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A New Way of Doing Politics ? Global Justice Movements and the Cultural Logic of Networking

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This article explores an emerging mode of political engagement among global justice activists in Barcelona and the transnational circuits through which they travel. Inspired by the Zapatistas and previous struggles against free trade, structural adjustment, and ecological destruction, activists have made innovative use of new technologies, creative direct action, and network-based organizational forms. I argue that what grassroots activists in Barcelona and elsewhere refer to as a «new way of doing politics» specifically involves a growing confluence among network-based technological infrastructures, network-based organizational forms, and network-based political norms, mediated by activist practice. Beyond morphology, networks are increasingly associated with values related to horizontal relations, participatory democracy, self-management, and decentralized coordination based on autonomy and diversity. The network has thus become a powerful political and cultural ideal, a guiding logic that provides a model of and model for emerging forms of directly democratic politics of local, regional, and global scope.

I. New Way of Doing Politics ? Global Justice Movements and the Cultural Logic of Networking

In late September 2001 several dozen global justice activists packed into a small union hall in downtown Barcelona to discuss the future of the Campaign against the World Bank. The mobilization the previous June had brought 50,000 protesters to the streets and generated a great deal of media coverage. Moreover, the Campaign had provided a space for communication and coordination among diverse sectors, including institutional actors, traditional leftists, and a new generation of activists committed to autonomous organizing within grassroots networks. This alliance

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had always been tenuous, threatened by competing political visions and modes of organizing. In particular, a heated debate had raged throughout the summer and early fall about whether the Campaign should be disbanded, or become a permanent platform, particularly in light of the upcoming mobilizations against the World Trade Organization (WTO) and European Union (EU). Traditional actors supported continuity, while activists with networks such as the Movement for Global Resistance (MRG) and the Citizens Campaign to Abolish the Foreign Debt (RCADE) passionately argued against rigid structures, emphasizing what they referred to as a «new way of doing politics» based on fluid interactions within constantly shifting networks¹.

At one point during the assembly, Luis, an organizer from a major leftist party, spoke out in favor of creating a more permanent organization²:

How can we maintain the relations we have built within this movement? Our model has no precedents in terms magnitude and form of organizing. We have to do something like the Italian Social Forum³, which is a democratic convergence of all movements against globalization. If not, we are just a series of initiatives with nothing in common. We have to maintain this unitary space!

MRG and RCADE-based activists shook their heads in disapproval, and Miquel finally intervened, explaining that:

I'm here to do politics differently. There are a lot of people who don't believe in political parties, but who want to be politically active. We have to provide that space. We have to take advantage of what we have - two years of building networks - but with minimal structure!

Carme, from MRG, went even further:

We have come from different sectors to organize in a different way: assembly-based, plural, and diverse. At the end of the 20th century, political structures are becoming more participatory. We are a movement of movements. We can't have a rigid structure or a rigid manifesto. Rather, we have to create spaces to bring together the maximum number of people according to some basic common principles, and each collective should work autonomously. We should not become a homogenizing structure. We have a series of coordinating tools, and we can come together when we have things to discuss. I would sacrifice "unity" to continue building the movement of movements!

This debate reflected a deep tension between two different ways of practicing politics and conceiving democracy. Traditional leftists empha-

sized continuity and structure and the need for a united movement with clear membership and high visibility, while activists from decentralized networks countered that rigid structures discourage participation and allow political elites to take advantage of the movement for electoral purposes. They argued that future campaigns should be organized along network lines, combining horizontal coordination around common objectives with maximum diversity and autonomy. After several hours of debate, the assembly finally agreed to dissolve the World Bank Campaign. However, the unitary space would continue under a series of different names: the Campaign against the WTO through November, and the Campaign against the Europe of Capital and the War in the winter and spring.

This article explores an emerging mode of political engagement among global justice activists in Barcelona and the transnational circuits through which they travel. Since the first Global Days of Action against Capitalism, including the protests against the WTO in Seattle in November 1999, and through subsequent actions against multilateral institutions and alternative forums in cities such as Prague, Quebec, Genoa, Barcelona and Porto Alegre, global justice activists have challenged global inequalities, while making new struggles visible. Inspired by the Zapatistas and previous struggles against free trade, structural adjustment, and ecological destruction, activists have made innovative use of new technologies, creative direct action, and network-based organizational forms. Global justice movements thus not only challenge growing corporate influence over our lives, communities, and resources, they also constitute laboratories for generating alternative codes, values, and practices.

Influenced by the networking logic of the Internet and broader dynamics associated with late capitalism, social movements are increasingly organized around flexible, distributed network forms (Arquilla/Romfeldt, 2001; Castells, 1997; Hardt/Negri, 2004). I specifically employ the term "cultural logic of networking" as a way to conceive the broad guiding principles, shaped by the logic of informational capitalism, which are internalized by activists and generate concrete networking practices⁴. Networking logics entail an embedded and embodied set of social and cultural dispositions that orient actors toward: 1) building horizontal ties among diverse, autonomous elements, 2) the free and open circulation of information, 3) collaboration through decentralized coordination and consensus decision making, and 4) self-directed networking. Networking logics represent an ideal type. In practice, they are unevenly distributed and always exist in dynamic tension with other competing logics, generating a complex "cultural politics of networking" within specific spheres.

¹ In fact, activists ultimately "self-dissolved" MRG as a response to declining participation and a political statement against the reproduction of rigid structures.

² Unless otherwise specified, acronyms have been used to protect activist identities.

³ Modeled after the World Social Forum, the Italian Social Forum was founded before the anti-G8 protests in Genoa in July 2001 to provide a broad space of convergence for diverse global justice movement organization, sectors, and networks from around Italy.

⁴ I adapt this term from F. Jameson (JAMESON F., 1991), who refers to postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, and A. Ong (ONG A., 1999), who explores a specific type of late capitalist cultural logic-transnationality. Like P. Bourdieu's *habitus*, cultural logic implies a set of internalized dispositions, shaped by social, economic, and political conditions, which generate concrete practices. Unlike *habitus*, however, they are not so deeply embedded, and can thus be contested and transformed.

In the following I argue that what grassroots activists in Barcelona and elsewhere refer to as a «new way of doing politics» specifically involves a growing confluence among network-based technological infrastructures, network-based organizational forms, and network-based political norms, mediated by activist practice. As we shall see, beyond morphology, networks are increasingly associated with values related to horizontal relations, participatory democracy, self-management, and decentralized coordination based on autonomy and diversity. The network has thus become a powerful political and cultural ideal, a guiding logic that provides a model of and model for emerging forms of directly democratic politics at local, regional, and global scales. The following sections explore this new mode of politics within diverse movement spheres, paying particular attention to ongoing micro-practices and struggles. The conclusion then further considers contrasting models of democratic practice among radical global justice activists and their institutional counterparts.

II. Networking Technologies

Global justice activists have used digital networks to organize actions and mobilizations, share information and resources, and coordinate campaigns by communicating at-a-distance. On the one hand, given their speed, low cost, and geographic reach, new digital technologies have facilitated the organization of globally coordinated protests, including those inspired by Peoples Global Action (PGA). On the other hand, the circulation of discourses, strategies, and tactics signals the rise of a global web of alternative «transnational counterpublics» (Olesen, 2005 ; Fraser, 1992). Still, the Internet complements and reinforces, rather than replaces face-to-face interaction. During my time in Barcelona, activists used digital networks to stay informed about activities and perform concrete logistical tasks, while complex planning, political discussions, and relationship building took place within physical settings.

My own time thus largely involved attending meetings nearly every evening, followed by long hours of online work late into the night. In addition to electronic listserves, global justice activists have also used interactive web pages to facilitate planning and coordination. Particular activist networks have their own web pages, while temporary websites are often created during mobilizations to provide information, resources, and contact lists, post documents and calls to action, and house real-time discussions. Activist networking projects such as the Infospace in Barcelona have also begun to collectively produce and edit documents using open editing technology, reflecting a growth in digitally networked collaboration (Juris, 2005). Similarly, Independent Media Centers provide on-line forums allowing activists to post their own news stories, constituting a self-managed communications network beyond the corporate media.

As with similar networks elsewhere, new digital technologies were central to the early development of Catalan global justice networks, which involved a complex interaction among local political and cultural tradi-

tions, wider global forces, and innovative technological practices. RCADE, for example, was organized through a statewide network of autonomous collectives, which coordinated through electronic listserves and websites. At the same time, the decentralized structure of the Internet articulated with the network's emphasis on horizontal coordination and grassroots participation. Although the libertarian ethic among RCADE-based activists was shaped, in part, by the region's strong anarchist tradition, it was reinforced through their ongoing interaction with new digital technologies.

The Internet played a similar role in the emergence of MRG. After participating in global English and Spanish-language listserves, MRG-based activists created a statewide listserve in May 2000 to plan for the anti-World Bank and IMF protests in Prague. As Mar recalled, «The Internet played a key role in the rise of the anti-globalization movement at the international level and here in Catalonia» (interview). By communicating via Internet, activists from diverse groups and collectives were able to share information and coordinate in a flexible, decentralized manner without hierarchical structures, as Pau explained: «Before the Internet, horizontal assemblies were tied to local activity. When we built statewide coordinating mechanisms, we had to use representatives, and this was much slower» (interview). According to Joan, the Internet «favored decentralization and autonomy, which was fantastic for participatory democracy» (interview). The Internet thus not only allowed activists to coordinate more rapidly, it also reinforced their libertarian ideals, as technology, norm, and form increasingly coincided.

Similarly, digital technologies have facilitated communication and coordination within transnational networks such as PGA. The global website⁵ represents PGA's most important communication tools, providing an on-line archive documenting network history, housing text and video reports from previous actions, meetings and conferences, and providing information regarding future initiatives and events. In addition to the webpage, much of the transnational coordination takes place within various listserves, which include local, regional, and global lists as well as thematic forums around specific projects and campaigns, most of which can be accessed through the homepage. Beyond logistical coordination, PGA listserves also provide arenas for political and strategic debates. At the same time, given the continuing significance of the digital divide, grassroots organizations in Latin America and South Asia tend to use traditional means of communication, including phone and face-to-face interaction. Indeed, global coordination has largely taken place via personal exchanges among key network figures. However, after the unofficial global PGA meeting in Hardiware (India) in October 2005, activists organized a series of global chats, perhaps suggesting the beginning of a concerted

⁵ <http://www.agp.org>.

effort to make more effective use of the Internet's interactive tools and capabilities⁶.

Compared to radical transnational networks such as PGA, the world and regional social forums have been less directly shaped by digital technologies, partly reflecting their institutional character. As P. Norris suggests (Norris, 2001), traditional organizations often adapt new technologies to their ongoing communication routines, while more informal actors are more likely to reorganize around such technologies, using their interactive capacities to overcome disadvantages in terms of size and resources. However, the forums are beginning to use technologies more creatively. Organizers have used electronic tools, including websites and e-mail lists for communication and outreach, while specific projects and workshops provide platforms for experimenting with digital media and debating issues related to their use within grassroots movements.

The WSF website⁷ represents the Forum's most visible communications tool. Hosted on a Brazilian server and managed by the Secretariat, the site houses information regarding the history and structure of the forum process, logistical and program details, analyses and archival materials, as well as registration forms. Significantly, however, beyond a periodic electronic bulletin, there are no Forum-wide listserves. Particular committees have created their own e-mail lists, and are experimenting with new digital tools, including chats and wikis, but these have not been well publicized (Waterman, 2005).

For their part, regional and thematic forums have created more interactive web tools, including the ESF site⁸ and an open ESF listserv, which reflects the more participatory nature of the European process. Although the official forums have made limited use of new technologies, alternative projects have been more technologically oriented. For example, when members of the London ESF organizing committee objected to the creation of open listserves and restricted the flow of information, grassroots activists established their own website⁹ and listserv. The latter was wiki-based, allowing users to edit and update content, reflecting an emphasis on open access, decentralized coordination, and horizontal collaboration among grassroots activists. Moreover, diverse autonomous spaces, such as Beyond ESF in London in 2004, or the Caracol at the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre, have created their own interactive tools and websites.

III. Networking Forms and Practices

Beyond providing a technological medium, the Internet's reticulate structure reinforces network-based organizational forms. New Social

Movement (NSM) theorists have long argued that feminist, ecology, and student movements were structured around horizontal networks. Similarly, anthropologists L. Gerlach and V. H. Hine (Gerlach/Hine, 1970) pointed out many years ago that grassroots movements are decentralized, segmentary, and reticulate. At the same time, digital technologies have significantly enhanced the most radically decentralized «all channel» formations (Kapferer, 1973), greatly facilitating transnational coordination and communication. Network designs are diffusing widely, as digital technologies power the expansion of globally connected, yet locally rooted social movements, which are increasingly organized around flexible all-channel patterns, rather than traditional top-down political formations.

As we have seen, networking logics have given rise to what many activists in Barcelona refer to as a «new way of doing politics». By this they mean a new mode of organizing involving horizontal coordination among autonomous groups, grassroots participation, consensus decision-making, and the free and open exchange of information, although there is often a contradiction between theory and practice. While the command-oriented logic of traditional parties and unions involves recruiting new members, developing unified strategies, pursuing political hegemony, and organizing through representative structures, network politics revolve around the creation of «convergence spaces» (Routledge, 2004), where diverse collectives, organizations, and networks converge around a few common hallmarks, while preserving their autonomy and specificity. The objective becomes enhanced «connectivity» and horizontal expansion by articulating diverse movements within flexible, decentralized structures which facilitate transnational coordination and communication. Key «activist-hackers» (Nelson, 1999) operate as relayers and exchangers, receiving, interpreting, and routing information out to diverse network nodes. Like computer hackers, activist-hackers combine and recombine cultural codes (in this case political signifiers), sharing information about projects, mobilizations, strategies, and tactics within global networks.

Global justice movements in Barcelona are organized around precisely these kinds of flexible, decentered network forms and practices. For example, MRG was initially conceived as «a network of people and collectives against economic globalization and unitary thinking [...] a tool for providing local struggles with global content and extension»¹⁰. Activists wanted to create a flexible mechanism for communicating and coordinating among activists from diverse struggles, including ecologists, squatters, Zapatista supporters, solidarity and anti-debt activists, and opponents of the EU. Rather than top-down, centralized command, activists preferred loose, flexible coordination among autonomous groups within a minimal structure involving periodic assemblies, logistical commissions surround-

⁶ The «consultation» meeting in Hardiware was organized in lieu of the planned global PGA conference in Nepal, which was cancelled due to political instability in the region.

⁷ <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>.

⁸ <http://www.fse-esf.org>.

⁹ <http://esf2004.net>.

¹⁰ Cited in an article written by an MRG activist called «La Organización del MRG», which was published in the February-March edition of *EZMA*, a Catalan activist journal.

ing concrete tasks, such as finances or media, and several project areas, including a social movement observatory and a resource exchange.

In practice, MRG often dissolved into larger campaigns, while remaining an effective space for sharing resources and information, generating analysis and discourse, and inspiring more broadly what Pau referred to as a new form of political action based on «working as a network, through horizontal assemblies, and with local autonomy in order to reach people with a more open, less dogmatic style» (interview). In contrast to traditional forces of the left, open participation was favored over representation, as an early network document declared :

MRG provides a space for integration and convergence among people and collectives against global capitalism. It has a diffuse structure, and involves a diffuse sense of individual identification with the movement. MRG should therefore be understood as a movement “without members”; membership leads to static, non-dynamic structures and a clear and distinct, rather than a more diffuse sense of belonging.

At the same time, discourses of open networking often conceal other forms of exclusion based on unequal access to information or technology, while a given cultural logic always exists in dynamic tension with other competing logics. Indeed, even when particular cultural forms predominate, they never achieve complete hegemony. What many observers view as a single, unified global justice movement is actually a congeries of competing, yet sometimes overlapping movement networks that differ according to issue addressed, political subjectivity, ideological framework, political culture, and organizational logic. Indeed, social movements are complex fields shot through with internal differentiation (Burdick, 1995). Struggles within and among specific movement networks shape how they are produced, how they develop, and how they relate to one another within broader movement fields. Cultural struggles involving ideology (anti-globalization vs. anti-capitalism), strategies (summit hopping vs. sustained organizing), tactics (violence vs. non-violence), organizational form (structure vs. non-structure), and decision-making (consensus vs. voting), or what I refer to as the cultural politics of networking, are enduring features of anti-corporate globalization landscapes.

For example, when the Barcelona campaign against the World Bank was formed in early 2001, MRG-based activists brought their horizontal networking praxis to bear within this broader political space. Leftist parties and larger NGOs initially wanted their institutions to figure prominently within the campaign, which more grassroots activists interpreted as a strategy for gaining members or increasing electoral support. Formal organizations also favored structures based on representative voting, where influence would be determined by membership size rather than actual contribution. On the other hand, activists from MRG and other grassroots groups felt the best way to encourage broader and more active participation was to create open, assembly-based structures where everyone

would have an equal say through consensus decision making, while establishing a rotating group of spokespersons to issue public declarations. This open networking model ultimately won out, but it did not lead to an absence of conflict. Rather, collective decisions would be restricted as much as possible to technical coordination rather than abstract political debates, allowing diverse actors to organize within a common platform.

Following the mobilization against the World Bank, institutional sectors created their own representative structure called the Barcelona Social Forum. Meanwhile, as the opening vignette suggests, Marxists wanted the campaign to become a permanent statewide platform. Activists associated with MRG opposed this idea, arguing against a return to traditional organizational forms. They felt it was important to maintain open spaces for communication and coordination but that such spaces should facilitate the continual reconfiguration of fluid ties. The assembly finally agreed to bring the World Bank campaign to a close in September 2001, giving rise to a new coordinating space later that fall to plan for the upcoming mobilization against the EU. For their part, militant squatters, who had created an anticapitalist platform against the World Bank, would take part within the wider campaign this time around, as parties and unions had forged a space of their own.

Many MRG-based activists were also active in regional and global networks, particularly PGA, a highly diffuse network design involving communication and coordination among diverse struggles around the world¹¹. Given the lack of resources and cultural differences within the network, transnational coordination around specific campaigns has proven difficult, yet global conferences and e-mail lists have facilitated the exchange of experiences, information, and calls to action. Like MRG, PGA has no members, seeking instead to facilitate grassroots coordination and help «the greatest number of persons and organizations to act against corporate domination through civil disobedience and people-oriented constructive actions»¹². Any person or group can participate as long as they agree with the basic hallmarks, which include : a clear rejection of capitalism and all systems of domination, a confrontational attitude, a call to direct action, and an organizational philosophy «based on decentralization and autonomy»¹³. Rather than a centralized coordinating committee, each continent selects its own rotating “conveners” to organize regional and global conferences, assume logistical tasks, and facilitate communication mechanisms, often with the help of various support groups. Indeed, PGA’s emphasis on horizontal coordination, the free and open exchange of information, and directly democratic decision-making reflects the inscription of a horizontal networking logic within its network architecture.

¹¹ MRG served as a European co-convenor of the PGA network from 2001 to 2002.

¹² Cited from www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agg/cocha/principles.htm, accessed October 2, 2006.

¹³ See PGA Hallmarks : <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agg/gender/desire/nutshell.htm>, retrieved October 2, 2006.

Although largely driven by institutional actors, the social forum process reflects a similar confluence among network norms, forms, and technologies, although in this case network norms and forms are conceived in spatial terms. For example, the *Charter of Principles* defines the Forum as «an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences, and inter-linking for effective action»¹⁴. As a civil society initiative, «neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate». Moreover, as with PGA, the Charter declares that no one shall speak in the Forum's name :

The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body. No-one [...] will be authorized [...] to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants [...] it does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it.

As the Charter suggests, the Forum was not conceived as a traditional organization or unified actor, but rather, like PGA, as a tool for communication and coordination, which Indian activist and researcher Jai Sen has consistently referred to as an «open space», as he explains :

The Forum [...] is not an organization or a movement, or a world federation, but a space (a non-directed space), from and within which movements and other civil initiatives [...] can meet, exchange views, and [...] take forward their work, locally, nationally, and globally.¹⁵

At the same time, open space should be viewed as a guiding vision, not an empirical depiction. In principle, the Forum was designed as a sphere of open participation and horizontal exchange, but in practice the process involves myriad micro-level struggles for power and authority, while differently situated actors, including networked movements and their traditional counterparts, hold contrasting views of the Forum. At the same time, the discourse and practice of open space generate their own exclusions based on axes of race, class, religious faith, and political views. Although it is often undermined in practice, however, the open space ideal represents the inscription of a networking logic within the Forum's organizational architecture.

As we saw with the unitary campaigns in Barcelona, radical global justice activists face a continual dilemma about whether to operate within more strictly defined political formations, at the risk of being marginalized, or participate within broader spaces involving reformist and more traditional actors. In this sense, complex patterns of shifting alliances also operate at the global scale. For example, activists associated with PGA

and other radical transnational networks often create «autonomous spaces» during world and regional social forums, conceived as «separate, yet connected» to official events. The cultural politics of autonomous space thus reflect the cultural logic of networking along the terrain of the Forum. At the same time, depending on the political context, specific networks will take part in official forums, build their own autonomous spaces, or boycott the process entirely. Digitally powered movement networks are thus «rhizomatic» (Cleaver, 1999 ; Deleuze/Guattari, 1987), always emerging, fusing together, and separating, yet it is important to consider how such processes are generated through concrete practices and micro-political struggles.

IV. Emerging Political Visions

Expanding and diversifying networks is more than an organizational objective ; it is also a highly valued political goal. The self-produced, self-developed, and self-managed network has thus become a widespread cultural ideal, providing not just an effective model of political organizing, but also a model for re-organizing society as a whole. The network ideal is reflected in the proliferation of decentralized organizational forms within anti-corporate globalization movements, as well as the development of new self-directed communication and coordination tools, such as Indymedia, or the countless electronic listserves created over the past few years. The dominant spirit behind this emerging political praxis can be broadly defined as anarchist, or what activists in Barcelona refer to as libertarian. Classic anarchist principles such as autonomy, self-management, federation, direct action, and direct democracy are among the most important values among more radical sectors, while activists increasingly identify as anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, or left-libertarian.

These emerging political subjectivities are not necessarily identical to anarchism in the strict ideological sense. Rather, they share specific cultural affinities revolving around the values associated with the network as an emerging political and cultural ideal : open access, the free circulation of information, self-management, and coordination based on diversity and autonomy. Despite popular conceptions, anarchism does not mean complete disorder. Indeed, anarchists specifically emphasize the importance of organization, but of a particular kind : organization based on grassroots participation from below rather than centralized command from above. As the Russian anarchist Voline once wrote :

Society must be organized. However, the new organization [...] must be established freely, socially, and, above all, from below. The principle of organization must not issue from a center created in advance to capture the whole and impose itself upon it but on the contrary, it must come from all sides to create nodes of coordination, natural centers to serve all these points (Guérin, 1970 :43).

The networking logic within contemporary movements involves precisely this conception of horizontal coordination among autonomous ele-

¹⁴ See WSF Charter : http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?td_menu=4&cd_language=2, accessed October 2, 2006.

¹⁵ Cited from <http://www.choike.org/PDFs/introduc.pdf>, retrieved October 2, 2006.

ments. In this sense, influenced by their interaction with new technologies, many activists view the open source development process, where geographically dispersed computer programmers continuously improve, adapt, and distribute new versions of computer software code through collaborative networks, as a model of political organizing and potential harbinger of post-capitalist forms of economic, social, and political organization. The self-generating network thus becomes a powerful model for (re-)organizing society based on horizontal collaboration, participatory democracy, and coordination through autonomy and diversity. At the same time, activists increasingly express their emerging utopian imagines directly through organizational and technological practice, as G. Lovink (Lovink, 2002 :34) suggests : «Ideas that matter are hardwired into software and network architectures». This helps explain why, as we have seen, ideological debates are so often coded as conflicts over organizational process and form.

This emerging network ideal was particularly pronounced among the Catalan activists I worked with during my research in Barcelona. For example, RCADE, which helped give rise to and continued to work alongside MRG, self-consciously employed the terminology of computer networks to characterize its organizational structure. The "Network", as it is popularly known, is thus composed of various local, regional, and statewide "nodes". The organizational and political base of the Network is constituted by local nodes, defined in an early network document as «self-defined, self-managed and self-organized spaces». Wider coordination occurs during periodic meetings of regional and statewide nodes and annual gatherings. RCADE was specifically created to organize a statewide consultation asking citizens if they were in favor of abolishing the debt owed by developing nations to the Spanish government, as Joan explained :

We organized ourselves as nodes, using the nomenclature of the Internet. It was completely new because we were thinking in network terms. The nodes were the spaces where information was produced and made public, the physical embodiment of the Internet, what we might call affinity groups today. We took the idea, not of a platform (we didn't want to work as a platform) but rather of a network (inter-view).

Moreover, the political goal was not just abolishing the debt, but rather expanding the Network itself, along with its directly democratic *modus operandi*, as an RCADE document suggests : «The Network is a tool for creating social fabric, and we do this in our local contexts [...] Participatory democracy is not only a transversal theme in our work ; it constitutes our model of [...] operation». This network ideal emerged among many activist sectors around the Spanish state during the latter half of the 1990s, ultimately becoming an important part of the wider ethos within Spanish and Catalan global justice movements, as Nuria, from MRG pointed out : «For me, the twenty-first century, with the discourse of

postmodernity, people are always talking about the 'network of networks of networks', but for me building these networks represents the world we want to create» (interview). When asked about networks, Sergi, also from MRG, responded : «The revolution is also about process ; the way we do things is also an alternative to capitalism, no ?» (interview). Specifically contrasting traditional politics with the network ideal, Paul characterized networks as the best way to «balance freedom with coordination, autonomy with collective work, self organization with effectiveness» (interview). Networking tools, such as Indymedia, e-mail list, interactive web pages, and the Barcelona Infospace, are thus designed, as Pau suggests, to help people «construct networks at whatever rhythm possible» (interview).

This networking logic resonates with a broader political vision emerging among many younger global justice activists, involving what Nuria described as a world composed of «small, self-organized, and self-managed communities, coordinated among them on a worldwide scale» (interview). Sergi posited a similar ideal, where, «Exchange is prioritized over commercial and monetary relations. Regions would be self-sufficient, but they wouldn't close themselves off. Rather, they would work together through a kind of anarcho-eco-regionalist global government» (interview). These visions not only recall traditional anarchist principles of federation, they also reflect emerging network norms and forms within contemporary global justice movements, and the digital technologies that facilitate them, as Pau explained : «The Internet makes it possible to talk about international coordination from below. It allows us to interact according to models that have always existed, but weren't realistic before» (interview).

V. Conclusions : Politics Old and New

In this article I have argued that global justice activists in Barcelona and elsewhere are developing new modes of political engagement which involve an increasing confluence among network technologies, organizational forms, and political norms, mediated by activist practice. Beyond technology and organization, the network has also become a widespread cultural ideal, a model of and model for new forms of radical, directly democratic politics. Network norms and forms within global justice movements thus not only mirror one another, they reflect underlying technological transformations mediated by human practice, pointing to a broader dialectic among cultural norms, organizational forms, and technological change. As we have seen, however, networking logics are often challenged by vertical command logics, particularly within broad convergence spaces such as the "unitary" campaigns in Barcelona or the world and regional social forums. Such differences reflect a struggle between two competing visions of democracy : one based on democratic representation within vertical structures and another rooted in direct participation through decentralized networks.

This divide further entails contrasting views regarding the relationship between social movements and political institutions. In general, larger NGOs, leftist parties, and unions are committed to representative democracy, based on vertical leadership, political representation, majority voting, and electoral politics. According to this tradition, social movements are civil society lobby groups, which apply grassroots pressure to institutional actors, who are ultimately responsible for processing and implementing political proposals. Social movements, parties, and unions should thus work together, filling distinct, yet complementary roles within the political process. For example, as Arman, the social movement delegate from a major union in Barcelona, explained :

Social movements carry out grassroots work, raising awareness among citizens, but they cannot substitute for political parties. Neither should political parties attempt to direct social movements. Each one has to know what role they play, and in which social and political space they operate. If we don't work together, each one doing what they are supposed to do, we all lose (interview).

According to this view, representative and assembly-based forms of organizing are both legitimate. Each system has its strengths and weaknesses and responds to a distinct political base, as Enric, from a leftist party in Catalonia, pointed out : «There are two ways of operating within the anti-globalization movement. Grassroots assemblies and representative structures each have their own deficits, but there is a lack of mutual recognition» (interview). At the same time, however, other institutional actors view social movements as direct competition. Although some moderate grassroots activists share the view that social movements and political parties are distinct, though complementary spaces, radicals increasingly conceive social movements as an alternative to representative democracy. For example, during the first in a series of debates involving social movement activists and their institutional counterparts, Nuria, from MRG, strongly criticized the logic of political representation and electoral politics : «I understand how parties work, it's not that I don't recognize them, but I simply don't like how they operate» (interview). Guillermo, from RCADE, added that despite their pretensions, political parties represent very few people : «We are thus creating a new political culture, a new way of doing politics, based on grassroots citizen participation, and not representation».

Indeed, traditional anti-party sentiment among Catalan activists has recently fused with a growing perception of widespread democratic crisis, given what activists view as the increasing influence of transitional capital and signs of right-wing reaction. At the same time, new digital technologies increasingly facilitate grassroots participation. When I specifically asked Joan, from RCADE, about what should replace the current system of representative democracy, he was unsure, but thought it was important to build a more directly democratic system from below :

One of the things that motivates me these days is trying to figure out how we should organize democracy at the beginning of the twenty-first century, given the technological infrastructure at our disposal and new forms of economic integration. How do we deepen our local democratic practices (at work and in our neighborhoods) and transfer that spirit to the global level (interview) ?

For many activists in Barcelona, learning how to build more sustainable, though radically decentralized networks, which are locally rooted, yet regionally and globally coordinated, points to a concrete mechanism for generating alternative democratic practices and values. In this sense, within certain anti-corporate globalization sectors, networks are moving beyond the realm of technology and organizational form and are beginning to provide a broad vision for radically reconstituting politics and society. Whereas directly democratic forms of political participation have historically been restricted to local contexts, digital networking technologies and practices are facilitating new experiments with grassroots democracy, networked at local, regional and global scales. The most radical anti-globalization activists are thus not only promoting grassroots participation within their social movement networks ; they are generating innovative practices and values they hope might one day transform representative democracy itself.

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