

Computer-linked Social Movements and the Global Threat to Capitalism

Abstract: Of all the emerging roles of computer communications in social conflict, this paper argues that the most serious challenge to the basic institutional structures of modern society flow from the emergence of computer-linked global social movements that are, increasingly, challenging both national and supranational policy-making institutions. The suggestion is that we are currently witnessing an accelerating circulation of social conflicts whose participants recognize a common enemy: contemporary capitalism. In their increasingly common rejection of business priorities their struggles cannot but recall Marxist notions of "class warfare." Yet the common opposition to capitalism is not accompanied by the old notion of a unified alternative project of socialism. On the contrary, such a vision has been displaced by a proliferation of diverse projects and the notion that there is no need for universal rules. In response to these struggles, the threatened institutions are responding in various ways, sometimes by military and paramilitary force, sometimes by co-optation aimed at reintegrating the antagonistic forces. The problem for us is finding ever new ways to defeat these responses and continue to build new worlds.

Recent writings on the spread of widespread, computer communications have found them playing new roles in all kinds of social conflict: in the activities of terrorists, drug cartels, illegal arms merchants, nation-states, advocacy groups and social movements. The content of these roles differ --from hacker break-ins and extortion demands, to the circulation of information on the Internet-- but they all involve the use of modern computer technologies as weapons of criminal acts or political struggle.

Clarifying the importance of communications in such conflict areas depends on the examination of case studies. Case studies, in turn require us to narrow our focus and select a specific area of conflict for closer scrutiny. How to choose? In general this question is being answered by individuals according to their own interests and by funding agencies according to their priority of worries. Everyone, I assume, wonders "in which area of conflict are the effects of these new behaviors and organizational forms likely to be the most profound?"

Of all the areas mentioned above, I argue that the area developing in ways most likely to produce profound effects is that of broad-based social movements. The reasons for this view are simple.

On the one hand, no innovation in the organization of terrorism, criminal cartels, military operations or any other inter-state interaction threatens the socio-economic and political order of contemporary global capitalism.⁽¹⁾ Small groups wield terrorism as a political weapon in the struggle for conventional power. For governments terrorism is just another way of repressing the opposition or, at an international level, of putting pressure on other nation-states. Current efforts to reorganize the military are merely designed to make it more effective within the current system ­which includes, and is not threatened by, modifications in nation-state relationships. Similarly, the restructuring of criminal organizations (drug cartels, arms merchants) is no more mysterious than parallel efforts among their more legal corporate counterparts. In all of these conflict areas we may well expect innovation and changes in the forms of conflicts that citizens will need to take into account, but none of them threatens any fundamental change in the current system.

On the other hand, there is accumulating evidence that current trends in large-scale social movements do pose such a threat and hold the possibility of coalescing into a deepening and broadening of that threat. Many past studies of large-scale social movements have not seen them as dangers to the current social system but rather as narrowly focused, largely reformist

movements aimed at achieving particular changes, but not general ones. In contrast, this paper suggests that current struggles for particular changes are linking up into a collaboration whose impact may wind up being much larger than the sum of the individual influences. One of the most important dimensions of the movement toward collaboration is its increasingly global or transnational character. Local and national movements, which have fought local and national battles, are quite consciously seeking and finding ways to make their efforts complement those of others organized around similar issues elsewhere.

Transnational rhizomes, networks or social networks?

These tendencies in the emergence and evolution of social movements have attracted the attention of independent critical intellectuals, mainstream social scientists and national security analysts. Among the former, the theoretical work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari has been particularly fruitful. In the process of transcending traditional Left notions of structuralism, dialectics and a preoccupation with large-scale forces, they elaborated a number of new concepts to illuminate the micro-dynamics of both individual psychology and social movements. For my purposes here, the most salient of their ideas are the ones based on the metaphor of the rhizome: a subterranean plant growth process involving propagation through the horizontal development of the plant stem.⁽²⁾ Deleuze and Guattari juxtaposed this horizontal elaboration of a multiplicity of underground roots and above ground stems to more familiar arboreal processes associated with the vertical, centralized growth of trees. Through the metaphor of the rhizome they explored the characteristics one finds, or might expect to find, in horizontally linked human interactions -- whether of small-scale social groups or large-scale social movements. This work has been taken up by activists in such movements and used for thinking about their own activity, both locally and internationally.⁽³⁾

In the mainstream, first sociologists and then political scientists have taken over from mathematical graph theory the concept of networks to analyse a wide variety of social relationships.⁽⁴⁾ These have included individual behavior, small group interactions, organizational behavior and social movements --most recently transnational movements.⁽⁵⁾ Of these, the last two would seem to have the most salience here. Organizational theorists and observers have traced the emergence within businesses and to some degree the state sector, of network forms of organization that appear distinct from more traditional hierarchies and market systems.⁽⁶⁾ Recent applications of network analysis to transnational social movements have drawn on past sociological studies of local networks, on organizational studies and on empirical work on particular network-based campaigns to knit together a synthetic view of "those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse and dense exchanges of information and services." ⁽⁷⁾

Among national security analysts, the most perceptive work has been done by RAND's David Ronfeldt and his co-authors who have examined the implications of the emergence of network forms of organization for the Defense Department. Drawing on studies of the changing organization of business and the state, such as that of Walter Powell, they have taken over the juxtaposition of networks to markets and hierarchies and argued that contemporary social movements have been evolving into networked organizations capable of unleashing "transnational social networks." They see emerging transnational networks of "information & age activism" based on associations among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with modern and postmodern issues such as the environment, human rights, immigration, indigenous peoples and freedom in cyberspace.⁽⁸⁾

The Zapatista Movement

In much of this recent work, a primary reference point for the study of transnational rhizomes or

social networks has been the rebellion waged by Zapatista communities in Chiapas, Mexico and the activities of its supporters around the world since the beginning of 1994.

The first activist analysis of the communicational dimension of the conflict noted that the "most striking thing about the sequence of events set in motion on January 1, 1994 has been the speed with which news of the struggle circulated and the rapidity of the mobilization of support which resulted." (9) Modern computer communications, through the Internet and the Association for Progressive Communications networks, made it possible for the Zapatistas to get their message out despite governmental spin control and censorship. Mailing lists and conferences also facilitated discussions and debate among concerned observers that led to the organization of protest and support activities in over forty countries around the world. The Zapatista rebellion was weaving, the analysis concluded, a global "electronic fabric of struggle."

In July 1995 a Defense Department "strategic assessment" of the Internet written for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, quoted an earlier (and erroneous) Army report that:

Subcommandante Marco [sic] of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Mexico utilizes a portable laptop computer to issue orders to other EZLN units via a modem, and to foreign media contacts in order to maintain a favorable international propaganda image." (10)

Two years later, in a general essay on "netwar," defense analysts David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla wrote:

"In Mexico, a mix of subnational and transnational actors have mounted a social network against a state lagging at democratization. The network appears in the decentralized collaboration among the numerous, diverse Mexican and transnational (mostly U.S. and Canadian) activists who side with the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), and who aim to affect government policies, on human rights, democracy and other major reform issues. Mexico . . . is now the scene of a prototype for social network in the 21st century." (11)

In 1998, as part of their study of the development of transnational human rights networks, Keck and Sikkink reported that:

During the peasant uprisings in Chiapas in 1994 it became clear that the government could no longer control information as it had in 1968. . . . The press and domestic and international NGOs monitored the conflict closely, and electronic mail became one of the main mechanisms through which the EZLN communicated with the world. (12)

Such analyses, across the political spectrum, have sought to understand the characteristics of what appears to be a new capacity for this and other social movements to communicate across borders and to operate at a transnational level. The rapidity and thoroughness with which almost every aspect of modern computer communications have been used by pro-Zapatista forces has been central to this particular movement becoming "a prototype." From the use of mailing lists and conferences for the dissemination of information, the sharing of experience and the facilitation of discussion and organizing through the elaboration of multimedia web sites for the amplification and archiving of the developing history of the struggle to the use of electronic voting technology to make possible global participation in plebiscites on their political positions, the Zapatistas and their supporters have been on the cutting edge of the political use of computer communications.

These analyses of this movement have also recognized how the content of these rhizomatic or networking forms of social mobilization has differed from traditional Leninist notions of revolution. Instead of a dedication to the seizure of power, the Zapatista rebellion, including its international dimensions, has involved a mobilization with the essentially political objectives of 1) pulling together grassroots movements against the current political and economic order in Mexico and the world and of 2) facilitating the elaboration and circulation of alternative

approaches to social organization.

Such recognition differs markedly from that of the Mexican government whose primary responses have included police, military and paramilitary terrorism (backed by economic and military aid from the US).(13) The insistence on the fundamentally political nature of the conflict also stands in stark contrast to the thinking of some U.S. policymakers who often have difficulty distinguishing between types of struggles and wind up defining most of them as national security threats.(14)

At the same time, however, that activist analyses have sought ways to deepen the effectiveness of these grassroots efforts, "national security" research has emphasized how governments should learn to counter such social movements. "To ensure that netwars do not adversely affect Mexico's stability or transformability," Ronfeldt and Martinez wrote, "the government will have to improve its ability to wage counter-netwar . . ." (15)

Military "Counter-netwar" responses

A recent attempt to assess evidence of any Mexican Army shift toward networked forms has focused on signs of decentralization in operations, more inter-agency cooperation and "increased attention to public affairs, psychological operations, relations with NGOs, and human-rights issues".(16) Unfortunately, from the point of view of the local inhabitants, the dispersion of small units in a so-called "blanketing strategy" has primarily involved widespread Army intimidation and terror in Zapatista communities.(17) Inter-agency cooperation and "increased attention" to NGOs and human-rights issues has revealed itself as an increased government willingness and ability to persecute NGOs and foment human rights violations.

For one thing, the Mexican government has come to understand the important role of international observers in outflanking its attempts to cover up its terrorism and murder in Chiapas. Over the last year or so the Mexican immigration service has been used increasingly to harass and confine the activities of foreign observers. In an obvious attempt to avoid embarrassing international reports by human rights observers, the government has undertaken a blatantly xenophobic campaign accusing foreign observers of "political" interference in Mexican internal affairs. Hundreds have been expelled from Mexico, many banned from returning.(18)

For another, the major institutional change in the Mexican army in this period that looks like an adaptation to "netwar" appears to me to have been its insertion into domestic police functions (e.g., anti-drug and urban police operations) and their intimate relation with state-supported paramilitary terror networks.(19) Indeed, the most "networked" new aspect of army organization may be this linkage. This kind of mailed-fist response, however, is totally inappropriate to the political character of the social conflict. Vicious repression has only generated increased support from human rights groups and other sympathizers. By failing to respond politically to political challenges, the government has been losing the real "war."

Political "Counter-netwar" responses

An alternative approach to the antagonisms between social movements and the state suggests their reduction to the negotiations of pluralism. In the case of Chiapas, there have been recurrent efforts to convince or pressure the EZLN into laying down its arms and becoming an officially recognized player in the formal political sphere. More broadly: "Interests and needs continue to grow for all manner of civil & shy; society NGOs and other nongovernmental actors to develop new ways to work with government actors all across North America."(20) The formulation that it is the non-state actors who need to work with governments assumes an at least potential complementarity of interests.

Grassroots movements, in contrast, desire real changes in government policies, or even alternative forms of collectively managing the social commons. Even among those who think reform possible, many believe that without considerable external pressure governments will never change in the directions they desire. There is also a perception, based on past experience, that to "work with governments" is to risk having one's challenges to the current order neutralized through co-optation. Collaboration with the state, in other words, can lead directly to the subsumption of "civil society" within the state and an end to whatever autonomy it has managed to assert.[\(21\)](#)

The use of consultation-co-optation is currently in vogue at the World Bank. This supranational state institution traditionally is not directly accountable to the citizens of its member states. But in recent years, the Bank has been besieged by environmentalists and indigenous rights groups. Faced with multiplying objections to its approach to development, the World Bank has invited its critics to contribute to the reform of its policies --with some success, given that a certain number of NGOs have accepted to engage in such consultation. Of course, such discussions about reforming Bank policy must take place within the framework of contemporary global capitalism. Listening to critics has the triple advantage for the Bank of 1) getting them off the streets and into less visible conference rooms, 2) adding to its stock of ideas about how to foster capitalist development while, 3) bleeding time, energy and creativity away from any consideration of more radical alternatives.

In other examples of institutional responses to growing grassroots opposition to their practices, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have begun to accept the idea of "a dialogue with civil society." The surprising willingness in early January 1998 of IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus to meet with workers in South Korea who were opposing the government-IMF program to deal with the "Asia Crisis" broke with all previous practice.[\(22\)](#) His promise to set up a "permanent" dialogue between the IMF mission to South Korea and the labor movement is very much in the spirit of World Bank consultations with its critics.[\(23\)](#)

The OECD's opening to such dialogue came only after the defeat of its initiative to negotiate and pass a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) behind the backs of most of the world's peoples. That initiative --to define a global set of rights of corporate investors (paralleling the trade rules of the GATT)-- was begun in 1995 but not made public until February 1997 when a draft of the proposal was leaked. The temporary defeat of this initiative has been credited, in part, to the utilization of e-mail and web sites to circulate information about the MAI, including critiques of both the content of the agreement and the undemocratic process of drafting it.[\(24\)](#) As a result of the outrage that this information generated, the Internet also became a vehicle for circulating and organizing a mobilization campaign against the MAI in dozens of countries. Such mobilization put pressure both on the negotiators at the OECD and on member country governments. In April 1998, under intense fire, the OECD halted the negotiations for six months. In October 1998, France pulled out of the negotiations, substantially undermining them.

In an analysis of this conflict, Wharton School management professor Stephen Kobrin suggested that because the Internet makes it difficult to maintain the secrecy of such elite negotiations it will be necessary to invest in generating "public support for treaties such as the MAI" --no matter how difficult or costly.[\(25\)](#)

Stunned by the success of grassroots opposition, the OECD invited NGOs to a seminar-consultation on December 2, 1998. Only three NGOs participated in this seminar while the vast majority of those who are active in the anti-MAI movement stayed away, refusing to provide the OECD with the legitimization of their presence.[\(26\)](#) This refusal was expressed in a scathing public letter to the OECD, the draft of which was circulated on the Internet for modification:

"No additional time is needed. We know perfectly well where we stand on the MAI and on any text inspired by the same principles. We have already declared on many occasions that we shall continue to oppose it under any guise and wherever it may resurface."

Although we can understand your desire to re-establish the OECD's credibility, badly, perhaps terminally, damaged by the MAI process, we do not intend to lend ourselves to this enterprise.[\(27\)](#)

European Commission documents recently leaked and posted on the Internet, as well as other public reports, suggest that rather than abandoning the effort to create a MAI, or of undertaking any serious opening to "civil society," there is currently underway an attempt to shift negotiations from the OECD to the WTO, which has been even less inclined to talk with its critics.

In contrast to the IMF and the OECD, the World Trade Organization still largely operates behind a wall of obfuscation and state repression, as was seen in its response to the confrontations that took place in Geneva during its May 1998 meetings. As early as February of that year, an international coalition of grassroots movements formed a "People's Global Action" (PGA) to build a global coalition from the bottom against what they perceived as a global alliance at the top. Organized in part through the Internet, and dedicated to direct action as well as to non-violent civil disobedience, the PGA prepared huge demonstrations for the WTO meetings. When the time came, somewhere between ten and twenty thousand activists converged in several days of demonstrations. A Swiss police crackdown turned the city into a battleground tinged with the smell of tear-gas. There was no dialogue here, just traditional aloofness and antagonism.

The WTO's account of the situation is quite different. Because it has allowed some NGOs to attend its ministerial meetings since 1996, it presents itself as quite open to "external" feedback from "civil society:"

"Throughout the three-day-event NGOs were briefed regularly by the WTO Secretariat on the progress of the informal working sessions -- a feature which was welcomed by NGOs as a genuine sign of commitment to ensure transparency and the recognition of civil society as an entity which deserves attention in its own right."

A study of the list of NGO participants at this meeting (as well as at others), however, reveals that the WTO's notion of "civil society" is not one shared by most grassroots groups. The vast majority of the participants turned out to be business organizations and other organizations that work in their behalf. For the WTO, it seems, "civil society" refers to everyone outside the state. For the grassroots movements organizing against it, "civil society" --when they use that term--generally refers to that part of society which falls outside both the state and business sectors. By that criteria there were very few participants indeed and the appropriateness of their "non-business" status is debatable, e.g., trade union organizations that work as the labor relations arm of business, environmental groups that accept capitalism as a framework within which to work.

Nevertheless, since the massive confrontation in May 1998, the WTO has intensified its efforts to give at least the appearance of listening to its critics. It has adopted a few measures to improve the transparency of its activities and is talking about making its documents available to the public a little sooner. It will provide regular briefings for NGOs, invite NGOs to more meetings and distribute NGO papers to member countries. It is even engaging in a bit of "netwar" by creating a special NGO page at its web site. All these measures WTO Director General Renato Ruggiero calls "a genuine sign of commitment . . . to the recognition of civil society as an entity which deserves attention in its own right." However, given the character of the NGOs the WTO has seen fit to engage to date, it seems unlikely that this rhetoric signals a real opening to those opposed to its policies. One thing is clear: willingness to enter into dialogue with one's critics in civil society is by no means a hegemonic tactic and is often tentative at best, except in the case of

the World Bank's effort to lead the way.

There are two things about his new "offensive of smiles" on the part of major supranational capitalist institutions that I want to discuss further. First, while serious invitations to a dialogue between grassroots activists and supranational institutions are certainly a measure of the growing power of grassroots opposition we must also ask ourselves about the nature and sources of that power. Second, while in every case those being invited to dialogue are representatives of NGOs, "civil society" --defined as the mass of society outside the state and the business sector-- encompasses a much more comprehensive set of actors. The concept itself, moreover, has important limitations.

Dialogue and Power

The power to provoke invitations to dialogue with supranational capitalist institutions was not always there. Before social movements demonstrated their ability to organize an embarrassing amount of public pressure, they were ignored. To build such a level of pressure opposition movements organized themselves internationally, or globally, in ways that bypassed all the layers of mediation that previously protected these institutions. In this way the movements were able to confront the institutions at their own supranational level.(28) In the case of the OECD (or the WTO) the international character of mobilization is obvious. But even cases that appear purely local, such as the IMF talks with the South Korean labor movement, turn out at least partially to be a response to international struggle. Beginning with the general strike in December 1996, South Korean workers reached out to the rest of the world through various means, especially the Internet, and succeeded in mobilizing considerable support --in a manner similar to the Zapatista effort in Mexico.

At the heart of such efforts was the mobilization of power against Power. That is to say, the elaborate pattern of connections and linkages within social movements bring vast numbers of imaginative people into a collective endeavor where their joint creativity challenges that of a Power often organized in a more rigid and less-flexible manner.(29) Against a Power-ful rule-making and enforcing institution, grassroots power pits a rhizomatic constituent force, more capable of innovating and elaborating new lines of flight in struggle. The problem for Power is to divide and to harness power for its own purposes, to give itself life.(30) The constitution of a multitude of alternative, linked nodes of antagonistic power by-passing mediations, undermines that division and makes the harnessing more difficult.

Although the bypassing of mediation by grassroots opposition has been achieved through similar organizational forms, history and policy shifts have dictated that the pattern of confrontation would vary from institution to institution. Ever since the 1960s the World Bank, for example, had come under attack from Nationalist and Left-wing intellectuals for its role in American imperialism and/or capitalist exploitation in the Third World. But such critiques failed to stir any widespread movement against the institution.(31) It was not until environmentalists and indigenous rights groups widely disseminated horror stories about the suffering caused by particular projects along with appealing information about the peoples and cultures being destroyed, that Bank activities were brought to critical public awareness and challenge. The power of their protests was also augmented in the 1980s by attacks on the closely related role of the World Bank in the structural adjustment approach to the international debt crisis.(32)

The International Monetary Fund had also been long critiqued for the deflationary adjustment it sometimes demanded of its member states. The Right critiqued the assault on national sovereignty and the Left critiqued the imposition of unemployment, falling wages and poverty on the working class. But it only became widely known, and truly hated, in the 1980s for its central role in the international debt crisis.(33) Totally devoted to the interest of international banks in

achieving complete repayment for all loans, the Fund demanded the repeated imposition of killing austerity and neoliberal structural adjustments in exchange for its official sanction of debt roll-over loans. That austerity was imposed against people who were not responsible for having borrowed outstanding debt or for the difficulties of repayment.⁽³⁴⁾ As a major agent of the spread of neoliberal policies, i.e., pro-market, pro-business, anti-regulation, anti-worker, the IMF has promulgated increased unemployment, falling wages and increased suffering around the world. In its wake a legion of antagonists have been active in crafting international linkages and developing new forms of opposition.

Opposition to the World Trade Organization emerged out of a history of grassroots perceptions that a primary goal of trade agreements has been to hammer down trade barriers in ways that facilitate corporate circumvention of local controls. The recent creation of the WTO and its use by corporations to attack local constraints has hastened the extension of local struggles to the international level. For grassroots environmental movements that have fought and gained some local protections for nature from corporate rapaciousness, the dangers of an MAI or a WTO being used to undercut their successes became quickly apparent. For human rights activists who have fought for local laws against public contracts with corporations that support repressive regimes, the WTO is now seen as a primary vehicle for corporations to attack such constraints.⁽³⁵⁾ For workers who have seen falling trade barriers lead to runaway shops, there has been a shift from a struggle for protection to one for global organization.⁽³⁶⁾ The WTO has not only increased the centralization of global economic policymaking, but has also provided a central object of protest as well.

Finally, the Organization for Economic and Cultural Development was long, for most people, merely a quasi-governmental institution that periodically issued country and topical reports. For the Third World it was the Rich Country's Club, for the Right a part of the conspiracy for a world government and for the Left it was one more gathering place of capitalist policymakers. But the discovery of obscure negotiations to craft a Multilateral Agreement on Investment that would, like some trade agreements, undercut local and even national victories by grassroots movements focused the attention and anger of thousands of activists all over the world. Myriad individuals and groups with little previous interest in the OECD gathered information, linked up and shared ideas and methods for a campaign of global proportions.

This transition, however, from the local to the global has not always been direct. Sometimes it has passed through a regional phase. This can be illustrated with two examples.

In North America an important phase of this transition from local to the global organizing was the battle over the negotiation and passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). As with the later case of the MAI, negotiations for NAFTA were carried on in secret. But the discovery of this behind-closed-doors deal making led to the formation of tri-national collaborative networks of opposition in Canada, the United States and Mexico. This anti-NAFTA movement, operating through direct meetings and the Internet, forced the negotiations into public view and almost defeated this top-down trade agreement. The subsequent formation of the World Trade Organization caught the attention of these grassroots trade activists and made them realize that a purely regional approach was not enough. Many of them have since formed the North American backbone of the anti-WTO movement.

In Western Europe we find another progression from the local through the regional to the global. The recent, increasingly tight interlinking of economic and social policy --from the Maastricht treaty and Schengen Agreement, to the monetary union-- has met with growing challenge by grassroots movements. Those movements, one after another, have become convinced that these regional arrangements are aimed at a fundamental augmentation in the power of business and a parallel decrease in that of rank and file labor, immigrants, peasants, the Green movement and

other grassroots self-organization. But the mobilization against these regional arrangements has come in a period where others have already been intensely involved in confrontations with supranational state institutions. Thus European activists have been quick to join a more global organization of grassroots opposition. The European response was particularly strong in response to the Zapatista program that attacks globalisation while supporting the elaboration of globally interlinked local and regional alternatives to capitalism.

These new global conflicts have involved cross-fertilization and the combination of energies generated by local roots. In general we can say that local conflicts between citizen groups and governments have expanded into global efforts in response to two things: first, to a spreading uniformity of policies and international agreements among governments to implement world-wide sets of rules and second, to the resultant perception of common interests in challenging not only those rules but any set of uniform mandates unrelated to local situations.

The spreading uniformity of economic and social policies has been re-crafted over the last twenty years from the top down in ways more and more in line with "neoliberalism". The increasingly homogeneous character of policy across the face of the earth has created a situation where more and more people, over wider and wider areas, despite geographic, linguistic and cultural differences, have come to formulate a common opposition to these policies and to take more and more widely linked action against them.

In earlier years, abstract theories confronted an abstract system. The very existence of "a system" was sometimes hard to recognize in its diverse manifestations and policies. As a result critical theories had little capacity to galvanize widespread oppositional action. Today, the reduction of that diversity into a common array of policies has given new life to such theories, which, in turn, have informed the emergence of a common resistance on a scale never before known. As the central roles of institutions such as the World Bank, the OECD, the WTO and the IMF in the crafting and implementation of these policies have become clear, they have also offered focal points for protest.⁽³⁷⁾ In turn, the power of this mobilization has been forcing supranational institutions such as the World Bank and the OECD reluctantly to open their doors to "civil society."

Civil Society: Networks, Rhizomes and Currents

The development and deployment of this power has not gone unnoticed by national security analysts. Nor have the participants in its elaboration failed to articulate visions of what they were crafting. There has, however, been a tendency among many on all sides to reduce the meaning of "civil society" to formal NGOs.⁽³⁸⁾ This reduction has been more or less severe, largely depending on the interests of those using the words. For the WTO, as we have seen, the term NGO is used so broadly as to include the private business sector, while for most in the grassroots movements, the term refers only to non-governmental and non-business organizations. Nevertheless, in both cases references to "civil society" become concrete only in the form of NGOs. Such reductionism is not surprising in a society where political Power is usually vested in formal institutions. It is not, however, satisfactory.

Within the development of the kinds of grassroots movements I been describing, NGOs should be seen as only particular organizational crystallizations of a much more general and fluid "civil society." Indeed, partly in reaction to the growth and behavior of some transnational NGOs, various critiques emerged along with a quite conscious search for alternative ways of organizing. One such critique has been of an observed tendency for NGOs to become bureaucratic and self-preserving institutions, increasingly operating above and independently from their supporters. This critique parallels similar ones that have been directed at traditional labor unions and political parties by the Zapatistas who have been unusually successful in articulating this critique

in ways that have resonated widely through their networks. A second critique has been that such NGOs have cut deals with the state and with business in ways that have betrayed the purposes for which the organizations were formed. Here again, parallels can be drawn with the behavior of "business" unions and political parties.

These critiques have effectively reformulated the notion of "civil society" in a broader new sense. "Civil society" becomes a term applied to all those moments and movements within society that resist, intentionally or not, subordination to capitalist institutions and, in many cases, fight for alternative ways of organizing society.[\(39\)](#)

The conceptualization of networking used by the theoreticians of "netwar" do not quite grasp the reality being evoked here. A "net" is a woven fabric made up interlinked knots --which in social terms means interlinked groups. This is applicable enough where there are easily identifiable, cooperating groups, such as NGOs. What is missing, however, is the sense of ceaseless, fluid motion within "civil society" in which "organizing" may not take the form of "organizations" but of an ebb and flow of contact at myriad points.

The same critique can be made of the concept of "rhizome." Despite its power of evocation the rhizome evokes a fixed form, albeit growing horizontally in various directions. The cattail rhizome in ponds, for instance, elaborates itself and sends up shoots from old and new nodes, year after year. The shoots, however, with their long sharp leaves and heavy head of pollen, are always the same. So here too restlessness exists only at the margins.

As a metaphor for thinking about the ceaseless movement that forms the political life and historical trajectory of those resisting and sometimes escaping the institutions of capitalism, I have come to prefer that of water, of the hydrosphere, especially of oceans with their ever restless currents and eddies, now moving faster, now slower, now warmer, now colder, now deeper, now on the surface. At some points water does freeze, crystallizing into rigidity, but mostly it melts again, undoing one molecular form to return to a process of dynamic self-organizing that refuses crystallization yet whose directions and power can be observed and tracked. Thus too with "civil society." It is fluid, changing constantly and only momentarily forming those solidified moments we call "organizations." Such moments are constantly eroded by the shifting currents surrounding them so that they are repeatedly melted back into the flow itself.

Such phenomena, so characteristic of the history of social movements, have been a source of endless frustration to those who would harness the power of those flows, whether the institutions of capitalism or the Leninist party. Power would harness power, but power lies in the flow itself, in the broad and deep currents that transverse society. Indeed, in its more genial moments capitalism has understood something of this and sought to harness the flows (class struggle) without trying to freeze them.[\(40\)](#) Marx captured this in his application of the metaphor of circulation to sketch the "circuits of capital." The metaphor returned in mainstream macroeconomics' portrayal of the circular character of economic relationships and its sharp distinction between flows and stocks. But in both cases the flows in question are harnessed flows, like rivers or ocean tides diverted into hydroelectric plants to drive turbines. And this harnessing, this constraint, is endlessly resisted by the restlessness of a humanity that has so many, many different ideas about interesting forms of self-organization. This resistance and this proliferation of ideas have characterized precisely those social movements described above.

In line with this metaphor we can think about the conflicts described above not so much in terms of wars between set pieces (chess, go, military confrontations) or wars between classes for Power (Leninist revolution versus the capitalist state), but rather in terms of the vast imagination and capability of self-organization of society straining against the capitalist rules that bind, limit and

distort.⁽⁴¹⁾ There is a kind of class war here that involves increasingly resistance to the unity of global capitalism. But the resistance flows not from a unified class seeking a new unified hegemony, but rather from myriad currents seeking the freedom of the open seas where they can re-craft their own movement and their interactions free of a single set of constraining capitalist rules.

Technology, conflict & politics

Increasingly the self-organization of social movements risen in opposition to neoliberalism has used a mixture of traditional and modern forms of communication to connect their diverse moments. Traditional forms have included face-to-face encounters in village assemblies and transnational meetings. Of the modern forms of communication that have been used, the computer-based Internet has emerged as a favored space. In conflict after conflict, e-mail and web pages have been cited by protagonists on both sides as playing key roles.

But what, exactly are those roles and what do they tell us about the nature of the conflicts? While the roles have been diverse and changing, I would argue that the most important ones have been the sharing of otherwise hard to obtain information and the self-organizing of resistance and innovation that information has made possible.

1. Given well-documented constraints of flows of information designed to keep people in the dark, and decisions in the undemocratic hands of policy-making elites, the first task in virtually all these social conflicts has been to obtain accurate information on a given situation and then circulate it widely. This requires bypassing the elite-controlled mass media in terms of both obtaining information and getting it out. The preferred vehicles for such circulation have been, precisely, electronic mail and the web.

2. Information, however, is often of limited value until it has been placed within context and interpreted. Therefore, the circulation of information has always involved the circulation of interpretation and evaluation. This in turn has led to discussion and debate among those with different interpretations. Carried out through web pages, the presentation of interpretations can become quite one-sided --each position has its own page.⁽⁴²⁾ But in electronic mail, especially in the usual form of mailing lists and conferences, access is free and all sides have the possibility of articulating their own position. Unlike newspapers, radio and television media where feedback is slow or non-existence, these electronic forums insure quick interaction among varying interpretations. These lists then, with their ongoing flows of conversation (which are often archived on web pages) constitute a kind of alternative, oppositional community of discussion and debate outside of and operating much more democratically than traditional policymaking institutions.⁽⁴³⁾

3. What precipitates out of this community are various kinds of off-line activities, sometimes of protest and objection, sometimes of the positive elaboration of alternatives. This precipitation takes place as discussion and debate about what is going on passes over into questions of what is to be done. So, for example, knowledge about the Zapatista uprising led to mobilization to prevent its extermination. Similarly, examination of and debate about the drafts of NAFTA and the MAI led to discussion and debate about how to block them. Such discussion has ranged from general questions of strategy and tactics to the crafting of particular efforts. In the case of NAFTA, for example, there was a debate over whether opposition should be mobilized against agreement itself or against its fast-track negotiation and implementation. (The latter was chosen and the battle was lost.) In the case of the MAI there was a similar debate over whether to fight for its abandonment or to participate in its reform. The former was chosen and the battle was won --at least temporarily.) In the case of the NAFTA, there was considerable discussion of possible alternative principles for "fair" trade. In the case of the MAI what discussion there has

been about alternative approaches to corporate rights have concerned their limitation rather than their extension.

But the medium is also the message and throughout the electronic fabric of these computer communications we find discussion and debate about best uses and possible abuses of the medium itself. Partly this has emerged directly from the interactions -- as in recurrent discussions of netiquette. Partly it has come in reaction to outside attempts to limit or censure the content of the interactions as in efforts to outlaw pornography (U.S, Europe), to forbid political use (Singapore, Burma, China) or to interfere with political use (Germany, Italy). The debate over proper use has also emerged at the interface between these new movements and older forms of struggle.

As social conflicts have moved into cyberspace, not surprisingly, many tactics, well known in other areas, have been adapted to electronic environment. For instance, protest letter-writing campaigns to politicians, governments or corporations have been reproduced in the form of e-mail protest campaigns where decision-makers' e-mail boxes have been deluged with messages objecting to some particular policy. Or computer fax capability has facilitated similar campaigns via that media. Another example has been the adaptation of the tactics of graffiti and billboard art-modification protests to the World Wide Web. Those who have combined, either in an individual or a group or a movement, both political sensibility and technical skills have hacked into various web sites --usually those of institutions whose actions are being contested and whose web pages could be altered to make a political point. The CIA website was hacked and modifications imposed, much to the embarrassment of the agency.[\(44\)](#) In Mexico, someone unconnected with the Zapatistas but critical of the government broke into an official government web page and modified it.[\(45\)](#) While seen by most people as primarily humorous, such acts have been taken by governments as attacks on their competence and security --quite independently of the content of the hacks.[\(46\)](#)

More recently, there has been an adaptation of the strategy of civil disobedience to cyberspace. In quite conscious imitation of 1950s-style civil rights sit-ins, 1960s-style draft board blockades, or 1990s-style indigenous blockades of logging on claimed lands, a handful of self-styled "hactivists" have created a web engine that others can use to launch "ping" attacks against web sites they wish to "blockade" by overtaxing its server's "reload" function. The engine sends "load" signals over and over again in ways that block the site's intended role, e.g., state or corporate propaganda.[\(47\)](#)

The responses to such actions on the part of various social activist movements have often been highly critical. One criticism has been that the hacktivists have chosen bad targets and have done so because they are neither connected to, nor did they consult with, the particular movement their actions were aimed at supporting. A second criticism has been that the use of such tactics could open movements to the charge of violating their own rules of free speech and set them up for being attacked in the same way.[\(48\)](#) A third objection has revolved around the difficulty in demonstrating that such actions are not the rogue actions of a few individuals but do indeed involve thousands of people and are thus politically significant. Although the ping engines can generate information about the numbers and addresses of those who logged into a site and used it, there remain the questions of circulating that information, making it believable and gaining legitimacy for such actions.[\(49\)](#)

When this tactic was used by U.S. activists to attack Mexican government and financial websites, there was protest from within Mexico by activists who had not been consulted and who felt placed at risk by these actions. When it was used within the U.S. to attack newspapers about coverage of the Mumia case, it was severely attacked by lawyers defending Mumia as counterproductive. As a result of such criticisms, no social movement that I know of has

generalized the use of this tactic.(50)

Such cases of discussion and debate over general principles, or even over the application of a specific tactic, are key elements in the democratic and transparent character of organizing in cyberspace. Projects as small as the writing of a single letter of protest often circulate for collective critique and rewriting before ever being sent out.(51) Moreover, because the phenomena being discussed here are social "movements," on-going currents in the social sea, they take place over such time and such spaces as to generate diverse experiences of struggle. The Internet has proved a quick and efficient means to share those experiences and to evaluate, for example, the effectiveness of particular tactics in various situations. It has been such evaluation that seems to have limited the adoption of "electronic civil disobedience."

What we see in the above sketch of computer-linked social conflicts is the emergence of closely connected communities of struggle working out new forms of political interaction and self-organization. As the contents of these struggles have become more and more global, so have the communities and their politics. To some degree these communities and their interaction constitute a counterpart to the usual institutional structures of contemporary capitalism. But they also, obviously, are not only in opposition to it but seek to go beyond it to alternative and more democratic forms of social organization.

The fundamental character of these social movements and their struggles, it seems to me, cannot but recall the ideological dimension of the Cold War. Although many have argued that the US - USSR bipolarity was one of form and not content, there was rightly or wrongly, a sense of opposition of two alternatives, two possible ways of organizing society.(52) In that Cold War, understood by many in the West as a fight for the survival of capitalism, weapons were wielded of both guns and rhetoric, bullets and words. Weapons were built, armies were assembled, think tanks were funded and journalists were bought (or rewarded) in a combined war of ideas and arms. In the end, words had the most effect through the ideologies of capitalist freedom, of national liberation or of freedom from capitalism. In the end the Communist Bloc collapsed primarily from pressures within rather than from without. However, those struggles had fed, in part, on words from without (rather than guns), even though their opposition and desires were primarily articulated in local terms.

Today there is no bipolarity. There is no international communist movement of Leninist bands out to overthrow violently the capitalist state and therefore no singular target for guns and bullets. But there is certainly an opposition between the current hegemonic capitalist order and its critics and their alternatives. Instead of a facing off of Eagle and Bear, we have, perhaps, a shark surrounded by increasingly powerful and increasingly cooperative little fishes.(53) The shark may flay about with sharp teeth and kill quite a few fish in the process --say as the Mexican government has been doing in Chiapas-- but as the fish multiply, coordinate and threaten to clog the shark's gills, the futility of such desperate and wanton destruction becomes clear.

So, today the real battle for the future is one of "words and the Internet," one of conflicting visions of social organization. (54) The defenders of capitalism may strike at their opponents with violence but in the end their only real defense, as the more sophisticated among them realize, is finding ways to re-internalize and harness the opposition. This has always been capitalism's strength, the way it has absorbed human energy and imagination. Can it do it again? Current restructuring within capitalist industry, combined with a general shift to information and communication that involves the conversion of ideas and imagination into commodities, is one approach. The steps taken to listen to and incorporate criticism into programs of action on the part of the World Bank, the OECD and the IMF have a similar logic. But this logic is being more and more widely understood and refused. Will co-optation and instrumentalization outrun and

absorb the opposition, or will the opposition out think and out flank such absorption through the creation and defense of proliferating attractive alternatives. The survival or transcendence of capitalism will be determined through these struggles and the responses to them.

Harry Cleaver
Austin, Texas
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1. Even reversals in the widespread opening of financial markets and the rapid movement of "hot money" among them caused by the imposition of currency and capital controls are unlikely to have any long run effects --despite the fears of George Soros and others to the contrary. George Soros, "Capitalism's Last Chance?" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1998-99, pp. 55-65.
2. "Rhizome" in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 3-25
3. See, for example, Rolando Perez, *On An(archy) and Schizoanalysis*, Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1990.
4. In Mexico there has been objection to the use of "network" because it evokes "nets" and the "capturing" one does with nets. Instead, some use the term "hammock" which has the structure of a net but which is designed to support not capture, and adapts itself to the body of each user. See Gustavo Esteva, "Regenerating People's Space," *Alternatives*, XII, 1987, pp. 125-152.
5. A useful overview of the development of network theory, from mathematics to sociology, can be found in the introduction to J. Clyde Mitchell, *Social Networks in Urban Situations: Analyses of Personal Relationships in Central African Towns*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969, pp. 1-50. An adaptation of this approach to the understanding of social struggles was made in Italy by the Marxist sociologist Romano Alquati in his studies of workers conflicts with the Italian auto giant FIAT. Alquati meshed the Marxist analysis of class composition with the sociological one of networks, at factory, national and international levels. See: Romano Alquati, *Sulla FIAT*, Milano: Feltrineli, 1975.
6. An influential moment of this literature is Walter W. Powell, "Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization," *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 12 (1990), pp. 295-336.
7. Of particular relevance here is Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998. See also the earlier work by Cathryn Thorup, "The Politics of Free Trade and the Dynamics of Cross-border Coalitions in U.S.-Mexican Relations," *Columbia Journal Of World Business*, Vol. XXVI, No. 11, Summer 1991, pp. 12-26.
8. The RAND researchers are by no means alone in being concerned about the growing power of such networks. Reviewing the Keck and Sikkink book on transnational advocacy networks for the elite journal *Foreign Affairs*, Francis Fukuyama warned: "Like Stalin, one might ask 'how many divisions do transnational networks have?' The answer is that they have information, greatly abetted by modem communications technology, and thus the ability to set agendas for nation-states and transnational organizations like the World Bank, Shell Oil Corporation, or Nestle." Francis Fukuyama, Review of *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, no. 4, July-August 1998, p. 123.
9. Harry Cleaver, "The Chiapas Uprising and the Future of Class Struggle in the New World Order," ", *Riff-Raff: attraverso la produzione sociale* (Padova, Italy), marzo 1994, pp. 133-145. This early essay has been followed by a series of others most of which are available on the web

at URL: <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/hmhtmlpapers.html>

10. Charles Swett, "Strategic Assessment: The Internet", July 17, 1995. (Available on-line at the Federation of American Scientists webpage.

11. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *The Advent of Netwar*, Santa Monica: RAND, 1996, p. 73. The Zapatista struggle was also dealt with in David Ronfeldt and Armando Martínez, "A Comment on the Zapatista 'Netwar'" which appeared in John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*, Santa Monica: RAND, 1997, p. 371. Finally, the Zapatista movement and its international ramifications became a full-blown case study in David Ronfeldt, John Arquilla, Graham Fuller and Melissa Fuller, *The Zapatista "Social Netwar" in Mexico*, RAND Publication MR-994-A, 1998, available in hardcopy or on the web (henceforth referred to as Ronfeldt et al.). John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt had already published an article that analysed "netwar" prior to the Zapatista uprising, but that analysis was little noticed in activist circles until the uprising in Chiapas. When it was circulated on the Net, it provoked considerable discussion. See Arquilla & Ronfeldt, "Cyberwar is Coming!" (<http://gopher.well.sf.ca.us:70/0/Military/cyberwar>) Originally published in *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1993, pp. 141-165.

12. Keck and Sikkink, op. Cit., p. 115.

13. "Terrorism," might seem a harsh word to apply to Mexican government actions, but as a word that evokes the spreading of fear, of terror, for political purposes, it seems quite appropriate in Chiapas. Not only have the police and army been involved in the harassment of communities, rape, torture, and arbitrary arrest, but the paramilitaries that we now know to be an integral part of the state's counter-insurgency strategy have engaged in all of these plus mass murder (Acteal) and the forcing of tens of thousands of people from their homes and communities. When soldiers gang-rape peasant girls with impunity, or the police take away living prisoners and later return mutilated, rotten corpses to a community, as has happened, what other word is appropriate than "terrorism"? When paramilitaries slash open the womb of their victim to savage the unborn child, what other word can we use?

14. See the article by an ex-CIA chief John Deutch, "Terrorism," *Foreign Policy*, No. 108, Fall 1997, p.14. Ronfeldt and co-workers' perceptions that transnational social networks might have a positive role in pushing forward declared US foreign policy interests (e.g., expansion of democracy) is reminiscent of William O. Douglas's cry, back in the 1950s "Revolution is Our Business!" by which he meant that the US should support revolution if that was what was required to stabilize a country. Unfortunately, his voice was alone in the wilderness and John Foster Douglas' views prevailed, producing a generation of counterinsurgency and massive bloodletting. One can only hope Ronfeldt et al will not have the same fate.

15. Op cit. p. 383. These words are repeated, almost verbatim, in Ronfeldt et al, *The Zapatistas "Social Netwar" in Mexico*, RAND 1998, p. 80.

16. Ronfeldt et al., p. 78.

17. The supposed flip side of such terrorism has been the distribution of food and medical supplies by the Army under the rubric of social work (what the US counterinsurgency experts used to call "civic action.") The heavy hand of the state has remained visible, however, as relief has been distributed primarily to reward PRIista communities and withheld from those viewed as sympathetic with the Zapatistas. Or, where aid has been offered to such communities, it has been aimed at either splitting the community or simple intimidation by the Army's presence.

18. Detailed accounts on the Chiapas lists have followed many of these expulsions and the court

cases that have been fought in response. As might be expected, no such actions have been taken against foreigners supporting the Mexican government repression of its political opponents -- such as US military advisors.

19. Not only are there repeated reports of paramilitary bands operating with the tolerance or active support of the police and the Army, but evidence has surfaced of state government financial aid to such groups and of Army planning for such operations as early as 1994.

20. Ronfeldt and Martinez, *op.cit.*, p. 386.

21. One view that sees "civil society" as having already been subsumed within the private-state nexus that constitutes capitalism is that of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. See chapter 6 on "Postmodern Law and the Withering of Civil Society," in their book *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State Form*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, pp. 217-260.

22. The labor leaders who took the lead in demanding a meeting with Camdessus were those of the radical Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) that had organized the first General Strike in Korea (against the IMF agreement) during the winter of 1996-1997. The exchange between the KCTU and the IMF was documented and reported on their web sites almost as they occurred.

23. The proposal replicates a local Korean initiative to re-internalize a rebellious moment of "civil society" into capitalist planning: a Tripartite Commission that brought together government, labor and business to discuss policy options. The Tripartite Commission, however, was rejected by a substantial portion of rank and file workers who subsequently threw out both the agreement reached by union leaders and then the leaders themselves.

24. Typical of the stories about the Internet and the anti-MAI movement were Madelaine, Drohan, "How the Net Killed the MAI," *Globe & Mail*, April 29, 1998 and "Network Guerrillas," *Financial Times*, April 30, 1998. Serious discussion by activists on the relevant lists, in contrast, has tried to assess the real effectiveness of their efforts versus other influences such as OECD member country disagreements.

25. Stephen J. Kobrin, "The MAI and the Clash of Globalizations," *Foreign Policy*, No. 109, Fall 1998, pp. 97-109. Kobrin's argument that globalization is inevitable and that the anti-MAI coalitions are themselves an expression of it just as much as the MAI itself is a fine example of fetishization and normalization. Globalization is not just a phenomenon, inevitable or not, it is a *strategy* to achieve a fundamental shift of power, income and wealth in favor of capital. Resistance to such a strategy certainly is inevitable given the antagonisms inherent in the strategy. Recognizing this antagonistic conflict means to also recognize that the degree to which globalization will be realized will be determined by the development of the conflict.

26. The three NGOs that participated were the World Wildlife Federation International, Oxfam Great Britain and (as observer) Friends of the Earth. All three of these oft-critiqued mainstream environmental groups have also attended meetings of the WTO (see below).

27. From a letter drafted by Susan George in mid-November 1998. It can be found in the MAI-not list archives on the web. Susan George has been a well-published critic of the role of institutions such as the IMF in the international debt crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. See her book *A Fate Worse than Debt: The World Financial Crisis and the Poor*, New York: Grove Press, 1988.

28. When local activists are able to mobilize transnational movements against individual nation-state policies, as in the Zapatista case, they push the conflict into the international arena and

undermine local governments' efforts to obfuscate or hide the nature of the conflict.

29. The distinction in metaphysics between Power (potestas, pouvoir, potere, poder) and power (potentia, puissance, potenza, potencia) was Spinoza's and has recently been given a class interpretation by Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

30. Thus Karl Marx's repeated use of the metaphor "vampire" for capital and its domination of society.

31. Two books that are expressions of that era are Teresa Hayter, *Aid as Imperialism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971 and Cheryl Payer, *The World Bank: A Critical Analysis*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982.

32. World Bank projects supporting export strategies were quickly seen as contributing factors to ecological devastations as forests were destroyed to increase supplies of exportable wood to earn the foreign exchange necessary to repay debts. See for example: Bade Onimode (ed.) *The IMF, the World Bank and the African Debt: the Economic Impact*, Volumes I and II, London: Zed Books, 1989.

33. See Harry Cleaver, "Close the IMF, abolish debt and end development: a class analysis of the international debt crisis," *Capital & Class*, No. 39, Winter 1989. One result was The Debt Crisis Network which linked opposition to Fund activities from all over. Also see: John Walton & David Seddon, *Free Markets & Food Riots: the Politics of Global Adjustment*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994.

34. The massive accumulation of debt in Latin America was often the work of undemocratic governments and private or state enterprises that borrowed the money for purposes of repression or exploitation. The difficulties of repayment were due to the new tight money policies enacted in the US at the beginning of the decade. That tight money drove floating interest rates through the ceiling while throwing the world economy into such a global depression that export possibilities shriveled --and with them the ability to earn the foreign exchange necessary for debt repayment. In Latin America "FMI" (the Spanish language acronym) became, for millions, the initials of poverty and suffering and an object of derision and anger. In South Korea, in the wake of the recent program signed by the Korean government and the Fund, the initials "IMF" and attacks against it can be seen emblazoned all over the capital city, from store windows to packages of cigarettes (observed in recent visit).

35. In the previously mentioned article by Kobrin on the anti-MAI movement, he derides such fears as being based on "barely credible worst-case scenarios." Yet, very real cases are at hand, including the current battle over the Massachusetts Burma Law that bans contracts with corporations operating in Burma --currently governed by a highly repressive military junta renown for human rights violations. Business interests in the US attacked this law in federal court, while European and Japanese business has done so in the WTO. For more on this and similar conflicts see: <http://www.burma.net/selective-purchasing/>

36. See Ronalde Munch and Peter Waterman, *Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms*, Washington: Cassel, 1998 as well as Waterman's other writings on this theme at <http://www.antenna.nl/~waterman/>

37. One of the great weakness of the Soviet-style socialist state was that it provided a single central object of resentment and anger, and thus a common enemy for a wide assortment of discontents and ultimately a focal point for the mobilization of opposition. In the West, on the other hand, the diversity of nation-states, corporate and industrial structures, and so on, present a

multiplicity of targets for angry workers or citizens and thus increase the difficulty of opposition to the whole. The current movement toward uniformity on the part of a triumphant neo-liberalism anxious to complete its hegemony would seem to undermine both the diversity and the capacity to diffuse opposition.

38. See, for example, Howard Frederick, "Computer Networks and the "Emergence of Global Civil Society," in Linda M. Harasim (ed.) *Global Networks: Computers And International Communication*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993.

39. The concept of the "working class" has come to approximate this meaning in some Marxist theory where the label has been applied to all those, waged or unwaged, whose activity contributes to the expanded reproduction of capitalism and whose struggles undermine it.

40. An example of such harnessing can be found in the Keynesian period when workers' wage struggles were used to stimulate capitalist investment and productivity growth.

41. In one line of contemporary Marxist thought this imagination and capability is thought of in terms of "a general intellect" and is manifest not only in the increasingly central role of mental labor, but in its autonomy. See, for example, Paolo Vierno, "Notes on the General Intellect," in S.Makdisi, C. Casarino and R. E., Karl, *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, New York: Routledge, 1996.

42. This is akin to more traditional "position papers" or "party programs" where an individual or small group has sifted through information and come up with an argument presenting some of that information in a highly mediated manner.

43. One important feature of these lists is the way widespread networks of people can quickly check out, verify or falsify reports. Such corrections are common on lists and while sometimes concerned with minor details, are also very important in moments of crises. In one now infamous case, during a Mexican military offensive a report went out on the Internet that many people were being killed and the hospitals were filling up. This story was quickly checked, recognized as wrong and contradicted on the Chiapas lists. Critics of the use of the Internet by grassroots movements have often cited this example to illustrate the contention that such lists circulate misinformation just like governments. See for example, Charles Swett, op. cit., who uncritically quotes Todd Robberson, "Mexican Rebels Using a High-Tech Weapon; Internet Helps Rally Support," *Washington Post*, February 20, 1995. But uniformly such accounts have refused to recognize how quickly the report was corrected --far more quickly and far more thoroughly than most erroneous news propagated by governments and the mass media.

44. The hack occurred on September 18, 1996 and has been preserved on many web pages, e.g., <http://www.2600.com/cia/>

45. The hack occurred in February 4, 1998 by a group independent of but sympathetic to the Zapatista rebellion.

46. Corporations have sometimes been more flexible in response to such efforts. When the movie "Hackers" was released, a corresponding web page was hacked by real hackers and modified. The corporation replaced the original page but kept it on-line to amuse fans of the movie.

47. The intellectual background for this tactic was contained in two books by the Critical Art Ensemble: *Electronic Disturbance* and *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, both published by Autonomedia in Brooklyn.

48. The September 1998 counterattack by the Pentagon's Defense Information Systems Agency has demonstrated precisely the kind of dangers feared. See report by computer security writer

Winn Schwartau, "Cyber-civil disobedience," *Network World*, January 11, 1999. For more on the debate see the archives of the Chiapas95 listserv beginning in May 1998 (<http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/chiapas95.html>) and Stephan Wray's webpage on electronic civil disobedience (<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/wray/ecd.html>).

49. See my intervention into the debate on the net in the Chiapas95 archives: "H. Cleaver, A Contribution to the Discussion of ECD," May 1 (1998).

50. Such methods have been used from time to time, especially in Italy where "netstrikes" have been called in support of local struggles and international ones, e.g. against Turkish government and business sites in support of Kurdish Rebels in Turkey whose leader had recently been seized.

51. This was true of Susan George's letter to the OECD rejecting participation in discussions about the MAI (see above).

52. Viewed as alternatives of form rather than content, the US and the USSR represented two different ways of organizing capitalist society: corporate and state planning together with manipulated markets versus central planning buttressed by underground markets.

53. The metaphor was once used by Berthold Brecht and has been recently reappropriated and amplified by the Zapatistas. The original Brecht use was in his story "If Sharks were People," published in Bertold Brecht, *Tales from the Calendar*, 1947. The Zapatista appropriation can be found in the communiqué "Durito-Brecht Presentation for Table 7: Culture and Media in the Transition to Democracy" first published in *La Jornada* on July 5, 1996.

54. When Mexican government spokesperson Gurria used this phrase it was to cover up the actual violence being used by the police, military and paramilitaries in Chiapas. Nevertheless, it was at least an approximation of the character of the major weapons of the forces of rebellion: ideas and their circulation.