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Death of distance or tyranny of distance? The Internet, deterritorialization, and the anti-globalization movement in Australia

Ann Capling and Kim Richard Nossal

Abstract   Much of the analysis of the anti-globalization movement that has emerged in the last five years has focused on the degree to which the Internet has played a crucial role in contemporary social movements. It is commonly argued that the Internet helps create 'virtual communities' that use the medium to exchange information, coordinate activities, and build and extend political support. Much of the commentary on the web as a means of political mobilization for social movements stresses the degree to which the Internet compresses both space and time, accelerating the exchange of information among whomever has access to this technology. Equally important in this view is the deterritorialized nature of on-line protest and the diminution in importance of 'place' in current anti-globalization campaigns. Certainly this argument features prominently in analyses of the campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1997–98 and the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Seattle in November and December 1999. Our examination of the anti-globalization movement in Australia however leads us to a different conclusion: that while the Internet does indeed compress time, it compresses space in a different, and indeed quite variable, way. We examine the way in which

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Australians protested against the MAI and against the WTO meetings in Seattle, and show the differences in the nature of protest in each case. In the MAI case, the protests were well-organized and national in scope, with the Internet playing an important role in organizing the movement. By contrast, in the case of the WTO, the movement was minor and relatively marginal, with the Internet playing little discernible role in galvanizing protest. We conclude that crucial to an understanding of the differences was the considerable difference in the importance of 'place' in each case.

Introduction

It is ironic that the emergence of a variety of global social movements against the forces of globalization in the late 1990s (Lynch 1998; Scholte *et al.* 1999; O'Brien *et al.* 2000) was greatly facilitated by a revolution in communications and information technology that was itself a quintessential icon of globalization: the Internet and its various components, including e-mail and the World Wide Web. Much of the analysis of the Internet's role in political mobilization focuses on the impact that this technology has on distance; a common conclusion is that the Internet, more than any other feature of globalization, has meant that one's location – or 'place' – loses much of its importance as territorial constraints are dissipated by the intense flows generated by globalization (Albrow 1996: 2). And as territory loses its importance, so too, it is argued, does physical distance; the advances in communications herald the 'death of distance' (Cairncross 1997).

To demonstrate this at work, it has become common to point to the case of the global protests against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1997 and 1998. Many argue that the Internet was crucial in bringing the international negotiations on the MAI to an end (Kobrin 1998; Smith and Smythe 1999; cf., however, Dymond 1999; Ayres 1999; Deibert 2000). Likewise, in the wake of the various anti-globalization protests since the MAI – particularly the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999 – it was often argued that the Internet played a key role in the galvanizing of the protesters and in the organization of the protests themselves (Van Rooy 2000). Certainly the protests centred in Seattle during the WTO ministerial featured the use of the Internet, including, reportedly, the use of Palm Pilots – hand-held wireless computers connected to the Internet – to direct protesters on the streets.

However, while the anti-globalization protests in the late 1990s and early 2000s offer some evidence that new technologies have changed the face of global social movements, there are those who argue that the processes of globalization do not necessarily diminish the continued importance of the local (Massey 1993; Agnew and Corbridge 1995). This argu-

ment is particularly pronounced among political geographers. Kevin R. Cox (1997: 5), for example, has argued that the deterritorializing forces of globalization are also accompanied by forces that are essentially 'territorializing' – reinforcing the importance of the local, and maintaining the salience of 'place' (also Immerfall *et al.* 1998: 198). Indeed, Alan K. Henrikson (2000) has argued the importance of distance has increased, not diminished.

Our purpose is to assess these contending views of the globalizing impact of the Internet by examining a case study that should provide a good test of whether place still matters, and if so, how: we compare Australian reactions to the MAI in 1998, the WTO ministerial in 1999, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Summit meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF), held in Melbourne from 11 to 13 September 2000. We explore the relationship between anti-globalization protests, the Internet, and geographical space by examining how Australians mobilized politically in each case. Examining such manifestations of mobilization as street protests, lobbying efforts directed at members of parliament and government departments, participation in government-sponsored consultations, and mass letter-writing campaigns, we show that there were very different patterns of anti-globalization mobilization in each case. The MAI sparked a vigorous political campaign that spread across the country in 1997 and 1998 and was eventually opposed by significant segments of Australian society. By contrast, the Seattle meeting of the WTO was marked by an absence of significant public opposition or protest, either in Australia itself or by Australians at Seattle. But when a meeting of an organization deemed to be emblematic of globalization – the World Economic Forum – was held in Australia, large numbers of anti-globalization activists turned out to try to close the WEF meetings down.

We conclude that the significant differences in the ways in which the various anti-globalization movements in Australia mobilized in each of these three cases confirms the observation of those students of globalization that, depending on the issue, 'place' – meaning both physical distance and 'location' in the global economy – continues to matter. We offer an explanation for these differences, and argue that while the Internet was a crucial organizing tool in each case, 'place' was the key variable that explains the marked differences in popular mobilization against globalization.

The death of distance? The Internet and global social movements

In the view of many analysts, the Internet has altered the landscape of world politics. Ronald J. Deibert has argued that the Internet has given rise to 'new post-modern configurations of political space'. This space consists of flows among a '"global non-territorial region" of computer

networks', leading him to conclude that 'a "space of flows" is coming to dominate and transcend a "space of places" as the defining characteristic of post-modern world order' (Deibert 1998, 2000). There can be little doubt that the Internet does indeed contribute to the compression of both time and space, not only accelerating the speed of exchange of information among whomever has access to this technology, but also creating a 'virtual' space for such political projects as anti-globalization mobilization. Few students would today agree with Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, who in 1998 argued that the proliferation of international advocacy networks should be regarded as a puzzle given the high costs of international networking, including 'geographic distance, the influence of nationalism, the multiplicity of languages and cultures, and the costs of fax, phone, mail and air travel . . .' (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 12).

On the contrary: most students of contemporary world politics conclude that changing technology has indeed given geographical space, distance, and 'place' (or 'location') increasingly different meanings. W. T. Stanbury and Ilan Vertinsky (1994–95: 87) are by no means alone in arguing that the new technologies render 'geographic boundaries increasingly meaningless'. Most students of the Internet seem to agree that new information technologies have had the effect of deterritorializing political protest, instead creating 'virtual communities' of individuals and groups who use the medium to exchange information, coordinate activities, and build and extend support for political purposes. Stephen J. Kobrin argues that the Internet permits the creation of what in essence is a 'new, global, electronically interconnected civil society . . . a large virtual community that unites like-minded groups across great distances' (Kobrin 1998: 108). Moreover, the Internet is assumed to connect its 'virtual communities' in a way unmediated by political authority. Indeed, Wade Rowland argues that the Internet constitutes a 'public space' that is 'owned' and 'governed' by its users, and is thus fundamentally anarchic, even if all of its physical elements – personal computers, modems, servers, network cabling and phone lines – are inevitably located in the territory of sovereign governments (Rowland 1997: 338–40; cf. Wilhelm 2000: 6).

But what impact does this new technology have at the level of world politics? David J. Rothkopf has argued that the major impact is the capacity of social movements to amplify their concerns:

> In crisis situations from the Amazon jungle to Bosnia, from Chiapas to Tibet, Internet technologies have enabled virtual communities to unite to counter government efforts. . . . They have taken their case to the international court of public opinion, whose influence over states has grown as its means to reach an ever greater audience has multiplied.
>
> (Rothkopf 1998: 329)

And indeed a number of detailed case studies of indigenous protest move- ments – such as the Chiapas uprising in Mexico or the struggles of the *Movimiento revolucionario Tupac Amaru* (MRTA) in Peru – confirm the importance of Internet technologies in the processes of galvanizing public protest (Cleaver 1998; Dartnell 1999).

A similar impact has been noted in the case of global social movements mobilizing on behalf of human rights. The analysis of the Burma human rights campaign by Tiffany Danitz and Warren P. Strobel (1999) provides a useful catalogue of the effects of Internet technologies in this case. Although they are careful to point to many of the disadvantages of the Internet in political mobilization, such as the ease with which Internet communications can be monitored by authorities, they conclude that the Internet's capabilities enabled a 'relatively insignificant' group of 'cyber- activists' in the United States, 'backed by a loose coalition of activists around the globe, with the modem as their common thread', not only to influence American foreign policy towards Burma, but also to put the issue of human rights in Burma on the agenda of the World Trade Organization. In their view, the Internet was crucial for the success of the campaign: 'Without the Internet, it would have been virtually impossible . . . for activists to co-ordinate and bring the pressure to bear that they did.' Burma activists were widely dispersed geographically, but, as they note, 'because of the Internet, they might as well have been around the block'. As a result, a 'virtual community for action' was created.

> Co-ordinating such a campaign via traditional telephone trees or fax machines would have been all but impossible because of the need to act quickly and the sheer physical distances involved. Moreover, because the Internet permits them to rapidly exchange messages or send the same information to hundreds of recipients around the world, activists are better able to co-ordinate with a greater number of individuals and refine ideas. 'Listservs' like BurmaNet are partic- ularly suited for rapid brainstorming, because a single individual can send out an idea in an e-mail and can rapidly receive feedback from many different sources. A handful of organizers can rapidly generate dozens of letters and e-mails to decision makers, the 'cyber' equiv- alent of lobbying, with a few well-timed on-line appeals.
>
> (Danitz and Strobel 1999)

Comparable findings have been reported by those who have examined the case of the MAI. Writing shortly after the demise of the agreement, Kobrin (1998: 98–9) concluded that the capacity of Public Citizen, a public interest group based in Washington, to post the draft of the MAI treaty on the web was critical for galvanizing opposition. In an interview, Lori Wallach, an organizer for Public Citizen contrasted the speed and ease circulating that leaked document with the difficulties of circulating a draft

the Uruguay Round negotiating text that had been leaked to Public Citizen in December 1992 (Wallach 2000: 33–4). Moreover, these general conclusions have been confirmed in other national contexts (Dymond 1999; Freitag and Pineault 1999; Goodman 2000; Deibert 2000). Smith and Smythe have done the most extensive research to date on the role of the Internet in the MAI: their investigation, which included extensive interviews with anti-MAI organizers and activists, revealed that the use of the Internet 'radically altered the context in which the debate took place and how it was framed'. Once the text of the draft treaty was leaked and circulated on the Internet, 'the floodgates were opened. No longer could negotiations be hidden from the spotlight of public scrutiny.' Instead, those opposed to the MAI were able to use the Internet to spread information, attract viewers to web sites, and organize local and national protests. In short, according to Smith and Smythe, the Internet galvanized and focused opposition 'by opening up public spaces in which citizens engaged in discourse and by making domestic and international institutions of governance more permeable to the dialogue within these public spaces' (Smith and Smythe 1999: 101).

The death of distance? The Australian case

Australia should provide a good test of the argument the Internet shrinks distance for mobilization against globalization. First, like many others in the international system, Australians have expressed concern about the effects of globalization, not only on their own political community (Capling *et al.* 1998; Wiseman 1998), but also more broadly on the global system. Second, Australians are as 'wired' as most others in the international system: connectivity rates are high. In a 1997 survey of Internet hosts, Australia ranked fifth – behind Finland, Iceland, the United States and Norway (Alexander and Pal 1998: 5; Shapiro 1999: 21). There are high rates of Internet and web usage, particularly among the young (Australia 1999a).

But in terms of space, or physical distance, the Australian case presents an important paradox. On the one hand, as virtual space, Australia is not at all distant – in the sense that communication between those who are physically in Australia and those who are not is instantaneous (Cobb 1999). On the other hand, Australia as physical space remains exceedingly distant from other places in the world. In order to get there (or to leave there in order to be somewhere else), one can only travel by air or sea, and flights between the major cities in the southeast of the country and other places are uniformly long-haul. Australia's closest neighbours are several hours' flying time away from the main population centres in the Sydney–Canberra–Melbourne triangle: 2,200 km to Auckland, 2,800 km to Port Moresby, 3,100 km to Nadi and 5,400 km to Jakarta. Everywhere else

involves much longer flights, from nine hours to Southeast Asia to eigh-teen hours to fly to points on the eastern seaboard of North America and twenty-two hours in the air to reach cities in Europe. To be sure, travel between Australia and other places in the world in the early 2000s is far faster, and much cheaper, than it had been in 1950, 1900, 1850 – or 1788. But there can be little doubt that what the Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey (1966) has termed the 'tyranny of distance' very much marks Australia's physical location. As Michael Crozier (1999: 626) notes, there is nothing quite like the fourteen and a half hour flight from Sydney to Los Angeles to demonstrate the essential ethnocentricity of pop asser-tions by contemporary American and European scholars that 'Space is infinitely minute' and 'All is simultaneity': 'The [traveller] from the Antipodes (body aching, head throbbing) would beg to differ. . . .' More importantly, that distance continues to have a significant impact on how the politics of the anti-globalization movement have evolved.

Anti-MAI protests in Australia

Most analyses of the global MAI campaign stress the importance of the Internet and its distance-shrinking capabilities in determining the nature of that protest (if not the eventual political outcome). Do we find that dis-tance was comparably irrelevant in the Australian reactions to the MAI? James Goodman's account of the campaign to stop the MAI that emerged in Australia reveals that the way in which the MAI became a political issue in Australian politics reflected the experience in other places (Goodman 2000; Smythe 1998). As in other countries, the MAI negotiations were not a major issue in Australia prior to 1997. Indeed, most Australians, like those in other OECD countries, ignored the announcement of the twenty-nine OECD ministers in May 1995 that they had agreed to try to negotiate an agreement on investment rules by May 1997. In large part this was because the Australian government, like other OECD governments, took the view that these were treaty negotiations and thus should be kept secret. The result was that virtually no information on the position that Canberra would be bringing to the negotiating table was made public at the outset of the process. Certainly, there was no prior public consultation by the Depart-ment of the Treasury, which had been given responsibility for conducting the negotiations, despite the Treasury's inexperience in international nego-tiations (not to mention its lack of understanding about the need to engage broadly with domestic interest groups). In addition, Treasury officials were obsessively secretive about the negotiations, releasing information on a selective basis to pro-MAI business organizations while keeping even other parts of the government in the dark (Goodman 2000: 39). Moreover, the minister responsible for the MAI negotiations, Rod Kemp, did not manage to sell the 'benefits' of the MAI, and was slow to respond to public con-cerns about it. And only limited efforts were made to consult portions of

the business community, notably the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia via their membership in the OECD's Business and Industry Advisory Committee.

As in other OECD countries, opposition to the MAI began to emerge in Australia in early 1997 when the text of the draft treaty was leaked and immediately posted on the World Wide Web. This leak occurred at the time that a dispute between MAI negotiators and a number of NGOs began to escalate. A number of NGOs had been pressing for greater access to the negotiating process, requests that the OECD resisted. The leaking of the draft treaty helped to galvanize NGO opposition; in October 1997, selected NGOs were finally given an opportunity to meet with the negotiators. However, the refusal of the MAI negotiators to accede to the NGO demand that the negotiations be suspended prompted the NGOs to organize a global campaign to stop the MAI.

In Australia, anti-MAI protests gathered steam later than in some other OECD countries. A formal national campaign – the Stop-MAI campaign – was not launched until late January 1998, two months after the NGO meeting resulted in the launching of a global campaign, and many weeks after a national Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio programme on the MAI broadcast on 30 November 1997. The Australian campaign sought in the first instance to put the treaty on the political agenda. It tried to do so in a number of ways, including public meetings, letter-writing campaigns, ads in newspapers and a national petition.

The campaign had to work against two important obstacles. First, the ascendancy of neoliberal ideology (in Australia called 'economic rationalism') meant that ideas that contradicted the dominant ideological perspective were routinely ignored by the national media and the major political parties. Second, the anti-globalization movement in Australia (unlike its counterpart in Canada but similar to the movement in the United States) involved strange bedfellows. Concerns about the MAI were not only expressed by those who might be characterized as broadly on the left, but also by those on the conservative-populist side of politics in Australia. Among those who opposed the MAI was Pauline Hanson, the MP for Oxley in Queensland and leader of the One Nation party. Hanson gained national attention after her maiden speech in Parliament in September 1996 (Australia *CPD* 1996: 3860–3), which was a wide-ranging critique of all the ills that she believed beset Australia: policies that were too soft and too generous towards aboriginals and too unfair to white Australians; policies on multiculturalism that threatened to break apart 'the Australian nation'; policies on immigration that threatened to turn Australia into a 'mini-Asia'; and policies towards globalization and international organizations, which threatened the ability of Australians to make their own decisions. Espousing an economic nationalism that had long historical roots in Australia (Capling 1997a), One Nation enjoyed a brief success in Australian politics in 1997 and 1998 before disintegrating in 1999.

One reason for One Nation's popularity, particularly in the rural hinter-land of Australia, was its critique of the effects of globalization on Australia. As Michael Leach, Geoffrey Stokes and Ian Ward note, the rise of One Nation can be best explained by 'the pace and nature of the changes to Australian political economy': the embrace of 'economic ration-alism' by both federal and state governments – and by both the major parties, the Liberal/National Party coalition and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) – which had led to a growing divide between urban and rural Australia (Leach *et al.* 2000: 8–9; also Crozier 1997). For Hanson, cause and effect were clear: too many decisions that affected Australians were being made by international financiers and international organizations to which Australia belonged (Hanson 2000). One Nation sought to make common cause with the Stop-MAI campaign, and the national media initially characterized the anti-globalization position of the members of the international NGO campaign as a variant of Hansonism. Much embar-rassed, those involved in the international NGO campaign had to work hard to marginalize their would-be allies in One Nation (Leach 2000; Goodman 2000: 48).

Over the course of 1998, however, more 'establishment' voices expressed growing scepticism about the agreement. For example, Sir Anthony Mason, a former chief justice of the High Court, castigated the OECD and the Australian government for having tried to negotiate the MAI under a 'veil of secrecy' (Goodman 2000: 49). Likewise, members of parlia-ment became involved. In March 1998, the issue was referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT). To be sure, the Stop-MAI campaign was fortunate that it had the support of members of minority parties and independents in the Senate, and also that the Coalition govern-ment of John Howard was in a minority in the upper house. A coalition of opposition members outvoted the Liberal/National coalition to widen the scope of the JSCOT enquiry. The committee issued an interim report in May that urged the government not to sign the MAI until it was clear that it would be in Australia's 'national interests' to do so; however, its final report (Australia 1999b) was delivered in March 1999, long after the *coup de grâce* had been delivered to the negotiations. The JSCOT enquiry was crucial, since it focused attention on the agreement via some 900 submissions and testimony, the vast majority of which was negative, including those of peak associations representing local governments and some industry sectors, such as the Australian Business Chamber, the Australian Industry Group, and the film and television production industry (reproduced in Goodman and Ranald 2000: Ch. 4).

As Goodman makes clear, the Stop-MAI campaign in Australia was deeply Internet-based. First, the existence of numerous anti-MAI web sites, and the tendency of these sites to be connected via hypertext links, allowed Australians protesting the MAI to tap into a rich vein of global information and opinion as well as the Australian Stop-MAI site (http://

www.avid.net.au/stopmai). The campaign was coordinated by an academic in Brisbane. It was set up nationally via e-mail, with a coordinator for each state who agreed to organize state campaign committees. However, there were no offices or premises. Activities such as formulating positions, organizing 'days of action', and putting out press releases were conducted by e-mail. Likewise, the Internet was crucial for the organization of Stop-MAI's national petition, calling on the Australian government to endorse suspension of the MAI negotiations and tabled in the Senate on 31 March 1998. The Internet was also critical for coordinating state-based campaigns, which focused on raising the MAI issue with state and local governments.

In short, between the beginning of the international NGO campaign in October 1997 after the collapse of the Geneva 'consultations' and the formal end of the MAI, there was a sharp and vigorous campaign conducted by a network of NGOs and a large number of individual activists. We are not arguing that the anti-MAI protests in Australia in any sense *caused* the demise of this agreement. For the MAI was in trouble even before the public protest campaign began. David Henderson has noted (1999: 8) that

> the range of topics for negotiation proved too wide, and the initial goals too ambitious. Governments were unready to allow their hands to be tied in the ways that had been originally sketched out, nor were they able to find a basis for compromises where disagreements emerged.

This became evident when governments began to list their exemptions from the draft agreements; as these exemptions mounted, the value of the agreement correspondingly declined. In addition, the time frame for nego-tiation was unrealistic given the complexity of the task. It had taken highly experienced trade negotiators eight years to complete two much simpler agreements on investment: the code on Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMs) and the General Agreement on Services (GATS); that the OECD believed that a controversial agreement could be negotiated in such a short period clearly demonstrated its inexperience in drawing up international agreements. This too was a factor in the demise of the Agreement, and may also help to explain the OECD's failure to estab-lish consultative processes from the outset. But it is clear that by the middle of 1998, support for the agreement in Australia was diminishing: as an editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, itself a strong defender of the MAI, acknowledged, the treaty was opposed by 'the hard right, the hard left, the soft right and the soft left' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June 1998, p. 12).

Anti-WTO protests in Australia

The collapse of the MAI negotiations in 1998 raised the fear that the issue of devising rules for investment would simply be passed over to the World Trade Organization, which was scheduled to meet in Seattle in November 1999 to launch a new round of global negotiations. For many anti-MAI activists, opposing a new round under WTO auspices was thus a natural and logical extension of the campaign against the MAI. And indeed, in the United States, the two movements were often fused: many of the activists who participated in protests against the MAI had been active in the anti-WTO movement that dated back to 1993 and 1994 and the congressional debates over both the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Uruguay Round; and many of those in the anti-MAI movement helped to organize protests against the WTO ministerial.

The global anti-WTO campaign was organized in a way similar to the anti-MAI campaign. Considerable use was made of the web as a tool to galvanize opposition to the new round; listservs played a crucial role in attracting participants to the protests; and e-mail was extensively used in the actual process of organizing the protests. And the major goal was the same: to close down the international negotiations that would make an agreement possible.

In this, the protesters were largely successful. Thousands of people made their way to Seattle for the protests, and those numbers made a difference to the way in which the ministerial unfolded. Thousands of highly organized activists made it easy to block access to the conference; moreover, the police were out-organized by the protesters, who were able to take up crucial positions early on the first morning of the protests that allowed them to encircle the conference venues with a sit-down peaceful protest. The delay in opening the meeting was caused not only by this blockade but also by a 'security breach' that prompted the closure of the convention centre for most of the morning. Eventually the police were prompted to try to clear some of the streets, but their decision to try to disperse the protesters by firing rubber pellets and using pepperspray and concussion grenades triggered a series of street battles. The collapse of the non-violent protest was exacerbated by the arrival of anarchist protesters, who trashed businesses on Sixth Avenue deemed to be emblematic of globalization, such as Nike, McDonald's and Starbucks. And to this mix were added a large group of street people who made their way downtown and did battle with the police – and indeed with some of the peaceful protesters. The National Guard was called out, a 'protest-free' zone around the convention centre was created, a night-time curfew was imposed, but the WTO meetings were irreparably disrupted, and on 3 December the director-general of the WTO, Mike Moore, and the US host, US Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky, announced that the ministerial would take a 'time out' and reconvene in Geneva.[1]

While the protests in Seattle were organized globally – with representatives from NGOs from around the world attending the Seattle meetings and protests organized in other cities – what is noteworthy about the Australian case was the absence of the same kind of vigorous campaign that we saw in the case of the MAI. While the official Australian delegation to Seattle included representatives from eight non-governmental groups, they were all business groups. Moreover, many of the producer groups were able to finance large delegations to the Seattle meetings: for example, the Queensland Sugar Council sent a delegation of thirteen members to the WTO meetings.

However, there were no delegates from environmental NGOs or labour unions included on the official delegation. The Australian Council for Overseas Aid, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Australian Council of Social Service, Greenpeace Australia and the World Wide Fund for Nature (Australia) all offered to provide 'non-business advice' as part of the official Australian delegation. The NGOs even offered to pick up their expenses. However, the minister for trade, Mark Vaile, rejected the offer, obviously neither impressed by the NGOs' claim that they represented over a million Australians nor worried by their threats of retaliation.[2]

This did not prevent a number of NGO officials and activists from going to Seattle, such as Doug Cameron, the national secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, and Anna Reynolds, national liaison officer of the Australian Conservation Foundation. For Reynolds, 'being there' was important in order to establish face-to-face contacts with NGO counterparts from other countries; she also argued that the massive media coverage would allow the ACF to more easily get its message out from Seattle than from Canberra. By contrast, Michael Rae, of the WWFN Australia, abandoned plans to go to Seattle, deciding that it 'wasn't worth the greenhouse gases' to make the trip since others from the WWFN global network would be there (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 November 1999). But apart from this, there was no non-official Australian contingent of protesters of any significant size in Seattle. Moreover, while there were some 'mirror' protests by activists in other countries held to coincide with the Seattle protests – such as the 'Carnival Against Capitalism' in London – there were no demonstrations of any significance in Australia during the Seattle meetings. A few protesters did gather outside the stock exchange in Brisbane and a small group of activists occupied the offices of Burson Marsteller, a Melbourne public relations firm associated with globalization, and chalked anti-globalization slogans on the sidewalk. But the protests were so small that they were totally ignored by the media.

In short, in North America the anti-MAI movement and the anti-WTO movement were intimately connected, no such connection appears in Australia. In 1999 there were none of the vigorous anti-MAI protests that had been seen in 1998. To be sure, many of the activists themselves

continued to press their concerns at a series of public hearings organized by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the run-up to Seattle. In May 1999, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade invited submissions from the public on what Australia's approach to the Millennium Round should be. Some 200 written submissions were eventually received. Public hearings were also held in all the capital cities and a number of regional centres in September and October 1999. While there were some testy exchanges between activists and bureaucrats at these thirteen meetings, attendance was thin: only a few people showed up in rural New South Wales and Victoria, and only 50–70 in the major cities – some 350 people in all (see http://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/negotiations/hearings/index. htm). The Internet was used to galvanize concern (for example, http:// www.aidwatch.org.au), to organize protests, and to advertise anti-globalization speakers. But such efforts yielded little response of any political significance: the opposition to the WTO in Australia was simply nothing like the opposition that had been galvanized against the MAI.

The 'S11' protests

James Goodman has argued that Australian anti-globalization protests were 'tepid' because international conferences that tend to trigger these protests had not been held in Australia (quoted in Powell 2000: 5). But the Asia-Pacific Economic Summit meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF), held in Melbourne from 11 to 13 September 2000, provided an opportunity to mount an indigenous protest. The 'S11' protest – among anti-globalization activists, the protests are colloquially known by abbreviations based on day and month[3] – included a mix of student groups, trade unions, campus-based feminist and queer collectives, environmentalists, state-based Green parties, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and a number of groups which came together specifically for the protest, including the S11 Tempest, a self-styled group of 'electronic activists' (Elias 2000; *Weekend Australian*, 16–17 September 2000). Indeed electronic activism was crucial to the mobilization of support for the anti-WEF protests: the S11 web site (http://www.s11.org) provided extensive information on how to become involved in the protests through the organization of 'affinity groups', meetings, training camps, information-sharing and so on.

Like the Seattle protesters, those involved in S11 had interests that were too diverse to produce any consensus on what they wanted, short of their common objective to close down the meeting. Like their counterparts in Seattle, they were partly successful: blockades on the first day of the meeting prevented about one-third of the 800 delegates from entering Melbourne's casino where the conference was being held. A much more aggressive response by the police on the second day of the meeting cleared the blockades (*The Age*, 13 September 2000).

Media reports estimated that up to 10,000 demonstrators participated in the protest. But once again, distance made a difference, with the overwhelming majority of protesters coming from Melbourne and nearby regional cities and towns. While S11 support groups were established in every state and territory capital, and in a number of towns, these groups were often quite small. In addition, it was evident that distance precluded most of these groups from participating in the Melbourne protests. While the Sydney S11 alliance hoped to raise funds to send up to 300 people to Melbourne, the S11 alliance in Adelaide expected that only twenty of their members would attend, while only one member of the Northern Rivers group expected to participate in the protests; in the Western Australian capital of Perth, only 20–25 people attended the meetings.

And distance proved an impediment for international support. According to the S11 web site, support groups were formed across the Tasman in Auckland and Christchurch, although the latter appeared to fizzle out by the end of July. Outside the Antipodes, only two groups registered their support for S11: the Turkish Communist Youth reported that they would 'make an action on 11 September in many cities of Turkey' and usQueers.com Music Radio, based in San Diego, California, promised to 'pre-empt its regular music-only broadcast schedule in order to relay broadcast streams which support the truth about S11 …' (http://www.s11.org/s14/s11.html).

Explaining the differences

How can one explain the differences in these three cases of anti-globalization protests by Australians? Why were so many Australians galvanized against the MAI in 1998 – even if only eventually? And yet why did so many Australians remain indifferent to the WTO meetings in 1999 while the WEF meetings in 2000 produced Seattle-like protests? We suggest that there are a number of interrelated reasons for the differences observed:

Economic 'location': distinguishing between the MAI, the WTO and the WEF

Many in the anti-globalization movement see all global organizations as manifestations of the same processes; for example, it was common to see the WTO Ministerial as merely an effort to renegotiate the MAI under another guise. But it is clear that Australians did not make such automatic equations about global organizations. As numerous analysts have observed, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment was deeply flawed, in both design and execution. One did not need to embrace the discourse of the anti-globalization/anti-capitalism movement to oppose the MAI. And when the flaws of the MAI were exposed, Australians of all sorts besides anti-

capitalism activists expressed scepticism about the MAI – a former Chief Justice, members of parliament, business people, academics, One Nation supporters, contributors to a debate held in the pages of a Sydney tabloid in March 1998, or any number of callers to talk-back radio shows.

Moreover, while the Coalition government of John Howard was committed to the MAI negotiations, it should not be forgotten that Canberra was by no means enthusiastic about these negotiations. Like a number of other governments, Australia had wanted new multilateral rules on investment negotiated under the aegis of the WTO rather than the OECD, and had succumbed to intense American pressure to keep the MAI out of the hands of the WTO. Indeed, the government's lack of enthusiasm can perhaps best be gauged by the lengthy list of sixteen reservations it lodged with the MAI chair. Thus, closing down the MAI negotiations at the OECD was never regarded in Australian discourse as an unthinkable policy option.

By contrast, the idea of closing down the World Trade Organization, the avowed goal of many members of the anti-globalization movement, *was* widely regarded as an unthinkable option in Australia, even among those, such as One Nation supporters in the bush, who were deeply opposed to the MAI. This reflects the widespread consensus in Australia about the country's 'place' in the contemporary international political economy, and the broad political implications of that location. While not all Australians are in thrall to economic rationalism and neoliberal ideology, and while many Australians are concerned about foreign investment, there does appear to be a broad consensus on the importance of trade to Australian wealth. Of particular concern is the question of access to the markets of the world's major economic powers – all of which happen to be Australia's main trading partners. Because Australia does not enjoy the kind of secure access that comparably small economies have to the majors – under the North American Free Trade Agreement or in the European Union – a rules-based and non-discriminatory international order that helps to discipline the major economic powers is widely seen as crucial for the ability of Australian products to be sold in American, European and Japanese markets.

This applies in particular to primary products. As highly efficient agricultural producers, Australian farmers have long been dissatisfied with the continuing protectionism of the major powers in agricultural products. Indeed, primary producers and the government in Canberra were hoping that the Millennium Round would correct the failure of the Uruguay Round negotiations to liberalize agricultural trade; indeed, of all Australians, no group had more to gain from keeping the WTO alive and well than agricultural producers.

In short, Australia's 'location' in the contemporary international political economy led large numbers of Australians to the view that for a small economy not part of a broader free trade area like NAFTA or the EU,

the WTO was a crucial international institution – despite its flaws (Capling 1999). In such circumstances, opposition to the existence of the WTO was a particularly hard sell.

The WEF, by contrast, was not widely regarded by Australians as a global institution of crucial importance for the maintenance of a rules-based trading order. Because it was so emblematic of globalization, the WEF made a tempting target for protests. But Australians appeared to understand, even if only inchoately, that whether the meetings of corporate, financial and political leaders in Melbourne went ahead or not made little difference to Australian wealth in the way that the collapse of the Millennium Round in Seattle, by delaying the liberalization of global trade in agriculture, did have an impact on Australia's trade.

Processing the MAI, the WTO and the WEF differently

The way in which these three cases were 'processed' by the Australian government also had a bearing on the difference in the nature of the protests. As the case of Australia's negotiating position in the case of Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMs) suggests (Capling 1997b), it makes a difference which government department is charged with taking the lead on the issue. The lead department in the MAI was the Department of Treasury, and all evidence is that their handling of the issue deeply exacerbated relations between the state and civil society organizations. Treasury did not only keep information secret from NGOs and others, but also other government departments, such as Environment Australia. It also tried hard to keep documents out of the hands of one of the NGOs seeking to be heard on the MAI, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), which tried to secure information on the MAI by using freedom of information (FOI) legislation. The ACF submitted its FOI request in January 1998; it was not until August that an appeal tribunal ordered Treasury to make some of the documents available (others remained the subject of legal challenges throughout 1999, long after the demise of the MAI).

The new round of multilateral trade negotiations, by contrast, was 'processed' by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which clearly had learned a number of lessons from Treasury's missteps. While by no means as 'NGO-friendly' as some other foreign ministries, such as Canada's, which included NGOs openly opposed to the WTO on the official delegation to Seattle (Stairs 2000), DFAT did try to open up the policy process somewhat, as we noted above. The consultations held with NGOs and the public hearings certainly did not go as far as most of the NGOs would have liked, but there can be little doubt that they vitiated some of the frustrations that had been created by Treasury's tactics during the MAI negotiations.

There was also a difference in parliamentary involvement. The willingness of the Australian Labor Party opposition to cooperate in putting the

MAI into the spotlight (a somewhat risky proposition, since it had been an ALP government which had succumbed to American pressure to begin the negotiations under the aegis of the OECD in the first place) was crucial in helping to galvanize opposition. In the case of the WTO, there was simply no way that the political mainstream would have participated in a protest that called for the closing down of the new round of trade negotiations. This, it might be noted, extended to the labour movement too: merely days after the Seattle ministerial ended in disarray, debate at the Australian Council of Trade Unions annual council meeting was domi-nated by discussion of how to bring down the Howard Coalition govern-ment; there was no mention of Seattle and the crucial role that organized labour played in the protests (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 1999).

In the case of the WEF, there was no comparable 'lead' federal depart-ment seeking to organize consultations between the state and non-govern-mental organizations; rather, much of the 'processing' occurred in the context of planning meetings between the S11 organizers and local police. This meant that participation in the S11 protests was largely limited to local anti-globalization activists.

Regional definitions of 'place'

A third factor that affected the nature of the anti-globalization protests in 1999 and 2000 was also a function of how Australians defined their 'place' in the region. Since the mid-1980s, Australians have undergone a considerable 'relocation' as political elites in particular have sought to 'reposition' Australia as a country 'in' (even if not 'of') the Asian region (Higgott and Nossal 1997). While this relocation has not gone uncontested in Australian political discourse – indeed one of Pauline Hanson's criti-cisms focused on the supposed 'Asianization' of Australia – in 1999, we can see a clear manifestation of this relocation in the impact of the conflict in East Timor.

For most North Americans, the events in East Timor were of periph-eral concern; by contrast, the referendum and the violence around that event loomed much larger for Australians. The violence of the Indonesian-backed militias sparked huge protests, and drove the issue to the centre of the political agenda, to the point that the Howard government was prompted to take the lead in organizing what in essence was a multilat-eral intervention in support of Timorese independence.

How did this issue affect Australian protests against the WTO in 1999 and the WEF in 2000? There was a considerable overlap in membership between those who were active in the anti-globalization/anti-MAI move-ment and the East Timor movement. As one activist admitted, a degree of 'protest fatigue' seemed to set in over the latter part of 1999 (exacer-bated by the fact that the WTO meetings in Seattle coincided with the end of the university year and the start of summer holidays in Australia).

By contrast, the WEF meetings were held long after the Timorese issue had receded from the Australian national agenda, and also, it should be noted, in the middle of the university term.

'Place' and physical distance

The final explanation for the differences is distance. The cases of the anti-MAI, anti-WTO and anti-WEF protests demonstrate the variable importance of place and physical distance in mobilizing against globalization. In the case of the MAI, place was of much less importance than in the case of the protests against the WTO. The mobilization against the MAI negotiations was not focused on a particular locale, but on decision-makers in national capitals. As a result, the organizing power of the Internet played a crucial role. Organizers were able to move large quantities of data, including official reports and analyses accumulated from other sites of protest in other countries, around the country, making it easier to galvanize a 'virtual community' that persuaded some politicians in Canberra to make the MAI a political issue.

By contrast, opposition to the Millennium Round expected to be launched by the WTO in Seattle and the WEF in Melbourne was very much about place. The goal of the anti-WTO protesters in Seattle and the anti-WEF protesters in Melbourne was as simple as it was singular: to close the meetings in both cities down. But the only way to do that was to *be* in those cities, and do what in essence the protesters did: to surround the conference venues to make them impassable; to engage, and in some cases provoke, the police; and to attract media attention through demonstrations of different sorts, whether through sit-down protests or parading as sea-turtles or blockading a state premier in his car.

The anti-WTO protest was action to which Australians, some 11,000 km from Seattle, simply could not contribute in any significant way. Unlike North Americans, who could get to Seattle cheaply and quickly, those Australians who might have been active in the anti-MAI campaign and who might have wanted to protest against the WTO in person could only get to Seattle by spending approximately US$1,500 each, an option available only to the wealthiest Australian protesters, and not an option for those on limited incomes.

But the meeting of the WEF in Melbourne, by contrast, provided Australian anti-globalization protesters with an opportunity to organize the kind of protests that others in North America and Europe had been engaged in over the previous several years. That proximity proved to be a rallying point for those Australians who might have been unable to travel to Seattle, or who might have been unwilling to participate in symbolic long-distance 'sympathy' protests, but who did not share the mainstream Australian commitment to the institutions of liberalized trade like the WTO.

Conclusions

We began by asking whether the nature of 'place' has changed in an age when technology has increased the speed of communication, dramatically lowered its cost, and equally dramatically extended its reach. We can readily see why those who examine the Internet and its effects on global politics might be tempted, as Cairncross was, to declare that these technologies heralded the death of distance, or to argue that in a era of globalized deterritorialization, place no longer matters as much as it once did.

However, our comparison of Australian reactions to the MAI, the WTO Millennium Round, and the S11 protests in Melbourne suggests that a more cautious conclusion is warranted. On the one hand, there can be little doubt that the new information technologies played an important role in all three protests. The Internet helped move information, in huge quantities and to large numbers of recipients in distant locations. It allowed people to copy ideas from elsewhere, and made the organization of events easier. Moreover, the costs of networking, globally and locally, were virtually nil once the initial investment of a computer and modem had been made.

On the other hand, our exploration suggests that 'place' still matters, even in an era when the Internet offers a space for deterritorialized protest. As the analysis above suggests, 'place' in this case continued to matter in different ways. First, it mattered that the protests against the WTO and the WEF depended on being able to be in a specific location, while opposing the MAI did not depend so much on 'place'; one could work at opposing the MAI from anywhere. And it mattered that, for Australians, the specific location in the case of the WTO protests was 11,000 km, US$1,500 and 20 hours of travel time away – a powerful reminder that how dead distance is deeply depends on where one happens to be. And sometimes, 'place' as specific location would have paradoxical effects, as in the case of the ACF's Anna Reynolds, who calculated correctly that the ACF message was more likely to be heard in Australia if it were mediated by the media pack covering an event 11,000 km away from Australia.

But 'place' also mattered in the sense that Australian reactions to these globalizing phenomena were deeply local and thus particular to Australia. While the anti-MAI and anti-WEF campaigns mirrored broader global trends, at the same time there is evidence that many Australians defined their relationship to both physical location and the more notional concept of 'location' within the global economy rather differently than people in other locations. Thus, it made a difference that Australians tended to identify themselves as 'closer' to Southeast Asia than North Americans, and thus more caught up in the 'local' politics of East Timor in the southern spring of 1999 in a way that North Americans simply were not. And, obvious though such an observation might be, it made a difference that November and December mark the beginning of summer in some places

in the world and not others. Likewise, it made a difference that so many Australians, particularly those in the bush, defined their country's location in the international political economy as intimately tied to the WTO, and thus were not at all receptive to the idea that the WTO should be shut down.

In short, if the Internet shrinks time and space – and we would agree that it does – it does not necessarily follow that it also makes 'place' irrelevant. While there are some issues that lend themselves to deterritorialized protest – the Burma campaign examined by Danitz and Strobel or the campaign against the MAI are two such examples of protests that do not heavily depend on a *being* in a particular place – there are others, such as the No New Round Turnaround campaign or the street protests designed to close down a meeting of a global body like the World Economic Forum, that heavily depend on location. And while the Internet makes communicating over long distances both easy and cheap, it does not eliminate that distance. That means that for those in some places that are somewhat more remote, the physical space that lies between here and there will continue to exercise a certain tyranny.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 The role of the protesters in prompting the 'time out' remains contested. Wolfe and Curtis (2000) have suggested that Seattle has generated a certain mythologizing. On the other hand, see Lori Wallach's acidic response to suggestions that factors other than the No New Round Turnaround campaign were responsible for the outcome in Seattle: 'And . . . God had heartburn that day. I mean, these are ridiculous, *post hoc*, revisionist spins of people who lost' (Wallach 2000: 46).

2 In a 12 November 1999 press release, the NGOs stated that they 'warned the Government that the community would rebel against agreements that are done in secret and only involve certain interests. This occurred with the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and the WTO will suffer the same fate if it is negotiated in the same way.' The release also claimed that the groups 'will be informing other country delegations that the Australian Government has excluded key stakeholders in the development of this crucial international agreement'.

3   Thus the Seattle protest was known as 'N30' and the April 2000 protests against the World Bank were known as 'A16': see http://www.mayday2k.org/n30/, http://www.a16.org, http://www.s11.org, http://www.inpeg.org.

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