Counter Public Spheres and Global Modernity

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Introduction

In the last thirty years capitalism has gone through a major transition that has seen the intensification of globalisation, the rise of neo-liberalism and the New Right, the decline of trust and of social democracy, a process of de-traditionalisation, and the rise of new social movements. These changes have profound implications for the nature and functioning of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). In this paper we argue that the public sphere has been shaken substantially by these shifts opening up increasing possibilities in the process for counter public spheres to become established and flourish. We trace the development of the concept of the public sphere post 1989 that includes crucial and too often ignored revisions to the original Habermasian thesis. We argue that counter public spheres become established in periods of instability in the dominant public sphere. Several factors are indicative of this instability, we focus in particular on the demise of trust. Decreasing levels of trust have been associated with declining levels of social participation and are seen to signal the ill health of civil society.
Civil society is widely accepted as a concept that will inform and uphold democracy. Although, exactly how and by what mechanisms civil society is to be invoked is often unclear. In this paper we present the concept of civil society as double edged – one that can be and has been conceived of as an individualistic concept representing no more than the human face of capitalism serving ultimately to support the dominant public sphere or as a space that allows a critical intervention in the public sphere that has the potential to result in social progressive change.

Drawing on the work of Castells (1996, 1997, 1998) and Beck (2000) we argue that the changing nature of the public sphere and the conditions that are contributing to its transformation, including crucially the role of new communication technologies, point to a new stage of global modernity.

*The Public Sphere in Flux*

At the conference to mark the English translation of Habermas’ Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere in 1989, Craig Calhoun argued against Habermas’ Adornian-inspired pessimistic position of the early 1960s, maintaining that the consequences of mass media were not ‘uniformly negative’ and that there is a certain amount of room for manoeuvre for ‘alternative democratic media strategies’ (1992: 33). Calhoun is referring here to the possibility of groups in civil society exerting influence upon the mass media, on the one hand, and of establishing alternative discursively connected public spheres, on the other (1992: 37). Habermas has himself revised his public sphere thesis in the last ten years to take account of such phenomena.

We wish to chart the transformation in Habermas’s own work over the past decade, partly as a result of the critique of his original thesis and partly as a result of Habermas’s own reflections on the contemporary relationship between media and politics. As such, our account differs from the standard that first lays out Habermas’ original thesis and then
summarises critiques of the thesis, emphasising the exclusions of the male bourgeois public sphere. Our aim here is to chart the development of the concept of the public sphere post-1989.

Habermas’ focus in his Habilitationschrift was on the bourgeois public sphere. His intention was to show the rise and fall of the public sphere, the rise of a critical public and its decay. He argues that the increasing complexity and rationalisation of societies over the course of the twentieth century together with the growth of the mass media have transformed the public sphere: ‘the public sphere becomes the court before which public prestige can be displayed – rather than in which critical debate is carried on’ (1989: 201). In other words, horizontal communication between citizens is increasingly replaced by vertical communication between mass media, greatly influenced by both the state and capital, and consumers. The space for participatory communication is severely constricted. This interpretation of the trajectory of the public sphere owed a great deal to Adorno and Horkheimer’s work on the culture industries and the prognosis of a move towards an increasingly administered society (1973). However, Habermas’ intention was not only critical but also redemptive. He wished to rescue the rational kernel from the ideological concept. The ethical impulse lying behind the creation of the public sphere, of inventing a space where citizens may meet and discuss as equals, needs to be separated out from the exclusions that characterised the actual bourgeois male public sphere. The rational kernel needs to be preserved and then built upon in order to establish the conditions for living in a truly democratic society.

While Habermas maintains that most of his earlier diagnosis of the character of the public sphere in the twentieth century is correct, he does want to introduce certain revisions and elaborations. These relate in particular to instances of intentional political mobilisation that seek to make an intervention in the mass media public sphere or develop a counter-public sphere.
Habermas’ sole attention on the bourgeois public sphere aroused considerable criticism both at the time of the student movement in the late 1960s/early 1970s and at the time of translation (Negt and Kluge, 1972; Calhoun, 1992). Habermas saw proletarian public spheres, for example, as derivative of the bourgeois public sphere and as not worthy of too much attention. In his response to the conference in 1989 Habermas recognises this as a problem with the book. He admits that

only after reading Mikhail Bakhtin’s great book Rabelais and his World have my eyes become really opened to the inner dynamics of a plebeian culture. The culture of the common people apparently was by no means only a backdrop, that is, a passive echo of the dominant culture; it was also the periodically recurring violent revolt of a counter project to the hierarchical world of domination, with its official celebrations and everyday disciplines (1992: 427).

Thus, Habermas recognises not only the existence of alternative public spheres but also their capacity for challenging domination. While Habermas maintains that his analysis of the infrastructure of the public sphere still pertains with the mass media largely subordinate to the interests of capital, on the one hand, and the state, on the other, he has in the meantime revised his pessimistic opinion of the public. Rather than see the public as cultural dupes in the manner of Adorno and Horkheimer he now emphasises the ‘pluralistic, internally much differentiated mass public’ (1992: 438) that are able to resist mass mediated representations of society and create their own political interventions.

What this points to is a revision of the public sphere thesis in the light of the ‘revolutions’ in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and the developments in civil society through the emergence of new social movements in advanced capitalist societies (for example, the green movement in Germany). In addition, in recent years there have also been many attempts with modest degrees of success to decentralize the media and make them more accessible and responsive to citizens. Many countries have experienced a
growth in non-mass, localised forms of media such as community radio, television and newspapers (for example, the use of Restricted Service Licences (RSLs) for cable television and community radio in the UK). There has also been a considerable growth in NGOs (the number of registered charities in the UK is now in excess of 185,000) most of which, seek to use mass and/or small media as part of their work. A central question for Habermas is whether these groups in civil society can intervene in the mass media public sphere and change the agenda through setting off a critical process of communication. This can be exceedingly difficult to do in a market-led, mass mediated system enveloped in its own professional ideologies about what is and what is not newsworthy, about who is a credible source of opinion and information and who is not (Fenton et al., 1998). It is important not to romanticise the ability of alternative forms of communication to encourage progressive social change and to acknowledge the predominant context of global, multi-media conglomerates.

Dahlgren (1994) manages to retain this perspective by making an explicit analytic distinction between the common domain of the public sphere and the advocacy domain. In this functional differentiation, the common domain is the arena that strives for universalism by appealing to a general public. It is here that we find for the most part the dominant media, which ideally provide information, debate and opinion for all members of society. This is done through a variety of media, formats and representational modes, taking into account the socio-cultural segmentation of society. The advocacy domain consists partly of time and space made available by the dominant media and partly of a plurality of smaller civic media from political parties, interest groups, movements, organizations and networks. This distinction allows us to consider not only the official public sphere of the dominating, but also the public sphere of the dominated. As Verstraeten (1994:9) says “Every dominant public sphere almost inevitably calls up an anti-publicness”.

Habermas pursues a complementary line of thinking in ‘Between Facts and Norms’
(1996). Can autonomous public spheres bring conflicts from the periphery to the centre of public life via the mass media in order to generate critical debate amongst a wider public? Here, Habermas has moved away considerably from the ‘Structural Transformation’ work and wishes to maintain that autonomous public spheres can acquire influence in the mass media public sphere under certain circumstances.

Habermas’ earlier position outlined in ‘Structural Transformation’ saw the public sphere at rest rather than in flux. When one looks at the public sphere at rest one tends to note the mixed economy of capitalist owned and state regulated public sphere that is exclusive. However, when one introduces the notion that the public sphere, in a manner consistent with the rest of society, is subject to periodic crises then one can observe gaps opening up in the public sphere: ‘in periods of mobilisation, the structures that actually support the authority of a critically engaged public begin to vibrate. The balance of power between civil society and the political systems then shifts’ (1996: 379). The presentation of the issue is important: ‘only through their controversial presentation in the media do such topics reach the larger public and subsequently gain a place on the “public agenda”’ (1996: 381). A crisis situation, according to Habermas, raises the question of the normative foundations of society. The endogenous mobilisation in civil society can exploit the ‘latent dependency’ and ‘normative self-understanding’ (1996: 382) of the mass media public sphere in order to make its voice heard.

The issue then becomes how do we know when the public sphere is in crisis? There are various strands of evidence that would appear to point towards a breakdown of trust in the dominant public sphere and indicate a growth in counter public spheres. This in itself may not indicate crisis in the traditional sense of the word, but may suggest the possibility of a period of mobilization whereby the dominant public sphere prompts an anti-publicness that given certain circumstances could flourish. Part of the aim of this article is to explore what these circumstances could be.
"The Public Sphere in Crisis?"

Putnam (1995), talking about US society, argues that there has been a widespread loss of the sense of community that Tocqueville (1945) believed was central to American culture. Put simply, people don’t trust each other as much as they used to - this is linked to a recoil from civic life and social ties. In the UK, similarly, people belong to fewer organisations than they used to, vote less often, volunteer less and give less money to charity (Knight and Stokes, 1996; Passey and Hems, 1998). At the same time, it is claimed that people who have retained a sense of trust are more likely to participate in almost all of these activities, establishing a link between a decline of trust and the fall in civic engagement (Putnam, 1995; Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Uslaner, 1997).

Trusting involves making judgements about people or organisations that are strange to you. As civic engagement declines so social capital is lost. Social capital is a concept that embraces the trust, norms and networks that facilitate co-ordinated action. A number of commentators suggest that the ‘skill’ of trusting is developed in part through citizens associating in voluntary organisations, self-help groups, and mutual aid societies. Putnam (1995) for example, has argued that a decline in participation erodes the kind of intermediary institution that Tocqueville saw as essential to the structure of civil society. In this instance civil society is construed in general terms and does not distinguish between the likes of a common domain and an advocacy domain (Dahlgren, 1994). A conflation of the various organizational forms of civil society does not allow for differing public responses to very different and often divergent sections of civil society. Trust may be flouted in some and transferred to others, as Putnam has noted elsewhere (Putnam, 1995a).

The importance of trust in these civil contexts is heightened because of concern over the rapid decrease of trust in government and formal institutions constitutive of the dominant public sphere. The British Social Attitudes Survey 1996, for example, indicated that the
public had experienced a profound loss of faith in the institutions of the state. Its
efficiency and morality have been questioned. This claim is not restricted to Britain. A
large-scale comparative analysis based on national surveys points to declining public
trust in politicians in a range of ‘mature’ democracies, with the exception of The
Netherlands (Putnam et al., 2000). Data from the World Values Survey (19??) suggest a
similar pattern in terms of public confidence in political institutions, including the armed
forces, legal systems, police, parliaments and state bureaucracies.

These kinds of disengagement are particularly acute amongst the young (Gaskin, et al.
1996). British studies speak of extensive alienation of young people from society’s
central institutions and warn of the long term dangers this may have (Wilkinson and
Mulgan, 1995). More than one third of people between the ages of 18 and 25 did not vote
in the General Election in 1992 or 1997. Some reports on young people and citizen
service claim that this lack of engagement with social values and activities has created a
host of social problems including crime and drug abuse (Briscoe, 1995). With the state in
retreat - not simply in the neo-liberal sense but more broadly in terms of public support -
civil society, or certain parts of it, become fore grounded as alternative arenas of public
trust, information and representation.

A decline in trust has been linked to the increase in non-traditional collective protest
often described as non-violent direct action (NVDA). As Criminalising Diversity and
Dissent a report by the civil rights pressure group Liberty puts it:

Public support for Non-Violent Direct Action continues to grow. A Gallup poll
reported in the Daily Telegraph showed that 68 percent of people believe there are
times when protestors are justified in breaking the law, suggesting that there is a
growing disillusionment with the response of politicians and governments to
public opinion…the belief that it is sometimes right to break the law as a protest
has spread from the traditionally more anarchic classes – to embrace all sections of opinion including those who used to know better.” (Cited in Brass and Koziell, 1997:14)

The defining characteristics which mark out some voluntary organizations and campaigning movements from the state and market sectors - non-profit, responding to localized need, oriented to certain values and so on - become paramount in building relations of trust with members and with the wider public. The relationship between organizational form, in particular the encouragement of active participation, democracy and inclusivity and the potential for trust to develop is crucial to contemporary society and its practices. When the dominant public sphere is felt to betray or is no longer capable of allowing for critical rational engagement then trust is diminished allowing counter public spheres the opportunity to flourish. One example of this is the revival of certain forms of grassroots collectivism. There has been a recent growth in local struggles over road-building, animal rights, ethnic or cultural identities that suggest the development of new forms of cultural resistance. While much of this activity is parochial the localisation of political struggle is paralleled by a fragmentation of political culture in which party allegiances and class alliances give way to more fluid and informal networks of action that spread much wider. Such networks are often staunchly anti-bureaucratic and anti-centralist, suspicious of large organised, formal and institutional politics. In turn, the fragmentation of political culture is fuelled by the rise of identity politics in which modern logics of incorporation and representation are challenged on the bases of their rigidity and exclusiveness. In contrast, the recognition of local diversity allows for differentiated notions of citizenship among diverse counter public spheres.

One example of this in recent times is a new type of eco-politics that exists outside of traditional political party structures and is characterised by non-violent direct action (NVDA). In the UK NVDA became popular in the 1990s. The protests were diverse – ranging from campaigns to stop the live export of sheep and veal calves, road protestors
and anti-capitalism marches to the right to hold raves. All were bound by a common basis in what has been termed DIY Culture (Mackay, 1998; Brass and Koziell, 1997):

The whole business of DIY culture is that you get together and say ‘This is an issue that affects us, the people in this room, and we want to do something about it’. …We are not MPs, we are not elected representatives – the popular mandate is ourselves. (George Monbiot, one of the founders of the Land is Ours land rights movement and a researcher at the centre for environmental policy and understanding at Green College, Oxford, cited in Brass and Koziell, 1997:8)

DIY culture is youth-centred and converges around green radicalism, direct action politics and new musical sounds and experiences. The notion of DIY culture being located in single-issue politics does not take account of the diverse range of interests, projects and people involved – from ramblers to travellers, trade unionists to squatters. Although it is built on a long heritage of grassroots protest what marks DIY culture out as different to what has gone before is its attention to issues of consumption rather than production. It is about people wanting to take responsibility for their own lifestyles and realising that how they live is a political action. Although, as noted above, many of the struggles are localised there is constant acknowledgement of the links to globalisation and many protestors move freely between resistance to the building of a local road and marches against global capitalism:

The more that corporations globalise and lose touch with the concerns of ordinary people, the more that the seeds of grass-roots revolt are sown; equally, the more that governments hand responsibility to remote supranational powers the more they lose their democratic legitimacy and alienate people. (Vidal in Brass and Koziell, 1997:277)

Counter public spheres may provide vital sources of information and experience that are
contrary to or at least, in addition to the dominant public sphere thereby offering a vital input to democracy. Because of the disparate and often underground nature the extent of this practice is unknown, its role in a democracy unexplored (Atton, 20002). It is our contention that the activity of counter public spheres has increased in recent years largely in response to a dominant public sphere that is coming under increasing strain.

In making a distinction between key aspects of the public sphere, whether we term them dominant and counter or common and advocacy, that shrink or swell according to particular circumstances, we must also disaggregate the various components of civil society. The possibility of a renewal of civil society through the expansion of civil associations, especially voluntary organisations (which in the broadest sense would include DIY culture), is problematic principally because such organisations do not necessarily increase democratic inclusion. Taken as a homogenous concept civil society can be seen as providing the foundations for general social solidarity and moral community. When this occurs it is not clear whether this thing called civil society simply builds on an association of interest that may have arisen out of the individualisation of lifestyles organised around consumption in the market-place, or whether it is based on something more than enlightened self-interest. This is important because civil society that operates as no more than an outlet for neo-liberal sensibilities and remains centred on the individual and their interests rather than on mutuality or reciprocity, is likely to uphold the status quo rather than actively challenge it through collective identity and critical solidarity.

**Self-Interested Individualism or Collective Progressive Politics**

Neo-liberalism, based on an ideology of economically centred individualism, consumerism and citizenship, held sway in a range of liberal capitalist governments throughout the 1980s and 1990s - most notably in the United Kingdom and the United States. In the UK, Thatcherism was described as the only ‘political and moral force that
has been in the business of eating away at the cement of social reciprocity’ (Hall, 1993: 14). Commentators have remarked that the rise of individualism, especially in the 1980s, has been at the expense of sociability and civic-mindedness. Such arguments are based on the assumption that if individual self-interest is allowed to develop unhindered, conflicts of interests will override relations of trust. These ideas are not exactly new. Durkheim argued that a society composed of isolated individuals pursuing their own narrow objectives was untenable. According to Durkheim, calculating individuals pursuing their own self-interest undermined social solidarity (1957, 1964). To overcome this danger society required a morality of co-operation and a network of secondary institutions which bound people together - these would help to mediate the pursuit of self interest by creating social bonds (Furedi, 1997).

Relations between individuals are increasingly governed by economic forces. Public support for charities, for example, often assumed to be an altruistic act, has not escaped the individualisation of the market. The social response to charitable giving relies frequently on assessments of deservedness of the beneficiary. Perceptions of who receives charity and who should receive charity are linked to the willingness of people to support charities through time and money (Fenton et al., 1993). Public attitudes on the seeming excess of voluntary and charitable organisations operating in the same field and the high administrative costs such organisations incur are common (Fenton et al., 1995). But more than this, the recipients of charity themselves are often viewed with nothing more than contempt, malign distrust or corrosive pity (Golding and Middleton, 1982). Thomas Harding argues that the new level of local, DIY activism is based on an individualisation of protest and the privatisation of activism (Harding, 1997). DIY privileges the notion of self-empowerment. It is worthwhile noting that many of the new protest groups do not see class as an issue and are led largely by the young generation of the middle classes (Mackay, 1998). A society so firmly entrenched in an ethic of competition and reward finds it difficult to escape the values it espouses.
However, public attitudes do not always obediently follow the wholesale promotion of
the market. Individualism and consumerism have not gone unheeded by the public. Other
attitudes prevail that mark civil society as different in character from both the state, the
world of business and the dominant public sphere. For example, voluntary organisations
are perceived as offering an opportunity to somehow defy the market and act on
principles other than profit and power. In the UK, research has shown that the ability of
voluntary organisations to represent something other than the market is vital to their
future well being (Gaskin and Fenton, 1997).

Putnam argues that forms of voluntary association are distinctive in their capacity to
function as repositories for all sources of social capital - obligations and expectations,
information potential and norms and sanctions (Putnam 1993: 89). As such they are
characterised as incubators of civic virtue. He contends that democratic, non-exclusionary
voluntary associations characterised by a high level of face-to-face interaction are
involved in a virtuous circle in terms of trust, because they instill habits of co-operation,
solidarity and public spiritedness; develop skills required for political activity; and
prevent factionalism through inclusive membership. It is problematic, however, simply to
assume that voluntary associations will be democratic and non-exclusionary - as Putnam
has noted (Putnam, 1995a). Many commentators on the organized voluntary sector would
debate whether it is quite so virtuous. A misplaced nostalgia for the civic life of the
1950s, as Putnam cautions - let alone for Tocqueville's America of the 1830s - ignores
the factors that shape and constrain association in an era of advanced modernity.

Misztal (1996) suggests that interest in the link between the concept of trust and that of
civil society has emerged as a result of evidence suggesting that legal formulas of
citizenship do not of themselves secure solidarity, participation and the expansion of the
public sphere. With many symptoms of the decline of solidarity (the decrease in
popularity of solidaristic parties, the decline in class solidarity, the collapse of
communism as a viable alternative to capitalism), the renewal of civic institutions and the
emergence of new social movements have been put forward as ways of constructing new identities and social bonds, and teaching new responsibilities and obligations. We would argue that this is evidence of an increase in counter public spheres. At the same time, Misztal points to the growing evidence of privatism, marketisation and a politics based on rights rather than duties, as evidence of a shrinking dominant public sphere. The task of protecting and promoting solidarity falls to the institutions of civil society which might offset the formalism, proceduralism and commodification of the state and market spheres.

Such an account places a distinctive emphasis on a politics and ethics of solidarity within civil society. Within more conventional theories of civil society, the concept of solidarity is frequently missing or sidelined. Wolfe (1989), for example, sees the role of civil society as maintaining a social fabric that tempers the operation of the market and the state and anchors them in a normative framework by creating ‘realms of intimacy, trust, caring and autonomy that are different from the larger world of politics and economics’ (1989:38). But solidarity is not mentioned. Indeed, the notion that politics and economics represent a 'larger world', together with a normative emphasis on values of 'intimacy, trust and caring' within civil society, appears to reinstate rather traditional distinctions between the public and private spheres. The civil realm is seen to exercise a civilising influence on market and state, rather than providing a sphere where alternative forms of social solidarity and political agency might be articulated.

Habermas (1992) defines solidarity as

..the ability of individuals to respond to and identify with one another on the basis of mutuality and reciprocity without calculating individual advantages and above all without compulsion. Solidarity involves a willingness to share the fate of the other, not as the exemplar of a category to which the self belongs but as a unique and different person. (Habermas 1992:47)
Thus solidarity infers both a private and a public sense of trust. To insist on solidarity as a crucial element in the likely success of counter-public spheres to influence rational-critical discourse resists the definition of civil society in simply individualistic or private terms. The potential of counter public-spheres as sites of solidarity and collective agency is realised by new social movements. These movements are held to engage in a kind of 'double politics'; aiming both to influence policy in a formal sense, and to construct new kinds of solidarity and collective identity through informal political association - a bringing together of public and private responses.

The concept of solidarity also helps to explain the connection of the local, often individualised issue to the often highly simplified but nonetheless global economics and politics, central to many of the new protest groups. Mackay (1998) argues that this is why direct action campaigns have focussed on export and overseas trade allowing a degree of unity and ambition of scale for otherwise disparate actions. For example, in the UK in 1995 animal rights activists protested at a range of seaports on the live export of animals; Reclaim the Streets activists organised a party and a protest action in collaboration with Liverpool dockers to show solidarity with trade unionists in 1996; ecotunnellers protested at the development of the second runway at Manchester airport in 1997.

The ability of voluntary organisations to make global connections and to inform the public about their work has been dramatically affected by instantaneous communications technologies. Together with patterns of mass migration and world trade new technologies increase awareness of, and dependence between, localities far away from each other. This can be seen as positive insofar as it can raise awareness of the politics of consumption - as Giddens notes (1990) the choices and actions of consumers in one locality can have an impact on the international division of labour and planetary ecology. Large international voluntary organisations can and do inform the public of the impact of a global economy. But it is a function that often precludes participation and negates any degree of control on behalf of the giver. Such groups may have large memberships but the members rarely, if
ever, see one another. People may be committed givers but the giving is organised at a distance, the act of participation is at arm’s length. Solidarity is not required. Altruism is relegated to an act of consumption - a financial relationship. However, other groups such as those that organize around anti-globalisation and the World Trade Organisation are predicated on participation and public demonstration with a real, if rather confused sense, of popular idealism. Solidarity in these instances is rather more than the human face of capitalism.

The question of whether civil society simply builds on associations of interest that may have arisen out of the individualisation of lifestyles organised around consumption in the market place, or whether it is based on something more than enlightened self-interest, is crucial to further theorising in this field. Is a ‘strong civil society’ something that will enhance and deepen democracy through increased participation in a revitalised public sphere, or is it rather a neo-liberal attempt at reconciling the demands of individual choice with the need for social cohesion? Hirst (1994) offers a vision of the future in which there is a substantial devolution of power down from the centralised state to a system of voluntary self-governing associations. But he also states that ‘the core ethical claim of associationism...is justified on essentially individualistic terms’ (Hirst, 1994:50). Assessing whether the anti-publicness that the dominant public sphere has called into play can be seen as a new realistic political force is beyond the scope of this article. What this article does attempt is to identify some key markers for change – a decrease in trust in the dominant public sphere, a rise in counter activity, a forging of solidarity between disparate resistant identities along with the technological potential to link geographical distances, political causes and organize translocal protests.

We wish now to broaden out the discussion and pose the question of whether these contemporary characteristics of capitalism are indicative of a new stage of modernity. To help us answer this question we will examine briefly the work of two of the most influential sociologists of the day, Manuel Castells and Ulrich Beck. Both have recently
argued that we are now experiencing a different kind of society, the 'network society' in Castells' case and in Beck's 'second modernity'. Do the central features of the network society and second modernity concur with the above analysis?

A New Stage of Modernity?

Castells locates the genesis of the network society in what he calls an information technology revolution in the early 1970s. The key elements of this revolution, for Castells, are the invention of microprocessors, which in turn enabled the rise of personal computing, and the diffusion of computer networks beyond military and scientific users (1996: 29-65). One may disagree with both Castells’ description of these changes as a revolution. To adopt a Kuhnian vocabulary one may see these developments as 'normal science', the extension of a digital paradigm that has its roots in mid-nineteenth century algebra and telegraphy and mid-twentieth century code-breaking and missile calculation (Winston, 1998). One may also dispute Castells mode of explanation. He appears to employ a technological determinist approach granting information technology a causal primacy (Garnham, 2000). For Castells, the information technology revolution in the early 1970s has led to an informational mode of production with computing and network technology underpinning both manufacturing and service industries and leading to dramatic rises in productivity and a changing occupational structure. Here one might object to Castells' use of mode of production as in Marxist economics mode of production covers both forces and relations of production. Not only may we question the actual impact of ICTs on productivity i.e. as a force of production but also we are surely right to doubt the impact of ICTs on the relations of production which in the OECD have remained capitalist over the period in question. According to Castells, computer networking has called into being a network society. Enterprises are organised into networks as they move from Fordist to post-Fordist methods of production exploiting the relative advantages of different sites of production. This gives rise to global production networks. Consequently a key determinant of inequality for Castells is how well different
places are connected to these networks. Are they nodes on this network or are they out of the loop? Castells develops the concept of 'Fourth World' to describe this phenomenon. While in the last decades economic inequality may have decreased between the USA and certain 'Asian Tiger' economies, inequality within the USA has increased and inequality between the USA and African states has increased. The network economy has led, in other words, to a reorganisation of space that has stretched advanced capitalist societies in terms of inequality (the so-called 'hour glass' class structure) and has benefited some developing states but has excluded others depending, amongst other factors, on their geographical relationship to networks of production (1996: 66-326).

In the face of the increased mobility of capital, encouraged by ICTs, states have lost some of their power to determine their own destinies and this leads, Castells argues, to a crisis of democracy as citizens are less and less in control of their societies (1997: 243-353). To a certain extent in response to the rise of the network enterprise, states have grouped together as network states in an attempt to reassert their control over capital. The European Union is the best example of a network state (1998: 330-354) but there are also many other examples of more loosely networked states (United Nations, North American Free Trade Association, G8). However, such international co-operation is made less effective because of inter-state competition as sites of production, the so-called 'beauty contest' for capital. This competition encourages state policies of low-wage and low corporate taxation, 'the race to the bottom', that have implications for income inequality and the redistributive powers of the state. The inter-state competition is also fuelled by the widespread acceptance of an ideology of consumer capitalism that, in turn, has implications for the ability of nation-states or even network states to address global environmental problems.

This logic has led to the adoption of a neo-liberal agenda in OECD states. Many states have seen a rightward shift in the policies of social democratic parties. While such a shift is often presented as an inevitable response to the globalisation of the economy it is
unable to address inequality at either local or global level and environmental problems. Consequently, we have witnessed the rise of new social movements (human rights, greens, development) that are united in their resistance to neo-liberal globalisation but are disparate in terms of aims and beliefs. Castells places much hope at the feet of these new social movements to work on an international level using information and communication technology to put pressure on states to address co-operatively questions of inequality and the environment. This is a politics of symbolic contestation fought out primarily in the mediatised public sphere:

The reconstruction of society's institutions by cultural social movements, bringing technology under the control of people's needs and desires, seems to require a long march from the communes built around resistant identity to the height of new project identities…Examples of such processes, as observed in contemporary social movements and politics, are the construction of new, egalitarian families; the widespread acceptance of the concept of sustainable development; and the universal mobilisation in defense of human rights wherever the defense has to be taken up. For the transition to be undertaken, from resistance identity to project identity, a new politics will have to emerge. This will be a cultural politics that starts from the premise that informational politics is predominantly enacted in the space of the media, and fights with symbols, yet connects to values and issues that spring from people's life experience in the information age. (1998: 372-3)

In contrast, and rather surprisingly given Castells' use of a Marxist sounding vocabulary and his emphasis on growing economic inequality, he consigns class struggle to the dustbin of history. This seems somewhat premature. The fundamental political question for Castells is whether good social movements can develop project identities that set out how society ought to be and a plan for how to bring that about rather than simply resisting. This move to project identities would necessarily involve single interest groups in dialogue with fellow travellers as their purpose is effectively to reconstitute a new civil
society and ultimately a new state. One example of the most developed Green movement in advanced capitalism, die Gruenen in Germany. This movement and party emerged out of the disappointments of the 68 generation in Germany. The movement migrated from a resistant identity to a project identity in the 1980s and 1990s developing a platform across a wide range of issues (the Green party opposed, for example, the 1993 change in the German constitution concerning the right of asylum). The party was successful in both local and national elections, first becoming a coalition partner at the federal state level and then joining the SPD to form a coalition government at national level in 1998. As such, they have undoubtedly influenced government policy in a number of spheres (doing so from within the traditional structures of industrial society that Castells claims are draining away). However, it is clear what the limits are to their influence and how the interests of the SPD and the Greens diverge on economic policy. As a consequence, the Greens are increasingly split between the leadership, the 'realist' faction, that sees compromise as necessary in order to achieve anything and the grassroots 'fundamentalist' faction that sees the leadership as contributing to the problem rather than addressing it (for example, the party was severely split over German military participation in the 1999 NATO war against Serbia that was supported by Fischer, the German foreign secretary and leader of the Greens). The Green party is also doing very badly in opinion polls as a consequence of their accommodation with the 'establishment'. Thus, the progress from a resistant to a project identity is fraught with difficulty. It is far easier to be unified in resistance than unified in a project.

It could be argued that the growing opposition from diverse quarters to global capitalism is attracting media attention and sympathy precisely because of its catch-all nature. The move to a project identity may serve only to highlight the contradictions that are present between and within the various resistant identities. If this sounds far more pessimistic about the ability of people to resist global capitalism and create a better society than Castells is, it is not our intention. Our problem with Castells is that as a thinker who still relies largely on an explanatory framework derived from Marx's work in political
economy, he somewhat inexplicably argues that class politics is dead, transcended by informational capitalism.

Now there are undoubtedly some indications that class may be becoming less important. Evidence suggests that, as part of a process of detraditionalisation, voting habits in advanced capitalism are less influenced by social class than they used to be. It also is true that labour movements in the West have lost some of the power that they held in the 1960s and 1970s as a consequence of high levels of unemployment and the transition from manufacturing to service industry employment. However, we are tempted to argue precisely the opposite to Castells. The number of workers engaged in manufacturing industry outside of the OECD states is increasing. Why will this not lead to the development of class struggle in newly industrialising states in a similar manner to the class struggles during industrialisation in the West? Will the workers in OECD states not respond as a class to the exporting of their jobs? Will not the inhabitants of the socially marginalised districts in dual cities (whose presence is determined partly by their place in the relations of production) resist the increasing polarisation of their societies? We can see evidence of all three. Our difficulty with Castells then is not so much that he is a determinist Marxist in terms of economic analysis but more that he seems to ignore Marx entirely in his social and political analysis.

While the metaphor the network is usefully employed in analysing contemporary societies, it is important to acknowledge the continuities of the last thirty years as well as the changes. Rather than speak of an information technology revolution, one should speak of a rapid evolution. There are certainly informational forces of production that have an impact on both manufacturing and service industries but this has not resulted in a revolution in the relations of production in OECD states. States have lost some of their power because of the increased mobility of capital but this has actually served to increase the power of the state in some aspects (for example, the relationship between states and labour movements). New social movements have developed but how significant are their
gains? It is also premature to consign class struggle to the dustbin of history. At the same
time, however, it is clear that capitalism has gone through a major transition in the last
thirty years, one that has seen the intensification of globalisation, the rise of neo-
liberalism and the New Right, the decline of social democracy, a process of de-
traditionalisation, and the rise of new social movements.

If one takes away Castells' account of the origin for this process lying in an information
technology revolution in the early 1970s, there is a good deal of agreement between him
and Beck. Beck's development of the concept of 'second modernity' in the late 1990s is
supposed to emphasise a break, an epochal shift. 'Second modernity' is meant to
distinguish his conception of the present from that of postmodernists who see societal
fragmentation, from that of evolutionary theorists who see no evidence of an epochal
shift, and from his own earlier formulation of the concept of 'reflexive modernisation'
which has led to misunderstandings concerning the scale and scope of transitions in
modernity: 'Reference to a second age of modernity is intended to make it clear that there
is a structural epochal break - a paradigm shift (2000: 81).

Second modernity, according to Beck, may be characterised by a pervasive
interconnectedness of the economic, the cultural and political. Globalisation is often
conceived primarily in economic terms. The development of global capitalism, aided and
abetted by technological advance, restricts the ability of nation-states to determine their
own destinies. Beck argues that these economic changes are accompanied by cultural and
political changes that he wishes to signify through developing the concept of
'cosmopolitanization': 'As more processes show less regard for state boundaries - people
shop internationally, work internationally, love internationally, marry internationally,
research internationally, grow up and are educated internationally (that is, multi-
lingually), live and think transnationally, that is, combine multiple loyalties and identities
in their lives - the paradigm of societies organised within the framework of the nation-
state inevitably loses contact with reality'(2000: 80).
Beck's development of the concept of cosmopolitanization owes much to the work of David Held in bringing together political theory and international relations. For Held, however, although he can discern cosmopolitan trends in the contemporary world, the concept of 'cosmopolitan democracy' is, first and foremost, a normative concept, an ideal that is to be worked towards rather than a currently existing reality. Held suggests that Falk's notion of an emerging global civil society, for example, 'seems somewhat premature' (1995: 125).

Beck argues that cosmopolitanization as an accompaniment to globalization is a process and is to be understood in terms of its relationship with culturally and politically reactionary responses to globalization. One must understand the process of, for example, de-nationalization and re-nationalization as related but different responses to the same process of economic globalization (2000: 98). To use a similar argument to Billig (1995: 52), this assumes that nationalism has gone away in order for re-nationalization to occur. Perhaps banal nationalism has not even left us yet, never mind been and gone and come back again. The process of cosmopolitanization, according to Beck, occurs at both the micro-level of the lifeworld, for example, multi-linguality in schools, and at the macro-level of international economic and state networks. While cosmopolitanization is clearly taking place, according to Beck, at the objective level of the lifeworld and economy, he suggests that it may be 'being (actively) masked by a dominant national project and a national self-definition of society - in the political parties, in the government, in the media, in the educational system etc' (2000: 98). It is only sensible to speak of cosmopolitanization, Beck contends, when it is both indicated at an objective level and also reflexively known and commented upon in, for example, the media.

Although, there are clearly opponents of cosmopolitanization, Beck is generally optimistic about its prospects. It appears that we are, indeed, approaching the realisation of Held's concept of cosmopolitan democracy:
In the first age of modernity the non-Western societies were defined by their foreignness and otherness, their 'traditional', 'extra-modern' or 'pre-modern' character. In the second age of modernity everyone has to locate himself in the same global space and is confronted with similar challenges, and now strangeness is replaced by the amazement at the similarities.(2000: 88)

While cosmopolitan society, for Beck, undoubtedly exists, more empirical work is needed in order to flesh out the meaning of the concept. He suggests thirteen areas for empirical investigation: cultural commodities, dual citizenship, political intensities, languages, mobility, routes of communication, international travel, activity in transnational initiatives and organisations, criminal activity, transnational ways of life, transnational news coverage, national identities, and ecological crisis'(2000: 96-7). Now it is undoubtedly true that one may discern cosmopolitan, transnational trends in most, if not all, of these areas. As Beck would concede, however, one may also discern opposing trends. It becomes then a question of balance. In some areas the opposing trends are actually far stronger and one could argue we are moving towards an increasingly polarised society rather than a truly cosmopolitan society. Indeed, polarisation and cosmopolitanization appear to be able to co-exist without problem. This is in no way, however, to reject the normative concept of cosmopolitan democracy.

It is useful to amend somewhat Beck's relational understanding of cosmopolitanization. For Beck we are becoming either more or less cosmopolitan, or more or less de-nationalized or re-nationalized. However, the danger of seeing cosmopolitanization as a relational concept in this sense is that it is seen as either/or rather than both/and. It is difficult to understand, for example, how states inside the European Union are dismantling their internal borders (thereby becoming, according to Beck, more cosmopolitan) while at the same time raising the collective external borders of the EU (thereby becoming less cosmopolitan). In other words, processes of cosmopolitanization
and polarization may be occurring simultaneously and sustaining one another rather than working against each other. This points to the need to disaggregate trends that are considered as collectively leading to cosmopolitan democracy through limiting the meaning of the concept of cosmopolitanization or, at least, through clearly differentiating the contents of the concept. It also means clearly distinguishing between processes of cosmopolitanization and the achievement of cosmopolitan democracy.

For Beck, the work of groups in civil society and the public sphere needs to be fostered, as an answer to unemployment and the creation of what he terms a ‘neo-feudal service economy’ and the crisis and decay of democratic institutions (2000: 24). In order to sustain ‘creative disobedience’ (to use Beck’s symbolic contestation of Schumpeter’s concept of creative destruction), the state should pay citizens to do precisely that. While this may be in principal an excellent idea it is hard to find trends in OECD societies that indicate the imminent realisation of this idea (2000: 46). While people are being encouraged to undertake voluntary work and to donate to support the work of voluntary groups by states, the unemployed in the UK, for example, are increasingly forced into seeking traditional forms of employment in order to reduce the state’s social security bill. In other words, for Beck’s idea to be realised that would have to be a shift away from neo-liberal economic policy and there are few signs of this. In addition, it seems that states are becoming increasingly draconian in their response to acts of civil disobedience. In the UK, for example, the use of the Internet for purposes of disruption may now be considered to be an act of terrorism.

While Beck may have identified one the key processes of our age (the struggle between cosmopolitanism and various forms of reaction to globalisation), it is premature to signal the arrival of a ‘second modernity’. Again this is not to diminish the major transition that has taken place over the last thirty years but also to acknowledge continuities – capitalist relations of production, continued strength of national identities. We must more clearly distinguish than Beck the desirability of the development of cosmopolitan citizenship and
an empirical investigation of its presence.

The increasing mobility of capital and the consequent diminution of the power of nation-states requires a new political subject: 'translocal social movements and national-culturally rooted parties of world citizens. One hundred and fifty years after the Communist Manifesto it is time for the World Citizen Manifesto: world citizens of all countries unite!' (1998: 19) Beck, like Castells, places great hope in the cultural politics of new social movements operating at the local and the global level and united not just in terms of resistance but also in terms of belief in a concept of world or global citizenship. It is through allegiance to such a concept that the disparate social movements can develop a project identity.

The importance of the trans-national is also stressed by John Urry who criticises sociology for adopting a societal or nation-state frame of reference in the past. Such a perspective is certainly inappropriate, he argues, for an analysis of the contemporary world that is entering a post-societal phase. Twenty-first century sociology should be organised around a concern for understanding and explaining networks, mobilities and flows of people and of objects. As with Beck, the fundamental political question for Urry is whether a concern for global or cosmopolitan citizenship will win out over various forms of religious, national and economic fundamentalisms. This is crucial not only for the extension of democracy but also for the survival of sociology as a discipline. Here Urry seeks to reinvent the political engagement of sociology. Historically the discipline has been associated with emancipatory struggles of class, gender and race but it has somehow lost its engagement with the political. Sociology in order to survive, according to Urry, needs to engage both analytically and politically with movements for global citizenship (2000: 161-188). Leaving to one side the question of whether it is possible for sociology to survive in a disinterested state, we support Urry's call for a reengagement with the political. Sociologists may be of help to activists from disparate social movements in their praxis and may help to illuminate how a project identity is to be made
out of a resistant identity.

There seems much agreement between Beck, Castells and Urry in the hope they place in the role of new social movements and their ability to contest mediatised public spheres as progenitors of a global or cosmopolitan citizenship. This is indicative of the current inability of traditional nation-state political parties to address worsening global problems such as inequality and the environment. It may indeed be that new social movements are the best hope we have to extend democracy at both local and global level and yet when one considers the vastly unequal resources that are at the disposal of NGOs and transnational corporations and the increasingly privatised character of public spheres in advanced capitalist societies it is difficult to remain optimistic. In response, however, we need to consider that the public sphere is not static but in flux and affected by crises. It is clear, for example, that local and global inequality and the prospect of environmental catastrophe will not dissolve as issues over the course of the twenty-first century and the current regime of transnational neo-liberalism is singularly ill-suited to respond to them. The contemporary configuration of capitalism would seem to be particularly conducive to the development of counter public spheres in a distinct stage of modernity.
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