



OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS AND THE INTERNET: A CRITICAL/ RECONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH


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ABSTRACT We argue that the continued growth of the Internet, both as a form of mainstream media and as a tool for organizing democratic social interactions, requires that Internet politics be retheorized from a standpoint that is both critical and reconstructive. While we undertake an approach that is critical of corporate forms and hegemonic uses of the Internet, we advocate for new software developments such as blogs and trace the oppositional deployments of the Internet made by a wide variety of groups in the cause of progressive cultural and political struggle. In this regard, we describe how the Internet has facilitated the worldwide

emergence of the anti-globalization, anti-war and anti-capitalism movements, even as it has coalesced local communities and groups, and so we conclude that the future of Internet politics must be thought dialectically as both global and local. We end by noting the relevance of the ideas of Guy Debord, with his focus on the construction of situations, the use of technology, media of communication and cultural forms to promote a revolution of everyday life.

 It has been just over a decade since the blossoming of hypertext and the emergence of the utopian rhetoric of cyberdemocracy and personal liberation that accompanied the growth of the new online communities that formed the nascent World Wide Web. While the initial cyberoptimism of many ideologues and theorists of the “virtual community” now seems partisan and dated, debates continue to rage over the nature, effects and possibilities of the Internet and technopolitics (see Rheingold 1993; Barlow 1996; Gates 1996; Kelly 1998).¹ Some claim that the Internet is producing a cyberbalkanization of “daily me” news feeds and fragmented communities (see van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson 1996; Sunstein 2002), while in an accompanying article in this journal Jodi Dean argues that Internet content is often reduced to the circulation of noise and effectless content in a new stage of “communicative capitalism.”²

In our view, the continued growth of the Internet as a tool for organizing novel forms of information and social interaction requires that Internet politics be continually retheorized from a standpoint that is both critical and reconstructive. By this we mean an approach that is critical of corporate and mainstream forms and uses of technology and that advocates reconstruction of technologies to further the projects of progressive social and political struggle. Recognizing the limitations of Internet politics, we also want to engage in dialectical critique of how emergent information and communications technologies (ICTs) have facilitated oppositional cultural and political movements and provided possibilities for the sort of progressive socio-political change and struggle that is an important dimension of contemporary cultural politics.

To begin, the Internet constitutes a dynamic and complex space in which people can construct and experiment with identity, culture and social practices (Poster 1997; Turkle 1997). It also makes more information available to a greater number of people, more easily and from a wider array of sources than any instrument of information and communication in history (Kellner 2004). On the other hand information/communications technologies have been shown to retard face-to-face relationships (Nre and Ebring 2000), threaten traditional conceptions of the commons (Bowers 2001), and extend structures of Western imperialism and advanced capitalism to the ends of the earth (Trend 2001). The challenge at hand is to begin to conceive the

political reality of media such as the Internet as a complex series of places embodying reconstructed models of citizenship and new forms of political activism, even as the Internet itself reproduces logics of capital and becomes co-opted by hegemonic forces. In this sense, we should look to how emergent technologies and communities are interacting as tentative forms of self-determination and control “from below” – recognizing that as today’s Internet citizen-activists organize politically around issues of access to information, capitalist globalization, imperialist war, ecological devastation and other forms of oppression, they represent important oppositional forms of agency in the ongoing struggle for social justice and a more participatory democracy (Marcuse 2001: 180–2).

In contradistinction, since George W. Bush ascended to the presidency in a highly contested election in 2000, the lived ideal and forms of democracy have taken a terrible beating (Kellner 2001). The Bush administration arguably used the events of 9/11 to proclaim and help produce an epoch of Terror War, responding to the 9/11 terror attacks to invade, conquer and occupy both Afghanistan and Iraq and to promote a new geopolitical doctrine of preemptive war (Kellner 2003). In this context, the threat of constant terrorism has been used to limit the public sphere, curtail information and communication, legitimate government surveillance of electronic exchange and to cut back on civil liberties. Likewise, a panoply of neo-liberal economic policies have been invoked and made law under the guise of promoting patriotism, supporting the war effort and advancing domestic security. With democracy under attack on multiple fronts, progressive groups and individuals face the challenge of developing modes of communication and organization to oppose militarism, terrorism and the threats to democracy and social justice.

THE RISE OF INTERNET ACTIVISM

From the early days of the Internet, “hackers” have creatively reconstructed the Internet and created programs and code that would facilitate sharing of research material, communication and construction of communities. The term “hacker” initially meant someone who made creative innovations in computer systems to facilitate the exchange of information and construction of new communities. However, largely through corporate, state and media co-optation of the term, “hacking” eventually came to suggest a mode of “terrorism” whereby malicious computer nerds either illegally invade and disrupt closed computer systems or proliferate computer codes known as viruses and worms, which attempt to disable computers and networks. While hackers certainly are engaged in such activities, often with no clear social good in mind, we argue below that a relatively unknown “hactivist” movement has also continued to develop that uses ICTs for progressive political ends (see below).

In terms of the prehistory of Internet activism, we should also mention the community media movement that from the 1960s

through the present has promoted alternative media such as public access television, community and low power radio, and public use of new information and communications technologies. As early as 1986, when French students coordinated a national strike over the Internet-like Minitel system, there have been numerous examples of people redeploying information technology for their own political ends, thereby actualizing a more participatory society and alternative forms of social organization (see Foenberg 1995; Best and Kellner 2001; Couldry and Curran 2003).³ Since the mid-1990s there have been growing discussions of Internet activism and how new media have been used effectively by a variety of political movements, especially to further participatory democracy and social justice (Meikle 2002).

On the one hand much of the initial discussion of Internet politics centered on issues internal to the techies and groups that constructed the code, architecture and social relations of the technoculture. Thus, Internet sites like Wired (www.wired.com) and Slashdot (www.Slashdot.org) have provided multi-user locations for posts and discussion mixing tech, politics and culture, as well as places for promoting and circulating open-source software, while criticizing corporate forces like Microsoft. Yet, on the other hand politicized techno-subcultures, such as the anarchist community that frequents Infoshop (www.infoshop.org), have increasingly used the Internet to inform, generate solidarity, propagandize and contest hegemonic forces and power.

In this respect, while mainstream media in the United States have tended to promote Bush's militarism, economic and political agenda, and "war on terrorism," a wide array of citizens, activists and oppositional political groups have attempted to develop alternative organs of information and communication. In so doing, we believe that there has now been a new cycle of Internet politics, which has consisted of the implosion of media and politics into popular culture, with the result that unprecedented numbers of people are using the Internet and other technologies to produce original instruments and modes of democracy. Further, it is our contention here that in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks and US military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, a tide of political activism has risen with the Internet playing an important and increasingly central role (Kellner 2003).

In late 2002 and early 2003, global anti-war movements began to emerge as significant challenges to Bush administration policies against Iraq and the growing threats of war. Reaching out to broad audiences, political groups like MoveOn (www.moveon.org), A.N.S.W.E.R. (www.internationalanswer.org), and United for Peace and Justice (www.unitedforpeace.org) used the Internet to circulate anti-war information, organize demonstrations and promote a wide diversity of anti-war activities. February 15, 2003's unprecedented public demonstration of millions around the world calling for peace in unison revealed that technopolitics helps to define, coalesce and extend the contemporary struggle for peace and democracy across the world. Indeed, after using the Internet

and wireless technologies to successfully organize a wide range of anti-war/globalization demonstrations, activists (including many young people) are now continuing to build a kind of “virtual bloc” that monitors, critiques and fights against the aggressive versions of Western capitalism and imperialism being promoted by Bush, Blair and their G8 counterparts.

In the US, Vermont Governor Howard Dean’s team of Internet activists used the Internet to raise funds, recruit activists and organizers, and produce local “meet ups” where like-minded people could connect and participate in various political groups and activities. Although Dean’s campaign collapsed dramatically after intensely negative mainstream media presentations of controversial statements and endless replay of an electronically magnified shout to his followers after losing the Iowa caucuses, Dean’s anti-Bush and anti-Iraq discourses circulated through other Democratic Party campaigns and the mainstream media. Further, Dean’s use of the Internet showed that it could generate political enthusiasm amongst the youth, connect people around issues and articulate with struggles in the real world. The Dean experiment demonstrated that Internet politics was not just a matter of circulating discourse in a self-contained cybersphere but that it was a force that could intervene in the political battles of the contemporary era of media culture.

More recently, technopolitics played a crucial role in the March 2004 Spanish election, where the Socialist Party candidate upset the Conservative Party Prime Minister who had been predicted to win an easy victory after a series of terrorist bombings killed approximately 200 people days before the election. At first, in a self-serving manner, the government insisted that the Basque nationalist separatist group ETA was responsible. However, information leaked out that the bombing did not have the signature of ETA but was more typical of an Al Qaeda attack, and that intelligence agencies themselves pointed in this direction. Consequently, the Spanish people used the Internet, cell phones and messaging, and other modes of technological communication to mobilize people for massive anti-government, anti-occupation demonstrations (see Figure 1⁴).⁵ These protests denounced the alleged lies by the existing regime concerning the Madrid terrorist attacks and called for the end of Spain’s involvement in Bush’s “coalition of the willing,” which had Spanish troops occupying Iraq. The media spectacle of a lying government, massive numbers of people demonstrating against it and the use of alternative modes of information and communication developed a spike of support for the anti-government candidate. Millions of young people, and others who had never voted but who felt deeply that Spain’s presence in Iraq was wrong, went to the polls and a political upset with truly global consequences was achieved.

Groups and individuals excluded from mainstream politics and cultural production have also been active in the construction of Internet technopolitical culture. While early Internet culture tended

Figure 1



to be male and geek dominated, today women circulate information through media like Women's eNews (womensenews.org), which sends e-mails to thousands of women and collects the material on a website. Likewise, scores of feminist organizations deploy Internet politics, and increasing numbers of women are active in blogging and other cutting-edge cyberculture. Communities of color, gay and lesbian groups, and many other underrepresented or marginal political communities have set up their own e-mail lists, websites, blogs and are now a thriving and self-empowered force on the Internet. According to The PEW Internet and American Life Project (www.pewinternet.org), 44 percent of Internet users have created content for the online world through building or posting websites, creating blogs or sharing files; the numbers of Americans over sixty-five who are using the Internet has jumped by 47 percent since 2000, making them the fastest-growing group to embrace the online world, and young people continue to be extremely active in producing new forms and content in many dimensions of Internet life.

Of course, we do not mean to imply that the Internet qua infrastructure is essentially participatory and democratic, as we recognize that major commercial interests are fundamentally at play and that the Internet has been developed by a range of competing groups existing on the political spectrum from right to left. In addition, decisive issues exist from public participation in hardware design and online access to how individuals and groups are permitted to use and configure information and communications technologies (Feenberg 1999; Luke 2000: 69–105; Winner 2003: 383–402). Hence, while it is required that the progressive political uses of the Internet be enumerated, we recognize that this does not absolve it from being criticized and theorized as a tool and extension of global technocapitalism (Best and Kellner 2002).

Accepting this, our point here is that the Internet is a “contested terrain” in which alternative subcultural forces and progressive political groups are being articulated in opposition to more reactionary, conservative and dominant forces. It is not that today's Internet is either a wholly emancipatory or oppressive technology, but rather that it is an ongoing struggle that contains contradictory forces. Thus, as the social critic Ivan Illich has pointed out, while it is significant to criticize the ways in which mainstream technologies can serve as one-dimensionalizing instruments, it is equally necessary to examine the ways in which everyday people subvert the intended uses of these technologies toward their own needs and uses.⁶

Moreover, it is important to articulate Internet politics with actually existing political struggles to make technopolitics a major instrument of political action. Today's Internet activism is thus arguably an increasingly important domain of current political struggles that is creating the base and the basis for an unprecedented worldwide anti-war/pro-peace and social justice movement during a time of terrorism, war and intense political contestation. Correspondingly, the

Internet itself has undergone significant transformations during this time toward becoming a more participatory and democratic medium. Innovative forms of communicative design, such as blogs, wikis and social networking portals have emerged as central developments of the Net's hypertextual architecture, and online phenomena such as hacker culture and web militancy are no longer the elite and marginal technocultures of a decade ago.⁷

Contemporary Internet subcultures are potentially involved in a radically democratic social and educational project that amounts to a massive circulation and politicization of information and culture. Thus, it is our belief that many emergent online political and cultural projects today are moving toward reconfiguring what participatory and democratic global citizenship will look like in the global/local future, even as more reactionary and hegemonic political forces attempt to do the same. In the following sections we will accordingly focus on how oppositional groups and movements use ICTs to promote democracy and social justice on local and global scales.

GLOBALIZATION AND NET POLITICS

The Internet today has become a complex assemblage of a variety of groups and movements, both mainstream and oppositional, reactionary and democratic, global and local. However, after the massive high tech sector bust at the start of the new millennium, and with economic sectors generally down across the board due to the transnational economic recession, the Terror War erupting in 2001 and the disastrous effects of Bushonomics, much of the corporate hype and colonization of so-called "new media" has waned. If the late 1990s represented the heyday for the commercialization of the Net, the Bush years have found the Internet more overtly politicized beyond the attempt to grow the production, consumption and efficiency of online commerce alone.

Since 9/11, oppositional groups have been forming around the online rights to freedom of use and information, as well as user privacy, which groups such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR), and the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) have long touted.⁸ When it emerged in late 2002 that the Bush administration was developing a Total Information Awareness project that would compile a government database on every individual with material collected from a diversity of sources, intense online debate erupted and the Bush administration was forced to make concessions to critics concerned about privacy and Big Brother surveillance.⁹ Examples such as this demonstrate the manner in which technopolitics has been generated within online subcultural groups and communities, many of whom did not previously have an obvious political agenda, getting them to critically transform their identities toward speaking out against the security policies of government.

Alongside these shifts from online consumers to technocitizens, Internet corporations have attempted to court the middle ground – sometimes appearing to side with the users they court as customers (such as when Internet Service Provider UUNET instituted a zero-tolerance spam policy) or with the political administrations that could regulate them (such as Microsoft's anti-trust battle under the Clinton administration and then again under Bush). The general case of Internet corporations is perhaps best exemplified by a company like Yahoo, which has quietly fought legislation that would demand that companies notify users of attempts to subpoena information about their on- and offline personages. Even the supposedly progressive company, Google, has been criticized for not being forthcoming about its attempt to assemble and proliferate user information (for sale or otherwise) of all those who sign up for its new "Gmail" application. As the Internet has become more highly politicized, however, it has become harder for corporations to portray themselves simply as neutral cultural forces mediating electronic disputes between citizens and states, being in service to one but not the other.

Using the state- and corporate-developed Internet toward advancing state- and corporate-wary agendas, those now involved in technopolitics are beginning to develop and voice a critical awareness that perceives how corporate and governmental behavior are intertwined in the name of "globalization." As part of the backlash against corporate globalization over the past years, a wide range of theorists have argued that the proliferation of difference and the shift to more local discourses and practices define significant alternatives. In this view, theory and politics should swing from the level of globalization and its accompanying, often totalizing macrodimensions in order to focus on the local, the specific, the particular, the heterogeneous and the microlevel of everyday experience. An array of discourses associated with poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminism and multiculturalism focus on difference, otherness, marginality, hybridity, the personal, the particular and the concrete over more general theory and politics that aim at more global or universal conditions. Likewise, a broad spectrum of Internet subcultures of resistance have focused their attention on the local level, organizing struggles around a seemingly endless variety of social, cultural and political issues.

However, it can be argued that such dichotomies as those between the global and the local express contradictions and tensions between key constitutive forces of the present moment, and that it is therefore a mistake to reject a focus on one side in favor of an exclusive concern with the other (Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997; Castells 1999: 37–64). Hence, an important challenge for developing a critical theory of globalization, from the perspective of contemporary technopolitics, is to think through the relationships between the global and the local by observing how global forces influence and even structure an increasing number of local situations. This in turn requires analysis

of how local forces mediate the global, inflect global forces to diverse ends and conditions and produce unique configurations of the local and the global as the matrix for thought and action in everyday life (Luke and Luke 2000).

Globalization is thus necessarily complex and challenging to both critical theories and radical democratic politics. But many people these days operate with binary concepts of the global and the local, and promote one or the other side of the equation as the solution to the world's problems. For globalists, globalization is the solution, and underdevelopment, backwardness and provincialism are the problem. For localists, the globalized eradication of traditions, cultures and places is the problem and localization is the solution. Yet often, it is the mix that matters, and whether global or local solutions are most fitting depends upon the conditions in the distinctive context that one is addressing and the particular solutions and policies proposed.

Specific locations and practices of a plurality of online groups and movements constitute perhaps what is most interesting now about oppositional, subcultural activities at work within the context of the global Internet. Much more than other contemporary subcultures like boarders, punks or even New Agers, Internet activists have taken up the questions of local and global politics and are attempting to construct answers both locally and globally in response. Importantly, this can be done due to the very nature of the medium in which they exist. Therefore, while the Internet can and has been used to promote capitalist globalization, many groups and movements are constructing ways in which the global network can be diverted and used in the struggle against it.

The use of the Internet as an instrument of political struggle by groups such as Mexico's EZLN Zapatista movement to the Internet's role in organizing the anti-corporate globalization demonstrations, from the "Battle of Seattle" up to the present, have been well documented (Best and Kellner 2001). Initially, the incipient anti-globalization movement was precisely that: against globalization. The movement itself, however, became increasingly global, linking together a diversity of movements into networks of affinity and using the Internet and instruments of globalization to advance its struggles. Thus, it would be more accurate to say that the movement embodies a globalization-from-below and alternative globalizations that defend social justice, equality, labor, civil liberties, universal human rights and a healthy planet on which to live safely from the ravages of an uncontrolled neo-liberal strategy (Brecher, Costello and Smith 2000; Hardt and Negri 2000; Steger 2002).¹⁰ Accordingly, the anti-capitalist/globalization movements began advocating common values and visions and started defining themselves in positive terms such as the global justice movement.

Internet politics has thus become part and parcel of the mushrooming global movement for peace, justice and democracy that has continued to grow through the present and shows no sign of

ending. The emergent movements against capitalist globalization have thus squarely placed before us the issue of whether participatory democracy can be meaningfully realized. Although the mainstream media had failed to seriously debate or even report on globalization until the eruption of a vigorous anti-capitalist globalization movement, and rarely, if ever, critically discussed the activities of the WTO, World Bank and IMF, there is now a widely circulating critical discourse and controversy over these institutions. Whereas prior to the rise of the recent anti-war/pro-democracy movements average citizens were unlikely to question a presidential decision to go to war, now people do question and not only question but also protest publicly. While such protest has not prevented war, or successfully turned back globalized development, it has continued to evoke the potential for a participatory democracy that can be actualized when publics reclaim and reconstruct technology, information and the spaces in which they live and work.

ALTERNATIVE GLOBALIZATIONS: GLOBAL/LOCAL TECHNOPOLITICS

To capital's globalization-from-above, subcultures of cyberactivists have been attempting to carry out alternative globalizations, developing networks of solidarity and propagating oppositional ideas and movements around the world (Kellner 1998; Best and Kellner 2001; Kellner 2002b). Against the capitalist organization of neo-liberal globalization, a Fifth International, to use Waterman's phrase (1992), of computer-mediated activism is emerging that is qualitatively different from the party-based socialist and communist Internationals of the past. As the virtual-community theorist Howard Rheingold notes, advances in personal, mobile informational technology are rapidly providing the structural elements for the existence of fresh kinds of highly informed, autonomous communities that coalesce around local lifestyle choices, global political demands and everything in between (Rheingold 1993).

These multiple networks of connected citizens and activists transform the "dumb mobs" of totalitarian states into "smart mobs" of socially active personages linked by notebook computers, PDA devices, Internet cell phones, pagers and global positioning systems (GPS). As noted, these technologies were put to use in the March 2004 mobilization in Spain that at the last moment organized the population to vote out the existing conservative government. Thus, while emergent mobile technology provides yet another impetus toward experimental identity construction and identity politics, such networking also links diverse communities such as labor, feminist, ecological, peace and various anti-capitalist groups, providing the basis for a democratic politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics (see Dyer-Witheford 1999; Best and Kellner 2001; Burbach 2001).

Of course, right-wing and reactionary forces can and have used the Internet to promote their political agendas as well. In a short time, one can easily access an exotic witch's brew of websites maintained by the Ku Klux Klan and myriad neo-Nazi assemblages, including the Aryan Nation and various militia groups. Internet discussion lists also disperse these views and right-wing extremists are aggressively active on many computer forums.¹¹ These types of organizations are hardly harmless, having carried out terrorism of various sorts extending from church burnings to the bombings of public buildings. Adopting quasi-Leninist discourse and tactics for ultra-right causes, such groups have been successful in recruiting working-class members devastated by the developments of global capitalism, which has resulted in widespread unemployment for traditional forms of industrial, agricultural and unskilled labor. Moreover, extremist websites have influenced alienated middle-class youth as well (a 1999 HBO documentary "Hate on the Internet" provides a disturbing number of examples of how extremist websites influenced disaffected youth to commit hate crimes). An additional twist in the saga of technopolitics seems to be that allegedly "terrorist" groups are now increasingly using the Internet and websites to organize and promote their causes (e.g. www.alneda.com) (Kellner 2003).

This has led to dangerous policy changes on the part of the Bush administration, which has legalized new federal surveillance of the Internet and even allowed for the outright closing of websites that authorities feel condone terror.¹² Despite the expectation that any governmental administration would seek to target and disarm the information channels of its enemy, it is exactly the extreme reaction by the Bush administration to the perceived threats posed by the Internet that have the sub-technocultural forces associated with the battle against globalization-from-above fighting in opposition to US Internet policies. Drawing upon the expertise of computer "hactivists,"¹³ people are progressively more informed about the risks involved in online communications, including threats to their privacy posed by monitoring by government agencies such as the Office of Homeland Security, and this has led in turn to a wider, more populist opposition to Internet policing generally. This technical wing has become allied to those fighting for alternative globalizations with groups such as Cult of the Dead Cow (www.cultdeadcow.com), Cryptome (www.cryptome.org) and the hacker journal 2600 (www.2600.org) serving as figureheads for a broad movement of exceptionally computer-literate individuals who group together under the banner of HOPE (Hackers On Planet Earth) and who practice a politics called "hactivism."

Hactivists have involved themselves in creating open source software programs that can be used freely to circumvent attempts by government and corporations to control the Internet experience. Notably, and somewhat scandalously, hackers have released programs such as Six/Four (after Tiananmen Square) that combine the peer-to-peer capabilities of Napster with a virtual private networking protocol

that makes user identity anonymous, and Camera/Shy, a powerful web browser stenography application that allegedly allows anyone to engage in the type of secret information storage and retrieval that groups such as Al Qaeda have used against the Pentagon. Moreover, associated with the hactivist cause are the “crackers” who create “warez,” pirated versions of commercial software or passwords. While anathema to Bill Gates, there is apparently no software beyond the reach of the pirate-crackers and to the delight of the alternative Internet subculture, otherwise expensive programs are often freely traded and shared over the Web and peer-to-peer networks across the globe. Hackers also support the Open Source movement, in which non-corporate software is freely and legally traded, collectively improved upon and available for general use by a public that agrees not to sell their improvements for profit in the future. Free competitors to Microsoft, such as the operating system Linux (www.linux.org) and the word-processing suite OpenOffice (www.openoffice.org), provide powerful and economically palatable alternatives to the PC hegemon.

Another hacker ploy is the monitoring and exploitation for social gain of the booming wireless, wide-area Internet market (called Wi-Fi, WAN or WLAN). Wi-Fi, besides offering institutions, corporations and homes the luxury of Internet connectivity and organizational access for any and all users within the area covered by the local network, also potentially offers such freedoms to nearby neighbors and wireless pedestrians if such networks are not made secure. In fact, as then acting US cybersecurity czar Richard Clarke noted in December 2002, an astounding number of Wi-Fi networks are unprotected and available for hacking. This led the Office of Homeland Security to label wireless networking a terrorist threat.¹⁴ Part of what the government is reacting to is the activist technique of “wardriving,” in which a hacker drives through a community equipped with a basic wireless antenna and computer searching for network access nodes.¹⁵ Many hackers had been wardriving around Washington, DC, thereby gaining valuable federal information and server access, prompting the government contractor Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to begin monitoring drive-by hacks in the summer of 2002.¹⁶

But not all wardrivers are interested in sensitive information, and many more are simply interested in proliferating information about what amounts to free broadband Internet access points – a form of Internet connectivity that otherwise comes at a premium cost.¹⁷ Thus, wireless network hackers are often deploying their skills toward developing a database of “free networks” that, if not always free of costs, represent real opportunities for local communities to share connections and corporate fees. Such freenets represent inclusive resources that are developed by communities for their own needs and involve values like conviviality and culture, education, economic equity and sustainability that have been found to be progressive hallmarks of online communities generally (Schuler 1996). Needless

to say, corporate Internet service providers are outraged by this anti-capitalist development, and are seeking government legislation favoring prosecution of this mode of gift-economy activism.

Hactivists are also directly involved in the immediate political battles played out around the dynamically globalized world. Hactivists such as The Mixer, from Germany, who authored the program Tribe Floodnet that shut down the website for the World Economic Forum in January 2002, routinely use their hacking skills to cause disruption of governmental and corporate presences online. On July 12, 2002, the homepage for the *USA Today* website was hacked and altered content was presented to the public, leaving *USA Today* to join such other media magnets as the *New York Times* and Yahoo as the corporate victims of a media hack. In February 2003, immediately following the destruction of the Space Shuttle Columbia, a group calling themselves Trippin Smurfs hacked NASA's servers for the third time in three months. In each case, security was compromised and the web servers were defaced with anti-war political messages. Another repeated victim of hacks is the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), which because of its attempt to legislate P2P (peer-to-peer) music trading has become anathema to Internet hactivists. A sixth attack upon the RIAA website in January 2003 posted bogus press releases and even provided music files for free downloading.

Indeed, hactivist programs to share music, film, television and other media files have driven the culture industries into offensive movements against the technoculture that are currently being played out in the media, courts and government. While there is nothing inherently oppositional about P2P file trading, Napster gained notoriety when major entertainment firms sued the company and the government passed laws making file sharing more difficult. P2P networks like Gnutella and Kazaa continue to be popular sites for trading files of all sorts of material and millions of people participate in this activity. It highlights an alternative principle of symbolic economy whereby the Internet subverts the logic of commodification and helps generate the model of a gift economy in which individuals freely circulate material on websites, engage in file sharing and produce new forms of texts like blogs and wikis outside of the commodity culture of capitalism.

The related activist practice of "culture jamming" has emerged as another important global form of oppositional activity. Mark Dery (1993) attributes the term to the experimental band Negativland and many have valorized the subversion of advertising and corporate culture in the Canadian journal *Adbusters* (www.adbusters.org) and RTMark (www.rtmark.com), while drawing upon online resources like The Culture Jammer's Encyclopedia (www.sniggle.net) and Subvertise (www.subvertise.org) to further their own projects. Internet jammers have attacked and defaced major corporate websites, but they have also produced playful and subversive critical appropriations of the symbols of the capitalist status quo. Thus, in the hands of the

hacker-jammers, McDonald's becomes McGrease, featuring sleazy images of clown Ronald McDonald, Starbucks becomes Fourbucks, satirizing the high price for a cup of coffee, and George W. Bush is morphed onto the Sauron character and shown wearing the evil ring of power featured in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Additionally, Nike, Coca Cola, the Barbie doll and other icons of establishment corporate and political culture have been tarnished with subversive and sometimes obscene animations.

BLOGS, WIKIS AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

While hacker technopolitics such as the movement for freely shared community Internet bandwidth is promising, cheap Internet connectivity in itself does not guarantee social benefit if its only use is the sort of e-commerce typical of eBay. Importantly, however, emergent interactive forms of Internet media, such as blogs and wikis, have become widely popular communication tools alongside the ultimate "killer app" of e-mail. The mushrooming Internet community that has erupted around blogging is particularly deserving of analysis here, as bloggers have demonstrated themselves as technoactivists favoring not only democratic self-expression and networking but also global media critique and journalistic socio-political intervention.

Blogs, short for "web logs," are partly successful because they are relatively easy to create and maintain – even for non-technical web users. Combining the hypertext of webpages, the multi-user discussion of message boards and listservs, and the mass syndication ability of RSS and Atom platforms (as well as e-mail), blogs are popular because they represent the next evolution of web-based experience. If the WWW was about forming a global network of interlocking, informative websites, blogs make the idea of a dynamic network of ongoing debate, dialogue and commentary come alive and so emphasize the interpretation and dissemination of alternative information to a heightened degree. While the initial mainstream coverage of blogs tended to portray them as narcissistic domains for one's own individual opinion, many group blogs exist, such as American Samizdat (www.drmenlo.com/samizdat), Metafilter (www.metafilter.com) and BoingBoing (www.boingboing.net), in which teams of contributors post and comment upon stories. The ever-expanding series of international Indymedia (www.indymedia.org) sites, erected by activists for the public domain to inform one another both locally and globally are especially promising. But even for the hundreds of thousands of purely individual blogs, connecting up with groups of fellow blog readers and publishers is the netiquette norm, and blog posts inherently tend to reference and link to online affinity groups and peers to an impressive degree.

A controversial article in the *New York Times* by Katie Hafner, "For Some, the Blogging Never Stops" (May 27, 2004), cited a blog-tracking service, Technorati, which claimed that there are currently 2.5 million blogs active. Hafner also referenced a Jupiter Research estimate

that only 4 percent of online users read blogs, while bloggers were quick to counter with a PEW study that claimed 11 percent of Internet users read blogs regularly. Although Hafner's article was itself largely dismissive, it documented the passionate expansion of blogging amongst Internet users and the voluminous blogger response to the article showed an aggressive activism within the blogosphere.

One result of bloggers' fascination with networks of links has been the subcultural phenomenon known as Google Bombing. Documented in early 2002, it was revealed that the popular search engine Google had a special affinity for blogs because of its tendency to favor highly linked, recently updated web content in its site-ranking system. With this in mind, bloggers began campaigns to get large numbers of fellow bloggers to post links to specific postings designed to include the desirable keywords that Google users might normally search. A successful Google Bomb, then, would rocket the initial blog that began the campaign up Google's rankings to number one for each and every one of those keywords – whether the blog itself had important substantive material on them or not.

While those in the blog culture often abused this trick for personal gain (to get their own name and blog placed at the top of Google's most popular search terms), many in the blog subculture began using the Google Bomb as a tool for political subversion. Known as a "justice bomb," this use of blogs served to link a particularly distasteful corporation or entity to a series of keywords that either spoofs or criticizes the same. Hence, thanks to a Google Bomb, Google users typing in "McDonald's" might very well get pointed to a much-linked blog post titled "McDonald's Lies about Their Fries" as the top entry. Another group carried out a campaign to link Bush to "miserable failure" so that when one typed this phrase into Google one was directed to George W. Bush's official presidential website. While Google continues to favor blogs in its rankings, amidst the controversy surrounding the so-called clogging of search engine results by blogs, it has recently taken steps to de-emphasize blogs in its rating system and may soon remove blogs to their own search subsection altogether – this despite blogs accounting for only an estimated 0.03 percent of Google's indexed web content (Orlowski 2003).

Google or not, many blogs are increasingly political in the scope of their commentary. Over the last year, a plethora of leftist-oriented blogs have been created and organized in networks of interlinking solidarity, so as to contest the more conservative and moderate blog opinions of mainstream media favorites like Glenn Reynolds (www.instupundit.com). Post-9/11, with the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, the phenomenon of warblogging arose to become an important and noted genre in its own right. Blogs, such as our own BlogLeft (www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/blogger.php), have provided a broad range of critical alternative views concerning the objectives of the Bush administration and Pentagon and the corporate media

spin surrounding them. One blogger, the now famous Iraqi Salam Pax (www.dear_raed.blogspot.com), gave outsiders a dose of the larger unexpurgated reality as the bombs exploded overhead in Baghdad. Meanwhile, in Iran, journalist Sina Mottalebi became the first blogger to be jailed for “undermining national security through cultural activities.”¹⁸ And after the 2004 election in Iran, boycotted by significant groups of reformers after government repression, dozens of new websites popped up to circulate news and organize political opposition. In response to the need for anonymous and untraceable blogging (as in countries where freedom of speech is in doubt), open-source software like invisiblog (www.invisiblog.com) has been developed to protect online citizens’ and journalists’ identities. Recent news that the FBI now actively monitors blogs in order to gain information on citizens suggests a need for US activist-bloggers to implement the software themselves, just as many use PGP (Pretty Good Privacy) code keys for their e-mail and anonymity cloaking services for their web surfing (www.anonymizer.com).

On another note, political bloggers have played a significant role in recent US politics, beginning in 2003 with the focus of attention upon the racist remarks made by Speaker of the House Trent Lott and then the creation of a media uproar over the dishonest reporting exposed at the *New York Times*. Lott’s remarks had been buried in the back of the *Washington Post* until communities of bloggers began publicizing them, generating public and media interest that then led to his removal. In the *New York Times* example, bloggers again rabidly set upon the newsprint giant, whipping up so much controversy and hostile journalistic opinion that the *Times*’s executive and managing editors were forced to resign in disgrace.

A second blog intervention involves the campaign against Diebold computerized voting machines. While the mainstream media neglected this story, bloggers constantly discussed how the company was run by Republican activists, how the machines were unreliable and could be easily hacked and how paper ballots were necessary to guarantee a fair election. After the widespread failure of the machines in 2003 elections, and a wave of blog discussion, the mainstream media finally picked up on the story and the state of California recently canceled their contract with the company. Further, post-Election 2004 blogs again raised issues around electoral machine failures and anomalies in North Carolina, Ohio, Florida and other battleground states.

Taking note of blogs’ ability to organize and proliferate groups around issues, the campaign for Howard Dean became an early blog adopter (www.blogforamerica.com) and his blog undoubtedly helped to successfully catalyze his grassroots campaign. In turn, blogs became de rigueur for all political candidates and have been sites for discussing the policies and platforms of various candidates, interfacing with local and national support offices, and in some cases speaking directly to the presidential hopefuls themselves.¹⁹

Another momentous media spectacle, fueled by intense blog discussion, emerged in May 2004 with the television and Internet

circulation of a panorama of images of US abuse of Iraqi prisoners and the quest to pin responsibility on the soldiers and higher US military and political authorities. Evoking universal disgust and repugnance, the images of young American soldiers humiliating Iraqis circulated with satellite-driven speed through broadcasting channels and print media, but it was the manner in which they were proliferated and archived on blogs that may make them stand as some of the most influential images of all time. Thanks in part to blogs and the Internet this scandal will persist in a way that much mainstream media spectacle often does not and so it is not a complete overstatement to say that blogs made an important intervention into Bush's and future American military policy as a result.

Bloggers should not be judged, however, simply by their ability to generate political and media spectacle. As alluded to earlier, bloggers are cumulatively expanding the notion of what the Internet is and how it can be used, as well as questioning conventional journalism, its frames and limitations. A genre of "Watchblogs" (www.watchblog.com) has emerged that focuses upon specific news media, or even reporters, dissecting their every inflection, uncovering their spin and attacking their errors. Many believe that a young and inexperienced White House press corps was hypercritical of Al Gore in the 2000 election, while basically giving George W. Bush a pass; this time, however, the major media political correspondents are being minutely dissected for their biases, omissions and slants.

Increasingly, bloggers are not tied to their desktops, writing in virtual alienation from the world, but are posting pictures, text, audio and video on the fly from PDA devices and cell phones as part of a movement of mobloggers (i.e. mobile bloggers; see www.mobloggers.com). Large political events, such as the World Summit for Sustainable Development, the World Social Forum and the G8 forums all now have wireless bloggers providing real-time alternative coverage, and a new genre of confblogs (i.e. conference blogs) has emerged.²⁰ One environmental activist, a tree-sitter named Remedy, even broadcast a wireless account of her battle against the Pacific Lumber Company from her blog (www.contrast.org/treesit), 130 feet atop an old-growth redwood. She has since been forcefully removed but continues blogging in defense of a sustainable world in which new technologies can coexist with wilderness and other species.²¹

In fact, there are increasingly all manner of blogging communities. milbloggers (i.e. military bloggers) provide detailed commentary on the action of US and other troops throughout the world, sometimes providing critical commentary that eludes mainstream media. And in a more cultural turn blog types are emerging that are less textual, supported by audio bloggers, video bloggers and photo bloggers, with the three often meshing as an on-the-fly multimedia experience. Blogging has also become important within education circles (www.ebn.weblogger.com) and people are forming university blogging networks (blogs.law.harvard.edu) just as they previously created citywide blogging portals (www.nycbloggers.com).

While the overt participatory politics of bloggers, as well as their sheer numbers, makes the exciting new media tool called the wiki secondary to this discussion, the inherent participatory, collective and democratic design of wikis have many people believing that they represent the coming evolution of the hypertextual Web. Taken from the Hawaiian word for “quick,” wikis are popular innovative forms of group databases and hypertextual archives that work on the principle of open editing, meaning that any online user can change not only the content of the database (add, edit or delete) but also its organization (the way in which material links together and networks). Wikis have been coded such that they come with a built-in failsafe that automatically saves and logs each previous version of the archive. This makes them highly flexible because users are then freed to transform the archive as they see fit, as no version of the previous information is ever lost beyond recall. The result, then, is not only an information-rich databank but also one that can be examined as in process, with viewers able to trace and investigate how the archive has grown over time, which users have made changes and what exactly they have contributed.

Although initially conceived as a simple, informal and free-form alternative to more highly structured and complex groupware products such as IBM’s Lotus Notes, wikis can be used for a variety of purposes beyond organizational administration (Lenf and Cunningham 2001). To the degree that wikis could easily come to supplant the basic model of the website, which is designed privately, placed online and then is mostly a static experience beyond following preprogrammed links, wikis deserve investigation by technology theorists as the next development of the emerging democratic Internet.

One interesting wiki project is the dKosopedia (www.dkosopedia.com), which is providing a valuable cultural resource and learning environment through its synthesis and analysis of the connections behind today’s political happenings. Perhaps the preeminent example of wiki power, though, is the impressive Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), a free, globally collaborative encyclopedia project based on wiki protocol that would have made Diderot and his fellow *philosophes* proud. Beginning on January 15, 2001, the Wikipedia has quickly grown to include approximately 162,000 always-evolving articles in English (with over 138,000 in other languages) and the database grows with each passing day. With over 5,000 vigilant contributors worldwide creating, updating and deleting information in the archive daily, the charge against wikis is that such unmoderated and asynchronous archives must descend into chaos and not information. However, as required by the growth of the project, so-called Wikipedians have gathered together and developed their own loose norms regarding what constitutes helpful and contributive actions on the site. Disagreements, which do occur, are settled online by Wikipedians as a whole in what resembles a form of virtualized Athenian democracy wherein all contributors have both a voice and vote.

Blogs and wikis are both emerging examples of the trend in Internet development toward “social software” that networks people around similar interests or other semantic connections. As mentioned earlier, Howard Dean’s campaign use of Internet “meet ups” generated a new paradigm for grassroots electoral politics enthusiasm, and people are using online social networking to gather around all manner of topics and issues (www.meetup.com). Social software has moved to incorporate a quasi “six degrees of separation” model into its mix, with portals like Friendster (www.friendster.com), LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), Ryze (www.ryze.com), Orkut (www.orkut.com) and FriendFan (www.friendfan.com) allowing groups to form around common interests, while also creating linkages and testimonials between friends and family members. This has allowed for a greater amount of trust in actually allowing virtual relationships to flourish offline, while also allowing a new friendship to expand quickly into the preexisting communities of interest and caring that each user brings to the site.

While all of these examples are reason to hope that the Internet can be a tool for the strengthening of community and democracy amongst its users, it must be stressed again that we do not conclude that either blogs or wikis or social networking software, alone or altogether, are congruent with strong democratic practices and emancipatory anti-capitalist politics. For all the interesting developments we are chronicling here, there are also the shopping blogs, behind-the-firewall corporate wikis and all-in-one business platforms such as Microsoft’s planned Wallop application. It remains a problem that most blogs, while providing the possibility for public voice for most citizens, are unable to be found by most users thus resulting in the cyberbalkanization of so-called “nanoaudiences.” Further, that a great many of the millions of blogs have an extremely high turnover rate, falling into silence as quickly as they rise into voice, and that huge amounts of users remain captivated by the individualistic diary form of the “daily me” means that the logic of capitalism is here too apparent.

We accept these critiques made by Jodi Dean and others, but oppose totalizing, overly dismissive rejections of the Internet and technopolitics. Recognizing that Internet politics can serve as a “soft activism” that provides an illusion of political action through typing on a computer, we argue for a critical/reconstructive approach that sharply criticizes mainstream media institutions and the use of technologies like the Internet, but which valorizes approaches that break with the logic of capital and that advance oppositional politics. We have stressed how Internet politics can be connected to projects of political activism and provided examples of how ICTs have been used to promote ongoing political struggles. While there are no guarantees that social software will ignite a new phase in democratic life, it does appear that there are examples and trends that it is our job as critical theorists to recognize and engage.

IN CONCLUSION: SITUATING OPPOSITIONAL TECHNOPOLITICS

The analyses in this paper suggest how rapidly evolving media developments in technoculture make possible a reconfiguring of politics and culture and a refocusing of participatory democratic politics for everyday life. In this conjuncture, the ideas of Guy Debord and the Situationist International are especially relevant with their stress on the construction of situations, the use of technology, media of communication and cultural forms to promote a revolution of everyday life, and to increase the realm of freedom, community, and empowerment.²² To a meaningful extent, then, the new information and communications technologies are revolutionary and constitute a dramatic transformation of everyday life in the direction of more participatory and democratic potentials. Yet it must be admitted that this progressive dimension coevolves with processes that also promote and disseminate the capitalist consumer society, individual and competition, and that have involved emergent modes of fetishism, alienation and domination yet to be clearly perceived and theorized (Best and Kellner 2001).

The Internet is thus a contested terrain, used by left, right and center of both dominant cultures and subcultures to promote their own agendas and interests. The political battles of the future may well be fought in the streets, factories, parliaments and other sites of past struggle, but politics is already mediated by broadcast, computer and information technologies and will increasingly be so in the future. Our belief is that this is at least in part a positive development that opens radical possibilities for a greater range of opinion, novel modes of virtual and actual political communities and original forms of direct political action. Those interested in the politics and culture of the future should therefore be clear on the important role of the alternative public spheres and intervene accordingly; while critical cultural theorists and activists have the responsibility of educating students around the literacies that ultimately amount to the skills that will enable them to participate in the ongoing struggle inherent in cultural politics (Kellner 2002a).

Online activist subcultures and political groups have thus materialized in the last few years as a vital oppositional space of politics and culture in which a wide diversity of individuals and groups have used emergent technologies to help produce creative social relations and forms of democratic political possibility. Many of these subcultures and groups may become appropriated into the mainstream, but no doubt novel oppositional cultures and different alternative voices and practices will continue to appear as we navigate the increasingly complex present toward the ever-receding future. The Internet provides the possibility of an alternative symbolic economy, forms of culture and politics, and instruments of political struggle. It is up to oppositional groups that utilize the Internet to develop the forms of technopolitics that can produce a freer and happier world

and that can liberate humanity and nature from the tyrannical and oppressive forces that currently constitute much of our global and local reality.

NOTES

1. By “technopolitics” we mean politics that is mediated by technologies such as broadcasting media or the Internet. This Internet politics and a myriad of other forms of media politics are contained under the more general concept of “technopolitics,” which describes the proliferation of technologies that are engaged in political struggle. On technopolitics, see Kellner (1997 169–88); Best and Kellner (2001); and Armitage (1999). For useful comments that helped us significantly in revising this article, we would like to thank the editors and three anonymous reviewers of *Cultural Politics*. For an early history of Internet politics, see Walch (1999).
2. Dean has a book-length treatment of this concept, see note 23.
3. For a pre-Internet example of the subversion of an informational medium, in this case public access television, see Kellner (2004b). Selected episodes are freely available for viewing as streaming videos at www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner (accessed January 30, 2004).
4. The advertisement roughly translates (thanks to Lola Calderon for assistance with this): “An Event at 6 Genova Street! No radios, no TVs, the protest of March 13th in front of the party headquarters of the Popular/People’s party is going to be via Internet of SMS (the telephone company). Our arms (i.e. the cell phones) will prove our capacity to convocate.” The text message within the cell phone reads: “A concentration – At the People’s Party headquarters – pass it along.”
5. The use of text messages on cell phones and PDAs was also central to 2004 demonstrations in Boston for the Democratic National Convention, and New York for the Republican National Convention. Activists utilized the Textmob website (www.txtmob.com) and Dodgeball (dodgeball.com), as documented by the *Wall Street Journal* (Aug 31, 2004), “Get the Word Out” by Carl Bialik. While the use of cell phones by activists for progressive ends is an important new tactic, it should be pointed out that the technology has also been used for opposite purposes. Thus, in Madrid, the bombing of the subway was itself ignited by a wireless phone used as a triggering device. Further, during the massive protests outside the Republican National Convention, delegates often coordinated their activities via cell phone, so as not to be disrupted by activists.
6. Illich’s “learning webs” (1971) and “tools for conviviality” (1973) anticipate the Internet and how it might provide resources, interactivity and communities that could help revolutionize education. For Illich, science and technology can either serve as instruments

of domination or for progressive ends. Hence, whereas big systems of computers promote modern bureaucracy and industry, personalized computers made accessible to the public might be constructed to provide tools that can be used to enhance learning. Thus, Illich was aware of how technologies like computers could either enhance or distort education depending on how they were fitted into a well-balanced ecology of learning.

7. "Blogs" are hypertextual web logs that people use for new forms of journaling, self-publishing and media/news critique, as we discuss in detail below. It was estimated that there were some 500,000 blogs in January 2003; while six months later the estimated number was claimed to be between 2.4 and 2.9 million with a projection of ten million by 2005; see www.blogcensus.net for current figures. For examples see our two blogs: BlogLeft, www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/blogger.php, and Vegan Blog: The (Eco)Logical Weblog, www.getvegan.com/blog/blogger.php.
 "Wikis" are popular new forms of group databases and hypertextual archives, covered in more depth later in this paper.
8. The Internet has equally played a major role in the global environmental "right to know" movement that seeks to give citizens information about chemical, biological and radiological threats to their health and safety. For examples of links, see www.mapcruzin.com/globalchem.htm.
9. Recently, a subversive initiative has been formed by a team at the MIT Media Lab to monitor politicians and governmental agents via a web databank provided by global users. See Government Information Awareness at: <http://18.85.1.51>.
10. Hardt and Negri present contradictions within globalization in terms of an imperializing logic of "Empire" and an assortment of struggles by the multitude, creating a contradictory and tension-full situation. Like Hardt and Negri, we see globalization as a complex process that involves a multidimensional mixture of expansions of the global economy and capitalist market system, new technologies and media, expanded judicial and legal modes of governance, and emergent modes of power, sovereignty and resistance. While we do not find the dialectic of Empire vs. the multitude to be an adequate substitute for theories of global capital and analyses of contradictions and resistance, we share Hardt and Negri's quest to find new agents and movements of struggle and to use the instruments of technology and the networked society to advance progressive movements.
11. Extreme right-wing material is also found in other media, such as radio programs and stations, public access television programs, fax campaigns, video and even rock music productions.
12. For example the FBI closed down www.raisethefist.com and www.iraradio.com as part of its post-9/11 terror concerns.

13. On the origins of hacker culture, see Levy (1984) and Hafner and Markoff (1991). For more recent analysis, see Taylor (1999) and Himanen (2001).
14. See www.wired.com/news/wireless/0,1382,56742,00.html (accessed Feb 2, 2004).
15. See www.wardriving.com (accessed Feb 2, 2004) and www.azwardriving.com (accessed February 2, 2004). Related to wardriving is "warspying" in which hactivists search a city looking for the wireless video signals being sent by all manner of hidden digital cameras. For more on this, see www.securityfocus.com/news/7931 (accessed Feb 2, 2004).
16. See www.securityfocus.com/news/552 (accessed Feb 2, 2004).
17. See www.freenetworks.org (accessed Feb 2, 2004).
18. See Delio (2003). Another Iranian blogger, Hossein Derakhshan, living in exile in Toronto develops software for Iranian and other bloggers and has a popular website of his own. Hoder, as he is called, worked with the blogging community to launch a worldwide blogging protest on July 9, 2003 to commemorate the crackdown by the Iranian State against student protests on that day in 1999 and to call for democratic change once again in the country. See his blog at <http://hoder.com/weblog>. On recent political blogging in Iran, see Thomas (2004).
19. See www.dailykos.com (accessed Feb 2, 2004) for an example.
20. See <http://www.iht.com/articles/126768.html> (accessed March 31, 2004) for an example of how the World Economic Forum, while held in increasingly secure and remote areas, has been penetrated by bloggers.
21. See www.contrast.org/treesit (accessed Feb 2, 2004).
22. On the importance of the ideas of Debord and the Situationist International to make sense of the present conjuncture, see Best and Kellner (1997 chap. 3), and on the new forms of the interactive consumer society, see Best and Kellner (2001).
23. While we agree with Jodi Dean's analysis of the potential fetishism of the Internet and technopolitics, we believe that she inappropriately identifies Internet cultural politics with fetishism in the article published in this issue. Dean's recent book on the subject, *Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy* (2002), does a more well-rounded job of valorizing the positive political potentials of the Internet, and her idea concerning self-organizing networks of contestation and struggle is one that we are very much in support of here. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in more detail her polemic on the public sphere, we would argue for a more dialectical vision that seeks consensus and commonality amidst differences, but which emphasizes struggle and difference as a check to hegemonic consensuality, as well as to technocrats such as Arnold Schwarzenegger.

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