

Cyberspace, Revolution or Hegemony?

Homo sapiens are incredibly complex. Our evolution is the result of a series of biological changes with the utmost capability of adapting to a vast range of environments. Yet, this biological evolution intertwines with a complex cultural evolution. This cultural evolution enabled our species to develop the most advanced culture of all animal species in the planet's history. Therefore, to study humans, we must take into consideration both our biological as well as our cultural evolution. The following is an analysis of the way that technology impacted our human evolution.

The complexity of culture can be a difficult concept to grasp. In the history of humanity, we have undergone two major revolutions which radically changed our culture. The first was the Neolithic revolution approximately 10,000 years ago, where the way of life and ideology changed completely. Prior to this period of time, humans lived as hunters and gatherers in balance with the population density and the amount of resources (though some would argue that foragers drove many animals to extinction, e.g. driving herds off a cliff). A surplus of food allowed sedentary lifestyle and labor specialization, which in turn resulted in technological advancements. The second major revolution took place about 300 years ago in what historians call the industrial revolution. This revolution caused the most drastic changes within our culture. The industrial revolution gave rise to consumption of goods and services based on desire regardless of actual need. Advertising and marketing turned former citizens into consumers, and production and waste attained levels never seen before. In the first half of the 20th century, humans used more resources than in the entire 100,000 years of the existence of our species (*Earth and the American Dream* 2004).

Today, we are in the middle of a third revolution, what Lev Manovich calls “the new media revolution” (2001). He explains how the new media revolution is “the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication. This new revolution is arguably more profound than the previous ones, and we are just beginning to register its initial effects” (2001:19). The media and cyberspace have generated drastic changes in the way we operate: the way people communicate, shop, pay bills, travel, and even fix appliances. Walter Ong (1988) explores the impact of script on the new media revolution in his analysis of orality and literacy. He explores the interaction of orality and literacy in the various stages of evolution, which can provide a frame of reference for understanding the steps towards a more complex cultural evolution, one in which writing and electronic culture culminate in the most advanced stage in our history.

In an effort to understand the complexity of this cyberspace revolution, several aspects must be analyzed. One is the functionality of the web, and how humans depend on technology today. The second centers on social relations which heretofore have been framed by the hegemonic practices of Europeans who constructed a hierarchical system of classification based on the term “race.” Race is based on questionable and unscientific biological traits (such as skin color) and produces serious cultural implications. Most anthropologists as well as the American Anthropology Association state that while race is a biological fallacy it remains a cultural reality. As stated by Omi and Winant, “the concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world. Thus we should think of race as an element of social structure...we should see race as a dimension of human representation rather than an illusion” (1994:55). Race therefore, takes on a social and cultural dimension in the way people are represented in society and in the way people identify themselves. Additionally, race has been

historically manipulated by those in power to maintain their power and oppress those deemed racially inferior. One of the questions this analysis pursues is how race plays a role in cyberspace. Can the Internet help promote global social justice and equality, and eradicate racism? The internet's openness of inquiry and vastness of resources offers the possibility for social awareness to be spread and for the formation of advocacy communities. Maya Angelou states that racism is based on ignorance; therefore, using the internet as an educational tool, we can promote more tolerance.

One group which has taken the burden of pursuing social justice via cyberspace is the Zapatistas of Chiapas (also known as the EZLN- Zapatista National Liberation Army). The Zapatistas successfully recruit and appeal to an international community to pressure the Mexican government to meet their demands. The Zapatistas use the Internet to expose many human and indigenous rights violations by various hegemonic groups in Mexico. In so doing, they have successfully lowered the number of attacks. The case study of the Zapatistas exemplify ways that cyberspace offers possibilities for democracy and social change.

Functionality of Cyberspace

To understand the functional aspects of the Internet we must first define functionality. "Functionalism" refers to a cultural aspect which meets the needs of the individual and society as a whole (Nanda 2008). Efficiency, speed, user autonomy, and ability to acquire vast amounts of information are functional aspects of the Internet. In his book *Understanding Media, the Extensions of Man*, Marshall McLuhan (1994) explains the way media becomes an extension of ourselves. It is not the media per se but what is done with it, the way we interact with the media. McLuhan further promotes the development of integral awareness through the use of the media. Ultimately, McLuhan explains that there is no way of getting outside of mediation; our goal

should be to understand the way this mediation operates and how we operate within it. McLuhan sees technological media as staples or natural resources which societies are dependent on. In this sense, technological media transcends its social dimension to a key economic dimension. By so doing, in terms of functionality, it becomes a commodity for exchange. Media is now an economic dimension which is visible in the commodity exchange over the internet (i.e. online shopping). Yet, by understanding the way that mediation functions in society, we can reclaim the media for individual power. This paper will later show the ways that the Zapatistas reclaimed the media and empowered their cause and create cyber global communities.

Katherine Hayles further explores the functionality of the web as she compares it to earlier technologies, “compared to a hammer or stone ax, a computer has much more flexibility, interactivity, and cognitive power” (2008:48). In addition, Hayles (2008) explains the way that computers can handle both natural language and programming code and therefore can operate in complex human-computer networks, a complexity which has been seen in human language unlike any other animal.

Leading linguist Deborah Tanner (2006) addresses the impact of the Internet and IM (instant messaging) on the way people communicate. Unlike traditional communication methods (face-to-face or over the phone), these technologies grant people control over response time. Furthermore, the Internet shifts potential from ‘person-to-person’ interaction to ‘many-to-many’ communication. The internet enables people to communicate and socialize differently. People now have the ability to send emails to many, to chat with more than one person, and to have an extensive list of virtual friends. Tanner (2006) talks about some of the ways that the Internet has revolutionized communication through speed and efficiency. She refers to regular mail as “snail mail” versus “email.” We can be pretty much anywhere in the world and stay connected with

people via cyberspace and cell phones. Such flexibility and availability make the internet and other technology agents for change as they are accessed and used widely worldwide.



Machu Picchu trip, April 2009

Such flexibility also impacts identity development on the internet, which is a very interesting aspect explored by Nakamura in her book *Digitizing Race*. Nakamura explores identity creation and manipulation of Internet users. She discusses the way that people have the ability to construct an online identity that can manipulate nationality, religion, language, sex, gender, or affiliation with other cultural aspects. People tend to design their avatars (a virtual animated character of one's self or alter ego) and "buddies." Many times these virtual cartoons or figures are manipulated to match specific racial stereotypes. The website tizzletalk.com and badassbuddies.com can also add options for subcultures and for adding humor to this cyberidentity.

Nakamura also talks about the popularity of Internet games and various games which include blatant racial components, such as *Ethnic Cleansing*, *Border Patrol*, and *Grand theft Auto: Vice City*. Despite the hateful and racist component of this game, there is a certain level of functionality, as it enables some people to have an outlet for their hate which provides an outlet

for discussion of racism and hate in our society. It would be interesting to see how their popularity is affected after the racist law in Arizona against Latinos. Many games have become extremely popular and profitable, including *The Sims*, *Second Life*, *Gaia*, and more. The most popular among adults is *Second Life*, which is a virtual world developed by Linden Lab. Starting in the garage of two friends and launched in June 2003, it offers a free membership. Its players have the ability to design a virtual reality of their choice through an avatar. Players are called “residents” and interact with other players online with whom they can socialize and trade virtual property (or purchase it using real money). This game is restricted to people eighteen or older, but there is a sister site titled *Teen Second Life* designed for teenagers (thirteen to seventeen years old). Hayles (2008) explains the interactive fiction of the game elements where there is no clear difference between electronic literature and games “parser” in regards to the interaction between the computer and the user. Such a fine line between reality and liminality may be the reason why many human rights activists feel a sense of participation by joining the Zapatista online community. In a way, being part of these online communities, they feel a sense of fulfillment and belonging, what anthropologists call *communitas*.

The popularity of these games and cyberspaces is rooted in the functionality of the internet. Rheingold (1997) explains that virtual communities can serve as a form of psychotherapy, an outlet for addicted players, porn consumers, and even pedophiles. He analyzes how people “hunger for community as more informal public spaces disappear from our real lives” (1997: xviii). The more we are disconnected from other people by engaging in solitary activities or by disengaging from other communities, the more we seek the comfort and anonymity provided by the Internet. Inevitably, the future of the internet is connected to the future of communities, democracy, education, science, and intellectual life. In this sense, virtual communities take on a

transcendental place inhabiting our real and illusionary lives. Virtual communities actually do change people's lives. This transcendental quality grants many possibilities to the internet as a place where true democratic discourse can take place.

Rheingold (1997) explores three distinct ways in which they do so. One is the way virtual communities affect our perceptions, thoughts, and personalities. Virtual communities such as *My Space* and *Facebook* have become popular with people of various ages and backgrounds. This involves political change as well, since communication, particularly massive distribution of communication, has been critical to the politics of democratic societies (Rheingold 1997: xxx). It is through the internet that people's fears and views can be manipulated by advertising and political agendas. The domestic and international news are monitored and manipulated by various private channels to impact people around the world. Yet, the internet offers the possibility to explore and compare news around the world, even those news channels that are not sponsored by corporations. Additionally, the news of subaltern groups like the Zapatistas can be spread around the world uncensored through the internet.

Racial Aspects of Cyberspace

Despite the various functional aspects of the internet, we must also explore the way that racial representations and the racial divide play a role in cyberspace. There are many statistical studies which explore this question using quantitative data. Nakamura (2008) exposes some of the flaws embedded in this research, particularly the way that Asians are misrepresented and uncounted for in the Asian American category. As many as 69% of Asians lumped into the category of Asian Americans are immigrants and are not accounted for as part of the research, usually due to language barriers (Nakamura 2008).

Rheingold also questions the way people are impacted by internet access and technology. Rheingold explains how an early focus was on making the Internet accessible to all people: “The power of computer technology can and should be made available to the entire population...” (1997:62). The idea was that the impact this technology had on people would depend on how those in power used it and whether it became a privilege or a right. However, blacks and latinos lack access to the computers and the Internet. In a study done by Hiroshi Ono and Madeline Zavodny (2003), the statistical analysis showed significant differences in the percentage of blacks’ and non-Hispanic whites’ access to computers and use of the Internet. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration reports that 33 percent of black households and 34 percent of Hispanic households had computers at home in 2000, compared with an overall participation rate of 51 percent (Ono 2003). Another study done by Donna Hoffman from Vanderbilt University confirmed that 59 percent of whites versus 31 percent of blacks used the internet regularly (1998). Even though black people can access the internet outside the home, very few blacks and latinos actually do. This study showed that almost all of the differences in Internet usage appear to be explained by differences in computer ownership. Disparities in income and education seem to be a strong contributing factor to these differences. Other factors include the types of jobs blacks and Latinos do which usually do not require the use of computers. “Blacks and Latinos tend to be poorer and have lower educational attainment; computer ownership is strongly linked to income and education” (Ono & Zavodny 2003: 8). This becomes evident in the differing importance of teaching children to use computers. Black and Latino parents may not expect schools to teach students to use computers (K-12) in under-funded schools. There is an evident difference in the computers and programs offered for elementary school children in wealthy neighborhoods versus schools in lower socio-economic areas which

tend to have higher percentages of latinos and black children. Everett (2002) refers to this when she states that colonization is not over; it is evident through our social institutions. Statistically the net worth of the average African American family is one eighth of that of the average white family (*Race, the Power of an illusion*). This means that it is eight times harder for a black family to have access to technological advancements such as the internet than it is for a white family. However, as black people become more affluent, there is a correlation with the ability to purchase the technology which enables them to engage more actively in virtual communities. Ono and Zavodny's research also shows how the percentage of blacks buying online is much higher than latinos and whites. This is explained by the fact that when blacks buy things online, discrimination is much lower than in a face-to-face transaction (2003).

In *Digitizing Race*, Nakamura (2008) stresses various aspects of racial representations online. One interesting aspect about race is the way that Japanese and Navajo were considered the same race during the war. This is an example of how "the conception of race is transcending any individual, national, or cultural differences" (Nakamura 2008:74). This is particularly evident in the Web site alllookslike.com, where users can test their knowledge on racial differences among Japanese, Korean, and Chinese people. Nakamura states how "in recent times, the Internet is becoming a site of increasingly visual rather than textual reading" (2008:75). As one enters this Web site, there is most definitely a mixture of feelings; ranging from curiosity, to guilt, to a bit of arrogance. There are a number of different tests one can take to experiment with one's expertise as it pertains to "racial" or ethnic difference among Asians portrayed in the pictures. There are three different nationalities represented: Japanese, Chinese, and Korean. An interesting aspect of this site is the way it does not show pictures of actual people but artwork. Perhaps, the idea is to come face-to-face with the notions we have about a culture as a whole that

we then project on actual people. This site exposes how conditioned we are to using an empirical approach to knowledge (hence the use of the Scantron-like bubbles on the site). The other key aspect of this site is the lack of empirical methods to classify people on the basis of so-called race. Some interesting questions raised by its users include: “What does Japanese mean? Does it mean ethnic Koreans who speak Japanese and no Korean, who are third generation Japanese born?”(in Nakamura 2008:81). With the vast number of migrations and intermixing that has taken place throughout the world, it is nearly impossible to find racial purity in Asia or any where else in the world. Yet, the way an individual is classified plays a key role in many social and economic contexts.

Hegemony or Democracy

As we can see, the Internet provides a complex dimension of access and racial treatment. Yet there is another aspect of access which centers on economic differences and profit. Will Internet access be controlled by the corporations who own and market communication dissent? (For instance, Time Warner has started charging its users download fees). The third and final topic Rheingold and Everett examine is the complexity of the internet, and the way in which the internet changes democratic principles via consumption and marketing. Rheingold refers to this as *Disinformocracy* and describes the way in which the internet has been criticized for its impact on democracy, consumption, information to control people, and the creation of the “hyper-realists” (1997).

One of the questions we may ask if the internet can promote democratic principles across nations. Rheingold states that “virtual communities could help citizens revitalize democracy or be an attractively packaged substitute for democratic discourse” (1997: 295). Yet it is not very common to find the topic of democracy raised via the internet. Instead of looking at the positive

aspects of the Internet, Rheingold criticizes various aspects of this technology. The first critique is the way electronic communication media's content is more about advertisements for various commodities, what Rheingold calls "commodification of the public sphere" (1997:299). What seems to plague the online landscape is advertising. Internet users are constantly battling with advertising 'pop-ups' as they navigate the web or email. The cost of information or entertainment through building virtual relations is ad pollution. Rheingold calls this advertising industry "one of the most successful money-making schemes in history" (1997: 299).

The second is the way high-bandwidth interactive networks are used as surveillance, control, and disinformation. Basic traditional notions of privacy are not only challenged but altered, in which "electronic communication leaves invisible digital trails" (Rheingold 1997:299). This leads to the final point which is the way personal information is constantly exchanged through the networks. Government and private interests can get any information they want about you. Foucault (in Rheingold 1997) refers to this as 'Panopticon,' the idea of being seen without being able to see the person who is watching you. This setting instills the type of fear in which people no longer need to be physically restrained as they are psychologically restrained (Rheingold 1997). Perhaps the best example of this is Orwell's famous slogan "Big Brother is Watching You." After all, the emergence of the internet and technology has always been connected to military and government interests. People are willing to give their private information in exchange for discounts, convenience, rebates, and online shopping and banking (Rheingold 1997). This can be seen in the way that many of us pay our bills online, buy our groceries at stores that require or offer a membership card, pay with credit or debit cards, etc., even though we know that the information may end up in the hands of private interests, the

government, and marketing agencies. Or they may end up in more destructive hands, such as those of identity thieves worldwide.

In his book *The World is Flat* Thomas Friedman (2006) discusses the massive increase in identity theft by entities outside of the U.S. One example he cites is the way that many accounting firms are outsourcing to India. This means that private information is being sent across the continent and back, increasing the potential for identity theft in the U.S. A few years ago I was almost a victim of one such scam as I received a call offering me free gas vouchers from Bush. The various people I talked to on the other line had a strong Indian accent which made me wonder how the White House would have such a large number of people from India working there (if the mere fact that Bush was giving out free gas was not suspect enough). Finally, when the caller asked for my bank account and routing number I realized it was a scam.

Rheingold's book addresses a very interesting aspect, the "Hyper-realists," people who seek to replace the natural world and social order with a technology mediated hyper-reality. The goal is not only to be distracted, but to construct a more rewarding reality. The epitome of this is the popular game "Second Life" in which people can live an alternative life within a virtual community. Rheingold states that "when the technology itself grows powerful enough to make the illusions increasingly realistic, as the Net promises to do within the next ten to twenty years, the necessity for continuing to question reality grows even more acute" (1997:320). Today, technology makes the illusion of a "second life" so realistic that many people report valuing this cyber identity more than their real identity. People spend a lot of money purchasing (via real money) things for their virtual life. Men state that they would be more likely to cheat on their real wife than the virtual wife. This can be problematic because men or people in general may hinder the ability to have real interpersonal relationships base on day to day interactions.

Overall, virtual communities are filling a gap in human life today, communities which are deficient with the individualistic focus of American society. Or maybe it is that we are too busy and too inept at socializing with real people, so it's easier to do so behind a computer screen. Jean Baudrillard explores a process of degeneration of meaning through history in three major stages marked by the changes in meaning we invest in our symbol systems. In the first stage one looks at the changing relationship between signs and what they signify. The second stage is one where advertising, propaganda, and commodification attempt to hide reality. The last stage includes the hyper-real, where signs hide the absence of reality (Rheingold 1997:319). This model makes sense when applied to the increased obsession for virtual communities, realities, and cyberspace. To put this in perspective, think about the amount of time anyone spends on the internet, the types of sites visited and activities engaged in. By so doing, the question that comes to mind is whether the internet can help us build stronger, more human communities, and perhaps even promote democracy, or whether the Internet is yet another source of distraction and entertainment because of the increased commodification.

Some anthropologists like Serena Nanda state that the internet has reached many places around the world to the point that it is more likely to find internet access in the farthest regions of the world than clean running water (2008). Nakamura also cites activists' attempts at educating non-literate people to use the internet in India. The New Media Centre Sarai in Delhi attempts to bring software and training as "a means to wrest the medium away from cultural elites" (2008:88). In India, this has been very effective due to the culture's preference for visual media as source of information. Yet this brings out another issue, that of cultural preservation, in which threatens the survival of indigenous cultures and languages. As Nakamura states, "language is the collective memory bank of a people and that imperial languages such as English participate

in the ‘captivation’ of colonized peoples, especially when they are used by non-Western novelists as a part of their literary production and work to define a cultural elite that is then Western” (2008:91). Statistics correlate this point of inequality of access to internet connections. With the expenses associated with owning cyberspace, it is usually an elite minority who can afford the luxury participating in cyberspace culture. Therefore, the vast majority of content online is based on Western ideologies and advertising which are frowned upon by traditional cultures.

Hayles explains the way that “citizens of developed countries do business, conduct their social lives, communicate with each other, and perhaps most significantly, how they construct themselves as contemporary subjects” (2008:87). Perhaps the internet is not an equalizer for everyone around the world, but it does serve as an agent to promote ideals of equality, democracy, and human rights by informing and engaging people around the world, by forming communities of shared interest and transferring information without borders. A key aspect about the internet is understanding the way that the technology changed what it means to be human today. Kathleen Fitzpatrick explains this as she discusses the anxiety of obsolescence revealing “a fundamental anxiety about the contemporary state of humanism, which surfaces in both fiction and critical discourse. The computer age thus seems to offer new, potentially dangerous threats to the category of the “human” itself, as well as to its privileged forms of knowledge” (2002:523). In this sense, the internet/cyberspace has generated such a drastic and dynamic revolution that results in feelings of anxiety and fear for some, yet it also generates an opportunity for others to pursue democratic ideals. One such group is the Zapatistas Movement in Chiapas, Mexico.

The Zapatistas’ Quest for Democracy

To understand how the Zapatistas exemplify a group that uses cyberspace as a medium for social change, we must first discuss the background of the Zapatistas. On November 17, 1983, three *mestizos* (Mexicans of indigenous and Spanish descent) activists from the National Liberation Forces (FLN) and three indigenous Maya first formed the EZLN or Zapatista National Liberation Army. It is believed that one of these activists was Marcos, a man who, over the years has been the face of the EZLN and its Spanish voice. Many say that the *mestizos* who joined the movement (including Marcos) were survivors of the student massacre in *Tlatelolco* (a community in Mexico City) on October 2, 1968. The massacre was a violent attack staged by the Mexican army against a peaceful student protest of the *Universidad Autonoma de Mexico* (UNAM, one of the top universities in Mexico City), where several students were murdered. Subsequently, activists were forced to carry their operations underground and some fled to the Chiapas' rainforest. It was in Chiapas, in the *Lacandón* rainforest, that these intellectuals met the Maya and learned their culture and values. This group of intellectuals from Mexico City redefined their struggle to focus on the economic, cultural, and political rights of all the indigenous people of Mexico. It is believed that one of these activists is a former philosophy/sociology professor who now calls himself "*Subcomandante Marcos*." Marcos is an important figure for the Zapatistas, though the movement is mainly made up of *Tzotzil* and *Tzeltal* Maya groups, including the Indigenous Congress by the Diocese of San Cristobal founded in 1974 (Hayden 2002).

The Zapatistas or EZLN's first public national appearance was triggered by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by Mexico and the United States in 1994, which threatened to worsen the economic conditions of the poor and indigenous populations of Mexico (Hayden 2002). According to Mexican anthropologists Aida Hernandez and Richard Nigh,

Mexico made drastic reforms to agrarian policy in order to prepare for the implementation of NAFTA. This included the abandonment of an 80 year old commitment to land reform to benefit small farmers by taking away direct subsidies, credits, and technical assistance, as well as ending direct intervention on marketing structure and price regulation (1998:140). NAFTA supporters in Mexico popularized the ideal that NAFTA would bring modernization to Mexico through the vehicle of industrial technology. The goal would be to increase productivity and reduce the proportion of the population working in the agricultural sector. In most cases they did not inform the public of the price for this modernization, such as the heavy use of pesticides that led to various diseases and the contamination of the environment (Hernandez & Nigh 1998:140). The consequences to this destruction on indigenous lifestyles led to the uprising of various social groups including, the Zapatistas.

The morning of January 1, 1994 marked the public emergence of the Zapatista movement. Approximately three thousand armed Zapatista insurgents seized the *municipios* (towns) of Las Margaritas, Altamirano, Chanal, Rancho Nuevo, Oxchuc, San Cristobal de las Casas, Ocosingo, and Huixtan. In the ancient capital of the Spanish colonizers, San Cristobal de las Casas, the Zapatistas freed prisoners and set several police and military buildings on fire. The next day, however, the Mexican army arrived with forces to counter-attack and hold the region of San Cristobal de las Casas, around the market of Ocosingo. There were many casualties on both sides, and ultimately the Zapatistas retreated to the jungles west of Chiapas. By January 12, 1994, a ceasefire was called through the intervention of the Catholic bishop, Samuel Ruiz, who was wellknown as a leader Mexico's liberation theology. In the years that followed, the Mexican government continued to send armies to the region to drive the Zapatistas further from the

Highlands of Chiapas. Ultimately, even bishop Samuel Ruiz was removed from office by an order from the Vatican.

Despite the efforts of the Mexican government to defeat the Zapatistas, most of the commanders and leaders were never captured, and thus the movement maintained its strength. The global mobilization of sympathizers through an effective media campaign also helped the Zapatistas. Through the use of national newspapers (and later international media) and communications posted via the internet, the world was now able to learn about the Zapatista uprising, their demands, and the response of the Mexican government. Through the use of their website, the Zapatistas were able to appeal to an international left-wing community which exerted pressure on the Mexican government. Collier (1999) explains the way that European governments, including the Italian prime minister and Spanish president, demanded that Mexico respect indigenous rights, or they would stop all trading relations. The Mexican government and the EZLN held peaceful negotiations which culminated in the signing of the San Andres Accords in 1996. These accords granted indigenous community funds to improve their educational system, as well as autonomy in cultural practices.

Furthermore, international awareness led to an international gathering or “*encuentro*” (meeting of various activists) in the jungle. In 1996, an international gathering took place in the jungle of Chiapas, where many international activists met to show their support and engage in a dialogue of strategies to help the Zapatista cause (Wild 1998). The title of this gathering was “Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism,” and it joined sympathizers from Argentina, Spain, Italy, Germany, U.S., Austria, Switzerland, France, and Britain (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EZLN).

The Zapatista uprising resulted in changes that include an initiative for funding the Indigenous Education program in Chiapas and the end of the Institutional Revolutionary Party's monopoly of power. In 2001, for the first time in over 80 years, a president from the Democratic National Party (PAN) was elected. However, this by no means signified a change in Mexico's political attitude towards the Zapatistas. President Vicente Fox initiated negotiations but never followed through with the promises made. As the following message from Marcos explains, the situation was far from resolved.

The question is not whether we oppose what you represent or signify for our country, there is no doubt that we are your adversaries. The question is whether this opposition will take civil pacifist channels or a continuous armed struggle with our faced masked until we obtain what we ask for, which is no other Mr. Fox than democracy, liberty and justice for all Mexicans (*La Jornada*, December 3, 2001).

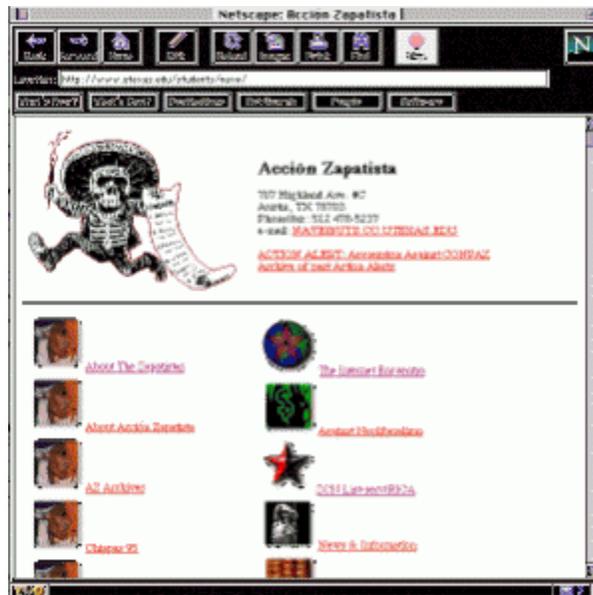
The Zapatistas use the internet as a key tool or "weapon" to gain international attention and for the circulation of information of their struggles in Chiapas, Mexico. Some would argue that the Zapatistas are one of the most successful examples of the use of computer communications by grassroots social movements. Their presence on the web has not only brought support to the Zapatistas from throughout Mexico and the rest of the World, but it has sparked a worldwide discourse and awareness of the meaning and implications of the Zapatista rebellion for other movements resisting neoliberalism and human rights violations.

The Zapatistas actively host international "encuentros" or meeting where they seek to find solutions by using rhetoric instead of violence. They built an Intercontinental Network of Alternative Communication (Spanish acronym = RICA) to "accelerate the intercontinental circulation of struggle by providing vehicles for the sharing of experience and the discussion of strategies for fighting for the overthrow of neoliberalism, of capitalism more generally and for the development and spread of a wide variety of alternative ways of organizing social life"

(webspaces.utexas.edu/hcleaver/www/zapsincyber.html). Evidence of these efforts is widely dispersed through various mediums of communication such as cyberspace, radio, television, music, and film. Subcomandante Marcos book *The Other Campaign* lists the following internet sites:

- The Zapatistas' Web page- <http://www.ezln.org.mx/>
This page contains all the letters, stories, and communiqués of the Zapatistas as they released them and it also features a daily blog of “The Other Campaign” which follows its updates as they travel throughout Mexico.
- Radio Insurgente- <http://www.radioinsurgente.org/>
This radio station features the voice of indigenous rebel communities in Chiapas. Past programs can also be downloaded from this site. This site contains the voices of Marcos, as well as the voices of the women, men, and young people who are fighting for democracy, dignity, and justice in Mexico.
- Enlace Civil- <http://www.enlacecivil.org.mx/>
This website provides a deeper sense for the indigenous struggle in Chiapas and the ongoing human rights abuses and paramilitary attacks suffered by the communities in Chiapas.
- Chiapas Independent Media Center- <http://chiapas.mediosindependientes.org/>
This is a very well-maintained bilingual site which has been put together by independent journalists, indigenous advocates, human rights activists and other intellectuals, artists and cultural workers. This site offers invaluable resources for news regarding the Zapatistas autonomous communities.
- Rebeldia magazine- <http://www.revistarebeldia.org/html/>

The web page of a Mexico-based Spanish publication with a vast range of Zapatista related articles.



Many of the authors included in this essay ponder the possibilities the internet may generate to create social change. However, it is important to recognize how futile it is to rest our hopes entirely on this medium. It is not the medium which offers social change, but the people themselves. The Internet is just another example of the high development of our culture. People can use it as a vast source of knowledge which offers convenience, speed, and unlimited communication; yet still only a small number do. Just like with the film industry, television, and other media, the promise to promote social consciousness is present, but public interest is slow. Perhaps it is due to the busy lives that we are forced to live in order to keep up with the capitalist system or “survival of the fittest,” which makes it hard to find the time or motivation to pursue knowledge. Many of us would prefer to be entertained, or to fulfill our need for social networking than to read a book.

Despite the pitfalls, through education we can raise social awareness and motivate individuals and groups to create social change. Then the medium of cyberspace can be a great

resource to spread social consciousness. Perhaps the next human revolution will be the abolition of corporations and the establishment of an effective global democracy. Or this may be just the dream of an idealist, and the reality may be more global consumption and waste until we drive species to extinction. Either way, the answer lies in our hands and during our time, and maybe only time will tell.

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