Communication Networks, Hegemony, and Communicative Action

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Abstract

Communicative action now commonly takes place in electronically mediated global networks and the networks are a powerful form of social ordering. This article analyzes the different forms of power that operate in communicative networks and how these alter communicative action. It suggests that the more optimistic literature on global and network governance, arguing and bargaining, and soft norm generation has not taken these new modes of hegemony fully into account. An analysis of the possible forms of communicative freedom in networks rounds off the article.

Keywords: networks, governance, international relations, political science

Preamble: Pierre Trudeau's ethics of civic participation

At the heart of former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's ethics is the activity of paddling against the current. As early as 1944, in 'The Ascetic in a Canoe', he said the ideal of paddling against the current is 'the resolve to reach the saturation point. Ideally, the trip should end only when the paddlers are making no further progress within themselves.' What does this ethics mean in practice today?

In the 1980s Trudeau campaigned for nuclear disarmament, downsizing military-industrial complexes, resisting the media's glorification of violence as the means to resolve disputes, and for the turn to peaceful and dialogical means of coping with disagreement. He saw this campaign for human security through peace and dialogue as a part of the *civic* ethics he had always practiced. He said that he opposed big concentrations of power: superpowers, military-

industrial complexes, media conglomerates, big corporations, and the enormous global inequalities these power networks enforce. His means of opposing big concentrations of power was to empower citizens to participate in civic life and join in these democratic struggles.

Trudeau argued that Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* should not be seen so much as a set of guaranteed rights and freedoms handed down from on high that Canadians could take for granted, but more as a toolbox that citizens could use to engage in practices of civic freedom against the unequal distribution of power in Canada and the world. One does not develop the skills of a proficient canoeist by being handed a paddle and canoe, but by engaging in the practice of canoeing to the saturation point. It is the same with acquiring the skills of a proficient citizen. Only by exercising their Charter rights in practices of civic freedom will future generations of Canadians develop the civic ethics of peace, dialogue and equality of power-sharing that Trudeau saw as both the democratic means of struggle and the aim of these struggles. Without this identity-transforming civic experience of 'progress within themselves' Canadians would be shaped, formed and swept along in the dominant current promulgated by the big concentrations of power, becoming passive subjects rather than active democratic citizens.[2]

Our question today – and every day – is how can we apply Trudeau's civic ethics of critical freedom against the currents of the vast concentrations of power that shape, form and carry us along today? This paper is an attempt to answer this question.

Introduction

The transformation of communication in the past century has left us with two well-known and seemingly paradoxical developments. The first is the defining trend of the present when it is described as the 'information age' or 'network society': the vast proliferation of networks of communication in which people share and create information and knowledge (Castells, 1996). Communication networks are the media through which ideas move. This current is associated with and legitimated by a broad and evolving concept of 'openness'. The second current is the defining trend of the present when it is described as the 'age of insecurity' or the 'risk society': the equally vast proliferation of exclusions, restrictions, inducements, barriers and boundaries placed on communication, as well as actual physical movement and ultimately the sharing of

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knowledge (Beck, 1992). These constraints govern the movement of ideas in communication networks. This trend is associated with and legitimated by a broad and contested concept of 'security' – of persons, cultures, religions, states, civilizations, freedom and so on.

I would like to provide a background exploration of each of these themes. *Section one* is an analysis of the rise of networks as the defining form of communicative and social organization in the present. *Section two* is an analysis of the forms of control, exclusion, hierarchy and concentration of power that have developed along with communication networks and govern the transmission of knowledge and information. *Section three* is an analysis of the possibility of critical and effective forms of 'social, political and cultural action' within the array of networks and controls in which we are both enabled and constrained to communicate and interact today.

These critical and effective forms of action are examples of the emerging form of civic communicative freedom of the governed that I call 'democratic communicative action'. It is a new form of civic freedom appropriate to being governed through the types of networks and controls discussed in sections one and two. The enactment of democratic communicative freedom in and against concentrations of network power and their communicative barriers, I will argue, is one way of adapting and applying Trudeau's civic ethics to the present.

1. Networks of communication and social ordering

It is often remarked of the present age that, due to the astonishing growth of formal and informal networks of knowledge, production, and transfer, great new possibilities exist for intellectual exchange, and the creation of shared knowledge across physical and cultural boundaries. The proliferation of networks of communication is in turn the communicative dimension of a larger and epochal trend – the emergence of networks as a key means of social ordering. As Manuel Castells states:

> *Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture.* (1996: 469)

Let's examine what it means to say that networks are not only the means of producing and communicating knowledge, but also of social ordering.

First, the idea that the network is the defining form of social organization today developed out of the rapid spread of the Internet as the prototype and basis of a network social order. The Internet originated in the United States Department of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DAPRA). It was designed to avoid the destruction of U.S. communications by a Soviet invasion. The U.S. military figured that the Internet could not be controlled by a vulnerable (or hostile) center and it would be made up of thousands of autonomous computer networks that would have innumerable ways to connect and overcome electronic barriers. ARPANET, the network set up by the Defense Department, thus became the foundation of a global communication internet network, a world wide web, by the mid-1990s. In ironic confirmation of the Defense Department's thinking, the Internet rapidly escaped the direct control of the U.S. military and is now routinely used by all sorts of networkers, including those whom the Department calls its 'enemies' (although apparently the Defense Department can still monitor the entire network).

Although the spread of the Internet and other information highways solidified the image of the network as the dominant form of organization in the popular and academic imaginary, the internet is built on, and still dependent upon, the earlier spread of electric light and heat, telephone, radio, television, radar, multimedia and other electronic 'networks', and this wider, pre-existing field of networks provides the background of the claim that we live in a network age. Moreover, the image of communication networks is ultimately grounded in the background understanding of human communication in face-to-face networks since time immemorial.

Hence, in the *primary* instance, Castell's claim that the network is the reigning form of organization today (1996) refers to a *communication* network: a network that produces and communicates information or knowledge among interconnected nodes by means of new information technology, especially the computer. For our purposes, we can pick out four main features of a communication network. The *modes of communication* range from the more or less unilateral in-forming of a passive, 'interacted' recipient at one end (information processing, surfing the web, watching a movie) to the ideal of 'interactive' communicative exchanges among free and equal networkers continuously creating new knowledge at the other. Second, a *node* refers to any unit connected in any network: such as individual users of communicative technology, corporations, organizations of various and conflicting kinds, stock exchange markets,

ministries, governments, cities, and, commonly, other networks or sub-networks (Castells, 1996: 470).

Third, these high-tech communicative networks are not only net-like but also exceptionally *flexible and open-ended*. Diverse and dissimilar nodes can be connected and coordinated, nodes can be easily added or subtracted, the organization of the network can be modified, re-organized and retooled, the information transmitted and the technologies of transmission can be created, destroyed, programmed and re-programmed as needed, and the inter-operating codes and switches among networks enable indeterminate coupling and decoupling of multiple networks. According to Kevin Kelly, the 'network is the least structured organization that can be said to have any structure at all. No other arrangement – chain, pyramid, tree, circle, hub – can contain true diversity working as a whole' (1995: 25-27; quoted in Castells, 1996: 61-62). Fourth, because the new information technology transmits information and knowledge instantaneously, it *compresses space and time*. This is not to say that it abolishes the 'here and now', the time and place of the lived practices of particular nodes. Rather, it takes hold of and 'hyperextends' or 'glocalizes' (globalizes and localizes) spatially and temporally the experiential field of social relations and interactions of participants in nodal practices in complex and massively unequal ways. Instantaneous network decision-taking outruns the time frame of traditional democratic decision procedures and the consequences of these decisions extend across the jurisdictional boundaries of traditional nation states. Communication networks based on the new technology are thus the basis of globalization.[3]

Accordingly, communication networks have transformed the way humans communicate. But this is only the first dimension that has been observed of the communication transformation. Because communication is intrinsic to all organized forms of human activities, the rise of communication networks and the corresponding revolution in information technology have helped to bring about a transformation not just in the way humans communicate, but also in the way they carry out their communicatively-mediated activities: production, distribution, finance, consumption, governance, war, culture, intimacy, and much else. As Castells puts it above, communication networks and their logic 'substantially modify' or colonize the communicatively-mediated practices (activities and institutions) in which they are embedded. They tend to modify the practices so that they too are organized along the lines of a network.

So, the network becomes the 'morphology' not only of communication, but also of the 'operation and outcomes in the processes of production, experience, power and culture'. It becomes the dominant form of 'social ordering', transforming or displacing older forms of social, political, cultural, military and economic organization. This deeper, colonizing effect of communication networks is referred to as the 'network society' and the informational transformation of society. Let's look briefly at three constitutive features of this revolution.

First, the production and communication of information and the production of the corresponding technology have become the leading sector of capitalist production. Following Castells, the information/communication technology revolution coincided with the global restructuring of capitalism and became its essential tool, thereby transforming the dominant mode of production. This marks the transition from the industrial age and industrial mode of production, oriented towards economic growth, to the informational age and the informational mode of production, oriented towards information technology development (the accumulation of knowledge and higher levels of complexity in information processing):

> *In the new, informational mode of development the source of productivity lies in the technology of knowledge generation, information processing, and symbol communication.... [W]hat is specific to the informational mode of development is the action of knowledge upon knowledge itself as the main source of productivity. Information processing is focused on improving the technology of information processing as a source of productivity, in a virtuous circle of interaction between the knowledge sources of technology and the application of technology to improve knowledge generation and information processing.... Whereas industrialism is oriented to economic growth, informationalization is oriented towards technological development, that is, toward the accumulation of knowledge and higher levels of complexity in information processing.* (Castells, 1996: 17)

Second, the 'informational' mode of production transforms the nature of the dominant laboring activities, from the 'material' labor of the industrial age (producing material objects) to the immaterial labor of the information or communication age (producing immaterial objects). According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, immaterial (or communicative) labor refers to three fundamental changes, called the 'informatization of production' (2000: 29, 280-302). *First*,

the predominant form of labor under informational capitalism is the production of immaterial goods, such as knowledge, communication, a service or a cultural product, and involving a similar range of information processing, communicative, problem-solving, and symbolic-analytical skills. All laboring practices tend toward the prototype of information processing and communication networks. *Second*, while the material laboring activities of industrial production remain to a large extent, they are transformed by the information technology into predominantly immaterial labor. Producing and servicing automobiles, for example, is mediated through computer technology and communication networks.

The *third* form of immaterial labor is the production and manipulation of 'affects'. This refers to social services that primarily affect the emotional well-being of those served. But, even more importantly, it refers to the multimedia communication networks that affect directly the emotions, desires and especially the imagination of the audiences to whom they communicate, without passing through self-conscious reflection. Movies, the news, election campaigns, political events, advertising, branding, internet spam and pornography, and so on all act directly on the senses of their connected audiences, in the 'Hollywoodization' of global communication. Behavior is now governed to a considerable extent by what Guy Debord calls 'the spectacle' of affects (1983), unmediated by conscious reflection, whether the spectacle is Lady Diana's death, 9/11, branding, scenes of high-tech war, or the latest election campaign. Following the footsteps of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, cultural theorists suggest that what is always given directly to the recipients in the endless programs and messages of communication networks as their unnoticed affects, no matter how culturally diversified the messages may be, tends to be a fourfold background global imaginary – of production and consumption, of risks and insecurities, of the endless programmability of cultural and natural relationships, and of *us* (who are open to this 'openness') *versus them* (who are closed to this brave new world) – and of the 'cool' ordering of one's desires and emotions within it. What moves along the information highways is not so much ideas as images that structure the form of consciousness of the recipient (paradoxically, images of the infinite programmability of consciousness).

Third, the spread of communication networks restructures not only the activities and subjectivities, but also the *form of organization* – the morphology – of the practices they colonize. Castells illustrates this with the restructuring of economic organizations in the 1990s. The 'industrial firm' has become the 'network enterprise' (Castells, 1996: 151-200) with its

flexible production and flextime workers, interfirm networking, corporate strategic alliances, horizontal global business networks, its ability to make decisions, add and drop nodes instantaneously, and constantly re-invent the network infrastructure in whole or part:

> *For the first time in history, the basic unit of economic organization is not a subject, be it individual (such as the entrepreneur or the entrepreneurial family) or collective (such as the capitalist class, the corporation, the state). As I have tried to show, the unit is the network, made up of a variety of subjects and organizations, relentlessly modified as networks adapt to supportive environments and market structures.* (Castells, 1996: 198)

The restructuring of economic organization along the lines and logic of communication networks is just the leading edge of the restructuring of forms of human activities that undergo the informational technology revolution. The military-industrial sector has undergone a similar re-organization into military-informational networks. Wars are prepared for and fought on the basis of the most advanced communicative technologies. Higher education, terrorism, religious and cultural organizations, dating and so on has been similarly networked. As new human practices become possible as the result of the information technologies, their forms and activities follow the communication network model, from gene splicing and biotechnology to the weaponization of space.

In addition to these three constitutive features of social ordering by communicative networks, every form of social ordering also has distinctive relations of power by which the conduct (roles) of those subject to it is ordered (governed). Furthermore, being subject to these relations of governance (as I will call them) and acting in accordance with them over time gradually brings about and instills a corresponding form of subjectivity or subjectification. For example, being subject to and so acting in accord with the exercise of power through the rule of law gradually brings about a form of self-consciousness of being a law-abiding subject with rights and duties and of comporting oneself accordingly. Social ordering by means of communication networks is no exception to this rule. It too has distinctive relations of network governance and networkers tend to acquire a corresponding network form of subjectivity through submission to their forms of organization, types of communicative activities, and routines. These two further features of the network age are ways of governing and controlling communication and communicators.

2. Controlling Communication

This leads us to an important question that is explored in this section: how and by whom is the communication of ideas controlled in the network age? No doubt there are innumerable ways networks communicators and their communicative actions are governed. I would like to provide a background to this issue by highlighting four generic types of control of communication that operate in countless instances in various networks.

The <u>first</u> and most obvious way communication is controlled is by the *exclusion* of people from communication networks. Networks are scarcely a global phenomenon. Over one third of the world population does not have access to a power grid and so is excluded. The next one third, while in societies where power is available, does not have the money, infrastructure or time to network. The remaining one third is concentrated in the advanced capitalist nations, predominantly in the North, and in the middle and upper-income classes.

That is, rather than a democratic and horizontal net of equal nodes unfolding around the globe, communication networks have developed on the foundations of and reproduce the unequal nodes and routes of communication, commerce and military rule laid down over 500 years of European-American imperialism, as many scholars, including Castells, have noted (Castells, 1998: 70-165). This *imperial* distribution of nodes and communication routes, in which 30,000 children die every day of malnutrition in the non-connected areas and the wealth of the 200 richest families in the North is eight times the wealth of 582 million non-connected people in the least developed countries (Koskenniemi, 2002: 171; UN Development Programme, 2000: 73, 82), is the underlying constitution of the network age, just as it was of the industrial age on which the network society is constructed. As a result, the very people whose lives are most adversely affected by the rise of network social ordering and who have the most pressing need and right to communicate are excluded from the outset. The information age is thus an imperial age with its historical legacy of exclusions, subordinations, and massive inequalities.

The <u>second</u> way communicators are governed in networks is by *inclusion and assimilation to a network form of subjectivity*. This is the central form of network governance to which every networker is subject. Castells argues that there are two main classes: those who 'interact' and those who are 'interacted' upon, and who fits in which class is determined by economic class, race, gender and country. Notwithstanding, there is a more general form of self consciousness and consciousness of others that comes along with engaging in communicative and

communicatively-mediated activities in network regimes that he calls the 'spirit of informationalism' (Castells, 1996: 195-200). This is the *habitus*, the habitual form of subjectivity and corresponding set of cognitive and behavioral competences and modes of relating to others (intersubjectivity or interconnectivity) that agents acquire and internalize in the course of using network technology in whatever communicative roles they perform. It is a mode of being-in-the-world-with-others that they come to acquire through immersion in immaterial labor, of knowledge acting on knowledge, with its creativity, flexibility and openness, its compressed sense of time and space, its particular communicative and interactive skills of information processing, analysis of symbols, reduction of complex phenomena to an underlying and manipulable code, and problem solving; its experience of being able to belong to contingent virtual communities and cultures and to modify or disconnect from them as one pleases; and its overriding sense of 'creative destructiveness' – that everything can be programmed or commodified. It seems to disclose the world as a set of contingent relationships that can be created and destroyed, programmed and reprogrammed, by the appropriate problem-solving techniques. At the same time, networkers are always vaguely aware that they too are subject to the communication of 'affects', surveillance, monitoring and manipulation at a distance. 'It is a culture of the ephemeral', Castells concludes, 'a culture of each strategic decision, a patchwork of experiences and interests, rather than a charter of rights and obligations' (1996: 199).

Arthur Kroker suggests that the genetic engineering of the 'codes' of life in humans and other organic resources, at one end, and the monitoring, surveillance and precision targeting of the global population in space-based network warfare through full spectrum global dominance at the other represent the two extremes of this way of being in the world (legitimated in terms of 'openness' of scientific inquiry and 'security' of individuals and the species). Here life itself is pictured as both a network and an object of manipulation and control by informational technologies. Human nature and the environment are absorbed into culture, and so culture/nature is pictured as a kind of standing reserve of manipulable networks (Kroker, 2004; Castells, 1996: 477).[4]

This is not a form of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that a person bears in one particular role among many. It is a communicative habitus that communicators tend to operate within at work and leisure, on the home computer, the cell phone, the wireless laptop, and the BlackBerry. When networkers put these more interactive modes of communication down, they tend to turn to

the technology of the communication of 'affects': radio, television, movies and videos. As a result, this worldview and skill set is carried into other areas of life, either colonizing them or disregarding them if they are inaccessible through the network technology.

The form of subjectivity and intersubjectivity of network communicators is not an ideology or a worldview in the traditional sense. It is rather the opposite: a mode of being that is skilled in and accustomed to 'worldviewing' - surfing through, interacting with and negotiating a kaleidoscope of shifting ideologies and worldviews. Secular modernists, western scientists, indigenous peoples, neo-liberals, non-governmental organizations, anti-globalization activists, hyper-globalisers, deep ecologists, apocalyptic religious fundamentalists in the Bush administration and Bin Laden terrorist networks are all at home in this habitat. Yet, it is not a neutral, all-inclusive medium of communication. It substantially modifies the pre-network forms of subjectivity it includes, transforming them into contingent and malleable worldviews, civilizations, codes, programs, and 'scapes', yet, paradoxically, placing beyond question its own background horizon of disclosure of the world *as* a complex system of contingent and programmable networks. This taken-for-granted form of subjectification tends to come with the network and goes without saying.

We are just beginning to study and make explicit the tacit ways communication networks are re-organizing human subjectivity. Boaventura de Sousa Santos and other critical sociologists of network communication and control argue that the net brings with it, in tandem with programmability, other taken-for-granted ways of organizing and imagining experience, privileging certain forms of communication, communicative rationality, knowledge, problem solving, cooperation and competition, and production and consumption, and discounting or excluding others (Santos, 2002; 2003). Finally, although this is a powerful new form of subjectivity and social ordering, it is one form among many that we bear as modern subjects, and we are not passive recipients of it (as we will see in section 3).

The third way the flow of knowledge is controlled is through the action of the more powerful nodes in any network. The popular image of networks as flexible, open and democratic governance communities or partnerships tends to hide this feature. Although all the various actors (nodes) in a network (or network of networks) participate and have a degree of active agency (the condition of it being interactive) within the relationships of network governance, the actors are differentially situated in these asymmetrical relationships. As a result, the more powerful or

hegemonic actors within a network are able to govern and control the less powerful or subaltern actors, not by directly commanding them to act in a certain way, as in pre-network forms of rule, but indirectly or infrastructurally, by structuring the field of possible actions of the subaltern actors in the network through strategically controlling the flexible and hierarchical infrastructural relations of communication, technology, research, finance, security, norm creation, and subjectification among them.

The distinctive feature of this form of network governance is that it is able to govern the conduct of weaker partners through their constrained free participation; through inducing and then indirectly channeling, by diverse means, their communicative, creative and productive participation, or by excluding them and connecting with others if they fail to participate in the way the hegemonic actors require. It is precisely this dimension of constrained free participation in a seeming democratic and flexible community of actors and norms, and where actors may be added and removed on an *ad hoc* basis, which serves to legitimate and obscure the differentials in power and influence between hegemon and subaltern participants. Jochen von Bernstorff sums up the critical literature on this 'hegemonic' type of network rule in his major study of public-private network governance systems in the European Union and the international arena:

> *The more abstract thesis developed throughout is that, on the global level, network-like governance structures inevitably exclude certain actors and interests while operating outside procedural and substantive legal commitments and constraints. These 'flip sides' of the flexible network structure tend to sustain the dominance of the strongest actors of the network, and may turn the 'participatory' claim into an instrument of hegemony.* (2003: 513)

Let's use two well-researched examples to illustrate the two general types of hegemonic network governance of communication referred to in this abstract quotation. These two types of hegemonic network governance can be found in almost any network.

We saw in section one that transnational corporations were among the first organizations to be transformed into networks by the information and communication revolution. In this reconfiguration they do not need to own their branch plants in the Third World and directly control the workers in them, as was the form of social ordering in the industrial age. Rather, branch plants in which the world's information technology is typically assembled are often

owned locally or regionally. They are participating actors in a global network exercising their interactive labor and management powers in their own ways to a certain limited extent. However, as Naomi Klein and others argue, their free participation is governed indirectly by the control that the hegemonic transnational corporations are able to exert over the infrastructural relations between the subaltern plant or sweat shop and its access to resources, financing, technology, research, branding networks, and world markets (Klein, 2000; Falk, 1999).

Von Bernstorff stresses that a key factor here is the ability of powerful actors to set up and structure a network in the first place. Moreover, if subaltern nodes fail to deliver the goods or adapt to the flexible work regimes, then the hegemonic corporation can govern their participation by constraining their access to the network infrastructure; entering into a public-private network partnership with the local government to support them and suppress the workers' expression of their grievances; threatening to remove them from the network, or removing them and adding a more compliant node. If the weaker actors in the network are able to exert a degree of collective control over the hegemonic actors, then the latter can leave the network and establish another. Here, as in thousands of other unequal networks, flexibility and openness become strategic resources for the hegemonic actors, rather than indicators of democratic transparency (Von Bernstorff, 2003: 524-25).

The second type of hegemonic network governance over communicative and communicatively-mediated activities consists in *bypassing or overriding* domestic and international legal and political institutions that would otherwise be able to enforce the freedom of expression and access to information of the subalterns. This type of undemocratic control over communication is called the 'delegalization' and 'de-democratization' of governance networks. Von Bernstorff shows that the more powerful states and transnational corporations in various global governance networks are able to do this in a wide variety of ways.

Networks operate in a different communicative time and space from traditional legal and political institutions (section 1). Due to the compression of time, decisions are taken instantly, in contrast to the time-consuming due deliberation, consultation and accountability of traditional legal and democratic forms of communicative reasoning and decision making. And, due to the compression of space, network decisions (such as financial decisions) affect the lives, environments and futures of millions of people, regions and countries around the globe who have no say over them; in contrast to the effects of decisions of traditional legal and democratic

institutions, which are limited to a specific territory and jurisdiction, and according to which all affected should theoretically have a say, representation or redress. (Of course, this ideal of representation and legal recourse is often unrealized in practice, yet, unlike networks, it is a norm of legitimacy intrinsic to legal-democratic institutions and their historical development.) As a result, governance networks seek to free their secret, immensely consequential and unaccountable communicative and decision-making procedures from the time-expensive and spatially-limited, old-fashioned legal and democratic restraints, in the name of efficiency, flexibility and the technical imperatives of the new age. In the words of the Clinton's administration's domain-name policy coordinator, Ira Magaziner, in 1998: 'We believe that the Internet as it develops needs a different type of coordination structure than has been typical for international institutions in the industrial age. Governmental processes and Intergovernmental processes by definition work too slowly and somewhat too bureaucratically for the pace and flexibility of this new information age' (cited in Von Bernstorff, 2003: 515). How are network governance structures able to bypass or override traditional legal and democratic communicative procedures that have been built up over the centuries?

In the first instance, as the quotation from Ira Magaziner implies, the operation of powerful governance networks simply leaves the traditional legal and political institutions in their wake and this lag then serves to support the claim to exemption. Next, hegemonic actors in global governance networks are able to create and control their own global constitutional and normative orders, administered by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, that override the legal and political institutions of representative democracies and international law; precisely the institutions that could open these guarded networks to democratic communicative action (Shrybman, 1999). In other cases, they are also able to outrun traditional legal and democratic protection of the flow of ideas by expanding their own, tailor-made, flexible and manipulable network of private law to govern networks, the controversial *lex Mercatoria* (Cutler, 2003). Finally, even when powerful networks are constrained to work with traditional institutions they are able to mobilize influence over parliaments and courts, not least through the ability of the oligarchy of media networks to create the language, images and effects of public discussion.

The rapid rise of this hegemonic mode of network governance of communicative action and its capacity to manipulate or evade the fetters of legal-democratic modes of governing

communication is not as surprising as it may seem. Recall from Castells' analysis that communication networks were developed by the four biggest pre-existing concentrations of power from the industrial age and under the lead of the United States: the military-industrial complex, private economic enterprises, the leading states prepared to support and promote the research, development and employment of the new technology, and the multimedia conglomerates. The information revolution transformed these four concentrations of power into the same network morphology and, in so doing, coordinated their interaction through common overlapping networks and a common orientation to expansion of the network age. The result is a global politics of 'structuration'. The complex interactions and struggles among networks of these differentially situated and resourced actors give rise to persisting global hegemonic-subaltern formations (or processes) and the large-scale formations reciprocally structure the field of interactions as in struggles over the Kyoto Accord, sustainability, and the Washington Consensus (Castells, 1996: 474).[5]

In what is perhaps the dominant public language of our age, a global pattern of hegemonic-subaltern networks, and its expansion over and against other modes of communication and social ordering, is legitimated in terms of 'freedom' and 'security'. The sense of 'freedom' here is 'openness' – the openness of individuals, groups, cultures, and civilizations to enter and participate in the creative, expanding world of communication networks, and to exercise their freedom to communicate, produce and consume in the ways available to them. The complementary sense of 'security' is the global monitoring, protection and extension of market freedoms and 'network freedoms', backed up by the 'full spectrum dominance' of the United States' global military network. This 'indispensable' security and freedom network is presented by its proponents as acting in accord with the legal and democratic institutions when possible, but it is prepared to act instantly, unilaterally and globally, including wars of intervention and regime change, without and against the time-consuming, multilateral communicative review of international law, civil liberties, and democratic will-formation domestically or through the United Nations, for the transcendent goods of 'freedom and security'.[6] Many of the traditional rights and freedoms of information and communication are dispensable in this new form of social ordering, as was demonstrated in the invasion of Iraq, the Patriot Act in the United States and the Anti-Terrorism Act in Canada. At many levels and to varying degrees, this cluster of hegemonic networks and legitimating languages of freedom and security 'structures' the global field of

possible alternative communicative actions in the network age (Johnson, 2004). And, perhaps partly because of its pre-eminence, the two types of hegemonic rule employed to control communicative activities are replicated in innumerable other networks (including the terrorist networks it opposes).

Fourth and finally, I would like to examine the specific nature of relations of governance characteristic of network governance. This will provide a fuller understanding of how communicative activities are actually guided by this form of governance, and this will provide the basis for understanding how we can act critically in response (section 3).

The first distinctive characteristic of relations of network governance is that they are *immanent* within relations of communication, and, as we have seen, relations of communication are immanent within relations of immaterial production. Networkers are subject to relations of governance of their communication and communicatively-mediated activities just in virtue of *participating* in them. The diverse technological and multimedia infrastructure employed in all communicative activities – information technologies, modes of communication, programs, codes, routines, commands, messages, operations, learning procedures and acquired skill sets – governs the conduct of the communicators *en passant* and almost intangibly. A relation of network governance is not so much a single relation of power acting on an individual subject from outside his or her activities as it is 'governmentality': a whole ensemble of governmental means operating *within* and on a field of interrelated communicators to create an overall network mentalité (Rose, 1999). This technological absorption of relations of power directly into relations of communication is, according to Hardt and Negri, the most revolutionary feature of the network age. Relations of governance thus 'become ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens' (2000: 23):

> *What the theories of power of modernity were forced to consider transcendent, that is, external to productive and social relations, is here formed inside, immanent to the productive and social relations. This is why communications industries have assumed such a central position. They not only organize production on a new scale and impose a new structure adequate to global space, but also make its justification immanent. Power, as it produces, organizes; as it organizes, it speaks and expresses itself as authority. Language, as it communicates, produces commodities but moreover creates subjectivities, puts them in relation, and orders them. The communication industries integrate the*

imaginary and the symbolic within the biopolitical fabric, not merely putting them at the
service of power, but actually integrating them into its very functioning. (Hardt and Negri,
2000: 33)[7]

From one perspective the folding of power relations into communication relations makes this
form of social ordering more decentralized, horizontal, more indistinguishable from the
communicative activities we perform, and thus in a sense more "democratic". Yet, from another
perspective, it provides for a more vertical, more "oligopolistic" form of control of
communication by the more powerful nodes:

> *[T]he computer technologies and communications technologies internal to production*
> *systems allow for more extensive monitoring of workers from a central, remote location.*
> *Control of labouring activity can potentially be individualized and continuous in the*
> *virtual Panopticon of network production. The centralization of control, however, is even*
> *clearer from a global perspective. The geographical dispersion of manufacturing has*
> *created a demand for increasingly centralized management and planning, and also for a*
> *new centralization of specialized producer services, especially financial services.* (Hardt
> and Negri, 2000: 297).

This vertical or 'oligopolistic' dimension is the basis for the kind of hegemonic governance of
network communications discussed above. Hegemonic actors do not govern the communication
of subalterns directly, but indirectly, by strategically manipulating, monitoring, planning,
dispersing, appraising, contracting-out and restructuring the horizontal distribution and
employment of technological infrastructure to guide immanently communicative activities to
specific ends. Relations of network governance are thus immanent to the field of communicative
action and are at once democratic and oligopolistic.

The second distinctive feature of relations of communicative governance is that they
operate *through the communicative freedom* of networkers; through their communicative action.
Networkers are not coerced by the detailed drills and repetitions of the industrial age, the
assembly line or Modern Times. From the beginning, starting now in daycare, networkers are
encouraged to see network communication from two perspectives. From one side, it is absolutely
necessary to submit to commands, functions and routines as an enabling condition of becoming a

networker and learning the rules of the game. On the other hand, it is a flexible and open-ended game in which networkers are treated as free players, as interactive and creative communicators, modifying the rules of the game as they play. They interact with the software and are encouraged to ask it questions, create new and different ways through the programs, customize the software, acquire and contribute information, solve problems and pose others, create their own networks, and eventually reprogram the programs through which they are governed. This is another reason why the immanent relations of governance and forms of subjectification in network communication are so difficult to notice, for we tend to presume that the exercise of power must be external (a separate structure of ruler-ruled) rather than immanent; that it excludes the exercise of freedom rather than encourages it, and that it imposes itself on a passive subject rather than playing strategic games with an interactive agent.

The informational mode of education, research, development, production and consumption actually depends for its existence and dynamic growth on this interplay between immanent relations of governance and the free, creative and unpredictable communicative competences of networkers, celebrated in the image of Silicon Valley. As a result, network relations of power are reciprocally dependent on and responsive to the communicative freedom of networkers. They govern communicative action and assimilate communicators interactively, by enabling and encouraging the free development of communicative capacities on one side and conducting their exercise to specific ends by diverse means on the other, and constantly readjusting in response to the unpredictable trajectory of communicative action. This realm of communicative freedom *within* network power relations is the subject of the final section.

3. Democratic Communicative Action

To summarize, I have tried to provide a background sketch of the *field* in which ideas both 'move' and are 'controlled' today. The communication of information and knowledge in networks is the defining form of human activity of our age and the dominant form of social ordering. Communicative action takes place within networks (with 4 main features); communication networks are the leading sector of the economy; and they transform the communicatively-mediated activities and institutions they colonize (into networks of immaterial labor). Communicative and communicatively-mediated action in networks is governed in four major ways: (1) exclusion, (2) inclusion and assimilation to an interactive network form of

subjectification, (3) network governance of communicative action by hegemonic actors by strategic employment of the communications infrastructure and by bypassing, overriding and influencing legal-democratic governance, and (4) relations of network governance are immanent, democratic and oligopolistic, and they govern by fostering and channeling free communicative action.

This background sketch sets the stage for a third important question: what form of critical and effective social, political and cultural action is possible today in relation to the control of the communication of knowledge? We could not answer this question until we laid out the specific context in which communication occurs and the relations of governance that enable and control it. For social action will be critical and effective only if it is based on an understanding of, and oriented in relation to, the specific relations of communication and governance in which it is situated. We may dream of other modes of communication and governance as much as we wish – free of power, technological mediation, spatial-temporal compression, hegemonic-subaltern relations and pre-reflective subjectification. But if we wish to confront the historical situation in which we are thrown, then we need to situate our question in this field.

I take this sketch of the existing field of power relations that operate in contemporary communications networks to be a more realistic approach than the optimistic literature on network governance and policy networks. As Jochen von Bernstorff's study suggests, this literature has a tendency to abstract from the unequal power relations in communication networks in advancing the claim that global networking fosters democratic governance beyond the state (Von Bernstorff, 2003). This is to disregard the forms of exclusion and to equate inclusion with democracy, thereby overlooking the anti-democratic powers of assimilation, subjectification and subalternization that are exercised directly or indirectly by hegemonic actors within the field of communication networks. Even the important work that seeks to combine 'bargaining' with the more idealized 'arguing' approach in international relations and international law still presupposes actors who are free of precisely the real world unequal relations of governance that I have tried to delineate in my sketch (Müller, 2004). As Antje Wiener concludes in her critical review of this literature, it presupposes an 'egalitarian political culture' that does not exist (Wiener, 2004: 27). What we need in order to be both critical and effective is not an account of norm creation for some ideal game, but an account of the possibility of democratic norm creation under the conditions of the field in which we find ourselves here and now (see Tully, 2005).

Now, Castells writes of this field and social action:

I would argue that this networking logic induces a social determination of a higher level than that of specific social interests expressed through the networks: the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power. Presence of absence in the network and the dynamics of each network vis a vis others are critical sources of domination and change in our society: a society, that, therefore, we may properly call the network society, characterized by the preeminence of social morphology over social action. (Castells, 1996: 469)

We will see if it is as deterministic as he implies. Yet, given our background sketch, he does seem correct to infer that network social morphology is preeminent over social action. I take him to mean that, if critical and effective social action is possible today, then social actors are constrained to think and act within, and perhaps within-and-against, the given social morphology of communication networks.

The first answer to our question of the possibility of critical action, therefore, is just to raise *explicit awareness* of the distinctive background context in which we communicate today, by means of various background sketches. For, as we discussed, network subjectivity tends to render its mode of governance intangible, a matter of course, and its immanent rule 'goes without saying'. Uncritical reflection on communication and control then tends to overlook the implicit infrastructural relations that govern communicative action without the communicators questioning them and having a say in and over them; that is, undemocratically.

Rendering networks and network governance explicit thus puts us in the position of being able to call into question and have a say over the relations of power through which our communication is governed and the norms that are advanced to legitimate them, that is, of *acting democratically*. For, the primary sense of 'democracy' is just the basic Athenian idea that the people have a say in and over the rules by which they are governed and over the public goods the rules are enacted to bring about. We can thus call the diverse forms of questioning and having an effective say in and over the relations governing all communication and communicatively-mediated action *democratic communicative action*. So, our question can be reformulated as: what are the possibilities and examples of democratic communicative action?

Two general types of democratic communicative action are possible (Tully, 2000; Held, 2004). The first is to subject communication networks to the traditional legal and political institutions of existing nation states, international law and the United Nations. The flow and control of ideas would be *regulated* in these legal-democratic institutions by the representatives of the people subject to network governance, against the dominant current of hegemonic rule by powerful network actors and their 'delegalization' and 'de-democraticisation' of network communication. This might be called the 'traditional' legal-democratic approach locally and globally. As noted earlier, legal-democratic, Enlightenment institutions are 'works in progress' that require major reforms to be effective, especially in the international realm, and their inadequacy has led to the search for another, more effective strategy. The second general strategy, accordingly, is to democratize communication networks directly, so networkers and those excluded yet effected can call into question and have a say in contextually appropriate practices of democratic discussion, negotiation and decision-making in the nodes in which they network (or from which they are presently excluded). This runs against the dominant current of assimilation and subjection to a form of communicative interaction that, while creative in many dimensions, is subtly (and not so subtly) channeled away from networkers questioning and transforming the dominant undemocratic relations of network governance. The creation of sites of democratic communicative action within networks might be called a new approach, one tailored specifically to the new form of communicative power, but also simply a new form of 'direct' or participatory democracy. Direct democratic communicative action is the fitting response to the compressed time and space of network communication and decision-making, as it too can be mobilized instantaneously and across the multi-jurisdictional global space of network effects.

These two types of democratic communicative action are counter-hegemonic (against the dominant undemocratic control of the flow of ideas) and complementary (working in tandem against different types of undemocratic control). One of the most depressing features of Canada today is the antagonism between proponents of these two strategies – between those who participate through the traditional institutions and those who wish to participate directly through direct democratic communicative action in networks. Yet, both strategies have the same means and end: the democratic governance of the means of communication by the communicators.[8]

If these two strategies were successful, they would constitute a revolution – the legal-democratic transformation of the network age. The people and their representatives would decide how to govern the communication of knowledge and information and for what ends. Such a transformation appears utopian from the perspective of the present and it certainly is if we imagine that the dominant actors of the network age might institute this transformation for us. If there is to be change in this direction, we the governed have to initiate it from the ground up by organizing and participating in concrete forms of democratic communicative action that *enact* initiatory and exemplary practices of these two strategies here and now.

Hence, we are in a situation analogous to Trudeau's three decades ago. For him the question was, given the big concentrations of power in Canada and globally, how could he help to empower citizens to participate democratically in civil society, communicate freely, democratize hegemonic concentrations of power and repatriate democratic powers and power-sharing to the sovereign people, and so diminish the enormous inequalities? His answer was Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the counter-hegemonic civic *ethics* he hoped it would foster. The difference today is that the concentrations of power and means of participation have been transformed by the communications revolution, and thus the analogous answer is democratic communicative action that subjects network communication to democratic control, and does so by democratic communicative means.

The first step is to realize that the possibilities and opportunities for democratic communicative action exist here and now, wherever we communicate. Section two suggested that the entire network organization of contemporary societies rests on the free, creative communicative capacities and activities of networkers. Network governance relations can foster communicative action and channel it towards specific ends, but they cannot control it in detail, for the development of the information age depends on creative and innovative forms of communication. This is why networks are necessarily flexible and open, encouraging and then responding to the indeterminate and unpredictable communicative activities of networkers, rather than fixed structures of domination. As a result, there is an element of interactive freedom or free play – a limited range of possible ways of communicating in any network situation. There is thus always the limited possibility of communicating differently, in discord with the commands, routines and norms in some way or another – just as in canoeing, there is always the possibility to

turn and paddle against the current in different ways. This element of interactive human freedom and surprise is irreducible.

Now, this creative communicative freedom is directed, with all the powerful technological and multimedia means at the disposal of hegemonic actors, towards its exercise in innovations and creations that serve the prevailing ordering and goals of the information age. In contrast, the exercise of creative communicative freedom democratically, *on* the prevailing governance relations, is discouraged, except for innovations in forms of local or regional self-rule and self-management that increase efficiency and can themselves be governed and monitored infrastructurally (as in the downloading and contracting out of regimes of self-government and dispute resolution to subaltern nodes in local, national and global governance networks). Nonetheless, because relations of governance are immanent within relations of communication, the existential possibility of exercising creative communicative freedom in its democratic form cannot be eliminated or blocked completely by the powers-that-be.

Democratic communicative action is not only possible in some abstract sense. It is an 'opportunity' in any node. The popular image of the expansion of the network age that the media communicate over and over is of a cluster of global processes that are technologically driven, necessary and inescapable, too complex to be modified by those subject to them, and, in any case beyond human control. Yet, networks are grounded in the communicative activities of networkers at their particular nodes, and the hyperextension of these activities and decisions throughout the network. As heretical as this may sound to some network theorists, these local practices of network communication are in turn partly grounded in the daily, non-technological, face-to-face relations of communication of the networkers, and these alternative forms of intersubjectivity provide grounds of resistance to networkization. Of course, there are hegemonic structural formations of global networks, and forms of subjectivity that make these appear inevitable, but these are grounded in and reproduced by the daily practices of local networkers going along with the prevailing routines of communication without a say. So, despite the hegemonic image of deterministic technological processes imposed on us from above and to which we must submit, global networkization is actually based in and hyperextends out from the everyday communicative activities of networkers. Steven Flusty describes this more accurate and counter-hegemonic picture:

[Network globalization] is a combination of distinct spatial and temporal practices that, in their execution and their accretion, exercise globally formative effects. These practices are brought about through the quotidian business of conducting life within and across ever widening distances and by means of ever more distended social relations. It thus entails a redefinition of globalization not as an extrinsic quasi-opaque imposition from above, an irresistible structural imperative, or a commandment unifying capital markets. Rather, it is globalization as both immanent in, and increasingly intrinsic to, our everyday practices. (Flusty, 2004: 3-4)

Consequently, communication networks are less deterministic and provide more opportunities for democratic challenge and reform from within than Castells suggests.

I would like to illustrate the range of opportunities available with a few examples of counter-hegemonic democratic communicative action that have helped to bring communication networks under direct and/or legal-democratic governance. First, the most popular vehicle for democratic communicative action in the network age is without doubt non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, their role is ambivalent. NGO counter-networks have been successful in organizing and including many formerly excluded peoples, challenging the assimilative features of network subjectivity, countering the hegemonic rule and aims of powerful actors in major communicative networks, and showing ordinary people that they have more freedom to organize and act critically than they are led to believe by the dominant discourse. Yet, NGOs have also been instrumental in reproducing and expanding some of the undemocratic features of existing networks. Over 70 percent of the 50,000 INGOs (international NGOs) are registered in Europe and North America and funded by Northern governments and corporations to promote their agendas. When they bring excluded peoples into the major government and corporate development networks, they often discount their traditional forms of communication and cooperation and assimilate them to the network form of communication and subjectivity they bring with them, rather than nurturing non-assimilative forms of inclusion. Their relatively ineffective informal consultative role in major networks is often used by the hegemonic actors to simulate democratic scrutiny and to legitimate cosmetic changes. Furthermore, NGO networks are often unaccountable to the people whose interests they claim to represent and their internal

organization tends to replicate the hegemonic-subaltern structure and undemocratic decision-making of major networks. Many are now referred to as CONGOS (co-opted NGOS).[9]

Since, as Castells argues, social action has to be organized in networks to be effective, NGO networks will continue to be used. However, if they are to be a means for the gradual democratization of communication in the network age, they too will have to be subject to democratic reform from within, so they embody the same democratic communicative action for which they claim to be fighting.

One of the most instructive examples of combining the legal-democratic and direct democracy types of communicative action is the use of democratic-communicative or 'soft power' networks to bring about an enforceable ban on landmines. This in turn is part of a larger, counter-hegemonic, soft power network organized through countless nodes of communicative action to question and fight to reform the dominant, global security-freedom network in the name of another kind of security and freedom. From this counter-perspective, enunciated by Lloyd Axworthy among many others in Canada, the causes of insecurity and unfreedom are the enormous global inequalities and the exclusion of the worse-off majority from democratic communicative action. The dominant global security-freedom network does not address these underlying causes but, rather, protects and extends them, causing more wars and insecurity. The path to security and equality is to provide the multifaceted infrastructure of network communication developing countries demand, so they can engage in free communicative action on a level playing field, and then the other inequalities will soon diminish. This global counter network is far from successful, yet it demonstrates the power of democratic communicative action to challenge and offer an alternative to the networks that now govern undemocratically the communicative action of millions (Axworthy, 2004).

From the pioneering activities of Amnesty International and Doctors Without Boarders in confronting and opening closed channels of communication to the latest small scale, alternative network globalization from below, such as providing e-mail for rural doctors and missionaries in Zambia by high-frequency radio and Sailmail, there are countless other examples from which we can learn ('E-mail innovation helps Zambia go Global', 2004).[10] However, I would like to move on and conclude with one final and indispensable feature of democratic communicative activities if they are to be effective in building a better future.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos observes with respect to the *World Social Forum* that we need more meeting places for the multiplicity of counter-hegemonic democratic networkers (Santos, 2003; 2004). These forums would be places, like the annual Pierre Trudeau Foundation Public Policy Conferences in Canada, where researchers, academics, students, democratic activists from diverse networks, representatives from the excluded majority, policy makers, filmmakers, communication experts, scientists, technicians and business people working on soft, democratic communicative technologies and education, representatives from the volunteer sector, politicians, and a host of other actors could come together and exchange their case-specific and specialized knowledge of how network communications are governed and how they can be rendered more accountable by democratic communicative action. They would be places for anyone uncomfortable with the ways communication is currently governed and hopeful that another world is possible. If democratic communicative action is to be critical and effective, it needs to be based on the reciprocal communication among academic research on how communication networks operate, policy communities' knowledge of what sorts of local, domestic and international legal and political initiatives are possible, and the experiential knowledge of communicative activists and the excluded on the ground. Finally, these forums could be models of democratic communicative action in which the participants learn through practice the civic ethics they hope to hyperextend in their diverse activities. The *World Social Forum* is an exemplary annual meeting place of such reciprocal networks, but the task now is to create a multitude of similar and more specific forums (Tully 2003).

Notes

[1] This article was originally written as a background paper for the First Annual Public Policy Conference of the Pierre Trudeau Foundation held in Montreal, Canada, October 14-16, 2004. I would like to thank the many participants who commented on the original paper, especially the Trudeau Scholars, Jocelyn Maclure, David Ley, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Stephen Toope and Jeremy Webber, and, more recently, Michael Simpson and Antje Wiener.

[2] This description of Pierre Trudeau's civic ethics is based on his lectures to an introductory class in Political Theory at McGill University in the late 1980s when he was campaigning for nuclear disarmament. The quotation from 'The Ascetic in a Canoe' is taken from the Pierre Trudeau Foundation's website: http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/trudeau_e.asp (May 5, 2005). I would like to thank Alexandre (Sacha) Trudeau for discussions of this ethics today.

[3] The compression of space and time is the central nexus of globalization according to Castells, David Held and Anthony Giddens (for example Castells 1996: 376-468; Held et al., 1999).

[4] If human consciousness and embodiment are as deeply wired into communication technology as Kroker claims then the tempered democratic communicative action I recommend in section three is too little too late.

[5] For the concepts of hegemony and structuration in network-actor theory see Tully (2000); Held (2004).

[6] This global network strategy of freedom and security is presented in two documents: The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (September 2002), www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html, and United States Space Command, *Vision 2020*, www.af.mil/lbibrary/posture/vision. For an excellent analysis of the global security strategy of the United States, and place of the first document in it, in relation to international law, see Brunnée and Toope (2004). For the historical development of the hegemonic language of security and freedom see Bacevich (2002).

[7] By creating 'subjectivities', Hardt and Negri mean that relations of immanent communicative governance give rise to the corresponding network form of subjectivity we discussed above.

[8] These two types of democratic communicative action have to be pursued in tandem as they are mutually supportive. Von Bernstorff concludes: the problem of de-legalization 'cannot be solved by the reference to a higher standard of 'accountability' and 'transparency' through a 'network constitution' or ombudsman structures for informal governance arrangements. Principles of 'good governance' cannot substitute for the loss of procedural constraints and substantive commitments imposed by a legal order' (Von Bernstorff, 2003: 526).

[9] For a relatively optimistic view of NGOs see Keane (2003), and for a critical view, see Hardt and Negri, (2000: 35-37, 312-314). For a range of views based on case studies see Khangram, et al. (2002).

[10] For two recent surveys, see Flusty (2004), and Jeremy Brecher et al., (2000).

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