In sum, Indymedia therefore only to a limited degree follow the journalistic ideal of an independent and diverse approach to sources.

6.4 Separating Facts and Values

According to Uzelman, “there is no distinction between ‘news’ and ‘opinion’”¹⁹⁵ in Indymedia (Uzelman, 2002: 16). Although this is probably the case in most collectives, Bendik Ås at Indymedia Norway, asserts they are careful to make sure this division is maintained in the features contributed by the editorial-collective:

The stories should be neutral there, if your can say neutral. You rather work with hyperlinks. The mode of

¹⁹³ Patel: “[...] I don’t think anybody in Indymedia claims to be unbiased. I think we have a bias. We support the repressed and social movements and movements who try to make the world a better place – without war, against capitalism. I think you can see that. Most people who do Indymedia work are also activists. And it is a venue for them to combat the effects of the corporate media. We see, almost everybody in [the] world sees as perpetuating the lies of the ruling classes of the world basically”. This position relates to Traber’s concept of alternative advocacy media (Atton, 2002: 16).

¹⁹⁴ One of the reasons why this is not possible in many situations is that Indymedia is not recognised as a journalistic actor by many elite/system sources.

¹⁹⁵ In Norwegian Østbye *et al.* calls this merger of news and views “kommentasje” (Østbye *et al.*, 1997).

expression is very important. You don't use harsh words there.¹⁹⁶

As a moderator for Indymedia Norway, Ås says their policy is to hide news postings which are only based on personal views. He explains that if postings of this sort are not hidden, it is because of lack of routines. At the same time, he acknowledges that this policy is not consistent, as they do not always leave it to the reader to connect news and views (chapter 2.4.1.1):

I suppose it does occur. Indymedia are occasionally used as a tool for mobilisation. For example, I wrote the second feature about Hausmania.¹⁹⁷ 'Rally at 2 pm on Saturday. Everybody is welcome'. I guess that's encouraging political activism.

- [...] in traditional journalism it is considered important to maintain a division between comments and news. In opinion pieces journalists can say 'this issue is so important that we think everybody should join a political manifestation', whereas such encouragement is not included in news stories. But this might not be so important for you?

I don't think so. We are not supposed to copy anything. We are supposed to create things. We get involved. We get engaged in the topic we are covering. We take sides and have a view if something is good or bad. We don't pretend to be objective.¹⁹⁸

Lars Andersen's approach is similar. He refers to the reports written by the British journalist Robert Fisk in *The Independent*,¹⁹⁹ which he considers as journalism even though it is influenced by Fisk's opinions. Even though the British press accepts more subjectivity in journalism than the Norwegian press does, Indymedia's approach are further from "neutral" journalism than Fisk's. According to Hussein Patel, Indymedia's activist journalists are always engaged in the issues they report on, and this means they take sides. The extent to which this is evident, varies from news story to news story. Although many activist journalists do not find that mixing the two includes a credibility problem, reports where the activist journalists own opinions dominate clearly break with the ideal of separating facts and values.

¹⁹⁶ Norwegian original text: Den skal være veldig nøytral, hvis du kan si nøytral der. Så kan du heller arbeide med linker. Ordvendingen, det er veldig mye på ord. Så bruker du ikke krasse ord der.

¹⁹⁷ Indymedia Norway are based in the cultural centre Hausmania in Oslo. In the period I interviewed Ås and Andersen, the users of Hausmania campaigned to pressure the local municipalities and the state entrepreneur Statsbygg to not sell the house. The result was that activists and artists were allowed to stay.

¹⁹⁸ Norwegian original text: Det er vel noen ganger det ja. Det hender vel det at vi er et mobiliseringsverktøy. Jeg skrev for eksempel den andre midtkolonnen om Hausmania. At det er 'demonstrasjon klokken to på lørdag. Alle er velkomne'. Det er mer eller mindre en oppfordring det.

- [...] i tradisjonell journalistikk dyrkes ofte skille mellom kommentarplass og redaksjonell plass. På kommentarplass kan man si 'denne saken er så viktig at vi synes folk burde komme seg ut å demonstrere', men i den redaksjonelle dekingen skal man ikke ha den slags type oppfordringer. Det synes kanskje ikke dere er så viktig?

Jeg gjør ikke det. For vi skal ikke kopiere noe som helst. Vi skal lage ting. Vi går inn i tingene. Vi lever oss inn i tingene. Vi tar stilling til ting, om det er vondt eller galt. Vi er ikke noen som leker at det er objektivt.

¹⁹⁹ Translated to Norwegian in Klassekampen.

6.5 Relevant and Examining Journalism

Indymedia activist journalists emphasise their critical approach to powerful political and economic institutions at all levels. According to Lars Andersen, they move beyond political rhetoric and rather analyse the implications of a policy. Andersen claims they often focus on issues and policies which have either not received much attention, or use an alternative approach which reveals misuse of power. Bendik Ås uses the watchdog analogy from fourth estate theory (chapter 2.4.1.2), and compares Indymedia with specialised Watch-groups like Human Rights Watch and GATS Watch. He asserts that they cover many of the same issues. Still, while the “watches” publish reports, Indymedia have more eyewitness accounts from protests. Although Indymedia have established a large number of local collectives which cover local news, it is the cutting edge and substantial coverage of large events such as WTO protests that normally break the infosphere and reach mainstream media.²⁰⁰ Ås and Andersen also focus on Indymedia’s role as muckraker into the Bush administration’s neo-conservative ideological projects.²⁰¹ They explain that this is part of Indymedia’s enlightenment project. While Al Longman highlights their coverage of the 2004 US presidential election candidates’ membership in the Skull ‘n Bones brotherhood, Lars Andersen argues that they have exposed the “Patriot Act” in the US. Both are at any rate linked to political institutions, which liberal theory of the press finds important to critically examine (chapter 2.4.1.2). At the same time, Andersen recognises that Indymedia publish (especially on the Newswire) a substantial amount of material which do not confine to these ideals. Still, with their focus on the global justice movement’s protests against the policies of corporations, national, and supranational organisations and institutions (and police brutality in such protests), Indymedia often (especially for radical and critical readers) take on the role as alternative watchdog. One might say that they often provide alternative angles to important issues, and occasionally cover issues the mainstream media ignores completely.

6.6 In Dialog with the Readers

Ideally, Indymedia want to remove the distinction between journalist and audience/user.²⁰²

Although their homepages are filled with easy open publishing and comment sections, it seems

²⁰⁰ For example, Dan Gillmor is impressed by Indymedia’s coverage of the protest in San Francisco in 2003 against US aggression in Iraq. He particularly emphasises how they revealed several cases of police brutality that major media had missed (Gillmor, 2004: 145).

²⁰¹ This includes Project for a New American Century – www.newamericancentury.org [7 May 2005].

²⁰² Hence Bart Coogan’s postmodern notion that “We are simultaneously Indymedia, and no one is Indymedia” (chapter 4.4.).

more meaningful to divide their users in activist journalists, occasional contributors²⁰³ and readers. According to Lars Andersen, they work as a news network which keeps each other informed about what is happening in the global struggle. Although the ambition is to reach people outside the global justice movement, Indymedia mainly consists of political activists who are reporting to and are discussing with their peers. Their news stories therefore cover most of the issues the activist community cares about. Still, although Indymedia are run by political activists, there are not enough activist journalists to cover all issues substantially. Some of those not contributing with news stories instead give input, comments, and criticism in the available dialog channels in Indymedia such as e-mail lists and wikis. Lars Andersen argues that these people should rather contribute: “There have been several times where we have said: ‘come on god dam it. Don't mourn if you don't contribute. It's open publishing’.”²⁰⁴ While this mode of expression is certainly not what Rosen thought of as “community connectedness” (chapter 2.4.2.1), Indymedia seems genuinely interested in being *the* space for dialog between different groups and individual activists within the movement. Since Indymedia provide information about most of the issues the movement is concerned with, they are relatively close to the ideal.

6.7 Engaged in Conflicts

As their slogan indicates (see chapter 6.1), Indymedia's activist journalists are often emotionally engaged in the issues they report on. Vanda Jones says emotional engagement “is the core of what I am”. Her first report was on the events that followed a demonstration against the G8 in Switzerland during the summer of 2003. She and other activists were “under siege” by police for seven hours:

And I experienced such a roller coaster of emotions, and that was the thing I wanted to talk about when I came back. Out of everything that I had seen, that was what I did a report about. I was not sure whether it was too subjective, because I felt it I was able to write about it. And I did an article, and it went on the Newswire [...].

²⁰³ Many of these do not see themselves as journalists. Mary Smith for example is a political activist who occasionally contributes. In Mumbai she told me: “Yes, I report for Indymedia. But that is sort of... I do that for my people back home: for the Western Mass Global Coalition more than anything else. I put the stuff on Western Mass Indymedia. But I don't have time to sit down and really do a polished piece of journalism. And I don't try to do that. I simply try to give a story of what is happening, and particularly what relates to them and their struggles.”

²⁰⁴ Norwegian original text: Vi har vært ute mangfoldige ganger å ‘kom igjen nå for faen. Ikke klag hvis dere ikke bidrar. Det er åpent for alle’.

In line with Martin Bell's notion of Journalism of Attachment, “which cares as well as knows” (chapter 2.4.2.2), Bendik Ås argues the engagement also includes an empathy which reveals encroachment in major wars and conflicts:

If the cold war was World War III, then World War IV is against the Arabs. And that's why Indymedia writes about what's happening in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq and so forth. But it is not the states in the Arab world which are at war with the West. [...] It is the individuals. So, that's what's called terrorism. It is individuals who have seen their brothers and sisters die in the streets, who can not take it anymore and want to resist. There are few people who are more honest than that. You have to see their actions as reactions. You should at least understand them.²⁰⁵

Although this might be a controversial approach, Hussein Patel agrees and says that his bias as an Indymedia activist journalist is for the underprivileged. Ehud Goldman does not believe this necessarily implies that Indymedia reduce everything to dichotomies between black and white or good and evil, but he says he is always very conscious about what effect he wishes to create with a news story. As the desired effect usually is social change, he often finds it necessary to present a one-sided story without including system-sources. He uses a film he made about animal cruelty as an example. This was screened for the Israeli Parliament, and it resulted in new legislation. As this somewhat instrumental approach seems to be a quite common, Indymedia's activist journalists are engaged, but often uncritically in favour of those they perceive as underprivileged.

6.8 Turning “the Others” Into Participants

As discussed in chapter 5.3.2, Indymedia's primary tool for turning their users into participants is open publishing. According to Al Longman, this give Indymedia a decentralised, people power approach, which is: “Giving people a voice, giving people the means to communicate information, to share information.” Bendik Ås maintains this implies going beyond the mainstream media's focus on system-sources like the WTO and rather: “Reach out to the voiceless and give them a voice.”²⁰⁶ He believes open publishing “promotes diversity and human richness in the journalistic channel”.²⁰⁷ For Ås, it is not enough to only give “voiceless” activists the opportunity to express themselves. Indymedia should be a medium for all sorts of people who have something to say which mainstream media are not concerned with, or are not

²⁰⁵ Norwegian original text: Hvis den kalde krigen var den tredje verdenskrig, så er den fjerde verdenskrig mot araberne. Og derfor går Indymedia og skriver om det som skjer i Palestina, i Afghanistan, i Irak også videre. Altså, det er ikke et land i araberverden som ikke er i krig med Vesten. [...] Det er jo enkeltmennesker. Så det er i det er det er det man i dagens form kaller terrorisme. Det er enkeltmennesker som har sett sine brødre og søstere dø i gaten, som ikke takler dette her og vil gjøre motstand. Jeg synes det er få mer redelige mennesker enn det. Man må se på aksjonene deres som reaksjoner. Man må i alle fall forstå dem. Det er det minste man kan gjøre.

²⁰⁶ Norwegian original text: Ta tak i ‘the voiceless’ og gi dem en stemme.

²⁰⁷ Norwegian original text: [...] får fram mangfold og rikdom i mennesket og i den journalistiske kanalen.

interested in covering. Hussein Patel argues that this approach implies that not only those who consider themselves as journalists report. For Bart Coogan this means that Indymedia should belong to everybody. Since contributing to Indymedia only demands a small amount of computer literacy, and access to a computer and the Internet, their potential is huge. In reality however, although Indymedia's open publishing have resulted in postings by a wide range of people (many of whom do not consider themselves as journalists), they have mostly given a voice to “voiceless” activists. Bendik Ås captures one of the reasons why Indymedia is mainly an activist public sphere: “We want to demand that something is done, and we want to mobilise to make sure it does. We are activists in that respect [...]”²⁰⁸ This is widely different from the mainstream media most people are used to. Although the voices belong to resourceful activists, Indymedia articles (which everyone can comment on) are therefore in theory and often also in practice in accordance with Atton's notion of “heteroglossic texts” (chapter 2.4.3).

6.9 The Website and Open Publishing as an Interactive Strategy

Most IMCs have the same basic structure on their homepages as the network site indymedia.org. The left column contains information about IMC and how to volunteer or donate, editorial policy, contact information, links to all the other Indymedia collectives, international projects, internal discussions, IMC documents, Process, FAQ, mailing lists, and technical information.²⁰⁹ The column in the middle, which is the largest, contains feature stories produced by the editorial collective or selected from the Newswire to highlight. The open publishing Newswire is in the right column.²¹⁰ All text, video, and audio contributions are posted with time/date in reverse chronological order without being put in sections such as “news”, “politics”, and “economy”. Many articles have a substantial amount of both internal and external hyperlinks, and old articles are available in an archive. Still, most articles have a fairly linear approach to text. Since all IMC software is based on open source code,²¹¹ collectives can adjust it to fit their needs.

Since Indymedia considers open publishing as the core of their project, all collectives are obliged to maintain a homepage with open publishing. Graham Meikle seems to have captured

²⁰⁸ Norwegian original text: Vi ønsker å kreve at noe blir gjort, vi ønsker å mobilisere for at noe skal bli gjort. På den måten er vi aktivister [...].

²⁰⁹ Some collectives put this information at the very bottom of the front page.

²¹⁰ Most IMCs allows anybody to post (anonymous if they like) here. This does not apply for the network page indymedia.org however. There, postings on the Newswire are provided by local collectives.

²¹¹ Matthew Arnison explains that most IMC software is based on the idea of copyleft (see chapter 4.1) where a GNU Public Licence prohibits anybody from privatising it. It can be shared and altered as long as it is not used commercially (Meikle, 2002: 106).

Indymedia's rationale for this, as he argues that writing to the Newswire must be perceived as activism – “a direct cultural intervention” (Meikle, 2002: 97). In an open ended piece about open publishing, one of the most influential IMC techies,²¹² Matthew Arnison gives this working definition of open publishing:

Open publishing means that the process of creating news is transparent to the readers. They can contribute a story and see it instantly appear in the pool of stories publicly available. Those stories are filtered as little as possible to help the readers find the stories they want. Readers can see editorial decisions being made by others. They can see how to get involved and help make editorial decisions. If they can think of a better way for the software to help shape editorial decisions, they can copy the software because it is free and change it and start their own site. If they want to redistribute the news, they can, preferably on an open publishing site (Arnison, 2001-2003).

As the title, “Open publishing is the same as free software”, suggests, Arnison argues that news should be produced in the same DIY-mode which software is developed in the open source and free software movements (see chapter 4.1). He uses the metaphor of moving from a “corporate model for computer use, the cubicle, to a much more community space – the newspaper” (Arnison cited in Meikle, 2002: 105). Although Indymedia do not allow readers to see how all editorial decisions are made and how the news production process evolves in their community newspaper quite yet, as Arnison notes, their ideal and most of their praxis is in direct opposition to old media hierarchy between storyteller and the audience (Arnison cited in Couldry, 2003: 41). While Kidd focuses on Indymedia's first person narratives (Kidd, 2003b: 50), Meikle perceives the Newswire as an alternative narrative:

The larger narrative, comprising all the articles, clips, appeals, links and comments may be contradictory and inchoate. But for those involved, it has the potential to address and represent the complexity of their social context, rather than reducing them to a consoling form (Meikle, 2002: 101).

Indymedia's open publishing does not only relate to Jensen's definition of interactive media where users are able to shape the expressional side of media texts (chapter 2.4.4), it also includes aspects of Meikle's notion of unfinished media (chapter 2.4.4). Through their Newswire and comments sections, Indymedia allow users to make news stories into collective and open ended conversations. As IMC are also used instrumentally by traditional left wing parties as a propaganda and mobilisation tool, and used destructively by individual “trolls”, Indymedia are not always about deliberation for the greater good. Nevertheless, at those IMC sites where constructive conversation is put at center stage, Waterman's ideal of communication as an ethical

²¹² The IMC techies are the technical staff (volunteers) of Indymedia. Some only work in a local collective, maintaining their homepage etc., while other (like Matthew Arnison) creates and maintains technical solutions for the whole network. Arnison was responsible for setting up Indymedia's first homepage on Seattle (with open source software).

end to be valued is taken seriously (chapter 2.1.2). Contrary to the majority of the homepages on the Web then, Indymedia are generally sensory rich since they combine allocation, consultation, and conversation (see chapter 2.4.4). A further positive aspect of IMC is that they do not log users IP-addresses or other forms of information (which users both knowingly and unknowingly leave on many other homepages). They therefore do not constitute a centre which registers information about their users.

Arnison argues that “open publishing assumes that the reader can tell a crappy story from a good one. That the reader can find what they're after, and might help other readers looking for the same trail” (Arnison, 2001-2003). He also assumes that users find contributing to an open publishing site as easy as using a hotmail email account. This approach, which expects critical, cooperative, and computer literate users, seems to be somewhat optimistic. Furthermore, as Indymedia are based on voluntary work, Couldry criticises them for excluding those who need several jobs to make ends meet (Couldry, 2003: 47). As the majority of Indymedia’s contributors belong to a small resourceful minority of young white North Americans and Europeans (Kidd, 2003b: 63), this is an important point. However, less resourceful people are rarely more included in mainstream media than in Indymedia. Arnison assumes that only about one percent of the users of an open publishing site contribute. This estimate probably correlates with reality. If the estimate also is correct for Indymedia, they are less dialogical than what they promote themselves as. A new slogan – “we make one percent of our readers become the media” – might be a revolutionary slogan in mainstream media, but it should not be regarded as such in independent media. Having said that: if one percent equals for example 700 users²¹³ who on a daily basis contribute to a site, the result would be a cacophony. Although this is an extreme example,²¹⁴ it is worth remembering that one individual’s view might disappear if too many express themselves.

Indymedia’s open publishing is, due to the limited (sometimes non-existing) editorial control, also IMC’s most controversial aspect (especially in mainstream media²¹⁵). Bart Coogan understands the criticism, but explains that they chose open publishing because they always “had this quite flippant attitude towards legitimacy”. He believes this has given them less credibility amongst NGOs and the political establishment, but that it has been very popular with ordinary users. Still,

²¹³ According to Indymedia Argentina, their all time high was in July 2002 when they received over 2 000 000 hits: argentina.indymedia.org/news/2002/07/39836.php [7 May 2005]. If these are (although they are not) all different users, one percent would be around 700 daily contributors.

²¹⁴ In fact there seems to be a problem in getting enough people to contribute to many Indymedia sites.

²¹⁵ According to Graham Meikle, a typical mainstream journalism response to IMC is that it can not be trusted because there is no central quality control, no peer review, and no editorial selection. He relates this to the fact that they have a stake in old media and in those media’s self appointed role as the fourth estate (Meikle, 2002: 110).

as Bart Coogan explains that they stopped the open publishing on Indymedia.org because they were “totally overrun by all sorts of crap, really right wing crap”, the flippancy has its limits.²¹⁶ Although it breaks with Indymedia’s ideal, this is a special case so far. As noted earlier, it is a requirement for all local collectives to provide a homepage with open publishing. Bart Coogan argues that this is necessary because open publishing is the most powerful element in Indymedia: “It breaks down that line of who is the media, and who is not, who is publishing and who is not”. Their ideal is to remove their users from the passive act of consuming news. This breaks radically with mainstream newspapers which only publish some letters to the editor. As Arnison’s working definition reflects this does not only include posting news but also editing other people’s work. There seems to be only a few experiments with this in Indymedia. But if they were to start using open editing as the norm, Couldry has a point when he questions if there are enough contributors available to conduct this editing (Couldry, 2003: 47).

As a tool for participation, open publishing has made it much easier for people to “become the media”. It is particularly the possibility to comment which has made Indymedia conversational. This is often utilised by users to correct and improve the factual basis of articles. Since comments normally appear instantly, this presumably makes it more inspiring for users to give feedback to the collective and other users. Having said that, the conversation does occasionally turn into destructive flaming. Another feature which might discourage some people from contributing to Indymedia is the political activist approach most articles have. Indymedia’s Newswire have therefore primarily enabled computer literate political activists to “become the media”.

²¹⁶ After this, the Newswire on indymedia.org have been moderated by an international editorial collective.

7. INDYMEDIA AT THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM IN MUMBAI

This chapter is an assessment of some of the results from my brief fieldwork following the international *ad hoc* (event specific) WSF Indymedia India collective²¹⁷ during The World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai,²¹⁸ India, 16–21 January 2004.²¹⁹ All findings are based on my observations and interviews with the Indymedia organisers, techies, and activist journalists,²²⁰ and the news stories they posted on the Indymedia India homepage.

7.1 The WSF Indymedia India Collective

Indymedia established a media centre at both the Intercontinental Youth Camp²²¹ and the main WSF venue for the forum. As it was a fair distance between the two (15 km), and as it seemed to be enough to get an overview of the activities in their main collective, I choose to only observe at the WSF venue. Since it is the focus of my thesis, and it was their most important information channel, I choose to focus on Indymedia India's Web operation.²²² The dominant language on the website is English. The WSF Indymedia India collective wanted to address an international audience and opinion leaders in India who could distribute their articles to a local audience.²²³

Before I went to Mumbai, I had some assumptions of how the WSF Indymedia India collective would be. I assumed the collective would be highly international and organised, according to their principles, without a formal hierarchy, but with a certain system of seniority. I presumed their coverage would be highly positive towards the social movements and its causes, and mostly

²¹⁷ Although most of the activist journalists contributed to Indymedia India's site india.indymedia.org, only a few were based in India.

²¹⁸ The city changed name in 1995, but the English speaking elite still use the name Bombay, hence Indymedia Bombay.

²¹⁹ As I followed the discussion about the preparation of IMC's operation on the forum on the email lists [imc-wsf] and [imc-India], and since I arrived one day in advance I was also able to get some insight in how Indymedia prepare such an operation.

²²⁰ See Appendix 1 for an overview of those Indymedia activists who participated in Mumbai.

²²¹ During the WSF, a youth forum which focuses on the same topics, but from young people's perspective is held at a youth camp near the main WSF venue.

²²² Besides the homepage, Indymedia's activist journalists produced a simple print edition, a photo project, and video. Some of the international activist journalists also did news stories (in different media) from the WSF for their home collectives. According to an e-mail from Bart Coogan, they planned to set up a Web radio stream, possibly in collaboration with the international translator network Babels/Nomad and the French art radio group AP033. Sanjay Davu brought equipment for FM radio broadcasting, and a live Web stream was planned for the opening of the forum. These project were not realised due to lack of coordination and human and technical resources. Instead Indymedia published links to other Independent media (which covered for example the opening).

²²³ The collective were aware that many people in India do not read English. There were some attempts therefore to translate texts to Hindi, but due to lack of time and skills this was not completed.

disregard their opponents' (TNCs, supranational organisations etc.) point of view. As Indymedia are much better organised in Brazil/Latin-America, I expected the collective would be much smaller in Mumbai than it had been in Porto Alegre in 2001–2003. I also presumed that their coverage would not be as important as what they had provided in some major demonstrations against WTO, IMF, the World Bank, and the war in Iraq.

In typical Indymedia spirit, a fair amount of people came by the WSF Indymedia India office for various reasons. Approximately 28 of these contributed, either by organising, doing technical support, or journalistic work. 16 of these dedicated most of their time to Indymedia work, and most of them contributed to the Indymedia India site. WSF Indymedia India had four principal organisers (although others contributed as well): US-American (Uruguay-based) Bart Coogan, Turkish (US-based) Hussein Patel, Mumbai resident Sanjay Davu, and the Indian (US-based) Rajiv Aram. Together with his partner Maria Sanchez (Uruguay), Coogan brought several computers to Indymedia India, and the two of them did most of the technical support during the forum. Aram did mostly organised and coordinated throughout the forum, while Davu and Patel did journalistic work as well. Besides these activists, the collective consisted of activist journalists, some of whom also contributed in promotion, print news distribution, and technical support.

Besides organisers and techies, six of these activist journalists were from The United States of America, two from Great Britain, two were from Israel, one from Germany, one from France, and five from India (one of whom lived in Singapore).²²⁴ Of these 22 people who were fairly dedicated members of the Indymedia collective, there were six women and 16 men. Most of them had higher education, or were university students. Over half of them were in their 20s, the rest were in their 30s and early 40s, two of them were about 50, and the oldest about 60-years-old. Although they emphasised the principle of organising non-hierarcically, the organisers Coogan, Davu, Patel, and Aram had a somewhat senior role within the collective, either by making technical decisions, answering questions from outsiders, facilitating meetings and workshops, or by proposing issues that could be covered. In terms of journalistic experience, the collective ranged from veterans to relatively inexperienced media activists. However, seeing as they all connected successfully to a wider network in order to find information about the WSF and Indymedia's operations, and seeing as they all had the means and time to travel to Mumbai, they can all be considered resourcefull individuals.

²²⁴ Since so many activist journalists, political activists and other delegates dropped by, it was at times difficult to distinguish between those who were in the collective, and those who were not.

7.1.1 The News Production Apparatus

Indymedia India and (the closed) Indymedia Bombay collectives did not have much production equipment. Most of what they needed was brought in by the organisers and by the activist journalists (personal equipment). In addition to computers, people contributed with digital video cameras, still photo cameras, audio recorders (as Mini Disk Recorders), headphones, microphones, and FM radio equipment. They borrowed a photocopier at the venue to produce a print edition and promotion leaflets. On occasions, the activist journalists had to queue to use the computers. The shared broadband line (with the WSF organising committee and Nomad/Babels²²⁵) was not fast but worked reasonably well.

7.1.2 Preparation

Some time before the WSF in Mumbai, the two Indian collectives, IMC India and IMC Bombay, had to disengage their homepages due to a lack of volunteers and problems with hate postings on the Newswire from the Hindu chauvinist right wing.²²⁶ Although he is based in the US, Rajiv Aram is active in the India collective. Before the forum started, he and a handful of active IMC'ers in Indymedia India/Bombay assessed they did not have enough resources to run two sites adequately. They therefore decided that all efforts should be used to make Indymedia India a vibrant site again. With the help of techies Bart Coogan and Maria Sanchez, the new Indymedia India site was launched some time before the WSF. To give the new Indymedia India collective a fresh start, the new site was used by the international collective during the WSF.

Most of the international coordination of the IMC operation took place on the Indymedia email list *imc-wsf*²²⁷ and on IRC (Internet Relay Chat). Here, those who wanted to come to Mumbai to contribute in the collective could get information about the WSF and discuss Indymedia's strategy. In terms of finance, Sanjay Davu described it as a “shoestring operation”. Bart Coogan and some of the other US-American activist had on behalf of WSF Indymedia India sent an application for financial support from the global IMC Finance group. They provided US \$ 750. 1/3 of this was spent on renting the office, while the rest was spent on equipment. Some of the

²²⁵ This is an international network which translated in the major WSF meetings.

²²⁶ These fundamentalist are particularly powerful in Mumbai where they are represented in the local government.

²²⁷ Like all other Indymedia e-mail lists it is open for all to sign on. I signed on the list some time before the forum, and was able to follow the coordination that took place there. This was also how I got in touch with the organisers of the Indymedia operation at the WSF.

US-American activists also brought some money from their home collectives. It is therefore not plausible to suggest that anyone controlled the IMC operation with financial means. In Mumbai the international organisers and activist journalists arrived from a month to a day before the forum started. Although some of them had met to plan the operation before the WSF, they were not particularly well coordinated, and the atmosphere was hectic and chaotic when I arrived one day before the opening of the forum. According to Chris Williams, this was partly due to the fact that Indymedia are not used to cover forums like the WSF. Williams asserted that Indymedia are better at covering large demonstrations.

Since the technical infrastructure had not yet been installed, this was prioritised. Techies Coogan and Sanchez worked on installing the computers and setting them up in a traditional office network with a shared Internet connection. The computers were later used for writing and editing news stories, editing audio, and still photos, and uploading it through a Web form on the website. Throughout the forum Coogan, Sanchez, and occasionally others provided technical support.²²⁸ They also updated the design of the homepage and facilitated the open publishing. Although many of the activist journalists had some technical skills, the collective seemed dependent on the two techies to have an operational homepage, and thus for enabling the contributors “to become the media”.

7.2 The World Social Forum and Indymedia Vs. *The Space of Flows*

The World Social Forum was first held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001.²²⁹ The forum began as the social movements’ counter-conference to the World Economic Forum (WEF). This gathering of the political, economic, and (to some extent) intellectual elites of the world, has been held annually in Davos, Switzerland since 1971.²³⁰ Gathering 60 000 delegates from all around the world, the WSF immediately formed a potent challenger to the neo-liberal “There is no Alternative” (TINA) doctrine and management orientation of the WEF in their claim that “Another World is Possible”. Porto Alegre also hosted the growing forum in 2002 and 2003, but for 2004 it was decided that the forum should move to Asia. The intention was to reduce the dominance by European and Latin-American movements and organisations by including more

²²⁸ This included helping activist journalists to transfer their images, sound, and video to computers, how to upload it, use FTP (File Transfer Protocol) etc.

²²⁹ www.forumsocialmundial.org.br [7 May 2005].

²³⁰ www.weforum.org [7 May 2005]. Until 1987 it was called European Management Forum.

Asian movements and organisations. In Mumbai²³¹ approximately 100 000 delegates participated at the forum.

The way the WSF is organised as a meeting place for the global justice movement does to a far extent reflect Castells definition of the movement (chapter 2.1.2). Although there are a few professional organisers, and a charter,²³² the large international organising committee only decides the overarching topics of the forum. While the local organising committee facilitates a space for dialog, and some of the large meetings,²³³ each organisation decides what kinds of topics should be discussed. Most of the meetings, seminars, and workshops therefore focus on subjects the participating organisations are interested in. While this model offers a wide range of presentations and discussions, in tune with Castells' definition of the global justice movement, it enables the different groups to raise issues, coordinate for,²³⁴ and protest against the elite's globalisation logic in the *space of flows* (see chapter 2.1). However, in order to spread awareness about these issues, media attention is helpful. This is where Indymedia enters the playing field.

7.2.1 Roles

Indymedia have their roots in the global justice movement (although not necessarily the exact same organisations)²³⁵ which organises the World Social Forum. The forum is therefore perceived as an important event, both for news journalistic coverage, for recruiting people to the IMC collectives, and for publishing on the Newswire.²³⁶ Most of the activist journalists in WSF Indymedia India were not involved in organising the forum. Still, while many of the activist journalists only worked for Indymedia during the forum, a few also participated as delegates, organised meetings, and/or helped organise the WSF.²³⁷ Although many of the activist journalists

²³¹ www.wsfindia.org [7 May 2005].

²³² www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=2 [7 May 2005].

²³³ In Porto Alegre in 2005, all events were organised by the participating organisations.

²³⁴ Although the social forums themselves do not decide to have protests or campaigns, many organisations use them to coordinate. The most prominent example so far is the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002, where several organisations sent out a call to hold Europe wide protests against US plans on a war against Iraq on 15 February 2003. The mobilisation was soon world wide, and on the day of protests more than 10 million people world wide hit the streets.

²³⁵ Several of the activist journalists were more enthusiastic about the smaller Peoples Forum hosted by People's Global Action (a global coordination network for grass root social movements) which was held in Mumbai on 20 January 2004. www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/en/ [7 May 2005].

²³⁶ Sanjay Davu in Indymedia India: "I think there was a lot of interest from Indymedia centres from all over the world that we should not miss an important event which is suppose to promote alternative thinking in how the world is shaping up."

²³⁷ The activist journalist Jack Reed was among those with many roles during the forum. In addition to doing some stories for his Canadian IMC collective, he participated in demonstrations, and worked as a volunteer for the

in the WSF Indymedia India collective were critical of how the WSF was organised and of some of the committee's priorities, cooperating with the forum to create a strong counter publicity to the WEF was seen as more important than maintaining a sharp distinction between WSF and IMC activities. The WSF also helped Indymedia. According to Sanjay Davu, the WSF India homepage informed their visitors that Indymedia covered the forum. Indymedia also planned to cooperate with the translator group Babels/Nomad, journalistically, by posting recordings the translators planned to do of the large meetings, and practically by sharing some office space and computer resources. For technical reasons, the meetings were not recorded. Some of the activist journalists also covered the forum for other media collectives.

7.2.2 Sources

The World Social Forum is probably the event in the world with the highest amount of potential sources from social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and left leaning political parties. In addition to organising meetings, seminars, workshops, testimonies, cultural events, rallies, protests, and marches (some of which were clearly staged for the media), many of the groups had stands where journalists could find them. For Indymedia it was just a question of choosing some to cover. There are also some system sources at the forum. In addition to their internal discussions the activist journalists also consulted groups like Babels/Nomad for advice on what issues and events to cover.

7.3 Community Connectedness Indymedia Style

The different organisers and activist journalists in the collective had different strategies for the IMC operation during the WSF. While most of the activist journalists in the collective seemed to focus on covering the forum, and secondly facilitating a meeting place for (also non-IMC) media activists, spreading the word about Indymedia, and rebuilding Indymedia India, Rajiv Aram's intention had been to focus completely on the latter:

[...] I don't think Indymedia is, whether this operation here or anywhere, should be, sort of, news driven.
[...] For me, what was vital, and it did not happen,²³⁸ for various reasons, was that this should become an

organisers of the WSF at the alternative media centre. The Israeli activist journalist Ehud Goldman arrived a month before the forum and offered to help organising, but gave up because of the WSF bureaucracy.

²³⁸ Although there were face-to-face exchange of experience among activist journalist, Aram claimed there was a 'hegemonic consensus' among the rest of the collective to focus on covering the forum.

independent space for media activists either from non-IMC or from IMC groups, to come and meet, to share politics, experience, and that it should be an internationalist space and [...] that we should be providing for needs of local groups. [...] My idea when I came, or before coming, was that this could be a space where people could drop in, and share informally whether technical questions, political questions, and very practical things also. Which you can not necessarily always do though email. Face-to-face sort of exchange. And that we should be very open and non-sectarian, and have other radical media activists [...]. So that we should be able to discuss the problems sometimes different IMC's have had. Whether it was about dealing with the rise of right winged politics, and how the far right groups use our own spaces because of open publishing and so on, or share experience with other groups that are maybe not part of IMC. For example in India, nobody knew about what IMC was about, but there has been a very long tradition of independent media in this country.

Since he did not think it had been made clear before the WSF started, midway through the forum, Rajiv Aram raised the question of the objective of the Indymedia operation. Although they had done a bit of all the above-mentioned tasks, as it turned out, the collective followed Aram's wish to a further extent in the last days of the forum.²³⁹ Aram recognises (although he is not stating it directly) that there is still only a global elite using the Internet creatively, and that, especially in India where many people do not even have access to the Net, training and sharing of information is needed. He also hoped that Indian activist journalists could teach fellow activist journalists more about journalism, as many IMC'ers have limited experience. Furthermore, his strategy, to facilitate an open, non-sectarian internationalist space for face-to-face discussions on politics and experiences, relates to the spatial-oriented discourse model for democracy.

7.3.1 Sharing Skills

As it turned out, Aram was correct in his assumption that there was a need to exchange experiences. When I first entered their centre, it soon became apparent that the IMC activists did not share the same amount of technical and journalistic skills. I was told that other international IMC operations, in cities where there were well organised collectives, had organised up to one week of workshops and other forms of training before the event started.²⁴⁰ They had not managed to facilitate this in Mumbai. While those with much or some technical skills were setting up a computer network, those with limited or no technical skills, like Vanda Jones, were left to watch. Jones explained that she "felt like a left tool":

You know, Indymedia is, I think have advanced a lot the last four years because of the computers, and because of the technical side. It is very very important. However it seems like there are predominantly men that have those skills, although there has been some women here at the World Social Forum helping out

²³⁹ One example of this is that the print group went from producing a double sided A4 short paper edition of the homepage to producing an information leaflet about IMC in general, Indymedia India at the WSF, and how to use the Newswire.

²⁴⁰ This was for example the case in Cancun, Mexico prior to the WTO ministerial meeting in 2003.

with the technical side. And quite often discussions around the technical side are often so far removed from what I can understand. So it is very difficult to play a part in that. I think that myself coming in to Indymedia was intimidated by that, and coming to the WSF. And that is no individuals fault. [...] So yeah, there is definitively a need to move away from that.²⁴¹

Several of the activist journalists also expressed some frustration that there were almost no organised internal sharing of skills, and no system of experienced activist journalists helping those with less experience. However, Glenn Foster was among those in ambiguity about organising this:

The interesting thing [...] is that I'm prepared to pay the price for that chaos, for the fact that nobody tells us what to write, nobody tells us what to do, and we do it ourselves. Ok, so it is chaotic, but it is a double edged sword. The chaos also gives us the freedom. So, I don't know, it is a price I think it is worth paying. Having said that, I think it is something I can do better.

Foster finds Indymedia male and techie dominated. But it is not only in technical matters most (amateur) Indymedia activists find the lack of professional training a limitation. For many, assuming the role of journalist can be quite intimidating. Vanda Jones found that learning how to use the equipment, handling the new environment, choosing what to cover in the chaotic environment at the WSF, and as she said “just not being afraid”, quite hard at first.

Towards the end of the forum, two–three workshops on video and radio hosted by Sanjay Davu were held at the Indymedia centre for Indian activist. These were on a very basic level, and were only meant to give the participants a general insight into independent media production as an inspiration to learn more later. Davu considered them useful for the targeted group. In line with the vision Rajiv Aram had for the centre – as a meetingplace where media activists could share experience – a meeting was held on the 18 th (Sunday) for all Indymedia activists who were in Mumbai during the forum. There, each activist journalist could share information about their home collective and seek advice for solving their problems. This included internal conflicts, problems with racist and sexist postings on the Newswire, how far the freedom of speech should go, starting an IMC in a dictatorship, financial problems, and how an unequal amount of skills and resources within a collective results in unequal distribution of power. Indymedia did therefore manage to establish some sort of open space for discussions between activist journalists.

²⁴¹ This seem to be a general problem in Indymedia: “Within the IMCs there is in fact a dependence on the technical skills of mostly white young males” (Halleck, 2002: unnumbered).

7.3.2 The Independent Media Centre

The WSF Media and Communications group had promised to give Indymedia an easily accessible office. For some reason, this did not happen, and instead they got a small office in the first floor of the WSF organising committee building. They had to share a computer room and meeting rooms with the translators in Babels/Nomad and various other groups and individuals. Although the office was in the middle of the WSF venue, a security guard outside the main entrance probably stopped some of those who wanted to visit Indymedia. To compensate, some IMC-activist made leaflets which they handed out, and put up banners and signs to attract attention to Indymedia and their centre at the WSF. As the venue was full of leaflets and banners, it is unlikely that this drastic increased the amount of people dropping by. The independent media centre therefore only partly functioned as a meeting place for activist journalists.²⁴²

Another strategy used by some of the activist journalists to get more contributors to Indymedia was to inform their sources about how they can use the Newswire.²⁴³ Although it was not surprising that they wanted political activists to use the Newswire, I assumed they would keep to purely journalistic tasks when they were covering an issue – not recruit their sources at the same time. In relation to Jay Rosen's concept of community connectedness in the Civic and Public Journalism traditions, where professional journalists are supposed to be activists on behalf of the citizens,²⁴⁴ Indymedia certainly go further in their attempt to connect with global civil society. At the same time Hussein Patel acknowledged that when dealing with poor Indian people with limited technological (and often literate) skills, this approach has its limits:

But he can also go to the website, which is another problem, because Indymedia mostly being a Web-presence that also put the class issue, because not everybody have access to the Internet, which a lot of IMC's are dealing with, and try to make it more accessible.

Nevertheless, this practise shows that Indymedia are serious about encouraging people to become the media, and by this not only reducing the division between user and contributor, but also the division between contributor and source (as sources are also encouraged to contribute.)

²⁴² The collective was offered some space in the official media centre, but declined since normal delegates were not allowed to enter. A central aspect of the Indymedia philosophy is to facilitate an open space where citizens and activists “can become the media”.

²⁴³ The activist journalists were generally enthusiastic towards their sources in the activist community. In some cases they also socialised after they had interviewed them.

²⁴⁴ See chapter 2.4.2.1.

7.3.3 Expansion in Asia

According to Bart Coogan, the IMC operation during the WSF did not contribute much to rebuilding Indymedia India:

One of the goals here was to organise and to try to help Indymedia India. It's been a difficult thing. There is only so much you can do from the outside. But the hope was that by doing a media centre, it would help the activists that are here to get more attention to their project and expose it. I would say that we only have been marginally successful at that.²⁴⁵

The Indians who used the Indymedia office were either Indymedia contributors or participants in workshops. Some of these were new “recruits” to Indymedia, and it seems some of them have continued to work in the India collective after the WSF. However, as the limited amount of articles posted after the WSF indicates, and as Coogan assessed, Indymedia India did not become a vibrant collective because of the WSF operation. Besides working to get a viable collective in India up and running again, the international activist journalists tried to both recruit new individual contributors (Newswire), and to inspire activists to start new IMC's. According to Bart Coogan, activists from Kashmir, Nepal, and South-Korea were interested in establishing new collectives. Joe Ravi in the WSF Indymedia India collective wanted to establish a collective in Singapore, but was unsure if this was a sustainable project in the repressive regime. However, in January 2005 none of these collectives were listed on Indymedia.org.

Although they favoured journalistic coverage, the approach of the collective combined journalistic and organisational face-to-face attempts to connect with their users and new potential contributors. Despite the chaotic (and almost uncoordinated) nature by which they pursued these strategies, Indymedia managed to recruit some new activist journalists – thereby pursuing their version of community connectedness: to enable people “to become the media”.

7.4 Covering the Forum: Alternative Organisation and Approaches?

However, most of the activist journalist's time was spent covering the forum journalistically. In his theory on alternative journalism, Atton emphasises (amongst other things) horizontal organisation and the focus on giving a voice to the Others – those who are not normally heard

²⁴⁵ The moderate amount of articles posted on Indymedia.india.org after the WSF 2004 ended seems to indicate that there has been some but not much activity in Indymedia India.

(chapter 2.4.3). As these principles are shared by Indymedia, I will in the following explore to what extent they were effectuated in Mumbai.

7.4.1 – No Grand Editorial Policy

The coordination of the coverage took place both informally at the IMC-centre in smaller groups, and more formally at the daily editorial meeting. The editorial meetings were held approximately at noon between two of the forum's meeting sessions, and in the evening when needed. In the editorial meetings, decisions were made on a consensus basis. Instead of voting over what issues to cover, the collective discussed ideas until they reached an agreement. Partly because the homepage had no real limitations when it came to storage space, and partly due to their anarchistic approach to journalism, the general rule was that everybody followed their own interests.²⁴⁶ The result was that it at times was unclear what issue each activist journalist was covering. According to Hussein Patel, this was also the approach when several activist journalists covered the same event, such as the march on the last day of the forum in downtown Mumbai. While Sanjay Davu was happy with the policy that everyone could cover what they wanted to as long as long as it did not have a right-wing angle,²⁴⁷ Glenn Foster was more ambiguous:

There is no grand editorial policy unfortunately, and it seems to me that people will chose to do things they are passionate or interested at, or things that is agreed amongst the collective we should cover. [...] And yeah, you can be critical of that and that is not proportionate, and that we are not allotting the right amount of time to every campaign. Yeah, I would agree with that, and we can't do that. But again, I have said it again and again; I always pull it back to: nobody tells us what to do, and that's the most important thing.

Foster is correct when he is stressing that the WSF and adjoining forums are so large²⁴⁸ that it is impossible to cover all issues. Since all the activist journalists were generally sympatric towards most groups represented in the WSF, the result was that there was only one conflict over what should be covered by the collective. The dispute was over a march organised by the mostly communist and Maoist forum Mumbai Resistance 2004.²⁴⁹ Since no agreement was reached here, Indymedia did not cover this event. Aside from this, there were only minor disagreements about what issues to cover.

²⁴⁶ Some of the activist journalists were however quite conscious of the importance of covering issues which the rest of the collective had not covered.

²⁴⁷ Davu: "Otherwise, what other interest do I have? It is his right to publish."

²⁴⁸ The WSF had over 1200 meetings, seminars, testimonies, workshops, and an extensive cultural programme.

²⁴⁹ This was a counter forum to the WSF: www.mumbairesistance.org.

When activist journalists did not have a topic they really wanted to cover, they were often more susceptible to ideas from the others. Rajiv Aram, and to some extent Sanjay Davu, often had views on what issues the collective should cover. Since the others considered them knowledgeable about which issues that are important in India, the international activist journalists often followed their advice.²⁵⁰ Rajiv Aram explains that working as an informal editor was the best way to influence what would get covered, but at the same time he claims he was not particularly successful in this. However, Aram's suggestions did influence the collective's coverage. Although Sanjay Davu did not make as many suggestions on coverage as Aram, as a local with a professional journalistic background, he acknowledges that he did have an impact on how issues were covered: “But have you noticed... [...]. A lot of them have in fact asked me for background for what they are doing. I’m not writing their story for them, but at least I’m giving them a background.” Aram and Davu did not however, (as far as I observed) control the quality of the articles. This was left to the individual activist journalist. If other members expressed their views, it was after it had been published, and their opinions were normally enthusiastic. Since it requires some technical skills, publishing features on the editorial part of the homepage happened mostly with the assistance of the techies. In the editorial meetings, the collective decided what issued should be featured on the editorial page, but not how. These decisions were made by the techies and those who assisted in uploading stories.

7.4.2 Journalistic Approaches

Throughout the forum, the activist journalists where eager to give voice to “the Others” – in this case particularly indigenous people, abused women, exploited workers, and Dalits.²⁵¹ Glenn Foster believed they would “cover the fringe: the demonstrations, the individual interviews rather than the big set piece meetings”. This also included interviewing Western NGO-activists who have more resources than the groups (from the global South) mentioned above, but still can be included in the group “the Others”, as mainstream media rarely take much interest in the issues they raise.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ When he was asked why he chose to do a story on an atomic nuclear plant in South India, Glenn Foster answered: “That’s a good question. Because Rajiv told me to. But there seems to be, certainly from an Indian perspective, a very, a big leap forward in terms of the way they are looking at their power strategy the next 20 years. So this is a big issue for, it seems for Indians. It is the way Rajiv has talked to me about it.”

²⁵¹ Dalit is the pariah caste of India

²⁵² See chapter appendix 4.

Most of the activist journalists use an open and basic journalistic formula when they covered the social movements and NGOs. Vanda Jones explains:

I just used three basic questions which are really simple. I mean, the more I am doing it the more confident I'm getting, which is basically 'can you tell me who you are? Can you tell me what your organisation is about? What do you want to achieve from the World Social Forum? And have you got a message for the international community?' And those four questions just bring about so much information. So I have just stuck to that.

Rather than asking critical questions, Glenn Foster maintained that the best he could do when interviewing activists was to take a step back and let the activists talk. Indymedia did not only allow political activists to talk freely, it also seems the accuracy of the source's statements was seldom checked in the editing process. Hussein Patel did not find combining a sympathetic and a critical attitude towards the WSF problematic. He wanted to write a news story which was based on what he found problematic about the WSF. This included finding out what part the Indian Communist Party had in organising the WSF.²⁵³ Ehud Goldman saw the role of Indymedia as an alternative to the mainstream media. As a counter publicity, he did not believe Indymedia's role was to be critical towards social movements. During the forum Goldman mostly recorded meetings, some of which were published on the homepage with very little editing. He agreed that it was more precise to call it documentation rather than journalism. Since the recordings were so long, and he did not have time to do much editing himself, Goldman hoped that somebody in the IMC network would edit them into more feasible sound bites.²⁵⁴ He related this to the, for the institutional media, uncommon practice on Indymedia of sharing both work and reports (without copyright). However, as he planned to publish the unedited recordings: when he was asked if this was uncritical reporting turning Indymedia into a platform where the sources had control, he exclaimed angrily:

What you saw today is not a typical way of working. *No no no*. I mean usually it is the opposite. Usually there is something I want to say. My opinion. [...] As a citizen I want to express what I think about the situation. Media is my tool and I'm using it.

This subjective approach differs somewhat from the two Britons' strategy of taking a step back to allow the sources to "say it for themselves." One could argue that Goldman's voice in his own reports could be included in the category "the Other", and when I observed his approach at the

²⁵³ It does not seem like this article have been published. Although they do not have Patel's angle, there are plenty of articles on the website (most of which have been posted by participants in Mumbai Resistance 2004) which are highly critical of the WSF. See chapter 7.5.3.

²⁵⁴ It does not seem like other activist journalists in Indymedia have edited the recording. Hussein Patel though this rarely happen in Indymedia.

WSF, he recorded and uploaded an anti-Bush meeting chaired by representatives from the civil society in South-Korea and Japan, which most certainly can be recognised as “Others”.

Al Longman distinguished between “a simple piece about me walking around describing what I have done that day” and an article he did on the Bophal march demanding compensation for the 1984 accident, which was “strict, you know, journalism”. The latter was given a higher status because he had done interviews and taken pictures of activists and survivors. While he had no problems wearing a “Support the Bhopal victims” T-shirt while doing the interviews, the difference for Longman between the two reports seems to be the inclusion of subjective observations in the former. This distinction did not seem to be relevant for Glenn Foster. After covering an Indigenous people’s march from the Himalayas to Mumbai and the WSF, he explained:

To me it is an incredible emotional experience, and I am sure you can see it in the footage; these people have walked from the Himalayas on their feet banging their drums. I suppose that is more what I am interested in. Not the camera technique, which the corporate media might be more interested in, but more try to capture the feel of what we can get there. [...] It is more about trying to capture something, the mood. And see if we can take someone out, so it gets more real and more vibrant.

For Foster, giving a voice to “the Others” is not enough: the activist journalist should get emotionally involved in their struggle as well. This strategy of focusing on feelings and the atmosphere of the event is a counter strategy of what Foster perceives as the sanitised form of news in institutional media.²⁵⁵ Vanda Jones gives her rationale for this approach, when sharing her thoughts on covering testifying seminars about dowry with extremely powerful stories:

I mean the issues here are horrendous, are absolutely overwhelming. You can not possible, I think, report on these issues without being emotional. But if you aren’t, you should not be reporting on it. Because this is about life and death. This is about peoples land and resources being raped. And that is not a word I use lightly. And also the courage of the people. Well, you know, I feel that I have been playing a demonstrator this past year in comparison to the people who got nothing.

Other activist journalists, like Benny Lang, covered less emotional topics. I observed his approach in a meeting called “The G-20: A Passing Phenomenon or Here to stay?”, about the role a group of 20 large developing countries have in the trade negotiations in the WTO. Here both government officials and civil society representatives were present. Lang's way of giving a voice to “the Other”, was to consciously favour the civil society representatives in his reports.

²⁵⁵ See chapter 6.1.

But when I am listening to say the trade ambassador from Brazil or whatever, I come in with... I guess I take it with a grain of salt. And when it comes to writing the article I will probably... [...] This ambassador will not be presented as unbiased with purely factual statements like they usually are in the mainstream media. [...] Basically, the Indian and the Brazilian gentlemen were both bureaucrats, and the other people from civil society had different positions. [...] But the idea is to, I guess, present what government bureaucrats, what corporate press representatives are saying in a more sceptical manner than what would generally be presented in mainstream news sources.

Relating this to Hemánus' contributions to counter publicity theory (chapter 2.3.3), Lang uses this approach to counter mainstream media's coverage. Furthermore, Lang had a clear opinion on what the governments in the G20 should do. In his view they should listen to, and come to an agreement with civil society in their countries if they had ambitions of becoming an effective counter force to the EU and the US in WTO-negotiations. Otherwise, he said, "[it] won't be much better if the G20 did not exist at all". When I asked him if he would present that view, either directly or indirectly, in his article, he said: "Yeah. I think so. One thing that I think is nice about Indymedia is that usually, in my experience, the stories are pretty up front about their biases." Although he mainly quoted the critical remarks made by the representatives of civil society, some of Lang's own opinions are also included in the article.²⁵⁶ In most meetings and seminars however, there were no representatives of the system present. In reports from these, Sanjay Davu favoured putting in a hyperlink to the system source in the news story.

From the extracts from interviews with Indymedia activist journalists covering the WSF, a few conclusions can be drawn in regards to their approach to "the Other":

- Although some of Indymedia's activist journalists are critical of the WSF, they are never really critical towards the social movement "Other".
- They see their reports as counter-information to the mainstream media's coverage.
- The sources in the social movements are given plenty of time to present their view.
- The sources are to some extent encouraged to break down the barrier between political activist and citizen, and "become the media themselves" in the way which pleases them.
- System-sources are either left out or referred to sceptically.

During the WSF, Indymedia was therefore both alternative (to the mainstream media) in terms of how they organised and in their journalistic approaches.

7.5 Indymedia.india.org as a Public Sphere

²⁵⁶ india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208771.shtml (Published 19 January 2005) [7 May 2005]

This subchapter explores how Indymeia.india.org's coverage²⁵⁷ of the World Social Forum relates to my normative public sphere theory Publicity for Empowerment.²⁵⁸ But first I shall introduce the homepage. Indymedia.india.org has a relatively typical Indymedia design: information and links to the rest on the network is on the left, the editorial collective run features column is in the middle, and the Newswire is in the column on the right. The features column has four sections about the WSF. The first (published 14 January) briefly introduces the WSF, and provides links to the WSF, the translator group Babels, and an introduction video. The second (17 January) is about the opening of the forum, and includes links to other independent media makers, and anti-WSF articles. The third (19 January) are audio reports from events at the forum. The fourth (19 January) includes the largest bulk of coverage of meetings and events, and photos from the forum. The Newswire features all sorts of posts. The user friendly setup makes it relatively easy to navigate on the homepage, but the links do not always go to where the front page promises (some “articles” turns out to be pictures etc.). The mixture of reports produced by the collective and others on the feature column also makes orientating through the site more difficult. The Newswire has a standard setup where the last post is featured at the top with an icon indicating whether there are photos, text etc., title, and the time and date it was posted.

7.5.1 Open for Users and Producers

One's position in relation to the digital divide does to a far extent determine whether or not one will have access to India.indymedia.org. Although internet café's and community computer centres are relatively widespread in India, many people do not have enough money and/or skills to use this medium.²⁵⁹ However, once online and with some computer literacy, the nature of the Web allows instant worldwide distribution (see chapter 2.2). Like all other local Indymedia homepages, the India site has a Newswire, and everything posted can be commented on.

7.5.2 Variation in Themes

²⁵⁷ Due to the extensive amount of published material on the Newswire, I will primarily analyse the posts from the WSF on the editorial collective controlled features column.

²⁵⁸ It is: (i) open for as many as possible (both users and producers); (ii) varied thematically; (iii) constructive and of high quality (with cooperative dialog); (iv) independent of the market and the state; and (v) instructive for larger public spheres and policy decisions. As independence from market and the state is discussed in chapter 6.2 and elsewhere in the thesis, this will not be discussed here. The accessibility for delegates at the WSF to the Indymedia office is discussed in chapter 7.3.2.

²⁵⁹ See for example (Economist, 2005).

To be interesting as a news medium for different people implies covering a wide range of issues. On the features (middle) part of the homepage, the WSF Indymedia India collective have reports of the following issues²⁶⁰: how the WSF is organised, the opening of the forum, a report from the first day, political art (including a video), a boycott campaign against US corporations, work to unite the WSF and Mumbai Resistance 2004, a review of a poetry book, the dowry system, the Dalits' struggle, South-Korean migrant workers, a plan to link some of the major rivers in India, a boycott of Coca-Cola, the G20, child labour, indigenous peoples struggle, and homelessness.²⁶¹ It also contains audio coverage of these issues: a defeating Bush 2004 meeting, US bases, songs from the WSF, testimonials about the dowry system, songs of Dalit resistance (2), seminar on indigenous people and their land rights. The homepage furthermore includes a wide range of photos of (amongst other things): the slum in Mumbai, stands and exhibits, posters of the WSF, anti-war posters of the WSF, women's issues posters of the WSF, cultural resistance, Mumbai Resistance 2004, art and resistance, queer and sex workers march, opening day, people of the World Social Forum, and Amnesty International.²⁶²

With over 1200 events at the forum, Indymedia naturally only managed to cover a tiny fraction of what was going on. It is difficult to assess how representative their coverage was. Bart Coogan said: "I think that ideally, we'd be generating coverage of the WSF which would analyse social movements, which would cover social movements, talk about alternatives, explain problems [...]". In this respect he assessed their coverage as good because it showed that the global justice movement have alternatives, and is not just protesting against globalisation: "Here at the WSF all the coverage is about the issues. It is less exiting than police brutality, but it is in some ways more important. So that is really useful." Bart Coogan assessed that the biggest hole in their coverage was the Peoples Forum, an alternative to both the WSF and to Mumbai Resistance. Although they published articles on it, in Coogan's view they should have done more on the Coca-Cola boycott and water issues. Although Indymedia's coverage of the WSF was quite diverse, it could have included even more issues and a much wider range of sources and angles. WSF Indymedia

²⁶⁰ All articles were published in January and February 2004. Furthermore, there is not enough space to make any thorough evaluation of the photos, and the video, and audio clips they published.

²⁶¹ Some of these stories might have been written by activist journalists outside the WSF Indymedia India collective. The same applies to the photos.

²⁶² The collective also published external hyperlinks and material produced by others: cartoons exposing the WSF, links to the WSF, video and radio coverage of the opening ceremony, links to articles on the WSF at ciranda.net, anti-WSF articles (5), links to Mumbai Resistance 2004, and a protest they were having, and a link to pictures of a candle making workshop. In this sense Indymedia also functioned as a distribution channel for material made by other activist journalists.

India's homepage therefore functioned as a relatively open and accessible public sphere for political activists, and to some extent for other users.

7.5.3 Constructive Quality Reporting?

An indicator of the quality of the coverage is whether it serves the needs of the readers or not. Bart Coogan said: "I think they are trying to find out what is happening, what are the interesting issues, what the forum was like, what has been discussed. That will be more or less I think answers that." Although the information might cover the needs of the activist community, he admitted that their coverage of the WSF follows a general Indymedia pattern: "[...] Indymedia produces an inconsistency product, but a product that is occasionally brilliant and based on what people are inspired to cover." As mentioned earlier, it is inconsistent because there is no overall plan or system for quality, and fact evaluation.

In terms of how constructive the dialog was, the homepage features two sorts of discussions. The first is a general discussion about what the WSF and Mumbai Resistance (MR) should be. According to Bart Coogan, "The Mumbai Resistance folks made sure that they published all their articles and announcements, including critiques, all on the Indymedia site. We did not go out and search out the Mumbai Resistance' critique, they came and posted them." For some reason, many of these strongly sectarian posts are published in the features column (instead of only on the Newswire). They include greetings to MR full of conspiracy theories about how the WSF is infiltrated by imperialists.²⁶³ Some of the organisers also call for activists to unite in a MR rally,²⁶⁴ or the WSF and MR to unite as such. However, the latter is mostly a critique of Western NGO's involved in the WSF.²⁶⁵ Opponents of both the WSF and MR refer to the former as "a puppet of imperialism",²⁶⁶ and instead contribute with caricatures "exposing" the forum and information about their own meetings.²⁶⁷ A few more nuanced posts address tactics but focus more on

²⁶³ "Jose Maria Sison's Message to the Mumbai Resistance 2004" by Jose Maria Sison (Published 15 January 2004) india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208428.shtml [21 March 2005].

²⁶⁴ Join the United Struggle against Imperialism! by Tape Transcript (Published 19 January 2004) india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208820.shtml [7 May 2005].

²⁶⁵ WSF and MR: Let us unite! By Vidyadhar Gadgil (Published 19 January 2004) india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208764.shtml [21 March 2005].

²⁶⁶ "Knowing the Enemy - A Criticism on MR-2004" by PALA, NDLF - Tamil Nadu (published 17 January 2004) india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208489.shtml [21 March 2005].

²⁶⁷ "We are People Against Imperialism" by People's Art and Literary Association (Published 18 January 2004) india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208518.shtml [21 March 2005].

internal discussions between communists in India than the WSF.²⁶⁸ In comments to these posts, those who defend the WSF criticise the opponents for not understanding that the WSF is an open forum, not a party which takes political decisions, and that it is a waste of time and energy to discuss these issues. Generally the discussions follow an old sectarian pattern in a new medium, and are therefore not particularly constructive.

The other discussion on the website is really several discussions about the content in different articles posted by the activist journalists in the collective. Most news stories do not have any comments, and when they do, these do not always comment the issue covered in the article. In articles which include comments, some have added information and a short opinion.²⁶⁹ Others again try to nuance a difficult issue,²⁷⁰ and others only briefly address the topic of the article before they promote their own agendas.²⁷¹ In sum, the discussions relating to the articles about different issues which were raised at the WSF are more constructive than the discussion about the forum itself. In general, I presume users and contributors to these discussions only to a limited degree acquire new knowledge and feel a stronger fellowship after leaving the homepage.

7.5.4 – Preaching to the Converted

As Indymedia do not log visitors, it is not possible to find out exactly how many readers the coverage of the WSF had. Sanjay Davu suggested that Indymedia India's operation at the WSF probably did not have an impact on larger public spheres and policy discussions.²⁷² A Google-search one year after the WSF in Mumbai supports this, as the reports on Indymedia only have been linked to by some bloggers, NGO's, alternative media outlets/news agencies. As no mainstream news media refers or links to their coverage, it is unlikely that Indymedia's coverage from the WSF has affected any (party political) policy discussions either. Relating this to Bennett and Entman's distinction between public and policy sphere (chapter 2.3), WSF Indymedia India fits the description of the former.

²⁶⁸ "a reponse to yechury's article on WSF" by antiimperialist (published 15 January 2004) india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208430.shtml [21 March 2005].

²⁶⁹ Linking rivers ! by Deepa (Published 18 January 2004) india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208600.shtml [21 March 2005].

²⁷⁰ Why we do not believe SOWRY is rampant in India? By santha n (published 18 February 2005). india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208541.shtml [21 March 2005].

²⁷¹ "Long Way Starts With The First Step" by Laot'se (Published 25 January 2004) india.indymedia.org/en/2004/01/208771.shtml [21 March 2005].

²⁷² Davu: "Early days I would say. Very early days to think about anything like that." The fact that the news stories from the WSF to only a limited degree addressed elected political entities (which is often the case on IMC), probably also contributed to the limited impact on policy spheres.

Rather than being picked up and accepted by mainstream media and policy makers, WSF Indymedia India shows that Indymedia fits Hemánus' description of a counter publicity.²⁷³ This can be related to an interesting remark made by Glenn Foster. He explained that one of the reasons why they stopped making their simple printed broadsheet (which was handed out at the WSF venue), was that they felt they were: "preaching to the converted." Although their homepage reached a much larger crowd of users, his statement might still describe the situation, as most of these users are probably activists in the global justice movement.²⁷⁴ In this case, the new media news channel india.indymedia.org probably did not reach a large number of people.

Compared to many of their other operations during big events, the WSF was, as Coogan explained, not highly important coverage. It did however focus on alternatives rather than police violence. Although 25–30 activist journalists is quite a few, the chaotic atmosphere, the limited coordination, and sharing of skills almost certainly led to fewer reports with lower quality than what could have been the case if they had organised differently. Still, the freedom many of the activist journalists expressed they felt from not being told what to cover should not be underestimated. Overall, the findings from my field study at the WSF Indymedia India operation at the WSF coincides with my presumptions in all respects. The collective was international, and had in practice a semi-horizontal structure with limited coordination both before and during the forum. The collective was relatively small compared to the 2–400 activist journalists who normally constitute the IMC *ad hoc* collectives during in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The coverage was with a few exceptions positive towards the social movements and the WSF, and generally critical towards the system. In sum, the collective produced and facilitated the production of counter information, which were never close to being balanced in terms of angles and sources.

²⁷³ See discussion in chapter 2.3.3.

²⁷⁴ The comments under the articles seems to indicate that many of the readers belongs to the activist community.

8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

8.1 Summary of the Findings

Indymedia began in 1999 as a reaction to ownership concentration in mainstream media, and its increasing focus on those issues their owners favour. Indymedia seem to be particularly active in developed countries without state owned public service television and radio (USA), or where these have been marginalised and commercialised (Argentina), and is used instrumentally by the government (Italy). The network is also a reaction to developments in the alternative weeklies in the US, which, as Benson has shown, are now hierarchically organised and owned by corporations which are increasingly more willing to sacrifice political ideals for profit or survival. But as Castells has noted, Indymedia go beyond the media sphere: they are a network for social change in society in general. The strategy for Seattle was to coordinate the efforts of several independent media outlets to give their total WTO-critical coverage a bigger impact. As this strategy has been pursued in the collectives established after this, it is fair to say that Indymedia use the technical tools the globalisation process has provided (Internet, cheap digital production equipment) against the arguably negative aspects of the very same process (marginalisation of locally based people), and the transnational organisations and corporations which initiate this.

Throughout the development of the network, Indymedia have recruited most of their activists from the global justice movement, and can therefore (at least partly) be considered as an offspring of it. Many of the activist journalists are first and foremost activists, and secondly (or not at all) journalists. These activists' use of Indymedia as their tool for social change can partly be understood as an instrumental approach. This approach is particularly widespread in the picketers-movement in Argentina, which evolved when neo-liberal policies, enforced by the IMF, the World Bank, and local elites ruined the economy.

Indymedia have adopted this and many other practices and ideas from a set of ideologies, philosophies, social movements, and media projects. The open source and free software movements have both helped them developing software and spread their values in the IMC network. These include openness, free speech, the Web as a cultural common where "all rights are reversed" and privacy is respected, user friendliness, cooperative meritocracy, and creative passion. The Zapatistas greatly inspired Indymedia by showing that it was possible for activists to

create a network which could both influence national and international media, as well as public opinion, through publicising on the Web and e-mail lists. The global day of protests and carnival against capitalism – J18 (1999) – inspired Indymedia both in terms of how the Internet can be used as a tool for coordination and discussions, and how open source software can be used in an explicit socially progressive way. Socialist ideology has influenced Indymedia to perceive media as a tool for social change. They are however sceptical towards the more authoritarian Marxist-Leninist tradition, and have instead adopted anarchistic values such as horizontal non-hierarchical organising and decentralisation. Liberal ideology and post modern philosophy have influenced Indymedia to focus on facilitating an unrestricted space for deliberation between people who are engaged in social change. As such, the media projects in the Public Access movement and the anarchist Counter Media during the US-American Democratic party conference in 1996 gave Indymedia ideas about how to organise as an independent media outlet.

This includes keeping their collectives and offices open for everyone who is interested in participating in covering the global justice movement's protests and meetings journalistically. There are also practical reasons for this practice in Indymedia: these meeting-places are full of enthusiastic activist who can be recruited. It is also a part of their strategy for breaking down the division between journalist and citizen. So, even though Indymedia are a shoestring operation, they will normally prioritise getting an accessible office during these protests and meetings. Still, how well these operations are planned varies greatly. Some organisers manage to facilitate an accessible and well equipped office, and workshops for sharing skills and experiences among the activist journalists. Others only manage to provide an office, infrastructure, some equipment, and a chaotic work environment which mainly informally works as an open space where activist journalists can meet. The latter is often problematic for less experienced activist journalists.

Some of the reason for this might be that event specific Indymedia collectives have (as permanent collectives) a non-hierarchical structure where there are normally not activists appointed to teaching inexperienced activists. Furthermore, although the collective formally make editorial decisions based on consensus, each activist journalist normally follows his or her own interests. The collectives often have one or more informal editor(s) who are more influential than others in this process. Indymedia's coverage from large protests often consists of eye witness accounts from the "frontline". Their style is subjective, and the focus is often on police violence. Indymedia recognise that they have too little background information about the organisations/corporations the global justice movement is protesting against. Although other

independent media makers often provide this (and the Indymedia homepage might have a link to it), it has been perceived – especially in the start – as one of their weaknesses. Since the first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001, Indymedia have therefore prioritised to cover these forums where the global justice movement is pro-active – discussing how one can achieve a better world. Reporting from the meetings that take place in the global, regional, national, and local social forums is an opportunity for activist journalists to give the users more background information. This is often done by giving a voice to the social movement activist “Other”. Ideally, Indymedia want these to contribute themselves, but since this is not always possible, many activist journalists formulate open questions which allow the activists to “say it for themselves”. System-sources are either excluded, referred to sceptically, or a hyperlink is provided to for example a report on their homepage.

As a global network of local collectives, until 9/11 2001, Indymedia mostly grew as a consequence of event specific collectives which turned permanent after the supranational organisation and the protesters left town. After this, the network seems to have focused more on local and national issues as several local collectives have been established without having a big event as a pretext. Still, as most collectives are much more active during large events than what they otherwise are, Indymedia are still fairly event-specific. Furthermore, their strong commitment to horizontal organisation structure and consensus democracy means that local collectives are in theory very democratic. However, informal power makes the power balance uneven in the collectives. Often, techies and organisers have more informal power than the activist journalists. Although some democratic procedures have been implemented at network level, informal power seems much more unevenly distributed here than in the local collectives. In theory, all local collectives can elect representatives who can vote over issues regarding the whole network. In practice however, many collectives function with little or no contact with the rest of the network. The founders and the Global Tech group still have quite a lot of informal power, and for formal decision making activists normally have to meet face-to-face in official meetings. As this rarely happens, Indymedia have had problems with making decisions in controversial issues in cyberspace. On the local level, spam, sexist, and xenophobic posts on the Newswire have made editorial moderating vs. free speech a controversial issue. As with other questions, since the collectives are almost completely autonomous, the practice varies from collective to collective.

The varying practices are also reflected in Indymedia's news journalistic convention – or rather: the range of different journalistic conventions within Indymedia. However, some generalisations can be made. Firstly, Indymedia's extremely limited editorial filtering results in stories with all sorts of approaches to the journalistic ideal of seeking the truth. While they seem to be independent of political actors outside the global justice movement, a political (but rarely economical) allegiance to the movement is often evident. Activist journalists are open about their biases, and as mentioned, this is reflected in their unbalanced use of sources. Although some collectives and activist journalists try to keep facts and values separated, the two are often mixed in articles. Indymedia cover relevant political issues which are often not prioritised by mainstream media. In this respect, they function as an alternative watchdog closely monitoring the elite's activities in what Castells calls the *space of flows*. Most of Indymedia's users are activists, and Indymedia seems successful in facilitating dialog with, and between them. People outside the activist community are not included to the same extent. The activist journalists are engaged in the conflicts they cover, but often end up uncritically in favour of those they perceive as victims/underprivileged. This does at times reduce conflicts to a dichotomy of good activists vs. evil transnational organisations and corporations.

Although open publishing sparks controversies, Indymedia's relative success does to a far extent lie in their strategy of putting it at the centre of their project. The Newswire and the comments section in each article have made them conversational and explicitly different from traditional alternative media. Still, the limited amount of approaches and angles – the Indymedia discourse – has resulted in the Newswire primarily enabling computer literate political activists to “become the media”. This consequently results in news stories considered interesting by this group.

Still, even though Indymedia's Web operation must be recognised as an activist counter publicity, it is fairly easy to use the sites for users with some literacy and technical skills, some experience in manoeuvring on homepages, and access to the Internet. Although this excludes the vast majority of the world's population, it is fairly accessible when you compare it to many other media outlets. Indymedia covers a wide range of topics about politics and globalisation. Although it can be found interesting by others, Indymedia's discourse is heavily influenced by the high “activists talking to other activists”-factor, and a biased activist angle: they often end up “preaching to the converted”. The contributors are mostly amateurs, and the quality of their news reports consequently varies greatly. Discussions are mostly constructive for those within the activist community, but unpleasant Web phenomena such as trolls, flaming, and hate posts do occur. In

Seattle and the following large protests in the US and Europe, Indymedia have to some extent been able to affect mainstream media, and in some cases also policy makers. But as the global justice movement have lost some of the momentum gained in Seattle and Indymedia rarely enters into a dialog with policy makers, Indymedia seems to have less impact now than earlier – both in itself, and on larger public and policy spheres. Being a counter publicity by and for left-leaning political activists has in other words its limits.

8.2 Theoretical and Methodological Evaluation

Most of the theory used in this thesis is presented in the theory chapter, which might be somewhat extensive and ambitious. I have however chosen to keep it this long, as I found it necessary to include globalisation/network theory, media ownership theory, public sphere theory, and journalism theory, to provide a context and get the necessary theoretical tools for the analysis of Indymedia. As there has been conducted little research on Indymedia, it seemed appropriate to provide the reader a descriptive section (chapter 4 and 5). This has resulted in a less extensive analysis than what may be appropriate. Although the empirical material for this study (a field work and interviews) is not comprehensive enough to present full and representative findings about Indymedia, it is enough to for example question some of the optimistic claims about the potential of digital political public spheres. I therefore hope to compensate for the short analysis by contributing with some modifications to the theory.

Castells is among those expressing optimism about the new social movement's capability to effectively use new digital production equipments and the Internet technology as tools for resistance against the dominant elite's networks. Accounts from Indymedia's coverage of the WTO meeting in Seattle support his optimism to some extent, but from what I observed in the collective in Mumbai, a more moderate approach seems more plausible. Due to poor organising, the collective had to use much of their time to get a viable broadband line up and running. The PC's provided by the international organisers worked, but both the number of computers and the size of the office limited the amount of people who could work at any given time. This is however not the most important reason to apply a moderate perspective on technology: middle class men from Western countries made up the majority of the collective (and these also brought most of the equipment). People in this group have far more technical skills than an average Indian political activist. Therefore, as the discussion about the Zapatista movement also showed,

there is a need to acknowledge this disparity in terms of technical equipment, infrastructure, and knowledge/skills in Web-based social movement and independent media projects.

For the time being, media projects like Indymedia rely on extensive technical know-how, and the idealistic techies who can do this job are mostly based in the activist communities in Western countries. This often makes it difficult to facilitate for Web journalism which focuses on interaction and dialog outside the West (as described in my normative ideal for journalism Journalism of Radical Engagement). Furthermore, most users in the West do not use the Net creatively, or (a part for email) even interact with others. It therefore seems necessary to moderate Castells' assessment that the Internet "does fundamentally change the character of communication", and acknowledge that there is a disparity between technology which *can* be used to improve communications and achieve social change, and technology which *is* used in this way. At least four prerequisites must be in place before ICT can be a tool for social change: a) the technology itself, b) the skills to use it, c) willingness to use it, and d) a strategy. Indymedia seem to have quite a lot of c), some of a) and d), and b) to only varying degrees. In sum, my findings indicate that until these four components are present amongst a considerable amount of people throughout the world, a moderate approach is plausible. Having said that, Indymedia often apply low tech equipment and media in developing countries to compensate for the lack of hi tech infrastructure and/or equipment.

As the analysis in chapter 6 showed, Indymedia do only to a certain extent adhere to Journalism of Radical Engagement. Although this does not mean that the theory is invalid, my findings can contribute to modifications in alternative journalism theory. Firstly, my findings support Couldry's uncertainty concerning whether or not Indymedia's hybrid consumer-producer practices can be sustained. As mentioned earlier, Indymedia seem to be in a moderate period of decline. Unlike during the first three years, a new Indymedia collective is not longer established every 11th day, and some of the existing collectives have officially halted their activities or (more often) stopped producing news. Since Indymedia is a network, other nodes are not paralysed by this development. Still, as they are a counter publicity with strong political connections to the global justice movement, it is unlikely that people outside the movement will take the apostate activists place in the future. Indymedia are as of Spring 2005 nevertheless still such a potent force, that they together with other similar project have to some extent managed to question the legitimacy of both corporate media, the traditional journalist role, and it's division between

storyteller and audience. It is however too early to say whether or not this has led to any real changes in mainstream journalism.

Indymedia do adhere more closely to my normative public sphere theory Publicity for Empowerment than to Journalism of Radical Engagement. However, as a virtual community/public sphere case, Indymedia seem to indicate that it is difficult to combine staying independent of market and state, to establish a discourse which is truly inclusive for all sorts of people and not just political activists, and manage to keep up the pressure and its influence on larger (and mainstream) public spheres and policy makers. In sum however, my findings indicate that Indymedia are closer to Hemánus' typology (chapter 2.3.3) for counter publicities than Publicity for Empowerment:

Table 5: Hemánus' typology of alternative journalism as counter publicity applied on Indymedia

1. Indymedia have grown out of the world-wide global justice movement. There are local differences, but individuals and groups active in Indymedia are predominantly left wingers. Many activist journalists are inspired by anarchism.
2. Their slogan "Don't hate the media, be the media" reflects this participatory democratic idea.
3. In many respects Indymedia are a toolkit for activists who want to inform about and coordinate their own protests and campaigns.

As a public sphere, Indymedia therefore have far more in common with the oppositional counter cultural public spheres of the proletariat Habermas ignored in "Structural Transformation", than his polite bourgeois public sphere (or the mainstream public sphere today for that matter). Thus, IMC is a public sphere or space for oppositional discourse and practices.

8.3 Conclusion

Now, to address the overarching research question: *What consequences does Indymedia's goal: to enable people to "become the media", which implies breaking down the division between journalist and citizen, have for their organisational and journalistic praxis?*

Firstly, it is worth repeating Sparks' sober assessment of the Web as a medium with "clear limits that exclude the voices and interest of a majority of the world's population". So although Indymedia might manage to include more people on the "wrong" side of the digital divide through their analogue media projects (which have not been evaluated here), it is fair to say that Indymedia are very far from realising their goal: to enable everybody (right-winged extremists mostly omitted) to become the media. As for users with skills and access to the Internet, it is worthwhile to repeat IMC techie Matthew Arnison's more realistic assessment that about one percent of Indymedia's users become contributors. This is not a very high number for an ambitious independent news outlet, so in practice Indymedia have therefore always mostly included political activists, and only to a certain degree managed to break down the division between journalist (the activist journalists in the collective) and citizen (the users). The genuine wish in many IMC collectives to achieve this nevertheless reflects a clear opposition to the journalist role promoted by the professional ideology *journalism* and mainstream journalism. Indymedia activists do however diverge in this important question. While some take the above-mentioned stance, others argue that Indymedia should be a forum where "activists are talking to other activists". As of today, Indymedia seem to mainly pursue the latter ambition. The question then remains if they should adjust their slogan, or find a strategy where everybody really can "become the media" on Indymedia. There is reason to believe that only the latter strategy can turn Indymedia into a medium for extensive social change.

Whether Indymedia chose to take this step or not, it is worth asking if they have underestimated the skills which are necessary to contribute high quality news stories, or if "all" in practice means the skilled and educated middle classes. The latter is not necessarily less elitist than the approach promoted by *journalism*. As Indymedia generally do not have any editorial quality filters today, a similar problem is present as they expect that "the reader can tell a crappy story from a good one", and find the information they are after. One might ask if it is not problematic to expect such a level of competence from the user. Maybe Indymedia would be more inclusive if they facilitated a space (for example the editorial collective-controlled feature column) where they can guarantee that the news stories are editorially filtered both in terms of facts and quality. Indymedia could furthermore increase their credibility by insisting that those who publish in the features column sign with their full name and email address, rather than allowing the dissolution of the journalist subject through the use of nicknames or just "IMC" as byline. This seems to work on many weblogs where the credibility of the easily identifiable blogger normally relies extensively on readers finding them trustworthy. A further move to reduce confusion amongst

users could be to cultivate the discussion group genre in the Newswire and rename it “Viewswire”. This could have more easily enabled IMC’s users to, as the passionate proponents of enlightenment in Habermas’ bourgeoisie public sphere, enter into deliberation about how “Another world is possible”, without being constrained by expectations that their contribution should be a news report.

The anarchistic DIY-attitude reflected in Indymedia’s slogan has resulted in a non-profit, non-hierarchical, and consensus approach to organising which bypasses editors, publishers, advertisers, and corporate interests. Although there might be one or more informal editor(s) in a collective, these function more as advisors rather than superiors. The same democratic approach is in principle applied on network level, but here the founding members and some techies have considerably more informal power than the rest of the activists. In Indymedia, few or none editorial filters result in an almost “anything goes” brand of journalism, and political agitation and/or coordination. Although there is some moderating on the newswires (mostly due to an increase in xenophobic, sexist, and other destructive posts), one could say that Indymedia is not about journalism at all. However, it is problematic to exclude them from the journalistic field as such. It seems fairer to say that Indymedia mostly contains activist journalism – a hybrid of journalism and social movement. It is nevertheless uncertain if their hybrid form can be sustained. Perhaps Indymedia at some point will have to choose in which direction they want to go.

The reports on Indymedia are mostly based on the activist journalist’s personal experiences, and on narratives and strategies for creating a better world. The reports are therefore often from the arenas where these strategies are contested: the large demonstrations against corporate led globalisation. This results in quite a few news stories full of action and passion, but much more rarely background analysis of the contested issues and news about local issues. As the same time as this politicised and emotional discourse challenges outdated ideas of objectivity in *journalism*, it can easily exclude people outside the global justice movement. Although a more differentiated coverage might have been more favourable for Indymedia in the long run, this coverage has created much enthusiasm amongst activist, and is a reflection of the priorities of the individual activist journalist. Contrary to the media projects in the Marxist Leninist left, Indymedia’s approach reflects the multifaceted and at times chaotic global justice movement in its journalistic approaches. Consequently, in accordance with Hardt and Negri’s concept, they generally address a politicised multitude rather than a homogeneous mass (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Although this

politicised multitude today is mostly activist in social movements, it does in itself represent progression from a more dogmatic past. Indymedia must therefore be understood as an interesting attempt which demonstrates the difficulty in trying to create a truly global, democratic, and well functioning network of public spheres. Thus, my conclusion does to some extent mirror co-founder Jeff Perlstein's characterisation of Indymedia as an "experiment in media democracy".

8.4 Further Research

Alternative and independent media have traditionally been an underexposed field within media research (Curran and Couldry, 2003). This might be because these media texts from the margins of society are not extensively read, and that they therefore have been assessed as less socially interesting than mainstream media content. It might also be because media researchers have too uncritically adapted the standards for journalism from mainstream media and their organisations. The first assessment might be partly correct, but as the World Wide Web is an increasingly more widespread and used medium, many Web-based alternative and independent media outlets are becoming more influential. There are quite a few studies about how social movements use the Internet as a tool for coordinating and effectuating political campaigns (see for example Webster, 2001, Klein, 1999, Axford and Huggins, 2001, Slaatta, 2002, Nes, 1999). Still, as noted in the introduction, Atton has assessed that the social movements' media are largely untouched. Indymedia have, as my summary in the introduction showed, received some attention, but there are still many areas which are unexplored. In addition to those mentioned in the introduction, other interesting aspects include field studies of their collectives during large protests and their own conferences, analysis of how their online coordination and discussions (e-mail, wikis, IRC) work both locally and internationally, reception studies of the users of Indymedia, studies of how the global justice movement relates to Indymedia, and studies of how Indymedia mediate their message in for example radio and printed newspapers. Some of the theoretical perspectives I have applied can also be used more extensively and more appropriate in further research on Indymedia. The globalisation/ network theory can be applied in a wider study of how Indymedia works as a network, and how they are connected to networks of social movements such as the Zapatistas and People's Global Action, and the open source and free software movements. The public sphere theory can be used in a more comprehensive evaluation of how Indymedia works as a public sphere. Finally, the journalism theory can be applied on a more representative study of Indymedia's journalistic values.

Appendix 1: Informants

The WSF Indymedia India collective:

Name ²⁷⁵ (alias)	Role in the collective	Nationality/country of residence
Chris Williams	Activist journalist	USA
Sanjay Davu	Organiser/activist journalist	India
Bart Coogan	Organiser/techie	USA/Uruguay
Glenn Foster	Activist journalist	G.B
Maria Sanchez	Techie	Uruguay
Joe Ravi	Activist journalist	India/Singapore
Rajiv Aram	Organiser	India/USA
Benny Lang	Activist journalist	USA
Erich Sommerset	Activist journalist	USA
Anne Hampton	Activist journalist	USA
Opera Reinfeld	Activist journalist	USA
David Gurion	Activist journalist	Israel
Bill Waterman	Activist journalist	USA
Hussein Patel	Organiser/activist journalist	Turkey/USA
Vanda Jones	Activist journalist	G.B
Ehud Goldman	Activist journalist	Israel
Associated members of the collective:		
Mary Smith	Activist journalist	USA
Priy Roy	Activist journalist	India
Jack Reed	Activist journalist	Canada
Boja Manoharan	Activist journalist	India
Ghanshyam Bardhan	?	India
Mahesh Mudgal	?	India
Larry Gibson	Activist journalist (photo)	?
Nina Schultz	Activist journalist (photo)	?
Francesco Latina	Activist journalist	Italy
Al Longman	Activist journalist	USA
Jean-Paul Calabert	?	France
Christiane Schmidt	Activist journalist (photo)	Germany
The IMC collective at the Youth Camp:		
Edgar Watson	Organiser/activist journalist	Canada

Indymedia Norway (Oslo):

Name (alias)	Role in the collective	Nationality
Bendik Ås	Organiser/activist journalist	Norwegian
Lars Andersen	Organiser/activist journalist	Norwegian

²⁷⁵ All names are chosen at random and are based on the IMC-activists country of origin.

Appendix 2:

Interview Guide World Social Forum (WSF), Mumbai, January 2004

General Questions:

- What is Indymedia?
- What is news for Indymedia?
- To what extent are Indymedia a continuation of traditional alternative media/ something qualitative new?
- This years WSF is arranged in India. To what extent is Indymedia important here and other countries in the South, where Internet is only available for a small part of the population?
- Do you see any problems in making everybody “the media”?
- Genre and Indymedia.
- Activist, journalist or both?
- What do you think about the term activist journalism being used on IMC?
- Ideal of objectivity?
- Communication/presentation from Indymedia to the readers/users.
 - o Interactivity
 - o Does Indymedia fulfil the reader’s need for information?
- To what extent do you distinguish between reports and editorial comments in IMC?
- Where does the slogan “being the media” come from?
- What sources of inspiration do you have?

Indymedia as a Public Sphere

- How big are Indymedia in terms of readers and contributors? And who are these?
- Are Indymedia for everybody, or just for those who sympathise or are a part of the alter-globalisation movement?
- Has there been a development here from the start?
- Have IMC in any way affected how traditional media report?
- Do IMC create debates internally and externally?
- Do IMC facilitate arenas for communicative action (Habermas)?
- Does your coverage affect policy discussions?

- How do you think the WWW works as a medium?
- Is the WWW creating many mini public spheres which are not able to affect the bigger public spheres?

Indymedia and the New Social Movements

- Manuel Castells have written in “The Internet Galaxy” (2002) that “Indymedia is the information backbone of the anti-globalisation movement”. This can be interpreted in several ways:
 - a) IMC are the movement’s political co-ordinating tool;
 - b) IMC are the news channel for the movement, and a watchdog monitoring the globalisation process’ concentration of capital and power;
 - c) IMC are the movement’s PR-tool against the transnational corporations.

Do you agree with one or several of these interpretations?

- Are Indymedia an organ for organisations or do you wish to keep them at a distance?
- In your FAQ it says: “Activists planning an alternative globalization event can assure a safe space for presenting non-corporate news by forming a local IMC”. Comment?

The WSF and Organising

- Why do you cover an event like the WSF?
- How is the work organised?
- How does global co-ordination work?
- What responsibility do the editorial group have in terms of organising and ethics?
- How have decisions regarding how Indymedia cover WSF been taken? Consensus?
- Who are the activist journalists from the IMC who are covering the WSF? Local or from Western countries? How does this affect the result?
- How is this coverage of the WSF financed?

Technological Aspects

- As a technician/programmer – why did you choose to work for Indymedia?
- Do you have a saying when it comes to the content of the IMC-homepages?
- What is new in the medium WWW that Indymedia operate within?
- How important is new information and communication technology for IMC?

- How has the development in ICT changed how Indymedia work and distribute your news from the start in 1999 till now?
- Do reading news from a computer screen affect the way news is perceived?
 - o Differences from paper edition?
- How is hypertext used, video clips, and sound used?
- Are Indymedia just a result of convergence of already existing alternative media, or are IMC's multimediality contributing with something new?
- How important is the open Newswire for how Indymedia work?
 - o Demanding little resources.
 - o Distribution.
- How do you think when you are designing an IMC-page?

Journalistic Approaches at the WSF

- How do Indymedia work as an alternative source of news during the WSF?
- Do you participate in the meetings as delegate or only as Indymedia?
- Are IMC as important here at the WSF as you are during for example a WTO meeting?
- Do Indymedia work differently when you are covering the WSF in comparison when you cover say the WEF or a WTO meeting? (pro-active)
- What effect does the sympathy you have (and openly write about on your homepage) towards the alter-globalisation movement affect how you cover the WSF?
- How important are IMC in bringing out news from this forum?
- What do you think about the coverage of this forum by traditional media as CNN?
- Biases/sources of influences in how things are interpreted.
- How do you relate to your sources?
- Do you talk to people from "the system"?
- Do your reports from the WSF come out in more than one channel?

Appendix 3:

Interview Guide Indymedia Norway, Oslo, November 2003

- What kind of work do you do in the editorial collective?
- As a genre, how would you describe the content of the editorial column and the Newswire in Indymedia Norway and internationally?
- What is news for Indymedia? (Criteria)
- How do you relate to the distinction between objective and subjective journalism?
- You write on your homepage that “Indymedia is a democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of truth”. Is it possible to combine these?
- Is it possible to find *the* truth?
- Are you activists, journalists or both – activist journalists?
- Is it possible to combine these roles?
- Manuel Castells have written in “The Internet Galaxy” (2002) that “Indymedia is the information backbone of the anti-globalisation movement”. This can be interpreted in several ways:
 - a) IMC are the movement’s political co-ordinating tool;
 - b) IMC are the news channel for the movement, and a watchdog monitoring the globalisation process’ concentration of capital and power;
 - c) IMC are the movement’s PR-tool against the transnational corporations.

Do you agree with one or several of these interpretations?

- Are there any similarities between how Indymedia relate to the global justice movement and how the press related to the parties in Norway in the party press era?
- To what extent do you separate news and views?
- Are the activist journalists in IMC-Norway involved in political campaigns they report on?
- How do you relate to “system sources”? To what extent are the representatives from the police, government and the marked allowed to comment in your news stories?

Appendix 4: Globalisation and Concentration of Media Ownership

This appendix applies theoretical contributions from Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney, Mars Crispin Miller, Ben Bagdikian, John Giuffo, John B. Thompson, and W. Lance Bennett to in greater detail (than chapter 2.2) evaluate the effects of the economic globalisation process and the consequent concentration in media ownership. Since there is not enough room for a comprehensive worldwide analysis here, the discussion includes mainly examples from the US,²⁷⁶ and gives tentative answers to these questions: to what extent is Indymedia's implicit assumption – that ownership concentration results in that capital's interests is setting the agenda – fair? Is their claim that this results in little (and then mostly bad), or none coverage of the global justice movement and their campaigns true?

Transnational Corporations

Throughout the 80s and 90s, policies for deregulation and liberalisation of the media sector were implemented in most countries throughout the world. These policies were promoted by actors who wanted a more integrated international media sector governed by the logic of the market. These actors are the industry itself, supranational organisations such as WTO and IMF, national politicians, or (most often) a combination of the three. This has for example resulted in privatisation of public broadcasters in European countries and the removal of many of the anti-trust media ownership laws in the US. With this new growth potential, existing media corporations started a race of buyouts and merges in order not to be “eaten” by their competitors. In this process the amount of important media conglomerates have been reduced to seven–ten (depending on how you count) Transnational Corporations (TNCs), which constitutes a global oligopoly (Herman and McChesney, 1997). There are still many medium sized and small media corporations, but Herman and McChesney use the term oligopoly both due to the global TNCs' power, their joint ventures, and cross ownership, which reduces the competition between them.

As these media conglomerates own news media, the trend seems to be similar in news production as well. The print news industry is increasingly dominated by “the big four” western

²⁷⁶ USA is chosen because many of the media conglomerates have their headquarter there, and because large market shares in an increasingly more deregulated media sector have resulted in increasingly more apparent merges between advertising and media. USA is also a useful example as Indymedia started there, and still have 1/3 of their collectives there (56 as of 4 May 2005 according to indymedia.org).

news agencies: AP, UPI, Reuters and AFP. Reuters TV and Worldwide Television News remain the dominant global television news agencies. While satellite television has made CNN International a prominent player, attempts by BBC and other European public broadcasters to provide a global alternative have had limited success so far.²⁷⁷ Pessimistically, Herman and McChesney therefore assess that: “For the balance of global public service broadcasters, the future would seem to be one of increasing domestic commercialization, marginalisation, or both” (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 47).

- We're here to serve advertisers

Thompson has no illusions of any idealism in mainstream media: “Like other domains in industry, the media industry are driven primarily by the logic of profitability and capital accumulation, and there is no necessary correlation between the logic of profitability and the cultivation of diversity” (Thompson, 1995: 240). Herman and McChesney’s empiricism supports this: “Roger Ailes, Chairman of News Corporation’s Fox News Channel is explicit in stating that it will be directed at the needs of advertisers and the affluent audiences to which advertisers are attracted” (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 49). With increasingly concentrated advertising and PR sectors, more and more editorial control is given from the media to their sources of income. The TV network NBC seems to have removed themselves completely from basic editorial virtues:

NBC agrees to let IBM have final say over content in its new cable program ‘Scan’, in return for IBM agreeing to sponsor the program on NBC’s networks in North America, Asia, Europe and Latin America. [...] Even more sweeping, NBC and Young & Rubicam²⁷⁸ began negotiations for an unprecedented partnership that would give all the agency’s clients integrated marketing and promotional opportunities on all of NBC’s global properties, while permitting the agency input on programming decisions (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 62-63).

While this is probably still an extreme case internationally, the example shows that big US players are increasingly willing to introduce their dubious practices in their overseas operations. Or to quote Westinghouse’s service minded CEO Michael Jordan: “We’re here to serve advertisers” (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 64).

The TNC's Coverage

²⁷⁷ An exception is perhaps the Qatar based TV channel Al-Jazeera which has established itself as an influential alternative to CNN and other western TV-channels in the Arabic world.

²⁷⁸ Young & Rubicam is one of the world’s top three advertising agencies.

As the media are to a far extent owned by the enormous TNCs, Miller worries that these conglomerates “[...] will have so many boats at sea that its most scrupulous reporters may well run the fatal risk of rocking some of them. [...] Thus does the chill of censorship have less to do with outright interference by the parent company (although that happens) than with editors and reporters learning what it takes to get ahead” (Miller, 1999). As examples of self censorship appear quite often in articles about this subject (see for example Klinenberg, 2004 (b)), it seems fair to assume that the problem exists to some degree in all mainstream media. In terms of ideological perspectives, Bagdikian argues that the mainstream media in the US reflect a “narrow range of politics and social values from center to far right”, and that corporate ownership of the media therefore is “no way to maintain a democracy” (cited in Hyde, 2001: 2). Although ownership interests can influence content, other factors such as ratings can be just as important. Now, as for how the global justice movement has been covered, the accounts differ. A study by Giuffo of how major news organisations covered protests at the IMF and World Bank meeting in Prague, the free trade talks (FTAA) in Quebec City, and the EU summit in Gothenburg in 2000, supports Bagdikian’s assessment. Of the 200 stories from 10 major US news organisations examined, editorial opinion leaned heavily towards the corporate side and dismissed the protest movement as circus or a sporting event. Giuffo concludes that “the underlying issues that have brought out hundred of thousands of people are often glossed over or misrepresented” (Giuffo, 2001). A slightly different perspective is offered by Bennett who argues that mainstream media coverage should be acknowledged in itself:

Large numbers of mass actions around the world have received extensive, if generally negative media coverage. At the least such coverage signals the presence of a movement that is demanding a say in world economic policies and their social and environmental implication. Moreover, numerous campaigns against corporate business practice, trade and development policies have received favourable coverage in leading media outlets (Bennett, 2003: 18).

The examples of the results economic globalisation process and the consequent concentration in media ownership included here are not comprehensive. Still, the examples indicate that there is an increasing trend towards sacrificing the ideals of journalism for market shares, advertisers, and owners.²⁷⁹ This trend seems to be strongest in the US, which to some extent explains why Indymedia started there.

²⁷⁹ Having said that, these ideals have never been stable and dominant in journalism. It seems fairer to say that they have been developed and revised gradually, and are based on the needs of the dominant forces in any given period. See chapter 2.4 for an elaboration on this point.

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