

Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book "Communication Power"

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Abstract: Manuel Castells deals in his book *Communication Power* with the question where power lies in the network society. In this paper, I discuss important issues that this book addresses, and connect them, where possible, to my own works and reflections. The book is discussed along the following lines: the concept of power, web 2.0 and mass self-communication, media manipulation, social movements, novelty & society.

Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 592 pp., 234x156mm, ISBN 978-0-19-956704-1, Hardback, \$34.95 / £20.00 / €24.99

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1. Introduction

The task that Manuel Castells has set himself for his book *Communication Power*, is to elaborate answers to the question: "where does power lie in the global network society?" (p. 42). He tries to show that communication is the central power in contemporary society by analyzing and presenting numerous empirical examples and by drawing on data from many studies. The discussion that follows does not engage with every detail of Castells' voluminous 570 page book because this is in my opinion not the task of a reflective review essay. Therefore I will concentrate on a selective discussion of those aspects that I personally find most important.

In *Communication Power*, Castells continues the analysis of what he has termed the network society, from a specific perspective – the one of power. He argues that global social networks and social networks of social networks that make use of global digital communication networks are the fundamental source of power and counter-power in contemporary society. The relation between power and counter-power is analyzed in respect to the contradictions between multinational corporate media networks and the creative audience, framing and counter-framing, bi-

ased/scandal media politics and insurgent grassroots media politics.

Four kinds of power in the network society are introduced: networking power, network power, networked power, network-making power (pp. 42-47, 418-420). Network-making power is for Castells the "paramount form of power in the network society" (p. 47). It is held and exercised by programmers and switchers. Programmers have the power "to constitute network(s), and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network". Switchers have the power "to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources, while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation" (p. 45). Castells gives numerous examples in his book for the usage of "programming" and "switching" networks in order to enact power and counter-power. He illuminates how power and "resistance to power is achieved through the same two mechanisms that constitute power in the network society: the programs of the networks and the switches between networks" (p. 47). The basic analysis is applied to power struggles between the global corporate multimedia

networks and the creative audience (chapter 2), the development of media policies in the USA (chapter 2), framing and counter-framing in political campaigns, especially the framing of the US public mind before, during, and after the Iraq war (chapter 3); to scandal politics in Spain in the 1990s (chapter 4), media control and censorship in the USA, Russia, and China (chapter 4); the environmental movement, the global movement against corporate globalization, the spontaneous citizens' movement that emerged in Spain after the al-Qaeda attacks in 2004, and the Barack Obama presidential primary campaign (chapter 5).

2. The Concept of Power

Castells defines power in a Weber-inspired way as "the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor's will, interests, and values" (p. 10). Power is associated with coercion, domination, violence or potential violence, and asymmetry. He refers to the power concepts of Foucault, Weber, and Habermas and argues that he builds on Giddens' structuration theory. However, Giddens conceives power in a completely different way, a way that is neither mentioned nor discussed by Castells. For Giddens, power is "transformative capacity", the capability to intervene in a given set of events so as in some way to alter them" (Giddens, 1985, p. 7), the "capability to effectively decide about courses of events, even where others might contest such decisions" (Giddens, 1985, p. 9). Power is for Giddens characteristic for all social relationships, it "is routinely involved in the instantiation of social practices" and is "operating in and through human action" (Giddens, 1981, p. 49f).

In Giddens' structuration theory, power is not necessarily coercive, violent, and asymmetrically distributed. Therefore it becomes possible to conceive of and analyze situations and social systems, in which power is more symmetrically distributed, for example situations and systems of participatory democracy. Power as transformative capacity seems indeed to be a fundamental aspect of all socie-

ties. This also means that there is a huge difference between Castells' approach and Giddens' structuration theory, which as such is not problematic, but should also be explicated, especially because Castells says that he builds on Giddens' structuration theory (p. 14), which he in my opinion does not. The problem with Castells' notion of power is that he sees coercive, violent, dominative power relationships as "the foundational relations of society throughout history, geography, and cultures" (p. 9). Such power is for him "the most fundamental process in society" (p. 10). Furthermore, Castells dismisses the "naïve image of a reconciled human community, a normative utopia that is belied by historical observation" (p. 13). Is it really likely that all history of humankind and that all social situations and systems, in which we live, are always and necessarily shaped by power struggles, coercion, violence, and domination? Relationships of love, intimacy, and affection are in modern society unfortunately often characterized by violence and coercion and are therefore frequently (in Castells' terms) power relationships. But isn't love a prototypical phenomenon, where many people experience feelings and actions that negate violence, domination, and coercion? Isn't the phenomenon of altruism in love the practical falsification of the claim that coercive power is the most fundamental process in society? My claim is that not coercive power, but that cooperation is the most fundamental process in society (Fuchs, 2008a, pp. 31-34, 40-58), and that indeed it is possible to create social systems without coercive power (in Castells' terms) and with a symmetric distribution of power (in Giddens' terminology). Conceiving power as violent coercion poses the danger of naturalizing and fetishizing coercion and violent struggles as necessary and therefore not historical qualities of society. The problematic ideological-theoretical implication is that in the final instance war must exist in all societies and a state of peace is dismissed and considered as being categorically impossible. Castells surely does not share this implication, as his analysis of communication power in the Iraq war shows.

One problem that I have with Castells' book is the rather technocratic language that he tends to use for describing networks and

communication power – social networks, technological networks, and techno-social networks are all described with the same categories and metaphors that originate in computer science and computer technology: program, meta-programmers, switches, switchers, configuration, inter-operability, protocols, network standards, network components, kernel, program code, etc. I have no doubt that Manuel Castells does not have the intention to conflate the difference between social and technological networks. He has argued for example in the past that social networks are a “networking form of social organization” and that information technology is the “material basis” for the “pervasive expansion” of social networks (Castells, 2000b, p. 500). But even if the terminology that Manuel Castells now tends to employ is only understood in a metaphorical sense, the problem is that society and social systems are described in technological and computational terms so that the *differentia specifica* of society in comparison to computers and computer networks – that society is based on humans, reflexive and self-conscious beings that have cultural norms, anticipative thinking, and a certain freedom of action that computers do not have – gets lost. It is no surprise that based on the frequent employment of such metaphors, Castells considers Bruno Latour’s actor network theory as brilliant (p. 45). It is an important task to distinguish the qualities of social networks from the qualities of technological networks and to identify the emergent qualities of techno-social networks such as the Internet (Fuchs, 2005; Fuchs, 2008a, pp. 121-147). Castells acknowledges that there is a “parallel with software language” (p. 48) in his terminology, but he does not give reasons for why he uses these parallels and why he thinks such parallels are useful. Obviously society is shaped by computers, but is not a computer itself, so there is in my opinion simply no need for such a terminological conflationism. Computer metaphors of society can just like biological metaphors of society become dangerous under certain circumstances so that in my opinion it is best not to start to categorically conflate the qualitative difference between society and technology. Technology is part of society and society constructs technology. Society is more than just

technology and has emergent qualities that stem from the synergetical interactions of human beings. Technology is one of many results of the productive societal interactions of human beings, it has therefore qualities that are on the one hand specifically societal, but on the other hand different from the qualities of other products of society. That there are nodes and interactions in all networks is a common aspect of social and technological networks, but an important task that should not be forgotten is to differentiate between the different emergent qualities that technological networks and social networks have – emergent qualities that interact when these two kinds of networks are combined in the form of techno-social networks such as the Internet so that meta-emergent techno-social qualities appear.

Castells carefully argues that power is differentiated in the network society and that the power structure is not fully determined by one group or one kind of power structure. But he also avoids a relativistic position that only sees different types of power without the analysis of the relations between these types. Relativism categorically excludes the possibility of the domination of a certain kind of power. Castells in contrast gives a realistic analysis of power. He says that there is no deterministic control of the power structure by one group and asserts that “whoever has enough money, including political leaders, will have a better chance of operating the switch in its favor” (p. 52).

3. “Web 2.0” and Mass Self-Communication

The rise of integrative information, communication, and community-building Internet platforms such as blogs, wikis, or social networking sites has not only prompted the development of new concepts – web 2.0, social software, social media, etc –, but also a new techno-deterministic optimism that resembles the Californian ideology that accompanied the commercial rise of the Internet in the 1990s. So for example Tapscott and Williams claim that the “new web” brings about “a new economic democracy (...) in which we all have a lead role” (Tapscott & Williams, 2007, p. 15;

for a critique of this approach, see Fuchs, 2008b). Kevin Kelly, who preached the neo-liberal credos of liberalization, privatization, and commercialization in relation to IT in the 1990s (see for example Kelly, 1998), argues that the “new web”, where people “work toward a common goal and share their products in common, (...) contribute labor without wages and enjoy the fruits free of charge” (Kelly, 2009, p. 118) constitutes a “new socialism” – “digital socialism”. The new socialism is for Kelly a socialism, in which workers do not control and manage organizations and the material output they generate. Therefore this notion of socialism should be questioned. For Kelly, socialism lies in collective production, not in democratic economic ownership. If “socialism seeks to replace capitalism by a system in which the public interest takes precedence over the interest of private profit“, “is incompatible with the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few“, and “requires effective democratic control of the economy“ (Frankfurt Declaration of the Socialist International, 1951¹), then Kelly’s notion of socialism that is perfectly compatible with the existence of Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, and other web corporations (as indicated by the fact that he lists Google, Amazon, Facebook, and YouTube in his history of socialism), is not at all a notion of socialism, but one of capitalism disguised as socialism.

Castells discusses the recent developments of the web and the Internet, but in contrast to the new web 2.0 ideology he does so

in a refreshing techno-dialectical way that avoids the deterministic pitfalls of techno-optimism and techno-pessimism. For Castells, a novel quality of communication in contemporary society is mass self-communication: “It is mass communication because it can potentially reach a global audience, as in the posting of a video on YouTube, a blog with RSS links to a number of web sources, or a message to a massive e-mail list. At the same time, it is self-communication because the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World Wide Web and electronic networks is self-selected. The three forms of communication (interpersonal, mass communication, and mass self-communication) coexist, interact, and complement each other rather than substituting for one another. What is historically novel, with considerable consequences for social organization and cultural change, is the articulation of all forms of communication into a composite, interactive, digital hypertext that includes, mixes, and recombines in their diversity the whole range of cultural expressions conveyed by human interaction” (p. 55, see also p. 70). Castells theorizes mass self-communication based on Umberto Eco’s semiotic model of communication as the emergence of “the creative audience” (pp. 127-135) that engages in the “interactive production of meaning” (p. 132) and is based on the emergence of the figure of the “sender/addressee” (p. 130).

Castells analyzes the economic operations of ten global multimedia networks (pp. 73-84) – Apple, Bertelsmann, CBS, Disney, Google, Microsoft, NBC Universal, News Corporation, Time Warner, Yahoo! – and of the second-tier of multimedia conglomerates (pp. 84-92). Important trends that he points out are an increasing economic concentration, the usage of a diversity of platforms, the customization and segmentation of audiences, and economies of synergy. These corporate networks stand in a contradictory relation to mass-self communication.

For Castells, the contemporary Internet is shaped by a conflict between the global multimedia business networks that try to commodify the Internet and the “creative audience” that tries to establish a degree of citizen

¹ Of course one should mention that the Socialist International today makes more modest claims and argues that “the democratic socialist movement continues to advocate both socialisation and public property within the framework of a mixed economy” (Stockholm Declaration of Principles of the Socialist International, 1989). This meaning of socialism is not fully divergent, but far apart from the one advocated by central historical figures of socialism, such as Rosa Luxemburg, who argued that socialism is “a society that is not governed by the profit motive but aims at saving human labour” (Luxemburg, 1951/2003, p. 301) and that the “aim of socialism is not accumulation but the satisfaction of toiling humanity’s wants by developing the productive forces of the entire globe” (Luxemburg, 1951/2003, p. 447).

control of the Internet and to assert their right of communicative freedom without corporate control: "Among the global media giants and other media organizations, the digitization of information and the expansion of networks of mass self-communication have facilitated a preoccupation with how to monetize these networks in terms of advertising" (p. 80). "All the major players are trying to figure out how to re-commodify Internet-based autonomous mass self-communication. They are experimenting with ad-supported sites, pay sites, free streaming video portals, and pay portals. (...) Web 2.0 technologies empowered consumers to produce and distribute their own content. The viral success of these technologies propelled media organizations to harness the production power of traditional consumers" (p. 97). "The interactive capacity of the new communication system ushers in a new form of communication, mass self-communication, which multiplies and diversifies the entry points in the communication process. This gives rise to unprecedented autonomy for communicative subjects to communicate at large. Yet, this potential autonomy is shaped, controlled, and curtailed by the growing concentration and interlocking of corporate media and network operators around the world. (...) However, this is not tantamount to one-sided, vertical control of communicative practices (...) As a result, the global culture of universal commodification is culturally diversified and ultimately contested by other cultural expressions" (p. 136). Castells gives a techno-dialectical analysis here, but it remains unclear what he means by the rise of autonomy for communicative subjects.

The notion of autonomy in mass self-communication is first introduced on page 129, but it is not defined, which leaves the reader wondering what Castells wants to tell her/him by using this normatively and politically connoted term (see also p. 302). The meaning of the concept of autonomy is not self-explanatory. Is it autonomy in the sense of Kant, understood as the autonomy of the will as the supreme principle of morality (Kant, 2002, p. 58), the "quality of the will of being a law to itself" (Kant, 2002, p. 63)? Or does autonomy mean the "true individualism" that Hayek (1948) had in mind, in which capitalism

is conceived as spontaneous order that should be left to itself and should not be shaped by political rules (Hayek, 1988)? Does it refer to freedom of speech, taste, and assembly – "the liberty of thought and discussion" – in line with the harm principle, as postulated by John Stuart Mill (2002)? Or is autonomy the existence of functionally differentiated self-referential subsystems of society (Luhmann, 1998)? Or does it in a less individualistic sense refer to the combination of individual autonomy, understood as subjectivity that is "reflective and deliberative" and "frees the radical imagination" from "the enslavement of repetition" (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 164), and social autonomy, "the equal participation of all in power" (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 136; see also Castoriadis, 1998)? Does Castells' notion of autonomy confirm one of the two poles of the theoretically unreconciled relationship of private autonomy and public autonomy that Habermas (1996, p. 84) has critically examined, or does it refer to the dialectic of autonomy that Habermas has in mind when he speaks of a "cooriginality of private and public autonomy" (Habermas, 1996, p. 104) achieved in a "system of rights in which private and public autonomy are internally related" (Habermas, 1996, p. 280) and "reciprocally presuppose each other" (Habermas, 1996, p. 417)? Or does autonomy mean the "status of an organized people in an enclosed territorial unit" (Schmitt, 1996, p. 19, for a critique of this approach see Habermas, 1989)? Or is autonomy a postmodern project of plural democracy with a multiplicity of subject positions (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985)? In short: There are all kinds of meanings of concepts such as autonomy, and it is one of the tasks of social theory to clarify which ones are feasible and suitable for the situation of contemporary society.

If we define "web 2.0/3.0" platforms as world wide web platforms that are not predominantly sites for information consumption or search, but sites for social networking, community building, file sharing, co-operative information production, and interactive blogging – platforms that are more systems of communication and co-operation than systems of cognition (for details of this definition see Fuchs 2009c, 2008a) –, then this allows us to analyze the ownership structures and

usage data of the top 20 “web 2.0/3.0” platforms. I have gathered statistical and eco-

nomical data about these platforms (see table 1).

| <i>Rank</i> | <i>Website</i> | <i>Ownership</i> | <i>Country</i> | <i>Year of Domain Creation</i> | <i>Economic Orientation</i> | <i>3 Month Average Daily Share of Global Page Views</i> |
|-------------|----------------|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 3 | Facebook | Facebook Inc. | USA | 2004 | Profit, advertising | 2.99% |
| 4 | YouTube | Google Inc. | USA | 2005 | Profit, advertising | 4.06% |
| 7 | Blogger | Google Inc. | USA | 1999 | Profit, advertising | 0.56% |
| 8 | Wikipedia | Wikimedia Foundation Inc. | USA | 2001 | Non-profit, non-advertising | 0.54% |
| 11 | Myspace | MySpace Inc. | USA | 2003 | Profit, advertising | 1.25% |
| 15 | Twitter | Twitter Inc. | USA | 2006 | Profit, advertising | 0.27% |
| 16 | Rapidshare | Rapidshare AG | CH | 2002 | Profit, non-advertising | 0.23% |
| 19 | WordPress | Automattic Inc. | USA | 2000 | Profit, advertising | 0.13% |
| 32 | Vkontakte | V Kontakte Ltd. | RU | 2006 | Profit, advertising | 1.48% |
| 33 | Flickr | Yahoo! Inc. | USA | 2003 | Profit, advertising | 0.23% |
| 37 | hi5 | Hi5 Networks Inc. | USA | 2004 | Profit, advertising | 0.44% |
| 39 | Photobucket | Photobucket.com LLC | USA | 2003 | Profit, advertising | 0.11% |
| 43 | Orkut Brazil | Google Inc. | USA | 2002 | Profit, advertising | 0.11% |
| 48 | Youporn | Midstream Media | USA | 2005 | Profit, advertising | 0.15% |
| 49 | Blogspot | Google Inc. | USA | 2000 | Profit, advertising | 0.06% |
| 50 | Pornhub | Pornhub.com | USA | 2000 | Profit, advertising | 0.13% |
| 58 | Orkut India | Google Inc. | USA | 2005 | Profit, advertising | 0.06% |
| 59 | ImageShack | ImageShack Corporation | USA | 2002 | Profit, advertising | 0.05% |
| 60 | Tudou | Quan Toodou Technology | CN | 2004 | Profit, advertising | 0.08% |
| 62 | Odonoklassniki | Odonoklassniki | RU | 2002 | Profit, advertising | 0.34% |
| | | | | | | <u>Total: 13.27%</u> |

Table 1: The top 20 web 2.0/3.0 platforms, ranked based on a composite index that takes into account the number of average page views over the past three months and the number of average daily visitors, data accessed on July 31st, 2009, data source: alexa.com

The ranking in table 1 is based on an index that takes into account the average share of page views during the past three months and the average number of daily visitors of web platforms. A website is considered as profit-oriented if the organization owning the domain takes measures in order to accumulate money profit with the help of the website (as for example in the case of advertising-based revenue models, the selling of platform memberships or premium memberships, the selling of

goods or services over the platform). A website is considered as advertising-based if the organization owning the domain sells advertisements that are placed on its sites to customers in order to generate profit. Platforms can be profit-oriented without being advertising-based. A number of observations can be made: 16 of the 20 dominant web 2.0/3.0 domains are owned by organizations that are registered in the USA. 19 out of 20 of the dominant web 2.0/3.0 platforms are profit-

oriented, the only exception is Wikipedia, which is advertising-free and non-profit. The most frequently encountered business model in this sample is one that gives platform access to the users for free, offers services for free, and generates profit by advertising. However, there are also other models. So for example Rapidshare, a file exchange service, is advertising-free and generates profits by selling premium memberships. YouPorn, PornHub and ImageShack are advertising-based and offer some free services, but also sell premium accounts. Odonklassniki, a Russian social networking site, requires all new users to pay a membership fee and is advertising-based. Flickr is an advertising-based photo sharing community. Uploading and viewing images is for free, Flickr sells additional services such as photo prints, business cards, or photo books. The 20 most accessed web 2.0 platforms accounted for 13.24% of the global average daily page views. 12.73% of these 13.24% were page views on profit-oriented platforms, which means that 96.15% of all views of the top 20 web 2.0/3.0 platforms were conducted on profit-oriented sites. These data show that web 2.0/3.0 is a strongly commodified space, there seems to be only a tiny minority of non-profit platforms.

Given these empirical results, one can question to which degree web 2.0/3.0 users are autonomous from capital. On the vast majority of platforms that they visit, their data and usage behaviour is stored and assessed in order to generate profit by targeted advertising. The users who google data, upload or watch videos on YouTube, upload or browse personal images on Flickr, or accumulate friends with whom they exchange content or communicate online via social networking platforms like MySpace or Facebook, constitute an "audience commodity" (Smythe, 1981) that is sold to advertisers. The difference between the audience commodity on traditional mass media and on the Internet is that in the latter case the users are also content producers; there is user-generated content, the users engage in permanent creative activity, communication, community building, and content-production. That the users are more active on the Internet than in the reception of TV or radio content is due to the decentralized structure of the Internet, which allows many-to-

many communication. Due to the permanent activity of the recipients and their status as producers/prosumers, we can say that in the case of the Internet the audience commodity is a producer/prosumer commodity (Fuchs, forthcoming; Fuchs, 2009a). The category of the producer commodity does not signify a democratization of the media towards a participatory or democratic system, but the total commodification of human creativity. During much of the time that users spend online, they produce profit for large corporations like Google, News Corp. (which owns MySpace), or Yahoo! (which owns Flickr). Advertisements on the Internet are frequently personalized; this is made possible by surveilling, storing, and assessing user activities and user data with the help of computers and databases. Economic surveillance is a mechanism that underlies capital accumulation in web 2.0/3.0. That web 2.0/3.0 users constitute an audience commodity means that they produce surplus value and are exploited by capital (Fuchs, forthcoming). We can therefore say that Internet users constitute an exploited class of knowledge workers (Fuchs, forthcoming). I think that Manuel Castells is right in arguing that there are potentials for counter-power within web 2.0 that can create autonomous spaces (which are autonomous from capital and state power). But unfortunately these autonomous spaces are hardly existent in web 2.0, they do not automatically exist, but must be struggled for. An autonomous web 2.0 is a mere tendency and potential that is today subsumed under the corporate logic that dominates, but does not determine web 2.0.

Mass-self communication for Castells allows subjects to "watch the powerful" (p. 413), but those in power "have made it their priority to harness the potential of mass self-communication in the service of their specific interests" (p. 414). Therefore they engage in enclosing the communication commons: "the commons of the communication revolution are being expropriated to expand for-profit entertainment and to commodify personal freedom" (p. 414). Castells speaks of a dialectical process in relation to mass self-communication: On the one hand web 2.0 business strategies result in "the commodification of freedom", the "enclosing of the commons of free communi-

cation and selling people access to global communication networks in exchange for surrendering their privacy and becoming advertising targets" (p. 421). On the other hand, "once in cyberspace, people may have all kinds of ideas, including challenging corporate power, dismantling government authority, and changing the cultural foundations of our aging/aching civilization" (p. 420). The typical web 2.0-business strategy in my opinion is not "selling people access", but giving them access for free and selling the people as a prosumer commodity to third parties in order to generate profit. As I have tried to show, this relationship is highly unequal, the actual power of corporations in web 2.0 is much larger than the actual political counter-power that is exercised by the producers. Castells acknowledges this at some instances in his book, for example when he speaks of "unequal competition" (p. 422), but on the other hand he contradicts this realism at some instances by a certain web 2.0 optimism, for example when he says that "the more corporations invest in expanding communication networks (benefiting from a hefty return), the more people build their own networks of mass self-communication, thus empowering themselves" (p. 421). The power of corporations and other powerful actors on the web is not to a similar extent challenged by actual counter-powers that empower citizens. The dialectic of power is only a potential, but not an automatic actual or necessary dialectic. Political counter-power on the Internet is facing a massive asymmetry that is due to the fact that the ruling powers control more resources such as money, decision-making power, capacities for attention generation, etc. Power struggles are struggles of the less powerful against the powerful, there is no guarantee that they can emerge, that they can mobilize significant resources so that they do not remain precarious, and that they are successful. There are examples for relatively successful counter-power struggles that have made use of the Internet, as Castells shows in an impressive manner, but I am not so optimistic that it will be possible to seriously tackle the existing economic, political, military, and cultural power structures in the near or medium-term future. It is only a potential, not an automatism that citizens "overcome the powerlessness of

their solitary despair by networking their desire. They fight the powers that be by identifying the networks that are" (p. 431). The problem is that there are also forces of power in contemporary society, such as ideology and coercion, that might forestall such fights, that keep people occupied with struggling for survival so that they have no time, energy, and thoughts for counter-power struggles. What I am saying is that the workings of counter-power should not be overestimated, but only assessed as potentials.

Castells argues that in mass self-communication "traditional forms of access control are not applicable. Anyone can upload a video to the Internet, write a blog, start a chat forum, or create a gigantic e-mail list. Access in this case is the rule; blocking Internet access is the exception" (p. 204). In my opinion, a central filter of the Internet that benefits powerful actors is formed by visibility and the attention economy. Although everyone can produce and diffuse information in principle easily with the help of the Internet because it is a global decentralized many-to-many and one-to-many communication system, not all information is visible to the same degree and gets the same attention. The problem in the cyberspace flood of information is, how in this flowing informational ocean other users draw their attention to information. So for example Indymedia, the most popular alternative online news platform, is only ranked number 4147 in the list of the most accessed websites, whereas BBC Online is ranked number 44, CNN Online number 52, the New York Times Online number 115, Spiegel Online number 152, Bildzeitung Online number 246, or Fox News Online number 250 (data source: alexa.com, top 1 000 000 sites, August 2nd, 2008). This shows that there is a stratified online attention economy, in which the trademarks of powerful media actors work as powerful symbols that help the online portals of these organizations to accumulate attention. This is not to deny that "mass self-communication" platforms such as Blogger (ranked number 3) or Facebook (ranked number 7) are heavily used, but political information generation and communication on such sites is much more fragmented, which is the reason why Jürgen Habermas speaks in relation to the Internet of a danger

of the “fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audience into a huge number of isolated issue publics” (Habermas, 2006, p. 423). In 2008, a year characterized by a huge interest of the US public in politics due to the presidential election and the grassroots appeal of the Obama campaign, only 14% of US Internet users posted political comments on social networking sites and 8% on blogs (Pew Internet & American Life Project: The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008). 64% of online political users in the US “got their information about the November elections from network TV websites such as *cnn.com*, *abcnews.com*, or *msnbcnews.com*; 54% visited portal news services like Google or Yahoo, 43% visited the websites of local news organizations, 40% read someone else’s comments in a news group, website, or blog; 34% visited the websites of major national newspapers”, 26% visited political or news blogs, “12% visited the website of an alternative news organization” (Pew Internet & American Life Project: The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008). If we assume that the general interest in online politics is in general somewhat lower than in 2008, then these data give a realistic picture of political information and communication online: The major platforms for political information are the online versions of the established news sources and corporate mass media, political “mass self-communication” is clearly present and forms an important tendency that nonetheless remains subsumed under and dominated by established powerful media actors.

Castells employs the terms web 2.0 and 3.0 (see for example pp. 34, 56, 65, 97, 107, 113, 421, 429) that he defines as “the cluster of technologies, devices, and applications that support the proliferation of social spaces on the Internet” (p. 65). Questions that should also be asked and answered in relation to the notion of “web 2.0” are in my opinion: To which extent are the claims about the “new Web” ideological and serve marketing purposes? What is novel about “web 2.0” and how can this novelty be empirically validated? What does it exactly mean to say that the Web becomes more social? Which notions of the social are employed when people speak of “web 2.0”? Which notion of sociality underlies “web 1.0” and how does this notion differ

from the notion of sociality that underlies the concepts of web 2.0 and 3.0? What is the difference between web 1.0, 2.0, 3.0? In short: The talk about “web 2.0”, “social media”, and “social software” compels us to answer some basic questions: What is social about the Internet? Which different forms of sociality do we find on the Internet? For answering these questions, we need to enter conceptual sociological discussions and therefore social theory becomes important for understanding the contemporary Internet (for a discussion of these sociological and social theory foundations of “web 2.0” see Fuchs, 2009c). Users do have the counter-power capacities to use web 2.0 against the intentions of the corporate operators in progressive ways and political struggles, but the corporate platform owners possess the power to switch users off the networks or to switch off entire networks. Furthermore they also have an interest in and power to permanently control the online behaviour and personal data of users in order to accumulate capital with the help of targeted advertising (Fuchs, 2009b). Economic surveillance is at the heart of capital accumulation in web 2.0 (Fuchs, 2009b). The power relationship between the corporate media and the creative users that Castells describes is an asymmetrical one that privileges the first.

4. Media Manipulation

Castells shows the importance of inter- and transdisciplinary research for analyzing the contemporary world by combining cognitive science and the analysis of communication power in order to understand how misinformation and the creation of misperception work as forms of communication power. For power to work it must also be cognitively reproduced in the neural networks of the brain. Political cognition works with emotions, especially anxiety and anger. Framing, agenda-setting, priming, and indexing are for Castells the four main mechanisms of communication power that are used in politics for influencing the public mind. The first three are concrete strategies employed by the media for trying to manipulate their audiences, so to speak, whereas indexing is connected to what Herman and Chom-

sky (1988)² have termed the third filter in media manipulation: the tendency of mass media to rely on information that is provided by powerful actors (such as governments and corporations). Castells shows the communication power of framing and the counter-power of counter-framing with the example of the framing of the US public in the Iraq war. The media frames of the war on terror and patriotism activated the emotional and subliminal fear of death of the audience, created misperceptions, and contributed to the successful securing of public support for the war. This analysis parallels Herman's and Chomsky's (1988) stress on anti-communism and anti-terrorism as ideological control mechanisms that they have studied for the media coverage of Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Vietnam. Castells shows that relation to Iraq, counter-frames could only be successfully employed after hurricane Katrina induced a public feeling of mismanagement about the Bush administration, after a series of political scandals, and with the help of citizen journalism. He concludes this analysis by saying that "by activating networks of association between events and mental images via communication processes, power-making operates in multi-layered dynamics in which the way we feel structures the way we think and ultimately the way we act" (p. 192).

Castells argues that media make power and have the capacity to shape human minds

² Once one brings up the names Chomsky, Herman, or McChesney, some readers tend to invoke the cultural studies-inspired negative sentiment that the propaganda model and these authors advance an elitist agenda that considers the recipients as stupid and passive and neglects possibilities for active reception. Such readers should be advised that Herman and Chomsky are mainly analyzing strategies in media production, no matter how these strategies that are crystallized in media products are decoded and enacted by the audiences, and, more importantly, that Chomsky, Herman, and McChesney stress the political importance of alternative media production, diffusion, and reception, which is an aspect of political activity and counter-power of the media (see for example: Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. 306f; Herman & McChesney, 1997, pp. 189-205; for this discussion, see also Herman, 1996a, 1996b, 2003; Klaehn, 2002).

by image making. Media politics involves for him four processes: securing access of powerful actors to the media, the production of images that serve the interests of powerful actors, the delivery of these messages in diverse formats and through diverse technologies combined with the measurement of its effectiveness, and the financing of these activities. Castells describes the tendency in media politics that the media exert communication power with the help of sensationalism, theatrical politics, personalization, dramatization, the fragmentation of information, negative stereotyping, attack politics, and scandalization. These are politics that focus on human emotions. He sees direct government control as well as corporate ownership and leadership as two important filters in media politics. The second aspect corresponds to the first two filters that Herman and Chomsky (1988) have stressed in their propaganda model: size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media; and advertising-orientation. Castells also discusses the role of political think tanks in informational politics, a lobbying that Herman and Chomsky (1988) have termed flak and that they characterize as the fourth filter of media manipulation. Castells analyzes political censorship and control of the media with the help of three case studies that cover the USA, Russia, and China.

For Castells, there are the following new aspects of media politics: the use of the Internet in political campaigns (p. 230), the multiplication of entry points of political reports, on which an interaction between mainstream media and the Internet is based (p. 234), an unprecedented prevalence and significance of scandal politics (p. 246), the easy and immediate diffusion of scandal politics over the Internet by everyone (pp. 247f), an increase of the publicity and perception of corruption and of the impact on public trust (p. 289). The result would be a worldwide crisis of political legitimacy, a decline in public trust, and a crisis of democracy. These crises could possibly, but not automatically result in depoliticization, and would in many cases also create a desire for insurgent politics, social movements, and new public spaces.

Castells continuously stresses that the communication structures that are used by powerful actors can also be used for counter-

power strategies. A question that remains unanswered for me after having read chapter 4 of *Communication Power*, is if Castells thinks that it is possible and fruitful if insurgent movements try to exert counter-power with the help of the mediated politics of scandalization, stereotyping, and attacks, or not. Scandalization, stereotyping, and attacking are the communication power-mechanisms that Castells analyzes in chapter 4, but it remains unclear if the dialectic of power and counter-power that Castells has in mind also applies here and if these strategies can be empirically observed in counter-power movements. In chapter 5, he gives the example of how the Obama campaign that he characterizes as a form of insurgent politics resisted the scandal and attack politics directed against Obama by the Hillary Clinton campaign without resorting to the same tactics. This therefore also leaves open the question if insurgent politics are necessarily non-scandal politics or not.

5. Social Movements

I have always been somehow sceptical about Castells' (2004) distinction between proactive and reactive social movements. The first – Castells (2004) discusses the Zapatistas, the American militia, Aum Shinrikyo, and al-Qaeda – have primarily a “resistance identity” (Castells, 2004, p. 70), are “defensive movements built around trenches of resistance” (Castells, 2004, p. 73), “stigmatized by the logic of domination” (Castells, 2004, p. 8), “primarily identity-based mobilizations in reaction to a clearly identified adversary (...) rather than purveyors of a societal project”, whereas the second – Castells (2004) mentions the movement for democratic globalization, environmentalism, feminism – develop resistance identity into “project identity” (Castells, 2004, p. 70) and “seek the transformation of overall social structure” (Castells, 2004, p. 8). All social movements are reactive and proactive, they have adversaries and a societal project. So for example environmentalism is not purely proactive, but also opposes pollution and polluters as adversaries, whereas al-Qaeda is not only reactive, but also proactive: So bin Laden on the one hand expresses a resistance identity that is oriented against the

West, especially the USA: “These tragedies and calamities are only a few examples of your oppression and aggression against us. It is commanded by our religion and intellect that the oppressed have a right to return the aggression. Do not await anything from us but Jihad, resistance and revenge. Is it in any way rational to expect that after America has attacked us for more than half a century, that we will then leave her to live in security and peace?!!” (bin Laden: Letter to America³). On the other hand he formulates a project identity, a clear societal project that al-Qaeda pursues: “to make the Shariah the supreme law”, “the religion of the Unification of God; of freedom from associating partners with Him, and rejection of this; of complete love of Him, the Exalted; of complete submission to His Laws; and of the discarding of all the opinions, orders, theories and religions which contradict with the religion He sent down to His Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)” (Ibid.; 9). Bin Laden’s vision sounds terrifying, but it is clear that what he has in mind and what he and al-Qaeda struggle for is a large societal project – a fundamentalist theocracy. In *Communication Power*, Castells seems to stick to this distinction between proactivism and reactivism of social movements (p. 300). The difference between certain movements cannot be found in their proactivism or reactivism, two features that are characteristic for all of them, but in their political content that ranges on a continuum from progressivism to anti-progressivism (Fuchs, 2006; 2008, p. 290).

For Castells, the movement for democratic globalization stands for “the old anarchist ideal of autonomous communes and free individuals coordinating their self-managed forms of existence on a broader scale, (...) the promise of self-managed networks enabled by technologies of freedom” (pp. 345f). So one can say that this movement enacts and represents the project of establishing a society that is based on “voluntary associations” that are based on “free agreements concluded between the various groups” and that “represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all

³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>, accessed on August 2, 2008.

sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international temporary or more or less permanent - for all possible purposes" (Kropotkin, 1910, p. 284). For me, the movement for democratic globalization is not just this, but even more (see Fuchs 2006, 2007; 2008a, pp. 290-294): it is the contemporary universal social movement, a movement of movements that unites the diversity of other protest movements, creates a unity in diversity that articulates the topics of all contemporary protest movements with the topics of capitalism and class. This unity in diversity can for example be observed by taking a look at the structure of Indymedia, which is one important voice of the movement: The US website of this platform is structured into 48 different topics, such as anti-war, environment, gender & sexuality, human & civil rights, labour, race & racism, etc. Historically, a single movement has existed for each of these topics, but now this diversity is combined within one movement. The central movement of the "programmed society" that Alain Touraine has so long been looking for (compare Touraine, 1985), might now have emerged.

Castells argues that social movements that engage in insurgent politics – "the process aiming at political change (institutional change) in discontinuity with the logic embedded in political institutions" (p. 300) – "in a world marked by the rise of mass self-communication, (...) have the chance to enter the public space from multiple sources. By using both horizontal communication networks and mainstream media to convey their images and messages, they increase their chances of enacting social and political change – even if they start from a subordinate position in institutional power, financial resources, or symbolic legitimacy" (p. 302). With the help of four case studies he shows how social movements try to reprogram "the communication networks that constitute the symbolic environment for image manipulation and information processing in our minds, the ultimate determinants of individual and collective practices": the environmental movement, the movement for democratic globalization, the spontaneous movement that emerged in Spain after the al-Qaeda attacks in March 2004, and the Obama presidential campaign. Methods of media counter-power that are discussed include: the

networking of scientists, activists, opinion leaders, and celebrities; the use of entertainment and popular culture for political causes; mobilization and networking with the help of social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook, etc); celebrity advocacy; event management; alternative online media; video sharing platforms (YouTube, etc); actionism; street theatre; hacking; electronic civil disobedience; flash mob activism supported by mobile phones ("instant insurgent communities", p. 363); online fund-raising; Obama's emotional political style that promised hope and change in order to stimulate enthusiasm and grassroots activism; online petitions; political blogging; or delocalized mobilization and micro-targeting tactics supported by the Internet.

6. A New Society?

Manuel Castells has advanced the disputed claim that the network society is a new society (Castells, 2000a, p. 371; see Garnham, 1998; Webster, 1997a, b) in the sense that the relationships of production, power, and experience "are increasingly organized around networks" that "constitute the new social morphology of our societies" (Castells, 2000b, p. 500). One can note that in prior publications power seems to have been conceived by Castells as a typical political process, whereas now it seems to signify a broader phenomenon, which brings up the theoretical question how power, the political, and the non-political differ and are connected. Castells considers informationalism as the "material foundation" of the network society (Castells, 2000a, p. 367) and characterizes the economic sphere of the network society as informational capitalism or global economy, the political sphere as network state, and the cultural sphere as culture of real virtuality (Castells, 2000a, pp. 366-391). Within this approach that stresses the centrality of networks, informationalism, and communication, it is a logical step that Castells argues in *Communication Power* that "power in the network society is communication power" (p. 53) and that "communication networks are the fundamental networks of power-making in society" (p. 426). But take a sphere such as the capitalist economy. Figure 1 shows the

distribution of the capital assets of the world's largest 2000 corporations at the end of the fiscal year 2008, a year that will be remembered for the emergence and intensification of a global economic crisis. Although finance capital suffered large profit losses in 2008, it still accounted for 74.86% of the total assets of the world's largest companies. The oil and gas industry accounted for 6.21%, which shows the economic importance of fossil fuels – a resource over which wars are fought, which points out the military and political relevance of this part of the economy. The information industry made up 4.59% of the total assets of the world's largest corporations⁴. This suggests that the capitalist economy is not dominated by the information economy and is not predominantly an informational capitalism, but besides an informational capitalism also new imperialism (Harvey, 2003), finance capitalism, hyperindustrial capitalism, etc. Capitalism is a complex economic field that is shaped by multiple interacting tendencies such as communication power, finance power, imperial power, hyperindustrial power, etc. Castells leaves no doubt about the large influence of finance capital in contemporary capitalism. He says that “the structure and dynamics of financial networks” are “at the heart of capitalist power” (p. 424). In my opinion notions such as “informational capitalism” and “communication power” should be used in a modest sense so that they signify only those parts of the economy or society that base specific operations on information and communication. Depending on which variables we observe (such as capital assets, profits, labour force, value added, transnationality index, etc in the economy), we can empirically calculate to which extent a certain aspect of a subsystem of contemporary society is information-based. This approach is different from saying that contemporary capitalism is predominantly informational and that the central power in contemporary society is communication power.

⁴ The information economy consists for statistical purposes in these calculations of the following realms: media, semiconductors, software & services, technology hardware & equipment, telecommunications services.

7. Conclusion

In sum: Manuel Castells' *Communication Power* is a powerful narrative about the connection of communication and power in contemporary society that presents rich empirical details, illuminating case studies, and represents an original and insightful approach. It will shape the disciplinary and transdisciplinary discussions about communication and power in the coming years. The central new category that the book introduces is the one of mass self-communication. Good books bring up many new questions, so I do have questions and also doubts about Castells' notion of power, the use of computer science terms for analyzing society, the assessment and categorical description of the power distribution between global multimedia corporations and the creative audience, the feasibility of the notion of web 2.0, his notion of social movements, the role of the movement for democratic globalization in contemporary society, and the centrality of informationalism and communication power. When all this is being said, it remains no doubt that this book empowers the academic discourse about communication power.

Contemporary society is a society of global economic crisis. This has resulted in a return of the importance of economic questions, which are also questions about class, in social theory and has shown which huge power the global financial and economic networks have over our lives. The central political task might now be to develop counter-power against the commodification of everything. That this is easier said than done was communicated recently by the result of the elections to the European Parliament. The task for social theory in the contemporary situation is to develop analyses of power and potential counter-power. Manuel Castells reminds us that the role of communication certainly should not be neglected in such endeavours.

Share of Selected Industries in Total Capital Assets of the World's Largest 2000 Corporations in 2008 (Source: Forbes 2000, 2009 List)

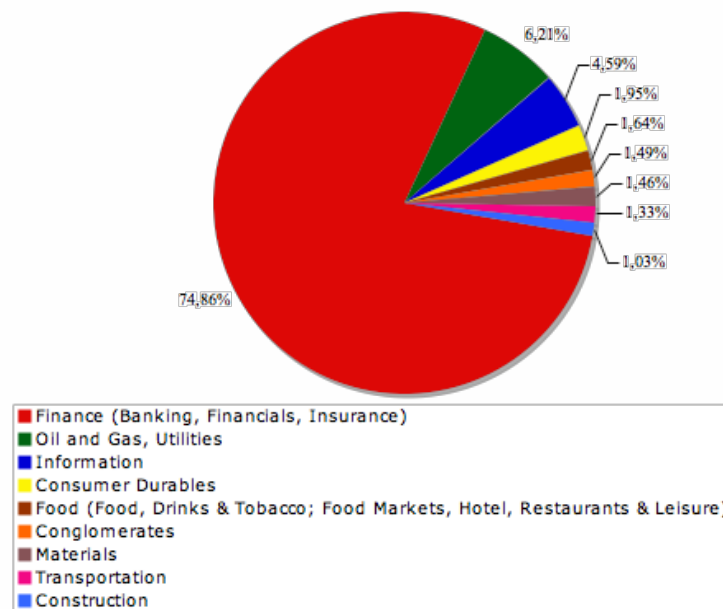


Figure 1

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