Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles

By

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B.A., University of the Fraser Valley, 2007

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Abstract

This project is a comparison of alternative media centers (AMCs) set up as part of the 2010 anti-Olympic convergence in Vancouver and the anti-G-20 protests in Toronto in the same year. It is made up of two parts: a video and a paper. The video introduces the idea of AMCs and explores the specific contexts of Vancouver and Toronto; it also compares the tactics and results of the two AMCs within these two sites. The paper portion delves into the definition of alternative media and the place of independent media centers (IMCs) within that, fleshing out the history of "media activism," with a particular focus on Vancouver and Toronto. It also addresses the methodology used to obtain the interviews and footage that were used to create the video.

Keywords: Alternative media; social movements; independent media center; Olympics; G-20.
Dedicated to my Acha and Amma for insisting that I get my Master’s, to Kurren Patani for taking me to my first demonstration, and to Dawn Paley: the best journalist I have ever known.
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMC</td>
<td>Alternative Media Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Anti-Poverty Committee</td>
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<td>ATIP</td>
<td>Access to Information and Privacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBSA</td>
<td>Canadian Border Security Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCAP</td>
<td>Carnegie Community Action Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMAQ</td>
<td>Media Alternatives Quebec</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEWC</td>
<td>Downtown Eastside Women’s Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIY</td>
<td>Do-it-yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DERA</td>
<td>Downtown Eastside Residents’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DND</td>
<td>Department of National Defence</td>
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<tr>
<td>DTES</td>
<td>Downtown East Side</td>
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<tr>
<td>G20ISU</td>
<td>G-20 Integrated Security Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMC</td>
<td>Independent Media Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>JIG</td>
<td>Joint Intelligence Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBQT</td>
<td>Lesbian-gay-bi-queer-trans</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDD</td>
<td>Media Democracy Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOII</td>
<td>No One Is Illegal</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCAP</td>
<td>Ontario Coalition Against Poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPP</td>
<td>Ontario Provincial Police</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORN</td>
<td>Olympic Resistance Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POC</td>
<td>Person/People of colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCMP</td>
<td>Royal Canadian Mounted Police</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRO</td>
<td>Single Room Occupancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAZ</td>
<td>Temporary autonomous zone</td>
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<td>TCMN</td>
<td>Toronto Community Mobilization Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>TMC</td>
<td>Toronto Media Co-op</td>
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<tr>
<td>VANDU</td>
<td>Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users</td>
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<td>VPD</td>
<td>Vancouver Police Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
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<td>VANOC</td>
<td>Vancouver Organizing Committee</td>
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<td>VMC</td>
<td>Vancouver Media Co-op</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISU</td>
<td>Vancouver Integrated Security Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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1. **Introduction**

This paper and the documentary film project that it accompanies were put together during the spring and summer of the year 2012; two years after the anti-Olympic protests in Vancouver and the anti-G-20 convergence in Toronto.

The project looks at Alternative Media Centers (AMCs) set up by grassroots and community media activists before and during the anti-Olympic and anti-G20 convergences in Canada in 2010. The paper component addresses and expands the literature and history of alternative media organizing with the purpose of shedding much-needed light on the changing nature of this practice, particularly around setting up convergence media centers.

The film component of this project examines the differences in the kind of coverage that came out of the AMCs in Vancouver and Toronto. The two protests were different from one another: in Toronto, what took place was a traditional summit protest where even mainstream media showed up to film demonstrators, whereas in Vancouver, protesters were confronting a highly choreographed athletic spectacle made for corporate media; to divert media attention away from the actual Games was a major challenge. The film is made up of interviews with media activists as well as organizers with the larger social movements at those convergences, complemented with footage from the AMCs: it tells the story of how the centers came together and the role they played in the protests. This paper will similarly touch upon these themes while at the same time addressing the experience of setting up and conducting the research that led to the creation of the film and project as a whole. It will also address the future of AMCs and grassroots media organizing in general.
2. Theorizing Alternative Media Centers

A core question in my research is what an alternative/independent media\(^1\) center is, and how closely it needs to adhere to the model set forth in the Indymedia model used during the Seattle (indigenous Duwamish territory) World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in 1999. In many respects the Vancouver and Toronto AMCs were very much like the one that emerged in Seattle in 1999\(^2\): they began with a physical space and a collective willing to have their stories posted anywhere as long as they got some exposure, with the idea of one website to aggregate stories coming later (Langlois 47).

The *Encyclopaedia of Social Movement Media* describes media projects such as Indymedia’s independent media center (IMC) as evolved out of alternative media at summits (Hadl n. pag.). Within this literature on alternative media a key definition of this form of journalism emerges as one that “supported social movement organizing at summits, disseminating information on developments inside the venue, logistics during mobilizations, and background information on the issues. Through participatory and dialogic features, they provided forums for discussing strategies and deepened analyses of movement concerns” (Hadl n. pag.).

\(^1\) Since Indymedia set up the IMC, while the Olympics and G-20 had AMCs, I will be using both terms.
\(^2\) The two AMCs were also slightly more formal than the one set up for the WTO since they were set up by media organizations – respectively the Vancouver Media Co-op and Toronto Media Co-op which were regional, autonomous groups under the national Media Co-op, which is affiliated with grassroots news magazine *The Dominion*. 
2.1. Defining Alternative Media

Having theorized the independent/alternative media center within the context of social movements, it now becomes necessary to address the terminology associated with it. While examining terms used in regards to alternative media, I found “citizen journalism” (Allan and Thorsen) problematic as it privileges citizens over other groups. I also have issues with terms such as “digital journalism” (Jones and Salter) that refer to social media; alternative media centers hold solidarity with movements fighting for social and environmental justice, with technology merely being an enabler, instead of the other way around in the way that social media journalism advocates. The term alternative media that uses open publishing (Atton 133) better fits the grassroots journalism about which I am speaking.

During a panel presentation at Media Democracy Day (MDD) 2010 I used “radical media” for describing the collective that put together the Vancouver AMC (which relates to the title of John D. H. Downing’s book Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements). Although the term indicates a level of anti-authoritarianism, Downing points out that it can also refer to far-right repressive movements and the media associated with them.

A phrase that is readily associated with AMCs in the Encyclopaedia of Social Movement Media is “anarchist media” (Atton n. pag.), which as a term implies the idea of pre-figurative politics or the importance of creating socialist principles in the present rather than merely imagining them for the future. Anarchists form associations without the need for formal titles to be bestowed i.e. anyone from a wide range of activist backgrounds can fall under this description (including myself who has never formally identified as being anarchist but has been described as such many times and is

3 Those who champion this term might argue that they perceive everyone as citizens of the world; however, the term “citizen” is not one by which everyone in the world identifies.
accepted by local anarchist communities as one). The term also leaves out those contributing to articles, videos, photos and press releases through the AMC that identify more as, for instance, feminist, lesbian-gay-bi-queer-trans (LGBQT) or indigenous.

Atton uses “do-it-yourself” (DIY) to refer to the type of media produced by anarchist movements (n. pag.). This term also is problematic because it does not take into consideration the community involvement aspect of a lot of the work coming out of alternative media centers; Milstein stresses the importance of calling it do-it-ourselves (301).

Another phrase coined by the Vancouver AMC collective was “unembedded journalism:” a term that the group has ceased using due to its lack of recognition to those unfamiliar with the work. The phrase basically refers to a form of media-making and journalism that was not embedded within the power structure of the mainstream. Referring to embedded journalists in war-zones (current examples being Iraq and Afghanistan), the phrase directly addresses the question of bias when the journalist depends on one of the sides engaged in the conflict for protection (more so when the side being depended upon is the aggressor). In the case of journalists in the global north, being embedded with the police is cause for concern in terms of their slant and framing of the issues. Acknowledging Vancouver as being occupied, unceded indigenous Coast Salish Territories gave this phrase even more meaning in terms of bias and power structures in mainstream media versus the alternative represented by independent media. The term did not mean that alternative media was unbiased, but simply not embedded (or in bed, as those with a propensity for puns pointed out) with dominant power structures whose interests were anathema to what the anti-Olympic protests represented.4

4 The term unembedded also speaks to the level of complicity official/mainstream media that were embedded with the Olympics; with CTV being the official media partner of the Games and other outlets showing protesters as being vandals more than anything else.
2.2. Redefining Alternative Media

One of the main issues with the semantics of AMCs is the absorption of terms by capitalism and neo-liberalism. Phrases such as “community media” (Fuller and ebrary) and “participatory media” (Zuckerman) all have become buzzwords used by marketers and large media institutions to strengthen the image of their products.

The other issue is that no one term fully envelops what an AMC does. Even a term such as “autonomous media,” which at first seems fitting for the kind of anti-authoritarianism that exudes from an independent/alternative media center, is problematic. The term is often used in the context of temporary autonomous zones (TAZ) set up during demonstrations, and slowly made its way to encompass grassroots media covering these events. Used by editors Andrea Langlois and Frédéric Dubois in their collection of essays on activism and media, the dictionary definition of the term addresses the idea of being answerable to no law but one’s own; this nicely envelopes the independence of such media centers from the mainstream as well as the government, but does not in any way touch upon the collaborative processes involved in media production out of these spaces.

Even the term “activist media” (Waltz) which at first seems to get to the very root of the AMC makeup, misses the entirety of the picture. Scott Uzelman notices how one cannot “say that there is some imagined community of pure media activists that is distinct and separate from other social movements. Rather, media activists, and media activist collectives and organizations generally work within the more encompassing contemporary movement of movements to which we append various adjectives – anti-corporate globalization, pro-democracy, anti-capitalist, global justice, etc.” (21). Uzelman describes media activism as something that cannot be separated from the other forms of activism. A media activist is rarely if ever just an activist in that one sense alone.

This debate shows that these AMCs are exempt in some ways from the labelling that often pushes the movement in unwanted directions; a perfect instance of this is in how the term independent media center has been taken up by one that is filled with technology-centred social media experts instead of activists (I will return to this later in
the paper). Each phrase has a potential of being absorbed by capitalism; therefore it might be best for the media centers themselves to stay away from these definitions and instead concentrate on creating media that defines them: in the case of the AMCs, they produced journalism that actually represented and examined the issues of corporatization being addressed by protesters instead of turning the convergences into mere spectacle.

Even established terms such as alternative or independent media become hard to own when they are used by conspiracy theorists such as David Icke and Alex Jones (Kelly). The term “grassroots media” as used by the *Dominion* magazine even is not perfect since organizations can “astro-turf” their credentials. If I were to be invited to MDD again I would describe the AMC as being alternative, independent, grassroots, radical, autonomous and community-involved, and at the same time none of those. A better description of us would be as the collective that organized the only media convergence space for movement-centred media activists that stood in solidarity with the anti-Olympics convergence; such a description is far more action-based and therefore comprehensive in terms of what the media center was.

### 2.3. What is Alternative About Alternative Media?

Downing points out that radical media outlets broadcast only the opinion of the collective in charge of the media rather than the society at large. He elaborates on this in his article on IMCs in which he says that “our conviction that a different world is possible is driven more by contemplation of the one we inhabit than by developed, let alone coordinated alternative policies” (245); he asks exactly what about social movements and IMCs are actually alternative to the mainstream neo-liberal world. The editorial process within and without alternative media collectives is the subject of much discussion.

During the Quebec City Summit of Americas, there was friction between Centre for Media Alternatives Quebec (CMAQ) which believed in screening for racist, sexist and otherwise offensive comments, and independent journalists who called for completely
open publishing (Montgomery 22). Andrea Langlois looks more into detail in terms of open publishing and CMAQ as well as IMCs in general, noting that posts are actually deleted for a number of reasons, creating potential for contentiousness because not everyone characterizes offensive content the same way (53). Two key points about the editorial process in IMCs that Langlois points out is that they are transparent and open to scrutiny and take a positive instead of negative approach by asking if posts promote diversity and equality instead of merely if they are offensive (54-56). This approach to editing posts, as opposed to a set hierarchical structure that is not in any way open to change, is telling.

Open publishing has only existed since the 1990s, and is an evolving concept; alternative editorial committees need to evolve as well. Even with this open model of publishing, people’s mind-set is hard to change. I have personally seen numerous requests via email and otherwise to change or delete posts based on disagreements with the opinion expressed in respective entries. The thinking continues that an AMC would delete posts based purely on pressure from readers; this was what happened in terms of posts on the Vancouver AMC website supporting diversity of tactics after the convergence. Quite simply, “there seems to be a transposition of responsibility with regards to content found in traditional media onto that found on Indymedia” (Langlois 56). Alternative media needs to push forward education on the idea of open non-hierarchical publishing: the backbone of the AMC.

This openness within the editorial structure does not mean that Independent/alternative media centers are fully accessible. Literacy is a major obstacle to people being able to access them, both in terms of understanding content and with regard to taking part in production (Langlois 48). Within independent/alternative media centers there are also long-standing and developing tensions over how to best establish and operate, as shown in the above example about CMAQ. One of the most important critiques of this kind of organizing is that “the Internet was the final frontier for advanced capitalism’s drive to mechanize everyday life” (Atton n. pag.), and thereby make this kind of organizing technology-centric. It is important to acknowledge these issues, which are ongoing problems that have not all been solved. My response to the last critique
mentioned, which is an important one that speaks to the heart of anti-capitalist organizing, is that the potential for the Internet to mechanize social relations depends on the strength of relationships built through creating alternative media.

Andréa Schmidt notes that in the actual creation of content, there needs to be a level of complicity between producer and subject that does not exist in the mainstream; a complicity that comes from the desire by the producer to create an intimate relationship with the subject which is strengthened by the resulting report (80-85). With this intention in place, the result for the independent journalist is not the article/report that comes out of the interview, but a stronger relationship with the person the report is about. This kind of solidarity strengthens flesh and blood connections even when mediated by the mechanized Internet.

2.4. Understanding Alternative Media as an Evolving Mechanism

The film *This is What Democracy Looks Like* (2000) give insight into the work of Indymedia camera-people who captured the protests from the demonstrators’ point of view as opposed to that of the state. The film also directly takes on views constructed by mainstream media, such as the intentional splitting of the protesters into three groups – labour, environmentalists and “thugs” – which allowed for a justification of heavy-handed police tactics and state repression of the demonstration; Christine Wong even argues that the mainstream actually split the protesters into three “legitimate” groups (the third being students), who were differentiated from the fourth set marked as “thugs.” The role of independent media during Seattle, according to *The Battle of Seattle: the New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization*, was multi-fold: from shining a spotlight on media silence (29), to holistically addressing the protests rather than just the 1/35th that took part in property destruction (93), to highlighting police violence which often gets left out in the mainstream media in favour of protester-caused property damage (100).

In the Canadian context, alternative media of this sort has had a history far ahead of Seattle’s WTO protests, though not necessarily in the form of an actual IMC or
AMC. The film *Kanesatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993) and the book *People of the Pines: the Warriors and the Legacy of Oka* both show how during the 1990 Oka Crisis standoff between Indigenous people and the police/army, some journalists chose to be embedded with the former as opposed to the latter. This kind of reporting took a view that was different from the usual news coming from journalists stationed with the authorities; it allowed for full coverage of the standoff as opposed to showing just what the government said.

Itself being what has been called a “movement of movements,” alternative media largely reflects the state of the larger movement with which it is involved. With social movement tactics being successfully challenged by the state, the safety of independent media became perilous, especially after the Genoa Indymedia center was raided and attacked by police in 2001 (Ryan 306). The film *The Miami Model* (2004) shows state repression to be so honed to this form of organizing that police actually push demonstrators into ghettoised neighbourhoods with the hopes that independent media will be robbed by locals.

A major facet of independent media has been the presentation of demonstrations and issues in general from the side of the marginalized. Rather than positioning themselves on the side of the police during protests, the alternative media person positions themselves alongside the protesters. In the case of covering something that is not a protest, the media person presents the side of the marginalized foremost. A good example of this was when independent media in Seattle captured images of the bodyguard of one of the summit attendees brandishing a gun and pointing it at protesters (Gillham and Marx 64) – a plain indicator of power levels, which mainstream media overlooked in the haste to present state-centric views of the protests that favoured heightened security and police violence.

Independent media also was able to keep up with developments coming from the world of activism that was not seen by the mainstream, such as the direct-action based alliances that grew from Seattle (Barrow 145). The main call for media activists at that time was to present a viable alternative to the concentration of power that existed in the
mainstream (Day 39), which was the reason for the lack of fair and equal representation of globalization and the protests against it.

One of the most notable comments about the IMC in Seattle comes from Kristine Wong, on the idea that the *Blind Spot* (the IMC daily paper for the convergence) “was closer to the mainstream media than the voice of the under-represented” (223). She goes on to explain the issue of under-representing people of colour (POC) that is problematic in both mainstream and alternative media. In the case of Seattle, much of the alternative media coverage focused on “white rioters,” trying to show the subtle nuances of what they were protesting: ideas that the mainstream media tried to drown out with the sounds of property destruction. Even Wong admits that “while the IMCs have challenges ahead of them regarding people of colour issues, they have succeeded where the mainstream media have failed, giving the world first-person, unedited coverage of what really happened on the streets of Seattle” (223-224).

Richard Day critiques the IMC movement for its inability to be taken outside the first world context, unlike other operations such as Food Not Bombs (40). His statement definitely rings true in the sense that Indymedia centers have not popped up in third world cities for summits quite the same way as in the West. The setup of Indymedia India shows that when these are put together, they have a much wider context than in the west where they are based in one city or town rather than for an entire nation5.

IMCs and independent media continued to develop alongside the larger social movements post-Seattle. In terms of the issue of not adequately representing the under-represented, what really helped address this was the development of community

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5 In the specific case of Indymedia India, the critique that the organization/site might have been too general strikes home because of the sheer cultural diversity of that nation. Being a country with no one official language (instead, 18) and a host of separately-identifying ethnic and cultural groups, it is hard to imagine one independent media site that could bring together all of the above. Indymedia Kerala would itself be hard to pull off in terms of inclusivity and respecting diversity, let alone a nationwide version.
organizing groups that did not just confront marginalization but actually were started by and involved organizers from marginalized communities. As well as the development of queer liberation and anti-poverty movements alongside anarchist groups, Day notices the burgeoning of groups such as No One Is Illegal (NOII) that centre around migrant justice and the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) that address homelessness and other issues (33). In terms of larger organizing, the presence of these groups strengthen solidarity where tactics were generally agreed upon, though goals could be drastically different. For anarchist groups, the overthrow of the state and the protection of radical spaces were central; whereas for groups like NOII and OCAP victories meant finding people safe asylum or adequate housing. The goals of the latter groups fall into a more reformist category; however, their co-existence with the former groups in one large movement help large-scale mobilizations take place.

Consequently, IMCs had more POC and marginalized people both joining their ranks and willing to speak out in interviews. In terms of Day’s critique about not being something that can be taken to the third world, IMCs have been a technique or method of organizing meant for the global north specifically. The presence of rights in these areas around free speech and assembly allow for such centers to exist; the far less-safe climate in the global south makes it hard to operate alternative media in the same way. However, much as how in the first world there is a range of media activism, from pantomime productions taking place in front of surveillance cameras to Yes Men!-type media stunts, so too in the third world there are a number of varied ways in which people engage with media, particularly with mainstream media conglomeration and concentration in mind.

The Arab Spring uprisings provide a good example where protesters almost completely distrusted mainstream media and instead directly uploaded footage, from the invasion of the palaces in Cairo to Ghaddafi’s capture to rebel engagements with Yemeni armed forces, onto video-sharing services like YouTube. These types of actions have been taken to the point that youth in a kingdom as strict as Saudi Arabia are creating films about poverty and monopolization and uploading them directly to video-sharing services.
Having examined the development of media centers from Seattle into the last decade, I would like to now look at them closely in terms of their operations as they are now. Sandra Jeppesen opines that though activist media has the propensity of creating a culture that is insular, i.e. anarchists reading what other anarchists have written (476), the idea of small-scale production has definite potential for subversive use (478) and can work around the determinacy and cultural legitimacy brought on by the mainstream (480). One of the most telling indicators of the culture that IMCs bring is the fact that they very often remain after the convergences that lead to their setup (Opel and Pompper xiv); there is therefore a drive to keep this kind of project going as well as a need for them to exist.

Especially worth noting in their evolution is the fact that alternative media work takes place alongside other kinds of media and art activism, for instance filming flash mobs that are kept secret in terms of location until the last moment. The role of alternative media is, as it was in Seattle, multi-fold in that it helps fight assertions by the mainstream that fewer protesters showing up means a failure of the protest, that protesters are dangerous and that the police are present to protect the entire city where the convergence is being held (Todd 101-102). These were some of the main roles of the AMC in Vancouver as well as of the one in Toronto.
3. The Context of Alternative Media in Vancouver and Toronto

In the film accompanying this paper I talk at length with activists about the media centers in terms of how they were organized and held together. Yet both cities have rich histories of alternative media that existed before and alongside the AMCs, which I will outline in this section. This background provides continuity for the AMCs, which were both part of a global movements and deeply connected to local activist traditions.

Vancouver has a rich past of alternative media, from zines to grassroots periodicals. This past stems from the radical history of anarchist and Indigenous organizers in the city, particularly those based out of the Downtown East Side (DTES), which is the city’s poorest neighbourhood. The Georgia Straight (first published in 1967) is a publication that is well-known today as a fairly mainstream weekly, but has a history of pushing radical points of view in the 1970s and 80s. Open Road (first published in 1976) followed a similar radical ideal, and was a popular zine that stopped publishing in the 1990s, but was widely-read in anarchist milieus around North America until then. Two ongoing zine projects that have been in Vancouver for a long time are Warrior Publications (started in 2006) and Zig Zag zines (first published in 1999). Both are produced by the same author, known by the pseudonym Zig Zag, and are illustrated zines that focus on anarchist thought and action, colonization, resistance and building the warrior spirit among Indigenous people, and insurrectionist themes.

Other current media projects include Redwire Native Youth Media, which though nationwide, is based in Vancouver and produces youth-centred indigenous-produced art
and journalism\textsuperscript{6}. Vancouver also had its own Indymedia project, which ran from 2001 till 2006. Vancouver Co-op Radio (started in 1973) is another project with a longer history that is continuing to stay present in the city, with an FM frequency and a physical location in the DTES. Carnegie Community Action Project's (CCAP) newsletter (first released in 1996) is a similar enduring project that specifically addresses poverty, homelessness and other issues in the DTES neighbourhood. An online publication known as \textit{The Mainlander} has emerged since 2011, focusing predominantly on the issue of gentrification and housing in the city. Another online publication that has championed progressive politics is \textit{The Tyee}, which has been creating content since 2003.

Toronto similarly has a large alternative media presence and history. Community radio is especially prominent, with the continued presence of CHRY, CIUT FM and university-based Ryerson Radio. CKLN FM, another radical radio station, lost its license but migrated its shows elsewhere. A number of nationwide alternative media projects are based in Toronto; these include \textit{Upping the Anti} (published since 2005), \textit{Shameless} magazine (launched in June 2004), \textit{Rabble.ca} (opened in April 2001) and \textit{This} magazine (started in 1966).

A friend from Toronto once told me with some hubris that the city had forgotten more alternative publications than had existed in the rest of Canada. Seeing the size of the city in comparison to other towns in the country (both population-wise and also in terms of cultural diversity) made me entertain this idea for a while. Genosko and Marcellus write about several alternative publications based out of Toronto in a journal article called “Dead Downtown: Writing the Cultural Obituary of the Alternative Press in \textit{Border/lines}.” They note publications such as the aforementioned \textit{Border/lines} (1984-1999), as well as gay periodical \textit{The Body Politic} (1971-1987) and anti-psychiatry magazine \textit{Phoenix Rising} (1980-1990).

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Redwire} was originally a magazine in print form, but had much of its funding pulled after printing a controversial issue that advocated land defence. It continues to exist as a website.
4. Setting the Scene

With the last of the anti-Olympics protesters only having ended their court cases late last year, and with the G-20 conspiracy cases on-going against people that the state is casting as the leaders of that convergence, the fallout from those demonstrations are still influencing people’s communities, friend networks and activist groups. The lessons and tactics learnt (including mistakes made) from these convergences continue to inform ongoing community organizing. The anti-Olympics convergence centred on the fact that the event took place on stolen Indigenous land. The anti-G20 protests brought together a myriad of issues, from disability rights to migrant justice and indigenous land struggles. Tactics shared by the two convergences included the setup of AMCs, themed days of demonstrations and calls for autonomous militant action.

Parts of the video that accompanies this paper include actual footage from and pictures of both alternative media centers. Additionally activists interviewed talk at length about their experiences setting up and working from within these media centers. What would be compelling to add to the narrative is footage from the inside of both media centers as they were set up and run. As I participated in their establishment I was not
planning of doing my Master's project on AMCs, and therefore did not record anything from the inside\textsuperscript{7}.

Actual footage from within the AMCs would have greatly added to the visual element of the video, but unfortunately little was available. I have decided hence to include in this paper a detailed but brief description of my experience within both AMCs. I am choosing to do this because this paper is at its heart about these centers, including the physical space they encompassed, and also because I would like for anyone viewing this project to be able to get the scope of what went into organizing and holding these spaces together.

4.1. The View from Vancouver

The Vancouver AMC was organized by the Vancouver Media Co-op\textsuperscript{8} (VMC), put together in the heart of the poorest neighbourhood in the city – the Downtown East Side (DTES) – an area that was and continues to be under the process of gentrification. A major component of organizing the AMC was the solidarity of other radical organizations in the city: the Downtown East Side Residents' Association (DERA), a progressive housing center, granted us space in one of their buildings known as Tellier Towers (sometimes referred to as the DERA Building since the organization's offices were

\textsuperscript{7} Filming from within the media centers would have been difficult during the convergences because of the heightened sense of security at those times. The Vancouver AMC went on high security after an article was published in \textit{24 Hours} in which University of British Columbia (UBC) journalism professor David Beers called it the hive out of which logistical coordination of demonstrations was going on. The Toronto AMC was actually visited by uniformed police officers, as mentioned in the video accompanying this paper. Filming within the AMCs would have been highly suspicious, though it had never occurred to me to do this at the time.

\textsuperscript{8} The VMC was made up of anti-Olympic media activists, creating simultaneously the AMC as well as a site vancouver.mediacoop.ca to aggregate news stories. The group became an autonomous local branch of the nationwide Media Co-op, which is a news localization project started by \textit{The Dominion} newspaper.
located there as well). Increasing gentrification in the DTES made it additionally difficult finding space until a few months before the Olympics. The VMC was granted use of a large room in the basement of Tellier Towers. The space was secure in the sense that it was easy to defend from a raid if needed. It was, however, not accessible to people with motor disabilities.

Tellier Towers is a pronounced building on the corner of East Hastings and Carrall Street, holding its own on a block that is steadily being encroached by high-end cafés, art galleries and condominiums. Consisting mostly of single-room occupancy (SRO) units, it was also a space that until 2011 had a number of community-centred activities such as a cooking program (which was run by another ally that cooked enormous quantities of food to help feed the fifty or so people working out of the AMC during the anti-Olympics convergence).

The basement area granted to VMC consisted of a long corridor leading past several locked storage rooms to a teal-coloured door that only editor members of the VMC (those making up the core founding group) had keys to (other than DERA staff). The corridor continued on to the building's emergency exit; this was occasionally used by the smokers in the group for some brief respite in the middle of editing. The room itself was large but completely unventilated.

Once the room had been cleared of all the things it had stored, the collective went into action and cleaned the space, brought in tables and also several fans to deal

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9 Just a few months after the Olympics in February, DERA was sued by BC Housing for mishandling public money meant to subsidize rents for low-income tenants in social housing. BC Housing took over the organization's buildings and dissolved the entity itself. Shortly before this happened one of the main DERA activists who helped acquire the space for the VMC AMC was fired from her position.

10 The corridor itself was not a stranger to being used as a radical space. One of the DERA activists who also organized with the Anti-Poverty Committee (APC), Dave Cunningham, used the corridor to house his Art and Anarchy exhibit shortly before the Olympics began: a collection of radical left zines and other publications which have been mentioned in this paper as part of the history of media activism in Vancouver.
with the mustiness of the room. A local computer recycling organization known as Free Geek provided several computers to be used for less resource-heavy journalism such as writing. Another local ally sold the collective two Macintosh computers that could be used for more intensive video and audio editing. The VMC's volunteer technology expert installed servers that held all the video footage journalists brought in during the convergence.

A large blue table took centre space in the room, used mostly for group meetings and also to place laptops. Three of the four walls were taken up with computer work stations. Any section of wall that did not have a computer up against it had some paper pasted up with information regarding upcoming actions, coverage needed and arrests. A couch was placed at the beginning of the corridor along with a Rubbermaid container filled with food for downtime. The only door into the building (other than emergency exits) required keys and swipe cards, which were provided to VMC editors. Though drab and somewhat cellar-like, the space was secure since only those with keys could get in; anyone else had to call AMC members for access. This secure level of access to the space became of utmost importance when the AMC was under lock-down following an article in 24 Hours that said that the center had a satellite-based communication system similar to that used by the military (Makwana).

4.2. The Toronto AMC During the G-20

Toronto's AMC was a remarkably different experience for me than being in Vancouver. Being a visitor to Toronto, I did not actually help organize the AMC but instead met with my affinity group (a set of people with whom I decided to attend events for the sake of security so that we could keep an eye out for one another), which was made up of two other VMC editor members. I found soon that my love for independence pushed me to create more fluid affinity groups with other Vancouver people that were in town for the G-20 as well. Often I rode around by myself on a bicycle I had borrowed.

I was struck immediately by the fact that Toronto's AMC was on street level, and had a large door that was kept open. The AMC was basically a garage in Little Italy that
was owned and rented to the Toronto Media Co-op\textsuperscript{11} by the proprietor of a progressive restaurant known as the Linux Cafe. At the doorway was a large desk that served as a reception; someone always staffed this area, functioning as a gatekeeper allowing access to the area inside the center. I identified myself and where I was from; someone I knew within the AMC confirmed the information I gave and soon I was allowed inside. Much like the VMC AMC, the space in Toronto was humming with activity.

A number of computers had been set up back-to-back on long tables, with a separate area for meetings to occur closer to the front door. The center was far more ventilated than the one in Vancouver, which was particularly helpful in the balmy heat of June. I popped back and forth between the AMC and the place at which I was staying, filing stories from the center whenever possible since I had arrived without a computer. I found myself keeping with those I knew from Vancouver, and the handful of media activists I had met during the Olympics. I very rarely spent time with anyone new, more because the opportunity never arose than because of issues around security.

I particularly remember the difference in the space on the Saturday night on which several of the arrests took place following the large Black Bloc demonstration that tore through downtown Toronto. Scores of calls came in about arrests, to the point that there seemed to be a new one every minute. As I typed up my story about diversity of tactics, I heard people answer their phones and repeat the information regarding each arrest. The arrests went up on a whiteboard, awaiting confirmation. The center brimmed with a very different kind of energy as people balanced their apprehension regarding a police raid on the space with worry for friends and comrades. The actual space was visited by the police the day after, though no raid took place; several AMC journalists were arrested, as Eli Horwatt mentions in his interview in the film \textit{Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles}.

\textsuperscript{11} As in Vancouver, a local Media Co-op branch came together to create the AMC and a website going along with it called toronto.mediacoop.ca. The TMC, like the VMC, put together the AMC itself, and opened it up to all independent journalists.
4.3. Comparing the AMCs

The obsession with security illustrated above was one of the major features differentiating the two AMCs, and relates to varying expectations about the security state. Vancouver media activists did their homework in terms of researching media centers, and made sure that security was a key element in the AMC they put together. However, Vancouver was hosting the Olympics, which is an event unlike traditional summits such as the G-20 or the WTO. Rather than hosting a number of world leaders at a closed door event, the Olympics was made to be watched by the world. A key part of showing the world the Olympics included showing Vancouver as a beautiful city awaiting tourism and investment. Though keeping the Games safe from protesters was on the mind of security forces such as the Vancouver Integrated Security Unit (VISU)\textsuperscript{12}, the major threat for the city was any attention being diverted away from the actual Games and towards the protests.

Former Olympics Resistance Network (ORN) member Joe Bowser in his interview in *Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles* mentions how the VISU was far more concerned in this sense with the level of media attention and particularly with the AMC than with any sort of actual attack on the Olympics or city by demonstrators. Largely due to wanting to show Vancouver to be safe and enjoyable to tourists and the influx of mainstream media, police did not actually attack the media

\textsuperscript{12} VISU was an organization that was very much along the lines of the US’ Homeland Security office, but on a temporary local level. Canada’s response to large events is to bring together a number of security forces temporarily based on each scenario. In Vancouver the VISU was made up of the Vancouver Police Department (VPD), Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Canadian Border Security Agency (CBSA), Department of National Defence (DND) and West Vancouver Police Department. Toronto similarly saw the creation of the G-20 Integrated Security Unit (G20ISU), made up of several of the above agencies but also including the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP). Two of the interviewees in the film accompanying this paper, Joe Bowser and Tim Groves, have submitted and received several access to information and privacy (ATIP) requests to several of the entities mentioned in this footnote regarding their activities around surveillance of activities at the two convergences; their reports can be found on the VMC, TMC and Dominion websites.
center, and did not arrest any journalists working out of the AMC. Nevertheless, the
Vancouver AMC was set up to be secure. The ability to secure the space was of such
importance that VMC co-founder Dawn Paley stressed the need for the Toronto AMC to
follow Vancouver’s on this regard, as noted by Toronto AMC co-founder Tim Groves in
the film *Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles*.

However, some of those who organized the Toronto AMC had a very different
plan in mind. Kate Milberry notes in her interview in *Alternative Media Centers at
Summits and Spectacles* that there were security components to the TMC AMC, such as
the use of a chute through which the hard drives containing footage could be sent out of
the media center in the event of a police raid. Nevertheless, the focus of the TMC AMC
was far more on outreach than security. Syed Hussan mentions in his interview in
*Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles* that unlike during the Olympics, in
which activists wanted to show the public why the Olympics were repressive, anti-G-20
activists did not have to try hard to convince the public as much about the issues with
that summit. Also, every major media outlet showed the police violence in Toronto.
Nevertheless, TMC’s AMC underlined very much the need for outreach more than
anything. AMC organizers mentioned in their interviews the importance of doing
community outreach in the neighbourhood to let people know that they were there and
providing a service rather than being a security threat. Outreach included having a
reception area at the AMC so that neighbours could visit, educate themselves and allay
any negative preconceptions about the center; it also included delivering the
convergence broadsheet, the Spoke, to neighbours. Not concentrating primarily on
security meant that when the police did visit the AMC, organizers could do little to
respond other than locking the gate to the space; in this respect the VMC AMC was
more secure because of the fact that it was a much less accessible location.

The need for outreach came from lessons learnt from the anti-Olympic media
center, which though secure was not doing much in terms of outreach, especially since it
was located in a neighbourhood that was already allied with the cause. Ironically it was the TMC AMC that had to respond to much more of a security state. Among the approximately 1,100 people arrested were around six AMC journalists. The AMC hence put together a press conference in conjunction with the Toronto Community Mobilization Network (TCMN) and also conducted a separate press gathering around the treatment of journalists in detention, as shown in the film *Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles*.

13 The DTES is, though under the serious threat of gentrification, was at the time and to a lesser extent today host to a number of radical organizations connected with housing, services for women and providing food. The VMC AMC hence was surrounded by a number of radical organizations such as the aforementioned DERA, Downtown Eastside Women's Center (DEWC), First United Church, Carnegie Community Center and Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU).
5. Researching AMCs

I began my Master’s program with the idea of researching migrant rights groups in Vancouver, and switched to my current research topic after the first semester. I developed my project idea as comparing the AMCs during the anti-Olympic and anti-G20 convergences, wanting to understand the similarities and differences of setting up grassroots journalism projects in respectively a traditional summit convergence and media spectacle. Part of the motivation around the topic included ease of access to research subjects for interviews, as well as my own role as a multidisciplinary media activist that interacts with a variety of radical groups in Vancouver and across Canada.

Beyond the university, my role within Vancouver social movements and media activism pushed me to create a documentary film project rather than a conventional thesis – I wanted to be able to present my project to activists in Vancouver, Toronto and anywhere else in an accessible format, in this case, a 25-minute film with an accompanying research paper.

My approach is social constructivist: I wanted to approach research as someone about to collect subjectively created meaning of the world. John Creswell characterises social constructivism by the way in which “individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences...these meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of the views instead of narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas” (8). I wanted to be able to get the full gamut of interviewees' ideas in order to put together a comprehensive analysis of AMCs and their role in past and future convergences.

My primary research took the form of interviews and gathering archival footage. The interviews were conducted using the phenomenological method, which teaches that the researcher needs to recognize not just subjectivity but also inter-subjectivity i.e.
language that is taken for granted (Holstein and Gubrium 267). These interviews stress not so much the accuracy of reconstruction but rather finding out what each subject believes (Silverman 72). For this reason I used open-ended questions that would allow interviewees to tell their stories with me leading them as little as possible. I also purposely set up each interview so that the interviewee looked at me rather than the camera, sometimes at a deliberate angle away from the lens. This was to acknowledge that the subjects had agreed to be interviewed based on their trust in me as a fellow activist. Had it not been for this trust, I would most likely have had a much harder time finding interviewees. One interviewee mentioned as he was signing the release forms that had I not been so heartily recommended to him (three people had asked him to speak to me), he would not have been willing to sign those forms.

The interviews I conducted were with activists involved in setting up and running the AMCs, as well as organizers involved with the larger convergences outside of the media centers. Having non-media activists in the film meant getting a full reading of how effective the AMCs were outside of those who actually organized these. The balance here was that though non-AMC activists would have a much-needed outside and therefore less attached perspective of the media centers, they would not know the level of details in terms of media organizing as those who ran these facilities. Hence I interviewed a roughly equal number of media activists and non-media activists.

I also used archival footage gathered from the two organizations – the VMC and TMC. The footage helped underline and support points being made by interviewees, and was crucial to the film. It was gathered simply by asking both collectives permission to use any footage they had either published or kept in archives. In the case of Vancouver this was much easier since I could access this footage at any time; in Toronto I had to identify and copy the footage I wanted over just one afternoon spent with a TMC member (due to time limitation). This footage, combined with interviews and a literature review are how I am triangulating my research. I have included aspects of the ethics approval, interview forms and interview questions in the Appendix to this paper.
5.1. The Challenges of Being an Activist and Researcher

Conducting the actual research led to some interesting developments. I chose to interview people I already knew, relying on the trust I had built up with them over my organizing history. I very quickly had five VMC members confirmed for interviews, with a sixth person who could speak to organizing with the TMC AMC as well.

I also easily found six organizers that had been part of the larger anti-Olympic convergence. Though I had verbal confirmation that they would participate, by the time I began interviewing, three of these backed out by simply not answering my emails and text messages. I realized that part of this had to do with me doing less community organizing work as I concentrated on my research. Two years of trust and comradeship was dashed as I pulled away from community organizing.

Instead I found others that stepped in to give me the exact missing links I was looking for in the interviews – these were people I had no previous indication would be open to speaking with me. In one case the interviewee told me that she would not be open to being interviewed, with my request being the rare exception. This kind of sentiment was touching.

Heading into Toronto for interviews, I had just three confirmations and no other leads other than one person I had interviewed when she was in Vancouver earlier. However, through contacts given to me by those I had confirmed with, I ended up with plenty of interviews. In this sense, community connections saved me.

There were lots of surprises in the interviews, from those who were overly brief in what they were saying to the point that I had to ask follow-up questions, to those that spoke extensively, such as the interviewee who gave me their full G-20 experience from the first to last day of the convergence. I also became privy to new facts, such as the
extent of the security state and surveillance, as told by Joe Bowser who is a security expert\textsuperscript{14}.

As an activist researcher, I found that I had a lot of power in what the interviewees were willing to give me because of my status within the community. I had a fear that people I talked to would open up too much about personal experiences in terms of being arrested and detained; I hence made it clear that I did not actually want to talk about detainment, but instead about the AMCs. This tactic worked well since I gathered information about the AMCs themselves, while at the same time getting interviews about the theoretical basis of police repressing independent journalists.

\textsuperscript{14} Bowser's interview was done just shortly after I had received my own Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) request to the Joint Intelligence Group (JIG), which came back with record showing that they had actually taken down my name from my involvement in the Welcoming Committee that organized the large Friday protest.
6. **Onward: The Future of AMCs and Avoiding Co-optation**

By no means is the kind of media organizing I have covered in this paper and film fool-proof. I have mentioned literature that talks about the limits of tactics, including media tactics. Certainly the police response to the two AMCs shows that it is time to begin thinking about different ways in which to approach the media center. Though the use of social media was something new that the state was not able to respond to effectively, activists need to now presume that police and security agencies will one day find a way to respond to this new component of the AMC. Ideas such as livestreaming à-la-Occupy and footage uploading to social media services are ways in which people are already responding to new challenges to alternative media.

As Hussan said in his interview, the future of alternative media and AMCs has very much to do with being able to cover protests quickly while at the same time creating comprehensive pieces around issues that are not merely reactive but instead flesh out the depth of social issues and struggles at hand.

Media theorists have expressed concerns about alternative media and AMCs particularly that go beyond just responding to state repression, but have to do with the very idea behind them. Downing warns that self-managed media might only express the opinions of the collective in charge, and that even in a socialist anarchist tradition, needs to be expanded beyond being mere islands of alternative viewpoints (70-72). Frédéric Dubois similarly writes that a good part of strengthening media solidarity includes “challenges to media activists …to not ‘preach to the converted’ but to create pathways through which the ideas and discourses developed within autonomous spaces can find their way to a more diverse audience” (137).
I challenge the idea of needing to grow the media movement in the way that Downing and Dubois mention, largely because this form of mushrooming growth is not the only way to advance radical ideas such as anti-capitalism. My feelings toward the idea of growth in this sense is not just a reaction to the mainstream media idea of expansion, but reflective of the dangers that come from it. This is not to say that reaching out to a broader audience immediately takes on the qualities of the mainstream; nevertheless it is important to balance the need to get the message out with the responsibilities outlined earlier in this paper.

Such responsibilities pertain to each person helping create a post, as well as the community that the media center represents. Growth and reaching a wider audience is something that an alternative media center can do, but without overshadowing the very characteristics that Downing mentions in regards to representing and building relationships with struggles for social and environmental justice. In terms of a movement looking to create alternative spaces that exude the idea of prefigurative politics, the alternative media center is essential as is: one where self-critique, relationships and group transparency are prized over expansion. The best example of this practice is that of what some call mentoring (Widgington 114), but can also be termed as training and skill-sharing (Uzelman 24) that enable communities to do their own reporting, and take power over their own narratives.

Discussion around the audience of AMCs is an access point for related ideas around the public sphere (an area in which people can debate social issues that concern them, as theorized by Jurgen Habermas), and the commons (shared resources). Tanni Haas writes of alternative media as an alternative public sphere explicitly opposing the official public sphere dominated by mainstream media (117). Christian Fuchs takes the view that alternative media has the potential to create a counter-public sphere for the proletariat in direct opposition to the bourgeoisie social class (180). In contrast, Uzelman warns that the cost of being overly inclusive can be at the loss of a sense of safety (285): he argues that one must not confuse open access regimes with democratically regulated resources i.e. commons (286), the latter of which are sites of continuous struggle over access to those resources (293). Keeping this idea of creating accessible spaces around
media in mind, I interviewed Annabel Koo in *Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles*, who spoke about the role of anti-oppression in media-making and moving beyond merely telling stories to actually witnessing and facilitating story-telling. Approaching AMCs and alternative media with this in mind is one way to address what Uzelman is concerned about.

In her interview, Koo also speaks about the potential for co-option and how to battle it. As illustrated earlier in this paper, the WTO protests saw the setup of what was known as the independent media center; what the VMC set up during the anti-Olympic convergence was very deliberately called an alternative rather than independent media center.

This was because, as Cindy Milstein notes about anarchism and media, capitalism tends to appropriate any innovation of subversiveness from even that which stands against it (301). In February the W2 Culture and Media House opened and independent media center aimed at hosting organizations that had not been officially accredited by the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC), as noted in the film *Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles*; the W2 center housed bloggers and social media people (CNN’s iReport was a prime example of one such organization).

The center also gave space to alternative media projects such as *Rabble.ca* (which was critical of the Olympics) and more mainstream media such as Vancouver local newspaper *24 Hours*. In mixing mainstream, alternative and social media, the W2 center became more of a show of technology with items such as its satellite distribution system, rather than a real IMC like the one set up during the 1999 Seattle WTO protests. Considering that the W2 was partially funded by the Cultural Olympiad, part of VANOC, chances for real critique of the Olympics coming from this space was unlikely. Keeping this in mind, the VMC deliberately set up what was deemed to be an alternative media center.

Toronto similarly had a media center for journalists not invited to Huntsville for the G8 that was referred to as the “other” media center (“G-20 Media Center with Fake Lake to Cost $1.9m” 2010). In this case the city of Toronto and others involved with
setting up the G8 and G20 summits tried to, as Annabel Koo mentions in her interview, co-opt the idea of alternative media towards something that could be named something radical-sounding but be state-controlled. In this case the TMC AMC’s outreach was meant to respond and show that it was in fact the actual media center hosting independent grassroots journalists.

The fight in Vancouver alternative media circle over the legitimization of the W2 media center, now known as the W2 Media Cafe, is ongoing. Lyn Highway mentions in her interview in *Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles* that she continues to distrust the people behind the project; she and other activists have called out the organization more than once. The VMC has been part of this process: media activist and VMC member Franklin López wrote a piece examining the W2’s capacity to co-opt resistance (2011); I myself critiqued a documentary called *With Glowing Hearts* about the W2 media center, criticizing it for claiming that a social media center was the ultimate result of the anti-Olympic protests (2012).

The attempts to co-opt alternative media organizing, both on the ground and structurally, show the effectiveness of grassroots journalism. The fact that the state and less radical entities want to compete with alternative media comes out of what these journalists are able to do. The media center in Vancouver was at moment able to produce coverage that distracted global attention away from the Olympics. The AMC in Toronto was able to bring attention to state violence and respond to mainstream narratives around protesters endangering the city.
7. Conclusion

This paper has been an examination of the AMCs set up during the anti-Olympic and anti-G-20 convergences of 2010 that took place respectively in Vancouver and Toronto: particularly at the theory behind AMC/IMCs, the context of media organizing in these two cities, and the research conducted to create the film accompanying this paper. It has explained further many of the ideas touched upon in the film in an effort to bring light to this under-researched area of study.

Since these two convergences took place, much has happened in terms of social movements and alternative media in both the unceded Coast Salish Territories (Vancouver) and in Canada. Late 2011 saw the continent-wide Occupy movement capture the imagination and energies of several cities in North America, inspired by the Arab Spring earlier in the year. Occupy brought with it the practice of livestreaming: a process by which entire demonstrations, meetings and other elements of organizing could be shown and viewed as video online in real time. Beginning on 22 March 2012, student protests over tuition increases in Quebec took the attention of people across Canada as large groups of this population and its allies took to the streets. Particularly inspiring was watching footage and reports of quarter-million strong demonstrations in cities like Montreal.

The anti-Olympics and anti-G-20 convergences of 2010 continue to influence current organizing, which is clear in examples ranging from the drive for decolonization at Occupy sites around the country (Sztainbok), to open defiance of the creation of laws in Quebec against large protests that were meant to curb the student demonstrations (Montpetit). Tactics used by activists and journalists on the streets today were developed and refined in 2010, out of ones that had developed since the summit against the 1999 WTO meetings in Seattle, Washington.
In terms of media, the setup of full-scale alternative media infrastructure within Occupy sites (Rickwood) and the use of social media engines such as Twitter to spread footage of protests against the aforementioned anti-protest Bill (Bolen) demonstrate the use of tactics that came to prominence during the 2010 convergences at which I am looking. Only the imagination restricts where these tactics will go in the future with regard to creating AMCs for summits and other convergences and alternative media organizing in general.
References


*Alternative Media Centers at Summits and Spectacles.* Creator and Director, Isaac K. Oommen. 2012. Film.


“G-20 Media Center with Fake Lake to Cost $1.9m.” *Toronto Star* 06 Jun 2010. Web. 01 Jun 2012.


Appendices
Appendix A.

Study Details for Ethics Approval

The research proposal in this paper has to do with a very specific form of news reporting – that which is centred on social movements. The term social movements implies a wide range of activities. I am looking specifically at anti-capitalist, anti-globalization movements involved during the anti-Olympic and G20 convergences. To define these further, they are made up of social justice activists that envision a world that is the opposite of that being offered by the two events in question: the movements seek one that is feminist and inclusive in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability. I define these terms so as to distance this research proposal from other independent media that are established voices of movements, such as labour union and socialist party newspapers. This proposal looks at alternative media centers (AMCs) set up during anti-capitalist convergences.

Academic work on alternative/independent media centers has been growing over the past few years. Studies have shed light on the organizing structure and philosophy behind these centers (Hadl 2010), particularly around summit convergences (Downing 2003). My study will add a perspectives on how media centers respond in their structure and philosophy to the type of protest, e.g. by differentiating types of convergences. Academic writing on the subject of alternative media centers has shown them to be dynamic organisms that respond to the structures that they are opposing (Kidd 2010); what needs to be examined is exactly how these centers respond to the needs of the larger social movements in which they are based with regard to each situation. It is for this reason that I shall be comparing the alternative media centers set up during the 2010 Toronto G20 summit and the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. I am here characterizing the latter as an elaborate media spectacle (Marshall 2010) (rather than a summit) with close ties to broadcasting and viewing that demanded particular strategies from the media center set up during the protests.

I am going to be using a combination of phenomenological interviewing and case study method in my research, all of which will be elaborated in detail in the following sub-sections. I will be studying the operations of the alternative media centers that were respectively set up during the 2010 Vancouver anti-Olympic convergence and 2010 Toronto G20 protests, to find similarities and differences that resulted from the distinct types of convergences. I plan to interview to both media and non-media activists involved with the protests, as well as access a selection of video, audio, photo and print material gathered by each of these centers. My final research project will take the form of a 30-minute video, accompanied by a 40-page paper. I wish to make my project one that is easily accessible to the community I am studying, so that its members can see the result of my research. I believe this project will provide some much-needed self-reflection and analysis of the two convergences in 2010 and, in so doing, help provide media strategy for future projects.

I shall be using interviews and case studies of the two sites I wish to analyze. These techniques have been chosen because my research is qualitative and exploratory. Though past studies have looked at alternative media and centers during summits, my research will be the first to delve into the different kinds of convergence media centers that exist; for this reason my research is exploratory as it is examining an area that has so far received little investigation. This approach will allow me to acquire further analysis to add to my research as it progresses. I have chosen qualitative methods because none of the data I wish to obtain can be put into simple categories or quantifiable tables. With an exploratory study of activist media, socially constructed realities are key and these will require qualitative data gathering, as elaborated below.
The population I plan to investigate falls into four categories:

- Those that helped organize or worked out of the Vancouver AMC
- Those that helped organize or worked out of the Toronto AMC
- Members of the larger social movements from the Vancouver convergence, who can talk about their impression of the AMCs
- Members of the larger social movements from the Toronto convergence, who can talk about their impression of the AMCs

The key will be to have an equal number of subjects represented in each category. I would ideally like to interview four people in each category (I arrived at this number because this was the smallest size of a collective that ran one of the AMCs).

Though I had initially thought to use the snowball method of sampling, whereby I would find contacts through activists I know, I decided that this would not be practical due to the small size of the community in which I am known to almost everyone I wish to speak to. Instead, I will be using the convenience method, thereby being able to contact those closest to the media and convergence centers. For instance, I already know everyone in the collective that set up the Vancouver media center, but will also be contacting journalists that were based out of there that I did not know at the time (again chosen because of their experience with covering convergences). The additional argument for using this form of sampling is that it deals with the ongoing security culture that has developed since mass detentions and police infiltration at the Olympics that peaked during the G20. Activists are not often willing to talk candidly with people whom they do not know. Coupled with an ongoing distrust of both mainstream media and academia that is common in this cohort, this can become a large barrier. By contrast, the trust that I have developed with this group will enable my access. However, given the concerns of this community, I will make sure not to get too far into subjects’ personal lives, even though they might reveal such things to me because of my status within the community.

The interviewees will be given two separate forms – one that seeks their consent to participate in the research, and one that seeks their approval for being in the film. The latter form allows me to make the film and have it available at places such as film festivals. Via the research form, interviewees can select if they wish to be anonymous, in which case I would not reveal their name, and not show their image in the film (I would use only the audio from the interview). These consent forms will be kept locked in the PI’s filing cabinet at home once signed.

I have carefully considered the different types of techniques available, and have decided that those most suited to my project would be interviewing using phenomenological method and case study research.

As mentioned earlier, interviews have been essential to those gathering information about media centers. John DH Downing used interviews to piece together policy information about organizations such as Republica newspaper decades after they ceased to exist. I believe from this that interviewing would be one of the main ways for me to obtain information about the two media centers I am researching. Since I am conducting exploratory research, my questions will be open-ended so as to allow subjects to show how they socially construct meaning around the media centers and protest.

I am drawn to the phenomenological method since it starts by saying that we need to recognize not just subjectivity but inter-subjectivity, and define those items in language that is taken for granted (Holstein and Gubrium 1994). Many objects, themes and ideas in activist and especially media activist language can go undefined. As someone situated within the community that I am researching (though still somewhat an outsider due to my newness to it), I will make sure to bring about definitions around these ideas. For instance, I will be asking subjects that talk about anti-
capitalist struggle and what exactly this means to them. These interviews will emphasize not so much the accuracy of reconstruction but rather on finding out what each subject believes (Silverman 1985).

Treating the two convergence media centers as case studies is similarly essential. Reinharz talks about the purpose of feminist case studies to not just generate and test theory but also “analyze the change in a phenomenon over time, to analyze the significance of a phenomenon for future events and to analyze the relation among parts of a phenomenon” (164). Though my research is not entirely feminist case studies, in observing organizations that have anti-patriarchy as part of their organizational standards, their approaches sync with mine. Case studies can also be a mix of explanatory and exploratory (Yin 2009), which works for this research due to the relative newness of the phenomenon being investigated. Most importantly, case studies in the words of R. K. Yin allow “investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (4).

The proposed research will take the form of multiple-case design, with the two cases being compared to one another. Data will not just be historical records (from mainstream news articles and journals) but also interviews (as discussed above) and actual archival footage taken by the two media centers (for which I will obtain permission for use from the two collectives that have the data). The case study method is by far the one that allows me to have the most holistic access to the history and living sites of the media centers.

The major ethical consideration that I am taking into account is in talking to people who have faced police/systemic violence and/or detention. There is a potential that in my interviews these details may be fleshed out, which might lead to the re-experiencing of trauma on the part of my subjects. I will address this issue by keeping interviews focused on the topic of the media centers themselves rather than discussing arrests and other related experiences.

As a male from the upper-middle class who is a settler of colour, I also have an enormous amount of privilege despite my long history of activism, which whether actively or inactively informs power dynamics on this project. Considering that I will be potentially interviewing queer people of colour as well as activists who are from indigenous communities or have disabilities, these factors are worth noting. Addressing this requires me to acknowledge my privilege with interviewees, and fill them in on all implications of the research (see consent forms).
Appendix B.

Informed Consent to Participate in Film Form

Principal Investigator: Isaac K. Oommen
Contact Info: [redacted] or isaacoommen@gmail.com

I hereby give Isaac K. Oommen, his licensees, successors, legal representatives and assigns absolute and irrevocable right and permission to use, reproduce, edit, exhibit, project, display, copyright, publish, publish electronically on the web or in other forms and/or resell photographic images and or moving pictures and/or videotaped images of me with or without my voice and name, or in which I may be included in whole or in part, photographed, taped, videotaped, and or recorded on this date and thereafter, and to circulate the same in all forms and media for education, exhibition, art, advertising, trade, competition of every description and/or any other lawful purpose whatsoever. I also consent to the use of any printed matter in conjunction therewith.

I hereby waive any right that I may have to inspect and/or approve of the finished product or products or the editorial, advertising or printed copy or soundtrack that may be used in connection therewith and any right that I may have to control the use to which said product, products, copy and/or soundtrack may be used. I consent to the photographing and videotaping of myself and the recording of my voice and the use of these photographs and/or recordings singularly or in conjunction with other photographs and/or recordings for educational or publicity purposes.

I further consent to the reproduction and/or authorization by Isaac K. Oommen to reproduce and use said photographs and recordings of my voice, for use in all domestic and foreign markets. I hereby consent that any photographs, recordings or moving pictures taken Isaac K. Oommen regarding my interview may be published in print, on a web site, used in exhibition, lecture or teaching for any purpose whatsoever.

I hereby release Isaac K. Oommen and Simon Fraser University and any of its associated or affiliated departments, their directors, officers, agents, employees and students from all claims of every kind on account of such use including any liability by virtue of any blurring, distortion, alteration, illusion or use in composite form whether intentional or otherwise that may occur or be produced in the making, processing, duplication, projecting or displaying of said images, and from liability for violation of any personal or proprietary right that I may have in conjunction with said images and with the use thereof.

Agreed and accepted:
Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________, 2012
Print Name: ___________________________
Witness: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________, 2012
Appendix C.

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Form

Principal Investigator: Isaac K. Oommen
Graduate Student, Department of Communication, Simon Fraser University
AQ 5054, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6
Contact Info: [redacted] or [redacted]

You are being asked to participate in a fieldwork-based case study. The goal of this research is to explore the experiences of setting up and running an alternative media center. With the setup of independent media centers at anti-capitalist convergences across the world, it is important to acquire a greater understanding of how they work as well as differences that emerge depending on the situation in which they are organized. This study will contribute to existing literature on alternative/independent media centers and how they are adapting to new challenges, as well as the grassroots news media community itself.

The study will start from the moment of approval from SFU Office of Research Ethics and will end on June 31 2011. The PI will use interviewing techniques and case study research to conduct the study. You have the option to decline all confidentiality, as the film may feature you with your real name and location displayed. There is also the option to maintain full, or a degree of, confidentiality. These options are spelled out below where you are asked to sign this form.

The time commitment you offer this project is also entirely negotiable. For example, it may involve anywhere from a maximum of several hours in one day, to several hours of the day on multiple occasions during the four month research period, or as is appropriate based on prior negotiation.

The PI will remain as unobtrusive as is possible. The PI will endeavour to respect, especially if you have experienced any form of detention or police harassment, through prior discussion and negotiation, your privacy and wishes. The benefits of participation include receiving a written copy of the PI’s project, and a DVD copy of the film, which may act as an historical record of your experience.

With permission, the interview process, filmed or otherwise, will comprise a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions. The topics covered, and the questions asked, in the interview will be guided by your interests. Initial consultation and discussions will be used to determine the direction such an interview takes. All aspects of the interview will be based upon prior negotiation. Examples of questions and topics of interest may include:

- Why did you choose to get involved in this convergence?
- Why did you get involved with the alternative media center during the convergence?
- What was your experience in the alternative media center?
- What part did the media center play in the protest?
- What do you think were the effects of having the media center at the convergence?
By consenting to participate, you are in no way bound to maintain contact with the PI and the research study. You may withdraw your participation from the study at any time, without providing a reason. The PI, as a M.A. student in the School of Communication, is conducting the study under the auspices of Simon Fraser University. His senior supervisor is Dr. Zoë Druick, and this project has been approved by the SFU Office of Research Ethics.

Complaints about the research study, or the way in which it was conducted, may be directed to:

Hal Weinberg, Director
Office of Research Ethics
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, B.C., Canada
V5A 1S6
778 782 6593
hal_weinberg@sfu.ca

The PI will keep secure all the data collected, in both written and visual/audio format, on an external hard drive, which will be placed in a safety deposit box at the PI’s bank. The consent form will be kept secure and the information contained therein will not be forwarded on to any third party.

The PI’s intended uses of the data collected in this research project include:

• Producing an M.A. project made up of written text and audiovisual recordings. This project will be a public document once passed by university examiners and catalogued by the SFU library;
• Publishing articles in academic journals and/or other formats (e.g. popular books, activist journals);
• Producing a short documentary film based on this research. This film may include recording both video and audio of you. This film may be publicly screened at film festivals and similar venues after completion, as well as uploaded online.

You are being asked to sign two separate consent forms. By signing this form – Informed Consent to Participate in Research – you are consenting to participate in a research study conducted under the auspices of Simon Fraser University and approved by the Ethics Review Board, which will result in an M.A. project. By signing the second form – Film Release – you are consenting to participate in a documentary film project conducted independently of Simon Fraser University, and by so doing you will indemnify Simon Fraser University, its staff, faculty and students for all legal liability in relation to your participation in the documentary film project that may contain your recorded image and/or voice property.

You are not obligated to sign both forms in order to participate in the study. If you wish, you may choose to sign only one. For example, if you sign this form, but not the second, you are consenting to participate only in the research study conducted under the auspices of SFU, which will result in an M.A. project, and subsequent publications.

This means that no audio or visual recordings of you will appear in the documentary film produced after the project is completed.
Consent: Choose one of the following (check one box only):

☐ I wish to participate in the M.A. project study conducted under the auspices of Simon Fraser University as a credited participant. The PI has informed me of the benefits and risks of participation. I understand that I may withdraw my participation from the project at any time, without providing a reason.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ________________________________________________
ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION: _________________________________________
CONTACT INFORMATION: ________________________________________________
SIGNATURE: ___________________________________________________________
DATE: ________________________________________________________________

OR

☐ I wish to participate in the M.A. project study conducted under the auspices of Simon Fraser University as a confidential participant. I understand that my identity will not be revealed in the finished product, and, if required, the PI will make use of a pseudonym when referring to my participation. The PI has informed me of the benefits and risks of participation. I understand that I may withdraw my participation from the project at any time, without providing a reason.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ________________________________________________
CONTACT INFORMATION: ________________________________________________
SIGNATURE: ___________________________________________________________
DATE: ________________________________________________________________
NAME OF PI: ___________________________________________________________
SIGNATURE: ___________________________________________________________
DATE: ________________________________________________________________
Appendix D.

DVD: Alternative Media at Summits and Spectacles

Creator/Director:
Isaac K. Oommen

Description:
The film is complementary to this paper. It explores the basic idea of independent/alternative media centers that arose from the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization Summit protests. It also compares the alternative media centers setup respectively during the 2010 anti-Olympics convergence in Vancouver, British Columbia and the 2010 anti-G20 protests in Toronto, Ontario.

Filename:
alt media centers at summits and spectacles.mp4