Internet Subcultures and Oppositional Politics
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Subcultures traditionally represent alternative cultures and practices to the dominant culture of the established society. While they often construct themselves within and against the governing culture from which they are born, their comparatively smaller population size, their associations with emergent youth culture and the manifold novelties of the day, and their occasionally politically resistant and activist temperaments all serve to ensure that subcultures are constructed so as to be more than mere reproductions of the grander cultural forms, themes, and practices. If the dominant culture provides the semantic codes by which groups attempt to transmit and reproduce themselves, then subcultures represent a challenge to this symbolic order in their attempt to institute new grammars and meanings through which they interpret the world, and new practices through which they transform it.

In this sense, Dick Hebdige has spoken of subcultures as a form of "noise" capable of jamming dominant media transmissions. Of course, as Hebdige also notes, the eventual reality of oppositional culture-jamming is not that it replaces dominant media representations with its own. Rather, alternative subcultures strive to capture media attention, and in so doing become involved in the Janus-faced process of attempting to transform dominant codes even as they become appropriated, commodified, and re-defined by the hegemonic culture which they contest (Hebdige 1979: 90-92).

Our present moment, however, is highly turbulent and complex, and can be characterized as a "postmodern adventure" in which traditional forms of culture and politics are being resurrected, imploded into and combined with entirely new cultural and political modes in a global media culture that is becoming increasingly dominated by the corporate forces of science, technology, and capital (see Best and Kellner 2001). To speak of post-subcultures, then, is to recognize that the emerging subcultures are taking place in a world that is saturated with proliferating technologies, media, and cultural awareness. Post-subcultures are constructed in new cultural spaces and with innovative forms, entering into novel global configurations by technological advances such as the Internet and multimedia which help produce alternative forms of culture and political activism.

Thus, whereas many traditional subcultures, like the Beat Generation, could aspire to the spirituality of "immediate" experience and intimate face-to-face communal relations, this is increasingly difficult for the post-subculture generation. Instead, the new subcultures that are arising around the evolving Internet and wireless technologies appear as wholly mediated and committed to the medium of network communication that they correctly recognize as their foundation, while reaching out to help shape the broader culture and polity of which they are a part.

However, as with previous generations of subcultures, Internet subcultures seek a certain immediacy of experience that strives to circumvent dominant codes in the attempt to access a wealth of global information quickly and directly, and then to appropriate and

disseminate material further. The new subcultural immediacy, then, centers around flows of information and multimedia, and post-subcultures can be seen to be using the Internet as an environment that supports their attempts to gain and provide access to information and culture that exists beyond the means of control of the dominant order. In this fashion, subcultures associated with the Internet are involved in the revolutionary circulation and democratization of information and culture. In as much as this material is also part of the media-process by which people come to identify and define themselves, the emergent mediated post-subcultures are also involved in the attempt to allow people the freedom to re-define and construct themselves around the kind of alternative cultural forms, experiences, and practices which radical deployments of the Internet afford (see Witheford-Dyer 2001; Best and Kellner 2001).

The Evolving Post-Subcultures of the On-line Global Network

While there are a plethora of alternative cultures at work on the Internet today, it would of course be a mistake to categorize them all as concerned strictly with either democracy or progressive politics. Rather, akin to the complexity of the postmodern era at hand, the subcultures of the Internet would be better represented as multiplicitous, with the Net being used for both progressive and reactionary causes by an abundance of groups whose politics range from the far-left to the extreme right.

Indeed, while the overall tenor of the revolution that is being brought about by the Internet is toward the proliferation of alternative information and forms of culture and subjectivity, many voices affiliated with both hate and violence have also found ready homes amidst its cultural forum. The Internet allows a myriad of groups to propagate and propagandize for their cause outside the media and norms traditionally instituted by pre-Internet society. Our point here is certainly not to valorize the gains made by such subcultural groups, but rather to note that the use of the Internet as a media tool has allowed for the construction of a wide variety of non-mainstream identities and communicative practices. Much like the hyper-textual nature of the Web itself, the identities of Internet subcultures are often hybridic and complex themselves, revealing a tendency to evolve through constant reorganization and affiliation with other Internet subcultural groups. In this sense, many post-subcultures of the Internet can be seen as dissolving classical cultural and political boundaries that appear too rigid and ideological for Net life. Still, groups also exist that have clearly defined political orientations.

At work within all of these Net subcultures is also the question of how they stand in relation to the dominant culture. During the late 1980s, major Internet subcultures such as BBS (Bulletin Board Systems) hubs represented the leading edge of the technology fringe. Populated mostly by an underground network of technically sophisticated professional users and computer literate youth, the bulletin boards proffered a veritable "gift economy" of pictures, simple games, and message boards over extremely slow networks. There was little or no discussion of service charges and most BBSs relied upon users to develop on-line reputations through which proven community service would garnish greater access from friendly SYSOPs (System Operators). With the advent of the 1990s, many successful bulletin boards, such as The Well, transferred protocols onto the

emerging World Wide Web of hypertext. Within only a few years, corporate and government culture would begin colonizing the web too, and by the time of the dot-bomb tech crash of 2000, early web pioneers such as Yahoo, Amazon, and NCSA (National Center for Supercomputing Applications), would be joined by a huge influx of companies selling everything from advertising to zoo animals.

As the Internet went corporate and on-line service providers like America On-line (AOL), Compuserve, Prodigy and Earthlink sought to brand and sell the Internet experience, many subcultures formed around the new on-line corporate behaviors with service providers becoming a key to one's on and offline identity. Historically, similar subcultures had formed around hardware computer manufacturers like Apple, Kaypro, and IBM, but during the 1990s factions erupted within computers as well over software domains such as web browsers (Microsoft vs. Netscape) and search engines (Yahoo vs. Alta Vista). Still, the strongest user bonds seem to have solidified around service providers, with AOL providing a sort of cultural benchmark for the movement. During this time of relative infancy for the Internet, AOL helped to bring millions of new Internet users on-line with its graphical user-interface (GUI), "You've got mail" aesthetic, and limitless user chat-rooms wherein people could find love, local gossip, trans-sexual vampires and anything else available to users' imaginations.

However, behind the corporate branding and growing of the Internet during the 1990s, non-corporate subcultures thrived too. Multi-user Dungeons (MUDs) and their object-oriented relatives, the MOOs, sprung up along side the WWW, allowing people to explore basic virtual environments and interact with one another in real time. Newsgroups became a rage and an important source of information, debate, and file sharing, as people freely formed topical groups on the Internet's Usenet platform. Then, as emailing grew readily popular, an equally large number of list-serves became housed upon the web and available for free user subscription. Large, popular list-serves like Nettime-L, or the Spoon lists housed at University of Virginia, allowed a variety of diverse subcultures to form themselves through group email discussions and opinion postings. And eventually, the WWW itself, though rapidly transforming under the "tech revolution's" pay-to-play capitalist ideology into a mainstream cultural movement, continued to support a veritable carnival of alternative voices and cultures as well. Far beyond the provocative web antics of Church of the Subgenius or Terence McKenna, the late 1990s revealed a web that people were actively helping to create and not simply experience.[1]

The rise of the Internet, then, as cultural and subcultural force, has been multi-faceted, and socially and politically complex. While corporate forces rapidly built a larger and speedier Internet for the new millennium, subcultural forces equally rapidly sought to borrow the new on-line environment for their own socio-political intentions. Thus was the case, infamously, with the peer-to-peer (P2P) client Napster, which allowed approximately sixty million users at one point to share and trade a variety of files directly with one another freely. However, when users began sharing large volumes of copyrighted audio material, because the newly formed broadband networks made such files easily accessible, corporate forces intervened and fractured the movement. Yet a

movement had been started that publicized the utopian potential of the net as subcultural community and bearer of a gift economy. Hence, despite Napster's fall, many continued to believe that the idea of the P2P network signaled a form of cultural revolution and a number of new P2P communities arose within the Internet space previously dominated by Napster.[2]

The music industry, however, has made every attempt to block P2P trading of music on-line and there is now intense interest in Hollywood's response to circulating videos and films. Less maliciously, but equally exemplary of how mainstream corporate culture has re-situated subcultural movements on the net, is the case of early on-line åzines like *Suck*, *Feed*, and *Salon*. As these on-line cultural spaces grew in popularity, corporate culture was quick to import and copy elements of their style and reinterpret and reposition them. Suddenly, the trendy use of neon colors like *Feed*'s orange became an industry standard, which as tech became "cool," lent itself equally as well to sneakers, clothing, and record posters as it had to websites. Further elements of zine style such as written and visual language became equally replicated and repositioned as advertising norms. Under such intense corporate pressure many of the successful on-line zines of the past decade have folded, unable to demonstrate or innovate a particular cultural niche in the face of countless imposters. Even the widely read and discussed *Salon* was rumored to face the possibility of insolvency in 2002, and only Microsoft's on-line journal *Slate* appears financially secure.

Globalization and Net Politics

The present Internet moment remains a complex assemblage of a variety of groups and movements, both mainstream and oppositional. However, following the massive hi-tech sector bust at the start of the new millennium, and with economic sectors generally down across the board with the global economic recession, the Terror War erupting in 2001 and the disastrous effects of Bushonomics, much of the corporate colonization of the new media has also waned. Following "9/11," however, the politicization of the Internet again emerged as a major cultural issue and new oppositions are forming around the on-line rights to freedom of use and information, as well as user privacy, that groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR), and the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) have long touted. For instance, it emerged in late 2002 that the Bush administration was developing a Total Information Awareness project that would compile a government data base on every individual with material collected from a diversity of sources. Intense debate has erupted and the Bush administration is being forced to make concessions to critics concerned about privacy and Big Brother surveillance. Such on-line political oppositions directly pit post-subcultural groups, many who did not previously have an obvious political agenda, against the security policies of government. In this scenario, Internet corporations are often left "in the middle" with the choice to either side with the users who they would court as consumers or with the political administrations. The latter are capable of making business either easy or difficult depending upon which laws are enacted and prosecuted (e.g. Microsoft's anti-trust battle under the Clinton administration and then again under Bush).

Still, as the culture of the Internet becomes more highly politicized, it is becoming harder for corporations to portray themselves simply as "neutral" cultural forces. Using the very on-line means that these corporations helped to popularize against them, users are globally beginning to portray for each other a maturing political awareness that perceives corporate and governmental behavior as intertwined in the name of "globalization".[3] As part of the backlash against 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 to corporate globalization. In this view, theory and politics should shift from the level of globalization and its accompanying often totalizing and macro dimensions in order to focus on the local, the specific, the particular, the heterogeneous, and the micro level of everyday experience. An array of discourses associated with poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminism, and multiculturalism focus on difference, otherness, marginality, the personal, the particular, and the concrete over more general theory and politics that aim at more global or universal conditions.[4] 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 identity issues.

However, it can be argued that such dichotomies as those between the global and the local express contradictions and tensions between crucial 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). Hence, an important challenge for the emerging critical theory of globalization 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 requires analysis as well of how local forces mediate the global, inflecting global forces to diverse ends and conditions, and producing unique configurations of the local and the global as the matrix for thought and action in the contemporary world (see 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, globalization is the problem and localization is the solution. But, less simplistically, it is the mix that matters, and whether global or local solutions are most fitting depends on the conditions in the distinctive context that one is addressing and the particular solutions and policies being proposed.

Specific locations and practices of a plurality of post-subcultures constitute perhaps what is most interesting now about oppositional subcultural activities at work within the Internet. Much more than other subcultures like boarders, punks, mods, or followers of the New Age, Internet subcultures have taken up the questions of local and global politics and are attempting to construct answers both locally and globally as a 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, the current configuration of on-line subcultures are interested in the number of ways in which the global network can be diverted and used in the struggle against it.

<u>Technopolitics and the Anti-globalization Movements</u> [5]

Successful use by the EZLN Zapatista movement in Mexico of the Internet dramatized its importance for progressive politics (Best and Kellner, 2001). Beyond deploying the Internet as a technology for plotting political organization and for furthering communication, activists quickly drew upon the Zapatista's imaginative use of the internet to begin broadcasting their new messages to a potential global audience. In the late 1990s, activists throughout the world began employing the Internet to foster movements against the excesses of corporate capitalism, most dramatically occurring in the protests in Seattle and elsewhere against the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in December 1999. A global protest movement surfaced that utilized the Internet to organize resistance to the WTO and capitalist globalization, while championing democratization and social justice. Many web sites contained anti-WTO material and numerous mailing lists used the Internet to distribute critical material and to organize the protest. The result was the mobilization of caravans from throughout the United States to take protestors to Seattle, many of whom had never met and were recruited through the Internet. There were also significant numbers of international participants in Seattle which exhibited labor, environmentalist, feminist, anti-capitalist, animal rights, anarchist, and other groups organized to protest aspects of globalization and form new solidarities for future struggles. In addition, protests occurred throughout the world, and a proliferation of anti-WTO material against the extremely secret group spread throughout the Internet.

Furthermore, the Internet provided critical coverage of the event, documentation of the various groups' protests, and debate over the WTO and globalization. Whereas the mainstream media presented the protests as "anti-trade," featured the incidents of anarchist violence against property, while minimizing police violence against demonstrators, the Internet provided pictures, eyewitness accounts, and reports of police brutality and the generally peaceful and non-violent nature of the protests. While the mainstream media framed the protests negatively and privileged suspect spokespeople like Patrick Buchanan as critics of globalization, the Internet provided multiple representations of the demonstrations, advanced reflective discussion of the WTO and globalization, and presented a diversity of critical perspectives.

The Seattle protests had some immediate consequences. The day after the demonstrators made good on their promise to shut down the WTO negotiations, Bill Clinton gave a speech endorsing the concept of labor rights enforceable by trade sanctions, thus effectively making impossible any agreement and consensus during the Seattle meetings. In addition, at the World Economic Forum in Davos a month later there was much discussion of how concessions were necessary on labor and the environment if consensus over globalization and free trade were to be possible. Importantly, the issue of

overcoming divisions between the information rich and poor, and improving the lot of the disenfranchised and oppressed, bringing these groups the benefits of globalization, were also seriously discussed at the meeting and in the media.

More importantly, many activists were energized by the new alliances, solidarities, and militancy, and continued to cultivate an anti-globalization movement. The Seattle demonstrations were followed by April 2000 struggles in Washington, DC, to protest against the World Bank and IMF, and later in the year against capitalist globalization in Prague and Melbourne; in April 2001, an extremely large and militant protest erupted against the Free Trade Area of the Americas summit in Quebec City and in summer 2001 a sizeable demonstration took place in Genoa.

In May 2002, a surprisingly large demonstration took place in Washington against capitalist globalization and for peace and justice, and it was apparent that a new worldwide movement was in the making that was uniting diverse opponents of capitalist globalization throughout the world. The anti-corporate globalization movement favored globalization-from-below, which would protect the environment, labor rights, national cultures, democratization, and other goods from the ravages of an uncontrolled capitalist globalization (see Brecher, Costello and Smith 2000; Steger 2002). Similar demonstrations had taken place in Monterrey, Mexico two months earlier and, more recently, two more occurred during June 2002 at Calgary and Ottawa to protest against the G8 Summit meeting in Canada. Each of these demonstrations was comprised of people hailing from many locations and intent on using the venue as an opportunity to promote their voice, and fight in common cause against what is perceived to be the oppression of a dominant mono-culture.

Initially, the incipient anti-globalization movement was precisely that: anti-globalization. The movement itself, however, was increasingly global, linking together a diversity of movements into global solidarity networks and using the Internet and instruments of globalization to advance its struggles. Following the Battle for Seattle, the Internet witnessed the rise of independent media outlets like the Indymedia network (http://www.indymedia.org), with major global cities receiving web portals in which to document, organize and proliferate information that would not otherwise be readily available through the major media. Countless other organizations and sites have developed similar websites and networks since, like Alternet (http://www.alternet.org), turning the Internet from a valuable tool in the anti-globalization struggle into the driving engine for a new global cultural vision for democracy.

Through the practice of the type of large-scale organization and assimilation of information afforded by the Internet, many opponents of capitalist globalization evolved from a simple subcultural nihilism to recognize the need for a global movement with a positive vision. Such alternative and oppositional globalizations stand for such things as social justice, equality, labor, civil liberties, universal human rights, and a healthy planet on which to live. 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.

Thus, technopolitics became part and parcel of the involvement of Internet subcultures, a mushrooming global movement for peace, justice, democracy, rights, and other positive values. In particular, the subcultural movements against capitalist globalization exploited the Internet to organize mass demonstrations and to disseminate information to the world concerning the policies of the institutions of capitalist globalization. The events made clear that protestors were not against globalization *per se*, but were against neo-liberal and capitalist globalization, opposing specific policies and institutions that produce intensified exploitation of labor, environmental devastation, growing divisions among the social classes and the undermining of democracy. The emerging anti-globalization-from-below movements are contextualizing these problems in the framework of a restructuring of capitalism on a worldwide basis for maximum profit with zero accountability and have made clear the need for democratization, regulation, rules, and globalization in the interests of people and not profit.

The new movements against capitalist globalization have thus placed the issues of global justice and environmental destruction squarely in the center of important political concerns of our time. Hence, whereas the mainstream media had failed to vigorously debate or even report on globalization until the eruption of a vigorous anti-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. Stung by criticisms, representatives of the World Bank, in particular, are pledging reform and pressures are mounting concerning proper and improper roles for the major global institutions, highlighting their limitations and deficiencies, and the need for reforms like debt relief from overburdened developing countries to solve some of their fiscal and social problems. Nonetheless, others like the world leaders involved in the G8 and related summits are resorting to hold their meetings in ever more remote regions, their inaccessibility thereby conveying a political reality that new subcultures are eager to reveal to ever-wider audiences.

Indeed, in late 2002 and early 2003, global anti-war movements began to emerge against Bush administration policies against Iraq and the growing threats of war. Reaching out to broad audiences, political groups like MoveOn (www.moveon.org) used the Internet to circulate anti-war information, organize demonstrations, and promote a wide diversity of anti-war activities. Thus, after using the Internet to successfully organize a wide range of anti-globalization demonstrations, activists, including many young people, are organizing massive demonstrations against the Bush and Blair administrations' threats against Iraq. The global Internet, then, is creating the base and the basis for an unprecedented world-wide anti-war/pro-peace movement during a time of terrorism, war, and intense political struggle.

From Hackers to Terrorists: Militant Internet Culture

To capital's globalization-from-above, the subcultures of cyberactivists have thus been attempting to carry out globalization-from-below, developing networks of solidarity and propagating oppositional ideas and movements throughout the planet. To the

capitalist international of transnational corporate-led 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. As the virtual community theorist Howard Rheingold notes (2002), 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. These multiple networks of connected citizens and activists transform the so-called "dumb mobs" of totalitarian and polyarchical states into "smart mobs" of socially active personages linked by notebook computers, PDA devices, internet cellphones, pagers, and global GPS positioning systems. Thus, while new mobile technology provides yet another impetus towards experimental identity construction and identity politics, such networking also links diverse communities like labor, feminist, ecological, peace, and various anti-capitalist groups, providing the basis for a new 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, as noted previously, rightwing 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 Web-sites 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 rightwing extremists are aggressively active on many computer forums, as well as radio programs and stations, public access television programs, fax campaigns, video and even rock music productions. These 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 ultraright causes, these 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 Web-sites have influenced alienated middle-class youth as well (a 1999 HBO documentary on "Hate on the Internet" provides a disturbing number of examples of how extremist Web-sites influenced disaffected youth to commit hate crimes).

A recent twist in the saga of technopolitics, in fact, seems to be that allegedly "terrorist" groups are now increasingly using the Internet and Web-sites to promote their causes. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* (February 8, 2001: A1, A14) reports that groups like Hamas use their Web-site to post reports of acts of terror against Israel, rather than calling newspapers or broadcasting outlets. A wide range of groups labeled as "terrorist" reportedly use e-mail, list-serves, and Web-sites to further their struggles, causes including Hezbollah and Hamas, the Maoist group Shining Path in Peru, and a variety of other groups throughout Asia and elsewhere. The Tamil Tigers, for instance, a liberation movement in Sri Lanka, offers position papers, daily news, and free e-mail service. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, experts are still unclear "whether the ability to communicate on-line worldwide is prompting an increase or a decrease in terrorist acts."

Since September 11, 2001, there have been widespread discussions of how the bin Laden Al Qaeda network used the Internet to plan the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, how the group communicated with each other, got funds and purchased airline tickets via the Internet, and used flight simulations to practice their hijacking (see Kellner forthcoming). Since "Operation Enduring Freedom," news stories have documented how many pro-Al Qaeda websites continue to appear and disappear, serving as propaganda conduits and potential organization channels for remaining terrorist cell members. By encrypting messages within what appear to be simple web pictures, Al Qaeda (or any group or person) can transfer sensitive information that only requires the receiving party to download the picture and then decrypt it in order to reveal the secret message. The sheer volume of video and still picture information on the Internet helps to ensure that the information can be circulated even when perused by such powerful governmental surveillance systems as Echelon and Carnivore. But, apparently in response to the threat posed to US "war on terror" interests, the Bush administration has begun the attempt to discontinue websites which it suspects terror cells are frequenting to gain information that could be used in terrorist attacks.

In fact, despite the expectation that any governmental administration would target the information channels of its enemy, it is exactly the mammoth reaction by the Bush administration and the Pentagon to the perceived threats posed by the Internet that have the subcultural forces associated with the battle against globalization-from-above fighting in opposition to US security policies. Drawing upon the expertise of a subculture of politically-minded computer hackers to inform oppositional groups of security threats and to help defend against them, a technical wing has become allied to those fighting for globalization-from-below. Groups like Cult of the Dead Cow (http://www.cultdeadcow.org) and Cryptome (http://www.cryptome.org) and the hacker journal *2600* (http://www.2600.org) are 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 "hacktivism" (on hacker culture, see Taylor 1999 and Himanen 2001). The hacktivists have been widely responsible for allowing oppositional subcultures to understand how they may maintain on-line privacy and how their privacy may be easily jeopardized by anyone seeking to do so.

Additionally, hacktivists have been especially influential in educating the public about governmental and corporate protocols that have been developed in order to survey the habits and attitudes of those active on-line. Perhaps most importantly, some of the hacktivists are involved in creating open source software programs that can be used freely to circumvent the intervention of government and corporate control into Internet experience. Notably, and somewhat scandalously, the hacktivists have released programs like Six/Four (after Tiananman Square), that combines the peer-to-peer capabilities of Napster along with a virtual private networking protocol that makes user identity anonymous, and Camera/Shy, a powerful web-browser stenography application that allows anyone to engage in the type of secret information storage and retrieval that Al Qaeda allegedly uses to combat 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 no software beyond the reach of the pirate-crackers and to the delight of the alternative Internet subculture, their often otherwise expensive programs are 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 softwares are freely and legally traded, improved upon at large, and available for general use by a public which agrees not to sell them in the future. Such free Microsoft competitors, like the operating system Linux (http://www.linux.org), and the word processing suite OpenOffice (http://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 (i.e. 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 near-by neighbors and wireless pedestrians if such networks are not made secure. In fact, as the U.S. 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 (http://wired.com/news/wireless/0,1382,56742,00.html). Part of what the government is reacting to is the activist technique of "war driving," in which a hacker drives through a community equipped with a basic wireless antenna and computer searching for network access nodes (see http://www.wardriving.com). Many hackers had been war driving around Washington D.C., 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 (http://www.securityfocus.com/news/552).

But not all war drivers are interested in sensitive information, and many more are simply interested in proliferating information about what amount to free broadband Internet access points -- a form of Internet connectivity that otherwise comes at a premium cost (see http://www.freenetworks.org). Thus, wireless network hackers are often deploying their skills towards developing a database of "free networks," which if not always free of costs, represent opportunities for local communities to knowingly share connections and corporate fees. 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.

Hacktivists are also directly involved in the immediate political battles being played out around the dynamically globalized world. Hacktivists like the German "The Mixter," who authored the "Tribe Floodnet" program 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 on-line. On July 12, 2002, the homepage for the *USA Today* news site was hacked and altered content was presented to the public, leaving the *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), who because of its attempt to legislate P2P music trading has become anathema to internet hacktivists. A sixth attack upon the RIAA website in January, 2003, posted bogus-press releases and even provided music files for free downloading!

But while a revolutionary subculture of hackers has formed on-line, those involved in the fight for an alternative globalization are far from comprising the totality of the hacker population. The US government and Al Qaeda, as well as an increasing number of different political groups, are all engaging in cyberwar as an important adjunct of their political battles. Indeed, Israeli hackers have repeatedly attacked the Web-sites of Hezbollah, while pro-Palestine hackers have reportedly placed militant demands and slogans on the Web-sites of Israel's army, foreign ministry, and parliament. Likewise, in the bloody struggle over Kashmir, Pakistani and Indian computer hackers have waged similar cyberbattles against opposing forces" Web-sites, while rebel forces in the Philippines taunt government troops with cell-phone calls and messages and attack government Web-sites as well.

Blogging: A Vision of the Democratic Future of the Net?

On an entirely different note, but equally political and contested in nature, a vibrant new Internet subculture has erupted around the phenomenon of "blogging." A blog, tech slang for "web log," is an extension of the World Wide Web of hypertext pages. A blog differs from other web pages, however, in certain key ways. Firstly, most blogs are created using a relatively easy to use automated software interface, provided freely (or for a small fee) by companies like Google's Blogger (http://www.blogger.com) or Radio Userland (http://radio.userland.com). Some blog subcultures like the more tech-oriented users of Moveable Type (http://www.movabletype.org), however, disdaining any tinge of capitalism, provide their own interface freely as open source. Whichever is chosen, the interfaces load like any other web page in a user's web browser, but provide a template for users to fill in with their blog's name, style, and features. Additionally, spaces for blog entries exist which incorporate all of the standard features associated with hypertext. When users fill in the information that they would like to post to their web log and hit "publish," the blog interface automatically formats and posts the user's information to their desired blog. This ease of use has made blogging a popular sensation over the last year, with giants like Salon and AOL joining the blogging craze, and with hundreds of thousands of new bloggers constructing blogs and net journals in an increasing trend.[6] Indeed, the highly successful search engine corporation Google scooped up the small company that makes Blogger, providing the potential for a major blogging explosion.

Another feature relatively unique to blogs is their ability to integrate a variety of Internet features into their pages. Thus, a typical blog will not only provide postings from

a blogger (or a team of bloggers), but it will also provide readers the opportunity to reply to postings and begin discussions with each other and the blog author(s) as would a messageboard. Blogs will also often permit users to subscribe to them, like a list-serve, thereby allowing readers to receive new blog postings directly to their email address. Blogs, and bloggers, are also doing interesting things with the hyperlinks that link web pages together. From the first, blogging has been about community, with bloggers eager to read one another's entries, post comments about them on their own blogs, and provide lists of links to the blog cartels that identify who particular bloggers think is "who" in their blog world.

This has led to interesting networks of links, with dynamic maps of the most popular blogs and the news stories that these blogs discuss being provided in real-time by such sites as Blogdex (http://blogdex.media.mit.edu), Daypop (http://www.daypop.com) and Technorati (http://www.technorati.com). Another 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 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 around desirable keywords that Google users would normally use to search. A successful Google Bomb would then rocket the initial blog that began the campaign up Google's rankings to No. 1!

Thus, while those in the blog culture often abused this trick for personal gain (e.g. 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 serves 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 a blog link entitled "Lies About Their Fries" as the top entry.

Blogs have not always been political, but post 9/11 the phenomenon of Warblogging appears to be trumping the simple diary format. More blogs than ever are being created to deal with specific political positions and alternative media sources than ever before and group-style blogs like Fark (http://www.fark.com), Metafilter (http://www.metafilter.com) and BoingBoing (http://boingboing.net), wherein community users post and discuss information of the day, have become extremely popular. But, it is perhaps the new ability to syndicate one's blog that truly marks the blog subculture as a democratic and oppositional culture with which the mainstream must reckon. News blogs like Google (http://news.google.com), NewsIsFree (http://www.newsisfree.com), and Syndic8 (http://www.syndic8.com) daily log syndicated content and broadcast it globally to a diverse audience. This has resulted in a revolution in journalism in which subcultures of bloggers are continually posting and commenting upon news stories of particular interest to them, which are in turn found, read, and re-published by the global media.

The examples in this section suggest how technoculture makes possible a reconfiguring of politics, a refocusing of politics on everyday life, and the use of the tools and techniques of emergent computer and communication technologies to expand the field of politics and culture. 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.[7] To a meaningful extent, then, the new information and communication technologies *are* revolutionary, they *do* constitute a revolution of everyday life being presently enacted by Internet subcultures. Yet, it has often been a revolution that also promotes and disseminates the capitalist consumer society, individual and competition, and that has involved new modes of fetishism, enslavement, and domination yet to be clearly perceived and theorized.

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. Those interested in the politics and culture of the future should therefore be clear on the important role of the new public spheres and intervene accordingly, while critical cultural theorists have the responsibility of educating students around the cultural and subcultural literacies that ultimately amount to the skills that will enable them to participate in the ongoing struggle inherent in cultural politics.

Subculture activism has thus materialized as a vital new space of politics and culture in which a wide diversity of individuals and groups have used emergent technologies to help produce new subcultures, social relations, and forms of politics. Many of these subcultures may become appropriated into the mainstream but no doubt ever-new oppositional cultures and novel alternative voices and practices will appear as we navigate the always-receding future.

Notes
1. On MOOs, MUDs, Internet chat rooms, and new forms of identity, culture, and community produced by information and communication technologies, see Turkle (1996, 1997).
2. For a solid journalistic account of the Napster and P2P story see Alderman (2001); for an optimistic account of the continuing potential of P2P potentiality, see Barbrook (2002).
3. On globalization, see Cvetkovich and Kellner (1997), Best and Kellner (2001), and Kellner (1998, 2002).
4. Such positions are associated with the postmodern theories of Foucault, Lyotard, Rorty, and have been taken up by a wide range of feminists, multiculturalists, and others. On these theorists and postmodern politics, see Best and Kellner (1991, 1997, 2001), and the valorization and critique of postmodern politics in Hardt and Negri (2000) and Burbach (2001).

5. On technopolitics see Kellner (1997); Armitage (1999); and Best and Kellner (2001).
6. For examples, see our two web sites. BlogLeft: Critical Interventions (2002),
< http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/blogger.php > (Accessed August 2002).
Vegan Blog: The (Eco)Logical Weblog (2002), < http://getvegan.com/blog/blogger.php >
(Accessed August 2002).
7. On the importance of the ideas of Debord and the Situationist International to make
sense of the present conjuncture see Best and Kellner (1997: Ch. 3), and on the new
forms of the interactive consumer society, see Best and Kellner (2001).

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