



Transformative democracy in the age of second modernity: cosmopolitanization, communicative agency and the reflexive subject

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Abstract

While international scholarly momentum continues to build around Ulrich Beck's ideas on risk, politics and reflexivity, his commentary on transformative democracy is only beginning to attract scholarly interest. To better understand the theoretical and conceptual dynamics of transformative democracy in the age of second modernity, I use Mark Poster's work on digital media and the culture of under-determination to focus analytical attention on the socio-technical domains from which the democratic-cosmopolitan imperative should be expected to garner strength. I argue that Beck's largely structuralist cosmopolitanization thesis can be strengthened by a supplemental understanding of the material-communicative dimensions inherent to processes of individualization, reflexive modernization and sub-political mobilization. Introducing certain correctives to Beck's 'cosmopolitan manifesto', I explore the complexities of second modern communicative agency and the constitution of the reflexive, socio-technical subject. My primary purpose is to develop theoretical and conceptual

insights into the socio-technical aspects of transformative democracy in second modernity.

Key words

cosmopolitanism • digitalization • second modernity • social movements • socio-technologies • subjectivity

It is at the interface of the social and the technical that we find the second-modernity's reflexivity. It is at this interface that we take on the precarious freedom of a 'life of our own'; that we 'invent the political', that we take on ecological responsibility. Reflexivity in the second modernity is profoundly socio-technical. (Lash, 2002: xiii, 2003: 54)

THE COSMOPOLITAN-DEMOCRATIC IMPERATIVE

According to Ulrich Beck, we are living in transformative times (Beck, 1992, 1999, 2000; see also: Beck, et al., 2003; Beck and Lau, 2005; Beck and Sznaider, 2006). The intersection of individualization, globalization and manufactured uncertainties, he contends, combined with the concomitant forces of gender revolution and underemployment, effectively signal the end of simple linear modernity. What is emerging from the victories achieved in the first, industrial modern period, Beck argues, is a new, second age of the modern era. He conceptualizes 'second modernity' as a historical epoch of the modern period involving the reinvention of global political, economic and societal relations — indeed, the reinvention of the global self. The logic of institutional action that dominated first modernity, Beck elaborates, was based on the 'either/or principle' (Beck, 1999; see also Beck and Lau, 2005). For decades, this institutional logic played out in terms of conceptual dualisms such as society *or* nature, traditional *or* modern, war *or* peace. Beck maintains that the stability inherent in the 'either/or principle' is being replaced in second modernity by the inherent instability embodied in the 'both/and principle': the blurring of categorically definitive boundaries and the merging of strictly differentiated first modern binaries. For Beck, this shift in the conceptual coordinates of the modern period necessitates the development of a new reference, a new sociology and a new analytical paradigm. In no uncertain terms, it also necessitates the development of a new political imperative that is better equipped to deal with the complexities of social-structural change in second modernity.

Beck conceptualizes the epochal shift from first (simple) to second (reflexive) modernity in terms of world risk society (Beck and Lau, 2005). World risk society, in Beck's view, connects individual autonomy and insecurity in the domain of labour relations or gender politics, to the techno-scientific complex, at once fusing together (whilst obliterating the distinction between) the local and the global. 'Personal biographies as well as

world politics are getting 'risky' in the global world of manufactured uncertainty' (Beck, 1999: 5). For Beck, what appears at the nexus of 'glocality' is a new sequence of transitional politics that ushers in the democratization of democracy through a political economy of perpetual uncertainty (Beck 1995). This complex set of relations, says Beck, entails the release of individuals from the structurally definitive world of first modernity into a new, second modern cosmopolitan society that embraces material and ethical questions of transcultural significance. Constituted in dispersion outside the traditional sphere(s) of first modern politics, second modern subpolitical mobilization is firmly situated by Beck in the context of a reflexive confrontation of first modern living: the modernization of modern society itself.

Although his writings are theoretically provocative and politically relevant, Beck has hitherto provided an incomplete understanding of the dynamics germane to the cosmopolitan imperative, i.e. the intricacies of how it is experienced, the socio-technical locations in which it is fostered, the streams of consciousness it presupposes (or enables) and its potential failings. Not only does this render his otherwise promising set of theoretical, conceptual and methodological insights underdeveloped, but it also (inadvertently) contributes to the perpetuation of the first modern conceptual difficulties associated with an over-determined subject. There is little need to critically interrogate the rationale behind Beck's call for a new paradigm capable of understanding the human condition in second modernity. On this he has been clear and convincing (see, for example: Beck, 2000; Beck, et al., 2003; Beck and Lau 2005). Instead, what is required is elaboration of the means through which cosmopolitanization is coming to fruition and, particularly, the conceptual apparatus capable of rendering cosmopolitan selves analytically comprehensible.

To develop a more complete theoretical understanding of 'critical cosmopolitanism' (Delanty 2006), I use Poster's (2001) theory of the culture of underdetermination brought forth by digital/electronic media to focus analytical attention on the socio-technical domains from which the democratic-cosmopolitan imperative should be expected to garner strength. I argue that critical understanding of cosmopolitanization as an essential component of transformative democracy must account for the techno-communicative aspects inherent to processes of individualization, reflexivity and the reinvention of the second modern self. Such a realization foremost necessitates rethinking the *regulative* conception of rational subjecthood that, however implicitly, continues to characterize Beck's waitings, in order to foreground the *constitutive* character of second modern communicative agency (cf. Lash, 2002, 2003). In more general terms, I seek to contribute to a fuller theoretical understanding of one of the ways in which individuals may arrive at the point of thinking and feeling themselves to be cosmopolitan — how

they may become cosmopolitans (cf. Stevenson 2002) — in order that cosmopolitanization may be better apprehended in terms of the socio-technical complexities of the second modern period.

In what follows, I first present a brief overview of the component parts of Beck's theory of second modernity. Many readers will be familiar with Beck's environmental-risk thesis. It is probable that his ideas on cosmopolitanism and transformative democracy are less well known, however. In the first section, I conceptualize individualization, reflexivity, and subpolitics as component parts of cosmopolitanization and transformative democracy. Here, I argue that Beck's argument flows into a regulative/deterministic conception of the formation of an instrumental-rational subject primarily because of his structuralist conception of second modern agency. In the second section, I argue that a fuller theoretical understanding of cosmopolitanization must take into account digital modes of communication and virtualization. Drawing from Mark Poster's writings on the second media age, I use the concept of 'underdetermination' to prioritize the significance of the material/communicative means through which transformative democracy could be realized in and through to-be determined socio-technical configurations. To substantiate the theoretical argument(s), I review recent contributions to democratic media activism and critical cosmopolitanism, and I conclude with commentary on the dilemmas of cosmopolitanization in the context of non-determinant subject relations. The purpose of the paper is not to substitute Beck's largely structuralist explanation with a techno-material one. The purpose, rather, is to explore some of the subtle nuances in Beck's writings, and to develop a critical theoretical insight into the dynamics of the reflexive, socio-technical subject in the age of second modernity.

COSMOPOLITANISM AND SECOND MODERNITY

Social and political theory is awash with dialogue on democracy, technology and, by implication, social change (for example, see: Falk, 1995; Held, 1995; Langman, 2005). Articulated across a series of contributions (e.g. Beck, 1999, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Beck, et al., 2003; Beck and Willms, 2004; Beck and Lau, 2005; Beck and Sznaider, 2006), Beck and his colleagues insist that the conceptual apparatus most appropriate for comprehending such concerns be presented in terms of the epochal distinction between the first and second age of modernity. Rejecting arguments that 21st-century societies in the western world are witnessing a shift towards post-modernity, Beck and his associates consistently argue that a transformation is taking place within the structure of modernity.

The argument is as follows. The sociological gaze of the first age of modernity involves an 'additive' conception of 'simple globalization'. Simple globalization emerges from simultaneous material crises in economic,

ecological, political and societal relations. Developing out of the globally politicized side effects of industrial modern production, a 'residual risk society' started to emerge from the successes achieved in the first modern period. These transformations precipitated an increased *reflection* on science, technology and expertise, as well as the responsabilization of manufactured uncertainties and an incipient form of risk consciousness. Importantly, however, within the conceptual parameters of first modernity, the individual remains tied to the ontology of difference. Citizens and citizenship are conceived of in the context of the nation state, and the primary point of reference for questions of economics, politics and social life is the territorial unit (i.e. the nation state).

The second age of modernity ruptures the familiarity of simple, rule-enforcing linear logics of prediction, intervention and control. The proliferation of side-effects produced in first modernity gave rise to an acute awareness of pervasive uncertainty, as the unintended consequences of industrial production became a dominant force in history and society. Modernity eventually became an issue and problem for itself, facilitating the ascendance of a globalization of doubt and a reflexive, rule-altering world paradigm characterized by ambivalence, contingency and indistinctness. In the age of second modernity, the tenets of simple globalization are radically undermined by reflexive cosmopolitanism. The first modern subject responded to heightened awareness of risk in a regulative fashion, seeking systemic solutions to catastrophic conditions. The second modern individual, by contrast, confronts, in a constitutive, non-linear manner, the institutional integrity of the first modern period (cf. Lash, 2002, 2003). Stated differently, whereas the first age of simple modernity sought to modernize the traditional order, the second age of reflexive modernity not only denotes an undifferentiated change in first modern social structure, but it 'revolutionizes the very coordinates, categories and conceptions of change itself (Beck, et al., 2003: 3; see also Beck, 2002b: 19).

Under conditions of reflexive modernization, the conceptual coordinates of the first modern age — such as national statehood, class antagonism and gainful masculine employment — lose their superlative explanatory purchase (Beck, 1999; Beck and Lau, 2005). Simultaneous transformations in the structural and experiential economy of world risk society precipitate processes of disintegration and reinvention. From the victories of the industrial age arise ethical imperatives to experimentation and choice unfolding in the context of pursuing biographical remedies to systemic contradictions. Set against the backdrop of the declining importance of the axial coordinates of industrial modernity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), the fall-out of intersecting ontologies of risk and crises of political legitimacy is the dis-embedding of industrial modern sensibilities and the re-embedding of new collective identities in a world public sphere.

What Beck and his associates find at the intersection of individualization, reflexivity and manufactured uncertainties is the cosmopolitanization of the political: a window for democracy in the age of globalization. Brought on by a reflexive confrontation with first modern living, they argue, experiential consciousness is transformed in new democratizing spaces located outside the traditional sphere(s) of political activity. Specifically, they theorize that cosmopolitan solidarities form in the context of subpolitical activity, where moral and ethical motivations complement science and technology as the dominant cultural foundations for action. This is not to suggest that a form of ethically-motivated 'earth polities' (Beck, 1999: 8) usurps the techno-scientific complex. What it does suggest is that scientists and laypersons become increasingly cognizant of the provisional nature of scientific claims-making. Traditional conceptions of the political demonstrate a tendency to understand citizenship and the formation of experiential consciousness within the purview of material interests. Subpolitical networks, however, emerge through a transnational 'democratic dialogue' (Beck, 1999: 14), motivated by the global recognition of increasingly shared risk and responsibility. Manifestations of subpolitics, in this regard, should be understood in terms of both individual and collective expressions, spanning the 'cosmopolitan culinary eclecticism' of the supermarket (Beck, 2002b) to the formation of transnational alliances.

At its most fundamental level, the socio-theoretical framework, developed by Beck and his research associates, seeks to account for the structural conditions that allow for, and give rise to, cosmopolitanization. In a world that could conceivably destroy itself, the ascendance of world risk society is not only about nuclear, chemical, ecological and medical threats, but speaks to wider transformations in social, political, and self-relations (see Stevenson, 2002). Convincingly, Beck (1999) recognizes that the formation of cosmopolitan constellations depends as much on active human participation 'from below' as it does on transnational institution building 'from above'. Indeed, just as hegemony theorists realize the frailty of coercion in the absence of consent, Beck is aware that cosmopolitanization hinges on the importance of individual engagement and participatory agency from below - a new kind of inclusive citizenship founded upon the global dissemination of information. Yet it is precisely in this regard that the conceptual limitation(s) of his otherwise provocative cosmopolitan vision begin to surface.

Beck has repeatedly proclaimed that democratization in second modernity is underscored by an individualized imperative necessitating choice and decision-making agency. Taken as a whole, however, his writings can be understood to imply that the ontology of risk has set in motion a set of macrosociological processes which envelop the microsociological world of experiential consciousness (see Elliot, 2002; Latour, 2003). The theoretical result is a rationally motivated, instrumentally oriented, collective cosmopolitan subject. In more specific terms, Beck has not hitherto fully

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explored the dynamics of reflexive modernization beyond blind social processes (Lash, 1994), where the globalizing social conditions of the present *in themselves* embody processes of cosmopolitanization. This line of argumentation derives primarily from his steadfast insistence that reflexivity emerges from objective changes to the substance of global risk phenomena — matters of fact — that secondarily reverberate throughout the whole of society (Latour, 2003). To sustain the cosmopolitan argument, then, causal agency is assigned to a collectivizing, rational-instrumental human assessment of the viability of existence itself.

SOCIO-TECHNOLOGIES AND UNDERDETERMINATION

In the interests of achieving greater clarity about the complexities of, and the possibilities for, democratic transformity in second modernity, at least three influences on cosmopolitanization can be identified. The first, sketched above, concerns the 'meta-change' resulting from the unintended consequences of simple modernization. In the transition from first to second modernity, a sequence of processes are set in motion, whereby traditional boundaries of social definition are increasingly replaced with despatialized globalizing networks of communicative interactivity (Beck, et al., 2003; Beck and Willms, 2004; see also Castells, 2001). A necessary second level to cosmopolitanization, therefore, relates to material developments in globally accessible communication channels. What decentralized, non-hierarchical communication networks bring to the cosmopolitan perspective is the material means through which democratizing exchanges are able to dislodge from the restrictions imposed by analogue communication networks. Decentred networks also help to explain how traditional boundaries become choices and new cosmopolitan identities may be negotiated collectively through nonlinear processes of individualization. Yet it is crucial to recognize that the widely distributed networks that make possible the global dissemination of images and ideas do not simply facilitate the project of transformative democracy in a linear or deterministic manner. Representing a third influence on cosmopolitanization, therefore, are the digital/electronic modes of virtualization that pose important implications for understandings of time, space, mobility, locality and subjectivity. Given that the cosmopolitan thesis simultaneously incorporates the dimensions of culture, politics, communication and the self, conceptual understanding of reflexive cosmopolitanism has much to gain from the possibilities for, and the nuances of, digital modes of communicative effectivity.

The writings of Poster (1990, 1995, 2001) are an instructive entry point to this line of critique. At the centre of his work is the argument that the modernist conception of the instrumental-rational subject is systematically denied in the age of decentralized electronic communication networks. Contrasting print to electronic modes of virtualization (i.e. symbolic

information exchanges), he maintains that communicative outlets in the form of print technologies function to sustain the quintessential Cartesian subject. The material character of print as a system of disembodied signs lends itself to the figure of the rational-autonomous subject sustained over and against the world of objects: 'Print objects were (and are) determinant, allowing/promoting/enabling/encouraging a relation of opposition in the shape of a subject' (Poster, 2001:14). Mediated through discourses and narratives as representations of the outside world, print culture contributes to the regulation of the reflective, determinant, knowing subject. Importantly, for Poster, the latter presumes an ontological separateness of subject/object relations in the conceptual economy of (first) modern society.

With the development of electronic modes of virtualization, Poster argues that the rational dualisms and, ultimately, the conceptual credibility of the subject, so central to the print mode of information exchange, begin to dissolve. Conceptualizing the transcendental foremost as a condition of thought (rather than as an ontological condition of history), he contends that broadcast media, as a material manifestation of the first stage of electronic virtualization, correspond to a different space-time regime than print media. Here, subject/object relations increasingly appear in fragmented configurations that are disaggregated from the regulative conditions of first modern dualisms. In the first electronic media age of broadcast communications, the relations of representation that maintain the subject are increasingly undermined in a simulacral world. Because broadcast cultural objects are to an advanced degree their own representation — mobile simulacrum that undermines relations of representation to an outside world — a new kind of subject emerges. Neither modern in constitution, nor entirely removed from the fixity of the subject/object binary, Poster contends that the individual reminiscent of the first electronic media age has become too mobile and diffuse through relations of self-representation to subtend the world, and hence to maintain determinant subject relations, as if from the outside. In the hyperreality of broadcast media, however, subject/object separateness is maintained, as individuals continue to think themselves capable of resisting the outside world.

As the second electronic media age sets in, the decentralizing forces initiated by broadcast media are continued. The phenomenon of advanced virtualization in the form of digital media dislodges subject/object relations into further space/time, mind/body, human/machine entanglements that reconfigure the distinction between what is 'actual' and what is 'simulated'. For Poster, in contrast to the world of print, and, to a lesser extent, broadcast media (where subject/object relations are in a sense overdetermined), there emerges in the second media age a culture of underdetermination. Poster's concept of underdetermination is not only an epistemological corrective to theoretical currents in poststructuralism — theoretical currents which postulate

interpellation as a contingent, fluid process only to configure the subject as fixed, fast and frozen; it is also a corrective for those who seek to explain new media outlets in the context of already-existing social relations. Poster identifies new media spaces as levels of analyses or fields of discourse, locating the explanatory importance of decentring operations of the subject in fluid systems of signification, not discursive articulations, material manifestations, or ideologically pre-existing subject positions.

Digital communication, networked infrastructures, and new media

Spaces One of the main difficulties to emerge from theoretical reliance on already-existing political structures — and this includes first modern conceptions of participatory democracy and publicity — is that new media spaces, new political networks, new forms of subjectivity and, ultimately, new realities are excluded from the foreground of analysis. To offer a few examples, Sardar (1996), assessing human-computer mediation, argues that cyberspace represents a surrogate for the old colonies, and he warns of the colonizing opportunities available in 'cyberia'. Agre (2002), likewise, argues that internet applications tend to amplify or reinforce already existing institutional patterns and routines. Buchstein (1997) maintains that the internet is a means to facilitate already-existing public spheres, rather than to usher in the creation of new ones. And Poster (2001) observes similar tendencies in scholarly emphases on patterns of encryption and commodification on the internet. In both instances, says Poster, the potential of digital communication networks to facilitate the development of new forms of politics is explained in term of existing social relations and material struggles.

Carroll and Hackett's (2006) recent analysis of Anglo-American liberal democratic media activism (DMA) as an emergent field of politics goes some way to reconfiguring the relationship between participatory democracy and new media spaces. Conceptualizing DMA through the 'extant traditions' of social movement theory, they attempt to understand the 'grounds' for resisting corporate-dominated and highly commercialized media systems. In contrast to the instrumental configuration of existing organizations in 'conventional' social movement activism, Carroll and Hackett find that democratic media activists tend not to respect existing movement boundaries (2006: 86); that they use media, not as a means to higher ends, but rather as an interim end in itself (2006: 88); that their activities significantly influence repertoires of collective action, including patterns of media access, reform, participation and message reception (2006: 88); and that DMA is increasingly characterized by small clandestine cells held together by trust rather than authoritative, hierarchical organizational structures (2006: 89). For Carroll and Hackett, changes in the action repertoires of DMA also pose implications for processes of identity formation among activists and within activist networks. Whereas

conventional activism is characterized by the construction of a clear collective identity, they find that democratic media activists exhibit weak identity ties and hold multiple political identities that are forged through decentred and destabilized systems, of interaction (see also Bennett, 2003). With an action repertoire focused on communication itself, they contend, less cohesive and more reflexive forms of action cannot be said to have simply carved out a niche in 'the ecology of contemporary movements' (Bennett, 2003: 99). Rather, in Carroll and Hackett's assessment, DMA is transforming action repertoires through a participatory model of communicative democracy that challenges the system of symbolic production itself.

Democratic media activism, as a form of global social justice activism, points to changes in the ways in which contemporary politics are being conducted. Of course, growing levels of accessibility to digital communications enable actors who were previously restricted in their access to global media to use channels of communication to participate in transnational protest politics. Carroll and Hackett recognize this when they argue that media activists, as the agents of an 'archetypically new social movement' (2006: 96), criss-cross various social movement organizations in their capacity as 'cosmopolitans' (2006: 94). Although they provide useful empirical data to substantiate transformations taking place in the subpolitical realm, one of the difficulties to emerge from their analysis is that they fall back on the (first modern) metaphor of the public sphere to conceptualize these changes. The problem with a continued reliance on the public sphere is, as DeLuca and Peeples (2002) argue, that it holds out a static notion of the public arena, privileging dialogue, rationality, embodied communication and consensus-building in the struggle for participatory democracy. It also marginalizes forms of dissent that exist in the shadows of normative political activity, even normative conceptions of counter-public spheres. It fails to differentiate analytically globalization from cosmopolitanism,³ and it ignores (however inadvertently) the importance of current social and technological conditions that are changing the nature of politics itself. Despite the fact that Carroll and Hackett draw from Fraser (1997) to theorize communicative democracy through 'subaltern counter publics', they are unable to fully shed the first modern conceptual baggage that accompanies the normative-philosophical metaphor of the public sphere.

In place of the notion of a public sphere (or spheres), DeLuca and Peeples (2002) offer the metaphor of the public screen as a necessary supplement. The most important contemporary public disseminations, they contend, take place on (or over) screens: television, the internet and newspaper pages. These techno-material developments, however, do not simply signify new modes of global communication through a shift from dialogue to dissemination. Rather, for DeLuca and Peeples, developments in the dissemination of

information flows and mobilities across screens suggest new forms of social organization, perception, sociability and subjectivity. The hyper- and re-mediatized images that increasingly appear on public screens place an epistemological premium on emotion over rationality, speed over reflection and distraction over deliberation (2002: 133). These developments do not signal the end of politics. Rather, what they signal is the end, or at least the reduced efficacy of first modern conceptions of dialogical politics in favour of subpolitical image-events disseminated both by transnational corporations and democratic media activists well beyond the domain of the nation state. From internet activism and culture jamming to Greenpeace-style media events (or public opinion dissemination campaigns against Walmart, Nike and the GAP), what we are witnessing in contemporary DMA is not critique versus spectacle, but critique through spectacle (see DeLuca and Peeples, 2002: 134). Far from Habermas's corporate corruption of the public sphere, corporations today are vulnerable to images and spectacles produced by publicity activists. And unlike Habermas's emphasis on (first modern) rational critical dialogue as a mode of perception, in the second media age we are witnessing a mode of perception more appropriately conceptualized as 'distraction': a mode of perception brought forth in a virtual media environment characterized by hypermediacy, remediation, image dissemination and a transformation of first modern understandings of publicity.

It is not, then, that democratic media activists simply adapt to, and interact with, new communication infrastructures in a networked society (Castells, 1997) to further their cause. Rather, a diverse range, of people — not all of whom are formal 'activists' — are able to consume as well as produce media messages, to find multiple points of entry, and to move with ease from one location to another. The emergence of new, virtual movements, with their corresponding fluid identities, traces back to the Zapatista movement of the early 1990s (Langman, 2005), and, later, anti-globalization protest movements. Today, virtual 'internetworked' social movements are the primary way in which resistance movements mobilize, and this is where the importance of the public screen becomes clear. The metaphor of the public screen enables us to understand not simply what is, but also what could be. Whereas Carroll and Hackett seek to assess what 'is' through their reliance on the normative philosophical referent of the public sphere, there is considerable theoretical value in probing the question of what could or should be (see Beck and Sznaider, 2006). The latter is important because the theoretical exercise of probing what could be hinges on the characteristic of indeterminacy, and it has the potential to facilitate the second modern explanatory transition from reflective to constitutive subject relations. To fully understand what is at stake in new communication technologies in second modernity, in other words, we cannot frame our research questions exclusively within already-existing

political structures and ideologies. To do so is to close down possibilities of 'thinking otherwise' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). I am arguing that the cultural medium of interactivity has changed — technologically and socially — and with it have emerged new forms of politics, subjectivities and global democratic forms of activism. I do not wish to suggest that DMA has been unaffected by transformations that have come with digital communications. What I am suggesting is that reliance on existing political structures (e.g. the public sphere) and concepts (e.g. globalization) has the inadvertent theoretical effect of limiting the extent to which we can gain insight into the constitutive, yet-to-be-determined functions of new media spaces that do not fit easily within the conceptual coordinates of first modern (nation state) society. To frame the question of transformative democracy using existing political structures is to limit the extent to which we can inquire about what could be. Even if the latter methodological approach to cosmopolitanism turns out to be wrong, this is precisely the theoretical challenge that lies before us.

It follows that we cannot continue to rely on a Kantian-inspired political cosmopolitanism that posits a single, 'universalistic' world polity or political culture as something more or less externally developed to regulate, if not replace, already existing social relations. A more 'critical cosmopolitanism' (Delanty, 2006) conceives of 'world openness' as socially situated and as constitutive of social relations from within multiple modernities, cultures, and publics. While cosmopolitanism has hitherto largely been associated with the political formation of a world republic, conceptions of the world polity have been forged in opposition to what Beck conceptualizes as the 'container theory of society' (the nation state and its component parts). Cosmopolitanism has been forged in opposition to the nation state because, whereas universalistic world polity envisions an open political community formed through a world citizenry, nation state theorizing has tended to envision a relatively closed or bounded domain of the social.⁴ The result has been an analytical separation of the political and the social in cosmopolitan theorizing (Delanty, 2006).

Critical cosmopolitanism shifts attention away from the largely Eurocentric vision of a global polity as something that is superimposed on already existing relations to the spaces where 'new relations between self, other, and world develop in moments of openness' (Delanty 2006: 27). Here, analysis is focused within rather than beyond social relations, and neither a pluralistic global community nor the mere fact of human diversity or participation in global dialogue is taken as the cosmopolitan world order. By the very logic of the conceptual coordinates of second modernity, we cannot think in terms of either/or — that is, in terms of whether or not cosmopolitanism exists. Rather, we are dealing with 'both/and' phenomena: multiple forms of cosmopolitanism, understood as a cultural medium of societal transformation.

Global, or even subaltern, counter-publics are surely important in the empirical world. But what critical cosmopolitanism offers is a more hermeneutic, constitutive engagement of social life through the notion of openness as opposed to universality, stressing the significance of new cultural modes of mediation. Socio-technological, and not necessarily just political, configurations are an obvious and crucial component.

By concentrating explanatory emphases on 'levels' of socio-technological praxis in the culture of underdetermination, analyses are effectively able to avoid two conceptual limitations that continue to thwart investigations into the political aspects of socio-technical configurations. The first pertains to the tendency to fetishize either the human or machine components of socio-technologies by positing a technical realm of effectivity which stands in conceptual, and metaphysical, contrast to a non-technical realm (Hand and Sandywell, 2002). One set of perspectives has taken the form of 'exclusionary' processes that seek to connect digital communication practices with the formation of a techno-democratic global citizenry. A second set of 'exclusionary' perspectives has forwarded the argument that cyber-imperialism, privatization and corporatization contribute to the solidification of institutional power relations and the perversion of global democratization. In the first instance, widespread access to instantaneous communication networks is understood to democratize global communications, as the physical and informational limitations of traditional forms of democratic interaction give way to the pluralization of boundaries afforded by informational fluidities and mobilities. In the latter scenario, individuals are situated as subjects in pre-existing relations of subordination/superordination. What both perspectives share is the tendency to minimize, if not ignore, the relational, constitutive character of socio-technologies, demonstrating a theoretical compulsion to premise the forces of inclusion or exclusion on an asymmetrical balance of causal (subject/object) effectivity.

Therefore, the problem that emerges from a sustained conceptual distinction between the social and the technological — even if merely for rhetorical-analytic purposes — is that the metaphysical logistics of subject/object relations, so characteristic of the first media age of emerging print culture, find contemporary expression in the epistemological essentialisms of social/technological determinism. Foreclosing on possibilities for theorizing the contingency of techno-communicative agency at the interface of socio-technical forces, protracted reliance on subject/object separateness contributes, secondly, to the reproduction of an oversimplified conception of instrumental-rational action in the grand narratives of social or technological process. Whether formulated through inclusive or exclusive perspectives, subjectivity is understood to develop prior to, or independent of,

actual communicative praxis, privileging either the social *or* technological components in the determination of socio-technical life.

Consequently, the methodological problematic at the heart of studying digital/electronic media is to approach communicative outlets, socio-technologies, as *constitutive* of unforeseen cultural forms. The difficulty arising from continued reliance on pre-existing, regulative conceptual frameworks to make sense of the spatial and temporal specificity of to-be-determined self/media configurations is that the social field is configured primarily as one of action. Castells (2001) recognizes this when he argues that the internet, as a malleable technology, is susceptible to any number of social outcomes. Not only does this distort the centrality of symbolic sign systems in the constitution of fluid subjectivities, but it also fails to allow for an understanding of how digital/electronic 'interpellations' are constituted outside the immediacy of consciousness (Poster, 1995). Theorizing communicative agency through digital/electronic media, in other words, should not focus on the delimitation of the subject or object in question — that is, on neither the instrumentality of consciousness nor technological objects — but rather on the levels of meaning derived from contingent configurations of communicative exchange.

COMMUNICATIVE AGENCY AND THE REFLEXIVE SUBJECT

As subject/object relations continue to dissolve in the second electronic media age, the informational mobilities endemic to the culture of underdetermination bring into analytic focus the necessary role of communicative agency in reflexive global configurations of the self. In a world of mobilities and flows, of non — or quasi — objects, where 'subjects' are already in the world with 'objects' of knowledge, individuals experience the world foremost beyond their immediate locality. Beck is acutely aware of this, recognizing the significance of what he designates as the 'nowhere place': the digital cosmopolitan architecture of television, mobile phones and the internet (2002b). The despatialized networks of global interaction made possible through technological advancement present, for Beck, a new space-time experience that is transforming first modern conceptions of politics, identity, sociability and the self. Not only does this identify second modern individuals as *creators* rather than interpreters of their networks of interactivity, but it also reveals the second modern individual as a reflexive 'quasi-subject' — both the result and producer of the networked self (Beck et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Beck acknowledges socio-technoscapes as central forces contributing to nonlinear subjectification, he reduces the explanatory importance of socio-technologies to the material means that *facilitate* rather than *constitute* processes of cosmopolitanization. That is, for all the recent emphasis on non-linear contingency in second modern

'quasi subjectification', an ontological conception of emancipatory politics is imposed on, if not inscribed into, an already-formulated cultural narrative of transformative democracy. Not only does this fail to fully appreciate the 'underdetermining' configurational character of the fusion of technological and social forces, it also lends itself to the continued fetishization of the social component of socio-technologic configurations, imbuing this component with an intrinsic essence oriented towards the determination of transformative cosmopolitan futures (see Hand and Sandwell, 2002). By simply assuming the global mediation of signs and information without concern for the technological nuances of the actual mode(s) of information dissemination, the historicity of techno-communicative relations remains confined within the conceptual parameters of a 'petrified sociology' (Beck and Willms, 2004:19). In effect, democratizing regimes of global interactivity are reduced to a simple matter of access to information and communications technologies, set against the explanatory backdrop of world risk society and its component parts.

As a necessary corrective to Beck's conceptual offering, effective negotiation of the dilemmas of cosmopolitanization must begin with an explicit rejection of relations of determinant metaphysical-reflective effectivity to embrace the non-linear complexities of the second modern self. Granting explanatory premium to the dynamics of the socio-technological sites of mediation in world risk society does not preclude accepting the importance of 'risk conditions' in subpolitical mobilization as a first step in the constitution of cosmopolitanization. It does, however, allow for deeper analyses of techno-mediation's influence on the dissolution of rational subjecthood in the culture of underdetermination. In a socio-theoretical scenario that simultaneously dissolves its own object and subject, the distinctly apolitical constitution of underdetermining communicative praxis paradoxically opens possibilities for [subpolitical activity via reflexive subjectification.

Furthermore, with emphases on a socio-technical conception of cosmopolitanization, it may be conceded that the digital architectures of the second modern media age open possibilities for the celebration of the postmodern pleasures available in the globalized society. In this narrative, cosmopolitans contrast to locals, where the former are educated, work, love, marry and shop internationally (Beck, 2000: 80). It is, rather, a more distinctly phenomenal interpretation of cosmopolitanization that comprises the theoretico-conceptual thrust of Beck's nomadic world of 'place polygamy' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 25). Here, the cosmopolitan need not be any more physically mobile than the local, as processes of cosmopolitanization stand as ethical negotiations of selfhood in a fluid world of blurring boundaries and unforeseen configurations of social life (see Stevenson, 2002). Again, this does not in any definitive manner imply overt forms of activism characteristic of social

movement organizations. In an age of global disseminations that are comprised of information, people, food, and risk, and which proliferate through the experiential domain of everyday living, cosmopolitanization pertains as much to a phenomenology of transnationality as it does to subpolitical activist networks.

CONCLUSION

Affirming Lash's (2002, 2003) philosophical interpretation of the linear character of modernity, it is useful to understand the first modern period as comprised predominantly of a logic of structures, assuming an ontological dualism where the reflective, knowing subject stands over and against the world of material objects. In the conceptual economy of first modernity, it is the distance from the material world afforded to the subject that enables the acquisition of reason, knowledge and certainty, reinforcing the stability and fixity of truth/falsity, public/private, human/technology distinctions. The coming of second modernity ruptures the determinacy of first modern certitudes, as a logic of structures is replaced by a logic of flows (Lash, 2002, 2003; Beck and Willms, 2004: 27; see also Castells, 2001). In the second modern period, it is the unintended consequences manufactured in the industrial modern period, the intractable uncertainties of techno-scientific advancement, which are purported to have culminated in a state of ever-incomplete knowledge. Far from presupposing a knowing subject that transcends the determinant world of objects — *res cogitans* against *res extensa* — the process of modernization has transformed its own taken-for-granted foundations.

Sharply contrasting the rational subjecthood found in the first modern period, consequently, networked techno-interaction plays an important role in contributing to fluid, contingent processes of second modern reflexive subjectification. The levels of communicative agency necessitated in world risk society and facilitated by the network society are antithetical to the instrumental conception of the subject that crystalizes through communicative rationality in the type of world public sphere postulated by Beck. The cosmopolitan imperative of second modernity rests on non-linear forms of communicative agency, and new possibilities for cosmopolitan consciousness open in socio-technical spaces of communicative effectivity. If cosmopolitanization, as an analytic concept, is to be fully understood, then it must take seriously the cultural contingency of increased levels of informational and experiential mobility made possible by global networked infrastructures. The conceptual economy offered up in the culture of underdetermination offers one point of entry to explore further the formation and trajectory of reflexive cosmopolitan selves.

Notes

- 1 Delanty (2006) recently formulated the concept of critical cosmopolitanism as a methodologically grounded approach designed to make sense of social transformation

- by identifying new or emergent social realities predicated on the notions of world openness and cultural modes of mediation.
- 2 In their special issue of the *British Journal of Sociology* devoted to 'methodological cosmopolitanism', Beck and Sznajder (2006) contend that the cosmopolitan turn necessitates a rethinking of all the basic conceptual presuppositions of the social sciences. They identify geography, anthropology, international relations, international law, political philosophy/theory, and sociology and social theory in this interdisciplinary movement. Notable for arguments presented here, media, technology, cyber-philosophy and communication studies fail to gain mention, and insights from these fields are largely absent from the issue.
 - 3 The distinction between globalization and cosmopolitanism is significant. A number of recent works theorize globalizing flows, mobilities and networked relations, but few consider the nuances of self-technology relations. That is, globalizing media are a feature of the contemporary era, but the ability to communicate globally does not equate *a priori* to cosmopolitan consciousness.
 - 4 The latest variant of first modern reductionism tends to assume the discursive currency of 'identity' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

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