The Information Age According to Manuel Castells

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The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. By Manuel Castells. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
>   *Volume 1: The Rise of the Network Society.* 1996. v + 556 pp. $27.95 (paper).
>   *Volume 2: The Power of Identity.* 1997. v + 461 pp. $27.95 (paper).
>   *Volume 3: End of Millenium.* 1998. v + 418 pp. $26.95 (paper).

The terms "information age" and "information society" are used by many writers as shorthand to refer to the confluence of an incalculable number of contemporary social and structural transformations.[1] A sizeable chunk of these events have been described and analyzed by Manuel Castells in *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture.* Castells is professor of city and regional planning and professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. He has had appointments at many universities worldwide, and has served on the high level expert group on the social and societal aspects of the information society, an advisory board to the European Commission. *The Information Age* is a culminating work by a sociologist whose widely recognized contributions to the interdisciplinary discourse about the information society touch significantly on many of the central concerns of social theory today.

Before Castells began reflecting on information technology and the social, cultural, economic, and political conditions that have shaped and been shaped by its development and use, he gained distinction for his contributions to the study of urban poverty and grassroots social movements (e.g., Castells, 1977, 1983). Although he has not abandoned those interests, his work on the information society has been a focal point through which he examines them. In his recent work, poverty is shown to have been restructured and exacerbated by the rise of a global network society, and the prospects for grassroots social mobilization are seen to be greatly enhanced by those same sociotechnical developments.

Castells has presented a work that seems intended to serve, for its time, as a definitive account of the transition to an information society, in much the same way that Max Weber provided an authoritative depiction of the shift from traditional to bureaucratic-industrial society. Indeed, Castells pays homage to Weber in coining the phrase "the spirit of informationalism" (pp. 195–200). Whether intellectual historians will assign *The Information Age* a place on the shelf next to

Weber's *Economy and Society* remains to be seen, but there is no question about the scale of Castells's ambition, nor is there any doubt that he is one of the most influential social scientists working today.

The literature on the information society predates the contributions of Castells, but no accounting of this subject in social theory can neglect what he has had to say. In Frank Webster's *Theories of the Information Society* (1995), published before *The Information Age,* the chapter on Castells characterizes his notion of "the informational city" as "a major contribution to our thinking about the significance of information in the world today" (p. 213). In Castells's book titled *The Informational City* (1989), he introduces many of the themes that appear more fully explicated in *The Information Age.* Of particular interest is his depiction of the "dual city," in which he contrasts "the cosmopolitanism of the new informational producers" and "the localism of the segmented actors of restructured labor" (Castells, 1989, p. 227). Among other significant claims, Castells demonstrates in that work, and in *The Information Age,* how the local-global nexus manifests itself in modern cities and exhibits the contradictory dynamics of the information society.

Castells's work offers a valuable contribution to a long view of communication history, especially through its emphasis on how developments in mass media and new information technologies have been central to the shaping and reshaping of cultural identities and political communities. For many years, a major focus in much of his work has been the relationship among technology, society, and space (e.g., 1985)—not outer space, but rather the spaces we inhabit and in which we communicate with one another. They include not only the spaces of domiciles, neighborhoods, cities, nation states, transnational regions, and the planet, but "virtual" space as well. A particularly interesting and important insight on which Castells elaborates about communication technology and spatial relations is highlighted by the contrast he draws between a "space of flows" and a "space of places." I've quoted the following memorable passage more than once in my writing and my classroom:

> The new territorial dynamics, then, tend to be organized around *the contradiction between placeless power and powerless places,* the former relying upon communication flows, the latter generating their own communication codes on the basis of an historically specific territory. (Castells & Henderson, 1987, p. 7; emphasis added)

This theme, which emphasizes how the space of flows is in growing tension with (and, in many ways, superseding) the space of places, is the leitmotif of Castells's writing on the information society. Although sometimes repetitious, his latest work is magisterial in the breadth of its interdisciplinarity and the depth of its detailed evidence. To tell his story of the information society, he draws from theoretical and empirical contributions made in economics, political science, communication, sociology, education, international relations, and even electrical engineering and computer science. The amount of data he presents on practically any social indicator that would be familiar to someone with research interests in the structural transformations connected to "informationalization" (Castells's term) is almost overwhelming.

This three-volume work of more than 1400 pages does not lend itself to sound bites, but highlights of exemplary issues and themes might help to illuminate Castells's perspective. In the first pages of volume 1, he makes what may be his biggest generalization: "Our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the Self" (p. 3). This is followed by a preemptive defense against charges of technological determinism and an attempt to explain why indeed "the dilemma of technological determinism is probably a false problem" (p. 5). Of course, it is hard to disagree with the uncontroversial claim that "technology does not determine society" (p. 5), but it seems a far cry from there to the many places we are then taken, both conceptually and geographically. On the one hand, the question must be raised in advance about what worthwhile explanation of technology's relation to social change resorts to causal explanations on such reductionist terms as those Castells questions. Once offered the palatable view that the dialectics of technology's relationship to society are much more complex, we are left to choose between a straw man and reasonableness. On the other hand, the actual path taken in the three volumes is one in which many, many complex social processes are presented, some with scant mention of information technology's embeddedness or imbrications, only to be asked at the end of it to agree with his recurring conclusion that "informationalism" is at the core of it all. Underlying such underdeveloped conclusions is a tendency to fetishize information and information technology.

Castells forges explanations of informationalism's connections to a dizzying set of presumably connected phenomena, including the economic successes of the Asian "tiger" economies and developmental states of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong; the questionable prospects of Russia's capacity to sustain a healthy civil society on the ruins of Communism; the mixed outcomes of crisis and decay in patriarchal institutions worldwide; child prostitution; cocaine networks; the corrupt "vampire state" regimes of the Fourth World (e.g., Mobutu's Zaire, Baby Doc's Haiti, Somoza's Nicaragua); the unlikelihood of Japan ever assuming a trusted leadership role in the Asian Pacific; and the potential for a democratic postsovereign Europe, despite declining political legitimacy, as the social contracts of European welfare states erode. Some of the more general topics—the chapters on "The Pacific Era" (volume 3) and "The End of Patriarchalism" (volume 2)—go on for more than 100 pages each, and others are no less substantial, for example, chapters on the decline of sovereignty and the global crisis of democracy (volume 2), the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union, global crime and the essential support service of money laundering, and the dubious "rise" of the Fourth World (volume 3). Of particular interest to scholars studying the relationship between media (old and new) and democracy, is a chapter on the subject in volume two, in which Castells refers to "scandal politics" as "the weapon of choice in informational politics" (p. 337). He holds greater optimism for the alternative potential of the Internet becoming the basis for the "electronic grassrooting of democracy," wherein he envisions the prospects for a "new civil society" (volume 2, p. 352). Although that optimism is tempered with credible caveats about how class-specific "actually enhanced citizenship" may be (p. 351), a point about which I could not agree more, Castells does at times write about

technology in the polymorphously perverse language commonly found in the breathtaking futurism of Alvin Toffler, John Naisbitt, and George Gilder:

> The information technology revolution will accentuate its transformative potential. The twenty-first century will be marked by the completion of a global information superhighway, and by mobile telecommunication and computing power, thus decentralizing and diffusing the power of information, delivering the promise of multi-media, and enhancing the joy of interactive communication. (volume 3, p. 353)

My point is not to trivialize or gainsay the value of the explanations Castells gives of profound social processes per se. These subjects are presented with amounts of detail and well-written narrative sufficient to make each case study a gold mine of evidence and explanations that offer valuable starting points for many future research and political projects. They are engaging and well-researched inquiries into some of the most profound social changes of this century, if not of human history. To be sure, the empirical scope of the project is formidable. Yet, it is reasonable to ask why we should agree at every turn that informationalism is the core process driving it all. The level of remove of informationalism from particular phenomena under study sometimes requires a significant stretch of imagination, due to the absence of sufficient self-explanatory power by some of the cases as they are presented. In many instances, a sympathetic reader would at best agree that informationalism constitutes a necessary, but not a sufficient, basis for the existence of the activity described. However, notwithstanding his defenses against the charge of technological determinism, Castells aims to establish a more determinative status for informationalism. The complexity of the world and the ambivalence of human responses to it are brought into clear relief by the cases presented, but not always with the desired effect of making the informational society seem to be the focal point.

Despite the author's occasional protests throughout against devolving too much into theorizing, the work would have been strengthened significantly by a more solid and unifying base of social explanation. Occasionally, Castells makes reference to the work of David Harvey (1989) in a gesture that is purportedly to avoid repeating what Harvey has said (e.g., volume one, p. 26). These references, however, provide insufficient depth to offer the reader an opportunity to evaluate the affinities and departures in the thinking of the two, especially given some underlying tensions in Castells's "exploratory, cross-cultural theory of economy and society in the information age" (p. 27). Whether or not one agrees with Harvey, his interpretations of the place of communication and information technology are considerably more developed, and more explicitly critical, in a theory of society that focuses centrally upon capital accumulation as the primary mechanism of global discipline. Depending on how one chooses to read Castells—be it the Castells who outlines the devastating effects of late capitalism upon the inhabitants of America's inner cities, or the Castells who paints very optimistic portraits of new and lucrative forms of free capitalist enterprises in the Asian Pacific region—his interpretations may or may not be at odds with those that Harvey offers. Whether by design or default, but in implicit contradiction to what Castells explic-

itly opposes, the ambiguities of this well-publicized work make it palatable according to some of the sacred dogmas of economic liberalism.[2] To be fair, exploratory work should not be read as conclusive.

Among the themes that receive the most sustained attention throughout are Castells's accounts of the status of sovereignty, democracy, and citizenship in light of the globalization of information flows. Particularly interesting are his discussions of the erosion of social democracy in capitalist welfare states. Indeed, the assault on the welfare state parallels the rise of the information society, although, as Castells notes in his discussion of the future of Europe, there is not a simple equation to explain the erosion of bureaucratic welfare state capitalism, on the one hand, and the emergence of informational capitalism, on the other (volume 3, p. 325). Nevertheless, it is clear that the emergence of the latter as it actually exists on a global scale has depended to a large degree on the creative destruction of the former (Calabrese & Burgelman, 1999). Globalization's discontents include those who are casualties of the erosion of welfare states, as the historical terms of sovereignty and citizenship are bent and broken to accommodate the "placeless power" of mobile capital.

Perhaps the most interesting theme of *The Information Age* is Castells's treatment of the contemporary realities and prospects for democratic civil society, particularly insofar as he connects such discussions to emerging social, cultural, and political projects. To begin, it is worth noting that Castells does not do as so many others who write about social movements and cultural identities have done, which is to wish them away by crude trivialization and to categorically dismiss them as political dead ends. His discussion of identity is more variegated than is typically found in social theory, although not all aspects of his distinctions hold up well to close scrutiny. At issue is the question of the effective arena and scope of political action in the interconnections among Castells's concepts of identity, civil society, the state, and informationalism.

Castells distinguishes among three types of identities: legitimizing, resistance, and project. The first type—legitimizing identities—are manifest in the "dominant institutions of society" (volume 2, p. 8), constituting what Castells terms "civil society," his definition of which is attributed to Antonio Gramsci (1971). Such identities are generated by or in churches, labor unions, political parties, cooperatives, and civic associations. The legitimate access to state power that civil society, defined as such, can enjoy "makes it a privileged terrain of political change by making it possible to seize the state without launching a direct, violent assault" (volume 2, p. 9). Castells holds little hope for the transformative potential of legitimizing identities in light of the global information society, given that they are premised on the continuation of a strong state, now in decline, that can be a focal point of struggles for power in civil society. For example, he concludes that "the labor movement does not seem fit to generate by itself and from itself a project identity able to reconstruct social control and to rebuild social institutions in the Information Age" (volume 2, p. 360). In the preceding volume, he states, "At its core, capital is global. As a rule, labor is local" (volume 1, p. 474). It is a familiar position, and it applies well to a discussion of nationally based organized labor, but it implicitly dismisses new trends in contemporary transnational labor coali-

tions and mobilization and their increasing sophistication in using new means of communication as organizing tools (Lee, 1997; Waterman, 1996; Waterman, Fairbrother, & Elger, 1998).

The second type of identities described by Castells—resistance identities—are not presented with significantly greater optimism. He reflects familiar concerns about the "communalism" that defines the major resistance movements of today, "generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society" (volume 2, p. 8). With valuable results, Castells reflects a level of understanding about the origins of communalism, and indeed he shows empathy toward them, which might be considered misspent effort by many others. He notes that identity building on the basis of history, geography, or biology often results from "unbearable oppression . . . making it easier to essentialize the boundaries of resistance" (p. 9). Familiar among the resistance identities described by Castells are those grounded in religious fundamentalism, race and ethnicity, queer culture, and other excluded or exclusionary groupings. Resistance identities are defensive sociocultural formations, and they are products of alienation and resentment in relation to the dominant institutions and ideologies of society, which makes their reasons for being no less comprehensible. In comparison with legitimizing identities, as Castells defines them, resistance identities do not generate the institutions of civil society, the reason being that they do not tend to aim primarily at institutional transformation vis-à-vis the state.

Seeing resistance identities as generally lacking the potential to construct new social projects of institution building, Castells introduces another concept of identity: *project identities*. A project identity is formed, "when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of the overall social structure" (volume 2, p. 8). According to Castells's trichotomy of identities—legitimizing, resistance, project—it seems that project identities can supply the foundations of civil society if and only if they aim to seize or transform state power, or perhaps when there is the prospect of creating a new state (for example, the European "network state"). In contrast to resistance identities, project identities seek to move beyond relations of exclusion by seeking to transform existing institutions or by constructing new ones. Castells uses the examples of the environmental movement, and of movements to construct a postpatriarchal society (p. 10). "Women's communes," he argues, "project themselves into society at large by undermining patriarchalism, and by reconstructing the family on a new, egalitarian basis that implies the degendering of social institutions, in opposition to patriarchal capitalism and to the patriarchal state" (pp. 357–358). Castells notes that not all religious fundamentalism can be ruled out as project identities, and that religious communes have transformative potential through efforts aimed at "re-moralizing society, re-establishing godly, eternal values, and embracing the whole world, or at least the nearby neighborhood, in a community of believers, thus founding a new society" (p. 357). He is not as optimistic about resistance identities of ethnicity or territoriality transforming themselves into project identi-

ties. On the question of national identities, he observes the mixed potential. On the one hand is "retrenchment into a reconstructed nation-state"; on the other hand, the possibilities of "nations beyond the state" increasingly enhanced in a global information society. In this regard, Castells envisions the prospect for the "building of multilateral networks of political institutions in a variable geometry of shared sovereignty" (p. 357).

Castells presents a hopeful vision for a European project identity based on a "network state . . . characterized by the sharing of authority," (volume 3, p. 332). Castells characterizes the European project as being "at the same time, a [defensive] reaction to the processes of globalization and its [globalization's] most advanced expression" (volume 3, p. 318). Although Castells generally does not endorse particular project identities as good or bad, and in fact he is at pains to avoid presenting such evaluations, he makes an exception in the extent to which he explicitly expresses passionate hopes for European unification, which, "when and if completed, will be one of the most important trends in defining our world" (volume 3, p. 310). In his overall assessment of the potential of Europe, he acknowledges that at present "there is no European identity":

> But it could be built, not in contradiction, but complementary to national, regional, and local identities. It would take a process of social construction . . . a blueprint of social values and institutional goals that appeal to a majority of citizens without excluding anybody, in principle. (volume 3, p. 333)

Such an identity, Castells notes, "was what democracy, or the nation-state, historically represented at the dawn of the industrial era" (p. 333), and naturally he ponders over aspirations for Europe's democratic prospects in the Information Age by social actors who oppose both globalization and regression into communalism:

> The defense of the welfare state, of social solidarity, of stable employment, and of workers' rights; the concern about universal human rights and the plight of the Fourth World; the affirmation of democracy, and its extension to citizen participation at the local and regional level; the vitality of historically/ territorially rooted cultures, often expressed in language, not surrendering to the culture of real virtuality. . . . Their affirmation . . . would take extraordinary changes in the [European] economy and its institutions. But this is precisely what an identity project is: not a utopian proclamation of dreams, but a struggle to impose alternative ways of economic development, sociability, and governance. (pp. 333–334)

In his inquiry into "the power of identity," Castells makes a starting point of Gramsci's (1971) concept of civil society and its relationship to the state. Given Castells's aversion to isolating all of his explanations of global social and cultural mobilizations in the arena of class struggle, his approach is consistent with other recent attempts, some better reasoned than others, to reinvent Gramsci as a founding theorist of "post-Marxism" (e.g., Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). However, Castells is incorrect in saying that Gramsci is "the intellectual father" of the idea of civil

society (volume 2, p. 8). Although it is true that Gramsci's (1971) contributions to contemporary discussions about civil society have been influential, the idea has much deeper roots in liberal political philosophy, going back to the writings of Locke (1690/1924), Ferguson (1767/1995), and Hegel (1821/1991), as well as to Marx (1843/1978a). These roots, particularly from Hegel and Marx, are in fact fundamental to Gramsci's explanations of the relationship between capital and politics, and consideration of them is essential for exploring what relevance Gramsci might hold in connecting civil society and the global information society. Despite the fact that Castells briefly problematizes the positive use of the term civil society, and despite his acknowledgment that the concept is in reality more ambiguous than is generally understood, he tends to unproblematically assign affirmative connotations to the term. The general implication conveyed is that if there is civil society, then all is robust and good.

In Marx's (1843/1978a) critique of the political achievements of the French Revolution, and more generally European bourgeois society, he argued that "the practical application of the right of liberty is the right of private property" (p. 42). He observed that the franchise of political power came as a right of property ownership and that in this context "man" was defined as bourgeois, "not man as a citizen" (p. 43). On this basis, he questioned why one's membership in the human species was insufficient to determine one's legitimate acceptance into the fraternity of citizens. For Marx, "Security [of property] is the supreme social concept of civil society; the concept of the police" (p. 43). Put differently, this is Locke's (1690/1924) view as well when he justifies the powers of the state in the interest of protecting the holdings of landed property owners: "The great and chief end, therefore, of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property; to which in the state of Nature there are many things wanting" (p. 180). From both liberal and Marxian viewpoints, a dominant historical tendency in civil society has been to constrain the scope of debate to within a range that does not fundamentally challenge the legitimacy of institutionalized political power derived from private wealth. Of course, in contrast to liberal assessments, Marx's expression was one of disillusionment, as well as of hope for the sort of alternative, counterhegemonic vision of civil society elaborated by Gramsci.

Though Gramsci is not alive to comment on how his ideas have been adapted to explain social mobilizations and cultural practices in the information age, and how they relate to institutional changes in the organization of capital and the state, it is of course useful to extrapolate from ideas that many recognize as having so clearly transcended their own specific time and place of origin (e.g., Bellamy & Schecter, 1993; Buci-Glucksmann, 1980). In this respect, Castells might have developed an argument to justify his application of Gramsci's thought to an analysis of how the idea of civil society relates to the information society. Castells is correct in noting that Gramsci's concept of civil society is premised on the idea that it is a site of struggle for the legitimate use of state power, and that identity formation within that realm functions to "rationalize the sources of structural domination" (Castells, volume 2, p. 8). Gramsci characterizes political struggle within civil society in military terms as a strategic "war of position," as opposed to a tactical "war

of movement," the latter exemplified in violent revolutions to seize state power (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 229–245). The success of a war of movement will not last if it is not preceded or followed by a successful war of position (Showstack Sassoon, 1980, p. 198), a point Gramsci made in the context of his discussion of the status of civil society in Russia of 1917: "In Russia the state was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous," as compared with civil society in the West, in which "there was a proper relation between state and civil society, and when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 238). Furthermore, according to Gramsci, the oppositional activities of "subaltern social groups" toward the hegemony of the ruling groups are "necessarily fragmented and episodic," due to their lack of a coherent class consciousness, and their aims can be realized only by the effective seizure of state power (Gramsci, 1971). In Gramsci's vocabulary, in order for the subaltern groups to gain control of the state, they must integrate to form a new "historical bloc" of political, economic, and cultural structures and relations, based on its own counterhegemony, as articulated and organized by its own organic intellectuals (pp. 366, 377, 418; see also Showstack Sassoon, 1980, pp. 119–125). Anything less than a permanent victory in a war of position reflects the failure of subaltern groups to unify and consolidate their own class power, thus resulting in their continued subordination to the hegemony of the ruling groups. In Castells's parlance, we might say that under such circumstances, the subaltern groups would have failed to transcend the status of resistance identities and become effective project identities.

Although it is never stated, it seems that Castells extrapolates from Gramsci's assessment of the status of civil society in Russia of 1917 to his own excursus on that same subject in the 1990s. Castells vividly describes Russia today as a society in chaos, wracked by wild capitalism's companions, widespread destitution and organized crime. Indeed, we might ask whether the struggles at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union represent yet another stage in a still "primordial and gelatinous" civil society (Gramsci). Putting the question more harshly, in Castells's terms, we might ask if there is a civil society at all in Russia. Castells terms the social mobilizations that brought down the Soviet Union as a "free-speech movement" (volume 3, p. 67), which he distinguishes from a "collective project," reflecting his view that there never has been, nor is there now, a civil society in Russia: "The most enduring legacy of Soviet statism will be the destruction of civil society after decades of systematic negation of its existence" (p. 68). Castells warns that because, among other reasons, the Russian mafia has become so deeply inserted into global networks of organized criminal activity, Russian society may never have the chance to gain the sound democratic footing that "end of history" prognoses envision for a postsocialist world. He shows the new Russian state's legitimacy to have been enfeebled from its start by an overnight gutting of the institutions of social provision, accelerated by uncontrolled privatization and the resulting corrupt legal and illegal capital accumulation by a small portion of the society, progressively stripping the majority of Russian citizens bare. Among other indicators of decline, average life expectancies have dropped dramatically.

Castells provides a compelling view of wild capitalism in Russia, but his obser-

vations are not sufficient indicators of the presence or absence of civil society. If that were the case, then we would have to ask: Are the profound examples of misery and hardship depicted in contemporary Russia unfamiliar to those who suffer in the hermetically sealed-off, urban, powerless places of the United States? Should the latter be consoled by the fact that there is a consensus in the world that the United States has a civil society, given that its legitimate and effective forms of political association are impenetrable in practical terms by those who exist in the "black holes" that Castells describes in his brilliant examination of America's "Fourth World" (volume 3, pp. 128–149)? Is the dark side of informational capitalism that Castells portrays any less painful for the latter group? What is the function of civil society in their lives?

Here is where Gramsci's debt to Marx's understanding of civil society is not dispensable. Castells's scholastic reading of Gramsci equates the latter's notion of civil society with social institutions that have legitimacy—"a series of 'apparatuses'. . . which prolong the dynamics of the state" (pp. 8–9), which is only partly true. For Gramsci, the idea of civil society needs to be understood in conjunction with his fundamental characterizations of struggles for moral, political, and cultural hegemony. According to his view, ruling ideas effectively retain their legitimacy not through coercion, but through consensus. This points to the greater instrumental legitimacy derived through gaining the consent of the governed— even over decisions that harm the interests of some or many of those who have agreed to them—in terms of achieving and sustaining political stability and social control. Yes, in Gramsci the struggle in civil society is for control of the state, but the legitimizing identities (described by Castells as the foundations of civil society) alone do not satisfy Gramsci's concept, especially in contemporary terms. For Gramsci, contestation within civil society, a war of position, to gain control over state power cannot be presumed to arise solely out of the legitimizing identities which, as Castells correctly depicts, are inherently conservative. Even if reconstituting the bases of legitimation is an outcome of political struggle, if Castells's notion of civil society defines the boundaries of such struggles, this "political" space will simply reproduce itself. That is why, coming from very different perspectives, Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991) concludes that there is a perpetual struggle between the construction of political space and its eventual depoliticization and decay (p. 416), and Hannah Arendt (1958) considers the real space in which political action can occur to be by definition boundless and unpredictable (pp. 190–191). There is a more open range of potential for where to locate the sorts of political struggle and renewal posed in Gramsci's idea of civil society than domesticated forms of identity allow, a point with particular relevance in light of Castells's characterization of the modern state as a postsovereign state.

Castells argues throughout *The Information Age* that the state has become just one source of power within a new global system of power that is characterized by "the plurality of sources of authority" (volume 2, p. 303). His prognosis for the future of the state is summarized well in the following statement: "Nation-states will survive, but not so their sovereignty," and they will instead "band together in multilateral networks, with a variable geometry of commitments, responsibilities, alliances, and subordinations" (volume 3, p. 355). Of course, such networks can-

not emerge in bureaucratic form out of Brussels or Uruguay unless they rest on foundations of legitimacy achieved in civil society. The struggles taking place within and across the three types of identities discussed by Castells (legitimizing, resistance, project)—perhaps together constituting a fuller meaning of the idea of civil society—are happening increasingly with transnational institutions of governance and quasi-governance as reference points, both at the level of new formations of "super nation-states" (such as the European Union) or established and emerging global institutions (including the UN Security Council, International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization). The bottom line is not whether civil society still must function effectively within the specific contexts of individual states, which of course it must, but whether we should understand some of the most profound struggles within civil society to function solely, if even primarily, with reference to historically specific states. Castells goes to well-warranted lengths to bring the state back in when he discusses globalization, which is particularly welcome in terms of roles various states play as investors, legal representatives, and power brokers on behalf of national capitals. Much of the "variable geometry" that such maneuvering entails, however, is being challenged and shaped by parallel geometries arising from civil society. The (so far) successful transnational movement against the oppressive potential of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) is one such illustration. Castells does not address the idea of a civil society that can conceive of political space beyond state, in contrast to a major stream of thinking about the subject in contemporary social and political thought (e.g., Braman & Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996; Falk, 1995; Held, 1995; Splichal, Calabrese, & Sparks, 1994; Walzer, 1995).

From Gramsci's point of view, the "historical blocs" within and against which national hegemony is exercised are increasingly transnational, which of course demands that counterhegemonic groups acquire the competence to engage in political action in transnational contexts, lest they lose relevance to global cosmopolitan elites. Arguably, such elites already do constitute a nascent transnational civil society (Calabrese & Borchert, 1996), but they hardly define its limits or potential. Given this view, it may be that the only hope for a feasible civil society to grow out of today's Russia that would more effectively constitute a Russian state run by popular sovereignty is if it happens as a part of a transnational civil society, necessarily defined according to terms different than those historically understood. Of course, reasonable minds will differ on whether the idea of a civil society has meaning or validity when it is no longer coupled with the idea of the state, defined at a minimum in terms of sovereign territory and a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, two conditions that Castells shows to obtain less and less everywhere in the world. Although I am not advocating such a polarizing position as removing the state, sovereign or otherwise, as a reference point for civil society, it can be said fairly that Gramsci never anticipated the speed and transnational scale of communication that today define for civil society the structural conditions of its contemporary wars of position. He saw even in his own day the need for a civil society capable of functioning strategically within a variable, international geometry of political power (Bellamy & Schecter, 1993, pp. 129–130; Showstack Sassoon, 1980, p. 121). The present spirit of informationalism would

only have heightened Gramsci's sensitivity to such a need. Today, the same technology that girds "the variable geometry of shared sovereignty" (volume 2, p. 357) increasingly serves the needs and interests of, and indeed necessitates, the variable geometry of a transnational civil society.

The Information Age is of great value for anyone aiming to delve into the challenges of trying to understand the contemporary dialectics of technology and society, especially those who are looking for expansive empirical accounts of the structures, processes, and effects of the information society. The ambition of this work naturally will attract intense scrutiny and criticism for years to come, and that will have been one of its most important and productive achievements. One of the interesting, if unnecessary, features in Castells' account is that he seems to struggle vigorously with the demons of his own political commitments, manifested in a defensive relationship toward Marxism. At several points, his emphatic criticisms of and attributions toward the legacy of Leninism serve as the main basis of his harsh anti-Communism, particularly (but not solely) in light of what it produced in the form of the Soviet Union. Although Castells never rejects Marxian interpretation, he vigorously attacks the Leninist idea of intellectual vanguards, which, in his view, destructively strive to forge an identity between theory and practice: "Surviving intellectuals may then reflect, from the comfort of their libraries, upon the excesses of their distorted revolutionary dream" (volume 3, p. 65). On the basis of that position, the conclusion to the three volumes makes reference to Marx's famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach, which reads: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Marx, 1845/1978b, p. 145). Among Castells's most strongly stated views is that he is "against trying to frame political practice in accordance with social theory, or, for that matter, with ideology" (p. 359). Whereas this is a time-honored position on science as a vocation, it seems contrary to Gramsci's view of the role of the organic intellectual, a view he adapted from Lenin (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980). One might usefully inquire about the extent to which Castells has presented throughout this work a repressed theory-in-use that reflects anxiety toward the normative aims and achievements of his own earlier work and that is sensitive to the hostility and trivialization that neo-Marxian interpretation now receives inside and outside of the academy. By the end of this tortured discussion, one gets the strong sense that Castells is struggling with his ambivalent declaration of membership in the community of "former Marxists."

It would take a selective and ungenerous reading of *The Information Age* to conclude that Castells's views on the value of respecting a separation between theory and practice are reactionary, or that they are not finely attuned to locating and explaining social injustice. At the same time that he is explicit about not wanting to set a distance between his work and political relevance, he also makes it clear that he does not wish to capitulate to the pressures to become "relevant," if that term simply amounts to parachute politics, the latter being a posture assumed increasingly by academics anxiously seeking to add the title of public intellectual to their resumes. There are good reasons for supporting Castells's view. Theodor Adorno offers advice to the intellectual struggling with finding a meaningful relationship between theory and practice by describing "the uncom-

promisingly critical thinker" as one who refuses to be "terrorized into action" (Adorno, 1978, p. 54). From a somewhat related point of view, Jürgen Habermas reflects on the nexus of theory and practice by cautioning against the idea that theory can or effectively should anticipate all forms of political conjuncture:

> The organization of action must be distinguished from [the] process of enlight-enment. While the theory legitimizes the work of enlightenment, as well as providing its own refutation when communication fails, and can, in any case, be corrected, it can by no means legitimize a fortiori the risky decisions of strategic action. Decisions for the political struggle cannot at the outset be justified theoretically and then be carried out organizationally. . . . There can be no theory which at the outset can assure a world-historical mission in return for the potential sacrifices. (Habermas, 1973, p. 33)

Castells concludes by arguing that he does not wish to produce knowledge for its own sake, that he does not see himself as a "neutral observer of the human drama" (p. 359), and that he hopes his work will become a useful basis for inform-ing political practice. His position is an honest and principled one, even if his interpretations and conclusions are ones with which reasonable minds will differ on a variety of well-warranted bases. Castells has provided a wealth of data and offered a valuable set of insights for future critical analyses and debates about a world affected profoundly, and disturbingly, by "informational capitalism." He also reflects thoughtfully and constructively about the prospects for democracy in such a world, and in that sense this is a politically and morally committed work. Despite the many flaws in this often brilliant study, the intelligence, integrity, and humanity brought to bear throughout make it a model of what excellent social science can, and should, aspire to achieve.

[1] I am grateful to Sérgio de Souza, Vincent Mosco, and Colin Sparks for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

[2] Robert Dahl (1985) distinguishes economic liberty, in which the right to property subordinates the right to self-government, from political liberty, in which the right to self-government subordinates the right to property (pp. 162–163). The former is often seen as the axial principle of the political-economic theory of "neoliberalism."

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