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FREEDOM AND THE INTERNET: A REVIEW OF *THE INTERNET GALAXY* BY MANUEL CASTELLS

Shyamkrishna Balganesh*

"The Internet is indeed a technology of freedom – but it can free the powerful to oppress the uninformed, it may lead to the exclusion of the devalued by the conquerors of value."
- Manuel Castells

Introduction

Manuel Castells is widely regarded in academic circles as the world's first Internet philosopher. His epoch-making trilogy *The Information Age* critically reviewed the socio-economic, political and cultural changes being accelerated through what Castells sees as the technologically driven process of globalization.[1] While his previous works concentrated on analyzing the *information era* and its consequences for society, they did not analyze the *Internet* as a relatively autonomous phenomenon, capable of generating its own sociological and regulatory ramifications. In *The Internet Galaxy,*[2] Castells seeks to do precisely this, focusing on the Internet as an independent techno-social process, and placing it in the context of the broader hypotheses of his previous work.[3]

The present essay will seek to critically reflect on *The Internet Galaxy*, but by specifically locating it in the context of the rights' discourse surrounding the value of 'freedom'. In doing so, an attempt will be made to analyze Castells' work within the context of a broader cyber-libertarian school of thinking. *Cyber-libertarianism*, as the name implies refers to a school of thinking "..that links the fruitions of electronically mediated forms of living with right wing libertarian ideas of freedom, social life and the political economy."[4] Within this school of thought (as in all forms of libertarian thinking), one might further categorize analysts into those that hold radical right-wing libertarian views and those that hold relatively moderate libertarian views. While both schools of thought believe in reduced governmental regulation of cyberspace, the former takes the argument to its logical extreme in arguing for the complete absence of all regulation in the context of the Internet, while the latter concedes that some amount of government support for individual freedoms may indeed prove to be beneficial.[5] While classifying any piece of writing into either category may not be

* B.A., LL.B (Hons.) '03, National Law School of India University, Bangalore; B.C.L student 2003-04, University of Oxford. An earlier draft of this paper was submitted as part of a seminar course coordinated by Prof. K. Sitaramam at the National Law School entitled 'Human Rights and the Challenges of Globalization'.

[1] *See* MANUEL CASTELLS, THE INFORMATION AGE: ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND CULTURE (1996) (hereinafter "CASTELLS – 1").

[2] MANUEL CASTELLS, THE INTERNET GALAXY (2001).

[3] Which relates to the emergence of what Castells calls the 'informational society' and '*informationalism'* where the economy and development as a whole is driven by the diffusion of information. He is however cautious to add that it is not reflective of the emergence of an altogether new mode of production. *See* CASTELLS – 1, *supra* note 1, at 13.

[4] *See generally,* Langdon Winner, *Cyberlibertarian Myths and the Prospects for Community*, *at* <http://ctcs.fsf.ub.es/prometheus21/articulos/obsciberprome/winner.pdf.>(last visited July 21, 2003).

[5] Castells classifies these schools into the European libertarian school and the American school, with the latter seeming to represent the radical approach. He makes it clear that his references to liberty are in the European sense, allowing for some government regulation at times. CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 33.

a straightforward task, recent instances of Internet-based libertarianism would seem to include the writings of law professor Lawrence Lessig.

Lessig's broad hypothesis is that cyberspace by its very architecture appears to be *prima facie* unregulable (a neutral platform – bereft of control over content), which may also have been an objective behinds its creation. This being the case, he argues that any form of *control* over Internet activities runs counter to the fundamental premise with which it was created.[6] One easily discernible trend in these pieces of writing lies in their making futuristic predictions about the impact of the Internet on society. Lessig, for instance, argues how control in the context of the Internet promises to radically change the direction of growth and innovation in cyberspace.[7] From one perspective, such futurological arguments cannot but be a part of a radical libertarian approach, given the extreme positions that are often adopted. Castells however, makes it clear at the very outset that he does not seek to make any such predictions and is restricting his work to an analysis of what *has already* transpired in cyberspace.[8] As an overall framework, his approach comes across as much more moderate in that he is not opposed to governmental regulation in all its forms, but would only seek to minimize the same to the bare essential level.[9]

In *The Internet Galaxy*, Castells undertakes a critical review of the value frameworks underlying the Internet as a medium of communication. It would therefore be apposite to classify Castells various chapters into five broad areas for review – (i) the social dimensions of the Internet; (ii) the Internet culture; (iii) the effects of the Internet on the market, (iv) the political implications of the Internet and (v) the Internet and the concept of the 'digital divide'. Right through his entire book, Castells follows the methodology of backing his arguments with a very large amount of statistical and anecdotal evidence. In spite of his theorization, Castells consciously succeeds in avoiding *any futurological predictions* as mentioned at the very outset, which is indeed remarkable for a work of this nature, but which can be rather disenchanting at times.

Castells takes off by providing a brief historical overview of how the Internet originated and the various purposes, which were initially planned for it. He analyses how the confluence of the scientific academia, military research and the culture of freedom were responsible for the creation of the ARPANET, the predecessor to the Internet. Unprecedented in history, the U.S. military pioneered this project, but did not seek to control its direction and use; instead preferring to wait and watch it progress to a stage where it could intervene. Luckily, this stage never arose. Castells contrasts this model of peripheral control with the Soviet model of 'security above all else'.[10] This makes for a very interesting reading – indicating how the military was actually responsible for the creation of the Internet, the abode for individual freedom. The question that immediately comes to mind is – was this

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[6] *See* LAWRENCE LESSIG, THE FUTURE OF IDEAS 26-85 (2001).

[7] *Id* at 199.

[8] CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 4. As Castells observes,

> "…In the pages that follow you will find no predictions about the future, since I think we barely understand our present, and I deeply distrust the methodology underlying these predictions."

The only place where Castells consciously deviates from this rule is in his discussion on the concept of the physical space vis-à-vis the Internet and his examination of William Mitchell's hypothesis in this regard. CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 235.

[9] Castells makes it clear that his normative position and interpretation differ from those of Lessig too. *See id* at 170.

[10] *Id.* at 21.

consequence merely serendipitous? If one places this military origins in the context of arguments to the effect that the code of the Internet can be easily manipulated to place undue restrictions on privacy, autonomy and liberty on the Internet, one begins to see how the militaristic origins of the Internet could indeed have some ramifications on the future *libertarian* nature of the Internet.

The Culture of the Internet: A Culture of *freedom*

What made the Internet the abode for libertarian values of privacy, freedom, and openness? Castells believes that the interaction between four types of cultures resulted in this. The first, he calls the 'techno-meritocratic' culture – which consists of techno elites rooted in the academia that believe in the inherent progressiveness of science. Being in the academia, they bring with them certain *academic values* – meritocracy lying in scientific discovery, the concept of peer review and recognition, the importance of applied technology rather than abstract theorization and probably most importantly, the culture of openness and cooperative sharing of information and findings. The second is the 'hacker ethic', which contrary to public perception, consists of law-abiding individuals who believe in autonomous creative programming. The projects they work on are, unlike the elites, self-assigned. They bring with them the values of openness (and the entire open source/free software culture), freedom (free distribution of knowledge and the right to modify it), cooperation, sharing and an inherent joy in pure creativity. Membership in the *hacker community* is of great importance to this culture. The third category consists of 'virtual communitarians' – of individuals who begin to use the networks created to advance their own goals and in the process give shape and direction to the further development of the network itself. Lastly, are the entrepreneurs, consisting of businesses ready to modify their standard practices and adapt them to the new culture brought about by the Internet.[11]

What characterizes this entire classification is that a general culture of 'freedom' – premised on the sharing of information, cooperation, free access, open source and the like pervaded the Internet in its original creation (as opposed to its myriad uses). Any form of control – whether through state or commercial arms of civil society (e.g., copyright), was resisted vehemently. Freedom therefore comes across as the underlying libertarian culture behind the *creation* of the Internet. But is this to be restricted to the initial phase of use/development of the Internet alone? While in the initial phase, the entrepreneurial class may have adapted itself to suit this culture, it is undoubtedly equally true that over a period of time, this has changed and the entrepreneurial class has used its clout to modify the Internet in turn to suit its interests – and the element of commercial control has become a reality. The use of cookies to invade privacy, copyright to restrict access to information and the like are the realities of today's Internet culture. The commercial misappropriation of the Internet is today a reality and there is a distinct possibility that it will remain the dominant structure of the Internet for the years to come.[12] – In retrospect, one does however feel that it would have however been clear that over time, the inherent flexibility in the Internet will be used by commercial interests to modify the very culture of the Internet to suit their interests (from a culture of openness to a culture of control) – a form of critical appropriation from within, which would make for an interesting study in itself.

Social Implications of the Internet: Rethinking the community (and community values?)

[11] *Id.* at 39 – 59. Specifically in his chapter titled 'The Culture of the Internet'.

[12] For a general discussion on this entire issue see LESSIG, *supra* note 6.

A major criticism leveled against the Internet and online communication is that it has resulted in reduced real-time sociability and entices individuals to live their own fantasies online through anonymity and role-playing, thereby escaping the real world Castells provides a large amount of statistical evidence to reject this[13] and then goes on to argue that the Internet has created a concept called 'networked individualism' – a social pattern, where individuals build their online and offline networks based on their own interest, values and affinities.[14] Social organization therefore is no longer premised on geographical proximity or other ethnic/familial identities but on the element of choice. Castells even argues that the 'virtual community' may necessitate a rethinking of the very concept of the community.[15]

Castells explicitly avoids making futuristic predictions about the social implications of the Internet[16] – and this may appear to be problematic. Studies have in recent times begun to question whether the individualism brought forth by the Internet, comes at the cost of certain other democratic values.[17] Networked individualism, coupled with anonymity may represent an abject ideal of libertarian freedom ("triumph of the individual"), allowing a person to be what who he or she wants, wherever he or she wants on the Internet. What seems unclear in Castells' analysis is the question of how networked individualism can actually interact with and detrimentally affect real-time sociability in many ways.[18] The reason this assumes importance is because at the end of the day, the individual (whether networked or not) is *human* and elements of human dignity and respect are therefore critical to his existence. Take the infamous *Lambda-Moo* case.[19] It certainly was representative of networked individualism – but the online activity had actual social repercussions – the online crimes had devastating real time psychological impacts on the *individual* victims. While networked individualism may be an *absolute virtue* from a purely libertarian point of view – it cannot be at the cost of other fundamental social values which will continue to remain unmodified by the Internet for one simple reason – human beings will remain human and continue to experience human emotions and feelings, however virtual they make seem to make themselves. Will networked individualism succeed in changing this too?

The Internet and the market: Flexible Labor

Castells observes how the Internet has brought about a radical transformation in the way business is carried out – not only in the creation of *dot.com* companies, but also of the *networked enterprise* – where the business model is characterized by individualized networks

[13] He does however conclude that while the overall picture does not support a finding that the Internet does reduce real-time social interaction, there are circumstances where the Internet is used as a substitute for the same. He goes on to observe that since most of the studies were carried out at different times and in different contexts, it may be inappropriate to generalise from all of them as a whole. *See* CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 124.

[14] *Id.* at 118 - 125.

[15] Castells notes how this entire debate was sparked off by a book written by Howard Rheingold in 1993 (HOWARD RHEINGOLD, THE VIRTUAL COMMUNITY (1993)). *See id* at 125.

[16] He alludes to the issue by pointing out that "…These trends are tantamount to the triumph of the individual, although the costs for society are still unclear." CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 133.

[17] *See generally,* CASS SUNSTEIN, REPUBLIC.COM (2001).

[18] As he observes, "…These trends are tantamount to the triumph of the individual, although the costs for society are still unclear." *Id.* at 133.

[19] Which involved the commission of *virtual crimes* of a heinous nature. *See* Julian Dibbell, *A Rape in Cyberspace or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database Into a Society*, THE VILLAGE VOICE, December 21, 1993, pp. 36 – 42.

of operations. At the same time however, he is clear that certain fundamental tenets of the economy have continued to remain the same (and probably will, though he refuses to say so in express terms).[20] He also provides a detailed analysis of how financial markets operate vis-à-vis the Internet and their valuation norms. The critical part for our discussion here is however, his reflections on labor in the networked enterprise.

The Internet, according to Castells has resulted in the need for self-programmable, re-programmable, skilled labor in large quantities.[21] He observes how this has resulted in the immigration of techno-elites from the developing world into the West and goes on to show how this can benefit the origin countries. It has also resulted in a simultaneous aggregation of capital and disaggregation of labor – with individual entrepreneurs being free to do as they please in the market. This is indeed a representation of the overall freedom introduced by the Internet, and the percolation of the same into the market as well. However, specifically in the context of labor relations, he shows how labor has become *flexible* as a consequence of the networked enterprise – which includes among other things the gradual reduction in the rights and obligations traditionally existent between the labor and management.[22]

Can this development have its own disadvantages as well? From a market liberalism point of view, it certainly is beneficial; but will the economic freedom of the entrepreneur come at the cost of the rights of the labor force. Understood concurrently with Castells' observations on immigration[23], it is possible that under the rubric of flexibility, a large part of the labor force may be denied its basic labor rights, as understood in most parts of the world – fixed hours, leave, etc. The problem probably is that Castells is concentrating his analysis on the developments within the West alone. The Internet is however a global phenomenon and the market patterns are likely to reproduce themselves in other parts of the world as well. In other countries (especially of the Third world), the lack of an advanced regulatory framework for labor while reflective of market expedience may simultaneously result in further marginalization of an already impoverished working class. In such a case, if these other repercussions were to follow, they could come at the cost of individual liberty as far as the labor force is concerned –market freedom for some may then mean the denial of basic freedoms to yet others.

At this point another problem with Castells' approach becomes clear – his attempt to segregate the social, economic and political implications. For instance, he does not sufficiently analyze the social implications of the *flexible labor* approach to work, or the cultural repercussions of having a large part of the labor force consisting of immigrant techno-elites.[24] This absence of inter-linkages in Castells' study may have resulted in his not capturing many dimensions of the Internet's socio-economic effects that have since the publication of his book, begun to assume critical relevance.[25]

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[20] Making reference primarily to the laws of the market economy. CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 66.

[21] *Id* at 90 – 92.

[22] CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 95. To use Castells' own language,

> "…The notion of a predictable career pattern, working full-time in a firm or in the public sector, over a long period of time, and under precise, contractual definition of rights and obligations common to much of the workforce, is vanishing from business practice…"

[23] *Id.* at 93.

[24] *See generally,* Raj Jayadev, *South Asian Workers in Silicon Valley*, *in* THE PUBLIC DOMAIN 167 (Shuddhabrata Sengupta et al. eds., 2001).

[25] For instance the emergence of issues such as *cyber racism*. *See*, William Jones, *Race in Cyberspace*, *at* <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/cyberracism/jonas.html> (last visited August 5, 2003).

Political Implications of the Internet

Castells' treatment of the impact of the Internet on civil society and democracy is indeed quite remarkable. He observes how citizens' movements and civil society organizations have used the Internet to build their networks, communicate their ideas and have indirectly had a bearing on the very structure and function of the Internet. He also deals comprehensively with the issue of how the Internet through e-governance has allowed for greater levels of accountability, transparency and information access, in principle.[26]

He then deals with the issue of the role of the state in this environment of absolute freedom in communication and expression and observes how states have begun to restrain freedom through the code of the Internet (citing the Singapore example), but have allowed a certain level of freedom.[27] He then presents a picture of how the Internet could be used by states for military purposes in a process called 'swarming'. This part of the analysis appears straight out of a science-fiction novel and makes for entertaining reading. Castells observes that in the context of the Internet, the entire discourse of power and control now revolves around control over the medium of communication and true freedom, that is the hallmark of the Internet, can continue only so long as people retain their control over the medium of communication.[28]

Castells then takes off from Lessig's hypothesis in *Code and other Laws of Cyberspace*[29] to show how in the context of the Internet, commercial and state interests have begun intertwining to regain control of the Internet medium, through a manipulation of the code therein.[30] He observes how privacy, liberty and anonymity are gradually eroded with the need to reassert sovereignty (by the state) and to reclaim property (by enterprises). Another very interesting point brought out is that the true constraint on liberty and freedom will no longer be localized, but will be global in the true sense[31] – consequently, the contexts of interpretation will have a bearing on determining the permissibility of an action – which Castells terms the 'electronic panopticon'. According to Castells, very interestingly, this could result in the process of individuals internalizing censorship.[32]

Castells' analysis of the linkage between commerce and state is indeed compelling. The networked enterprises, which began with a general libertarian philosophy, are now the principal actors in eroding these libertarian values on the Internet. The primary reason attributed to this is their attempt to regain a commercial monopoly on the Internet (through property rights), which they can do only by forging an alliance with the state. This in turn has, according to Castells resulted in a further subversionist movement – wherein individuals have begun to develop technologies of freedom (as opposed to technologies of control) that promote the values of libertarianism. Instances he cites are self-deleting email, encryption technologies, open source software (that questions copyright over software code) and the use of anonymity devices.[33]

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[26] CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 138 – 158.

[27] *Id* at 164.

[28] *Id* at 164 – 165.

[29] LAWRENCE LESSIG, CODE AND OTHER LAWS OF CYBERSPACE (1999).

[30] CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 170.

[31] *Id* at 179.

[32] *Id* at 180.

[33] *Id.* at 182 – 184.

This part of the book very poignantly portrays the Internet as the true battleground of libertarian philosophy where different methodologies – legal, political, physical, ideological and technological are used in the attempt to control the Internet. Unlike Lessig, who predicts in explicit terms (given recent trends) the loss of the freedom intrinsic to the Internet,[34] Castells argues that a paradigm shift is necessary to change the mutual distrust that exists between the state and civil society. This can, in some sense be viewed as extremely idealistic. It is clear that this has not occurred and the battle continues.

The Digital Divide: The Internet and the Third World

In the next few chapters, Castells provides a detailed statistical analysis of Internet usage around the world and ethnic profiles of individuals connected to the Internet. He then goes on to address the issue of the digital divide in the context of the Internet and raises two very critical questions. Does the absence of connectivity to the Internet, mean marginalization for a country and it people? In the alternative, does connectivity result in increased dependency of the developing world on the developed and a loss of the socio-cultural uniqueness integral to the third world?

Castells' analysis does not seem to address the issue sufficiently. Through a rather detailed descriptive analysis of global Internet connectivity statistics, he goes on to establish that the basis of the digital divide lies in the development divide and that the Internet comes at a stage later. He then makes an argument that it is only the elites within the developing world that seek to enter the digital marketplace and end-up playing a *subordinate* role to the dominant actors in that setting, which has the effect of further marginalizing the non-elite in the developing world. All the same, he argues that this is inevitable and that development without the Internet is impossible.[35]

From a third world perspective, what then is the solution? Once again – no ready-made solution seems forthcoming. Castells only says that the problem might be solved if certain factors are worked on – infrastructure, political will, public participation and so on – the usually mentioned ones. How would Castells react to a third-world project like the *Simputer*,[36] which involves a mobile computer, using open source software, designed specifically for rural usage? The marginalized no doubt still remain outside the realm of global commerce (since apart from connectivity they hardly have the other resources necessary), but in theory are no longer any worse off than the elite in their urban setting. In this case, are the marginalized any better off than they were before, or does connectivity here mean further dependence – which they could do without? This could be interpreted merely to be an extrapolation of Castells' own hypothesis that the Internet can be used by *virtual*

[34] *See generally,* LESSIG, *supra* note 6.

[35] As he observes,

> "The new model of development requires leap-frogging over the planetary digital-divide. It calls for an Internet-based economy, powered by learning and knowledge-generation capacity, able to operate within the global networks of value, and supported by legitimate, efficient political institutions."
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> CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 271.

[36] The 'Simputer' is the acronym for the Simple, Inexpensive, Multilingual Computer, a handheld computer, working on open source software, designed specifically for rural users in India. For a review of the Simputer's uses *see*, Fiona Harvey, *Computers for the Third World*, SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, October 2002, *at* <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?articleID=000454AE-7675-1D7E-90FB809EC5880000> (last visited August 10, 2003). *See also,* Bruce Sterling, *Simputer*, The New York Times, December 9, 2001, *at* <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/09/magazine/09SIMPUTER.html> (last visited August 9, 2003).

communitarians to their advantage and to further their interest. The *sequitor* of his hypothesis in the context of such rural usage – that it will ultimately modify the way the Internet is structured, is however a far off dream indeed. In the alternative, is it to be thought of a tool for the further marginalization of the rural poor in the digital economy?

Castells points out how developing countries are caught in a dilemma – of having to choose between greater connectivity coupled with a probability of their peoples' subordination across the global network, and reduced connectivity resulting in lesser network – based marginalization, but mired by the lack of sufficient resources to sustain any form of progress.[37] To Castells, connectivity is an inevitable element of economic development, and in this respect he is no different from several other writers.[38] He however dismisses the argument that developing countries ought to focus on real developmental issues first before the issue of connectivity as being based on a 'profound misunderstanding'.[39] He however does not seem to provide a comprehensive solution to solving these problems as well – which, can impede and in fact negate any progress that may be achieved through greater connectivity. Recent studies have however begun to question the use of the 'digital divide' as an autonomous concept to analyze social inclusivity across the developed-developing country characterization – an answer may be found in re-conceptualizing the very concept of the divide to integrate these 'other real issues' as well.[40]

Castells appears to be clear the Internet can have detrimental repercussions for developing countries, but seems to fall back on the argument that the Internet will continue to remain an integral element in any form of economic development (because, he concedes, it is the form of development most suited to the elites that control the global economy[41]). His only attempt to reconcile the two derives from an idealistic argument for increased development in other segments accompanying increased Internet connectivity – this indeed seems a far-off dream in the context of many developing countries, but one that may nevertheless be considered an ideal worth advocating.

Conclusion

There is little debate that the central idea discernible from the book is that of *the Internet as the abode of freedom – individual and collective*. In its origin, use and development, the Internet most certainly represents the values of liberty, privacy, free expression, anonymity and individual self-determination (networked individualism?). This element of freedom is surprisingly evident in all aspects of the Internet's functioning – social, political, cultural and economic. This point is brought out very elegantly by the book; but what are the repercussions of this *wantonly uncontrolled* freedom? The rights discourse has never witnessed a situation of absolute freedom; freedom has always come after a series of contestations. Could this mean that for the Internet, a new rights discourse of freedom ought to be propounded or will the existent one suffice? These are questions that one is left with and for which answers may not exist as of today.

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[37] CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 269.

[38] *See generally*, Neil Saravanamuttoo, *How Important is the Internet for International Development?*, *at* <http://www.thefullmuttoo.com/documents/import.pdf > (last visited August 6, 2003).

[39] CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 269.

[40] *See generally*, Mark Waschauer, *Reconceptualizing the Digital Divide*, FIRST MONDAY, Vol. 7, No. 7 (July 2002), *at* <http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_7/warschauer/index.html>.

[41] CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 270. This observation is indeed quite remarkable and representative of the international realist school's analysis of the global political economy.

Freedom in its traditional sense has never been *a given* (which Castells acknowledges[42]), and has always been acquired through a struggle. In the context of the Internet, freedom *was given*. What does this mean, in traditional libertarian terms? Does it mean that the challenge to freedom as a core value will emerge not from the state, but from elsewhere? This does seem to be the case with the Internet, through the manipulation of the code for commercial interests. It could on the other hand, also mean, as Lessig points out, that the true value of the freedom is never understood until it is taken away – and perhaps this point is critical. The value of the open architecture of the Internet and the free flow of information is only now being understood in light of recent challenges to the same. The Internet therefore is today's site for the libertarian challenge – but the principal difference being that the challenge is not from civil society to state, but from the state and commercial interests to the public civil society. This might necessitate a rewriting of the rules of the game as far as regulation goes, but then again it seems too early to clearly visualize the direction this would take. Scholars such as Yochai Benkler have for some time now been arguing that communication media such as radio spectrum and the Internet cannot really be considered *resources*, as we understand the term in its application to the tangible world.[43] Consequently, regulation in the context of such media relates more to controlling communication equipment than it does to resource-usage as such.[44] Given this scenario, the optimal regulatory model may consist in a commons-based open-access regime. Regulation then, through standard property metaphors (i.e., intellectual property rights) and otherwise represents a diminution of control at the periphery in favor of the core and a consequent move away from the freedom-based architecture that the Internet was initially premised on.

But who is all this freedom ultimately for? Is it for the elite of the developed world alone? If the argument is to be couched in truly global normative terms, it is but critical that liberty on the Internet is posited to include some elements of a unanimously agreed-upon universalist ideology for the Internet. In the absence of such a situation, it is highly possible that were libertarian precepts to be restored to the Internet, some day the developing world will see the same as another site of oppression – turning the Internet into the next site of the developed-developing debate on normative supremacy. One sees a similar debate having arisen in the context of the human rights discourse and the arguments for cultural relativism/pluralism therein.[45] It may not be far off, when one begins to see a similar debate emerging in the context of 'freedom on the Internet' as well.

Castells' work does provide an excellent foundation to study what freedom means on the Internet – more so in terms of *what freedom was*, given that several changes have taken place since his publication of the book. His conscious attempt to refrain from making any predictions necessitates using his work at best as a platform to take off further and theorize deeper. The book provides an excellent introductory reading on the Internet and its emergence as a libertarian abode – which we are all already a part of, through inevitability according to Castells.[46]

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[42] *Id* at 164.

[43] Yochai Benkler, *Overcoming Agoraphobia: Building the Commons of the Digitally Networked Environment*, 11 HARV. J. L. & TECH. 287 (1997-98). *See generally* Yochai Benkler, *Free as the Air to Common Use: First Amendment Constraints on Enclosure of the Public Domain,* 74 N.Y.U. L. REV. 354 (1999).

[44] *Id* at 288.

[45] *See generally,* MAKAU MUTUA, HUMAN RIGHTS: A POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CRITIQUE (2002); Makau Mutua, *Savages, Victims, and Saviors: the Metaphor of Human Rights*, 42 HARV. INT'L L. J. 201(2001).

[46] As he observes in his first sentence, which sets the tone for the entire book, "The Internet *is* the fabric of our lives…" (Emphasis supplied) CASTELLS, *supra* note 2, at 1.

Where it fails however is in drawing sufficient linkages between patterns of conduct that seem to have repeated themselves on numerous occasions. The emergence of new technologies for communication and information dissemination have for long been dubbed as 'technologies of freedom'[47] for their ability to influence human conduct and social organization. Many of these technologies of mass communication have, since their introduction however been used as vehicles of propaganda by elite, domineering forces, often taking advantage of the passivity assumed from the audience of such media.[48] Indeed, to use more extreme examples, they have even been used by dictators and tyrants to disseminate their information.[49] Apart from their use for such overtly reprehensible activities, what is important in the context of these technologies is their eventual appropriation and control by the elite in an attempt to restrict the truly free dissemination of ideas and opinions and their portrayal of ideologies representative of their own interests. The net consequence of such events has been the conversion of these technologies of freedom (*of information*) into technologies that seek to perpetuate a veil of ignorance. This has indeed proven to be the case with the *traditional* forms of media, according to several scholars.[50] What then are the chances of this happening in the context of the Internet as well? Is there, on the contrary, something inherently different in the Internet that puts it beyond the reach of such control – is this element that of individual autonomy? If this is indeed the case, there can be no better case then for the Internet as the true 'technology of freedom'; but, there do seem to be indications that the contrary may indeed be happening – much along the lines of traditional media.[51] The only difference, as mentioned earlier is that here – the domineering elite are not necessary politically motivated, but are commercially driven with the political apparatus merely aiding their commercial motives.

Additionally, Castells' penchant for classifying his chapters based on the social, economic, cultural and political dimensions avoids an understanding of certain multi-dimensional issues of critical relevance. An illustration of this would be Castells' discussion on networked individualism. His discussion of such individualism is confined to its social implications – and he goes on to show how networked individualism through the Internet is in fact a social pattern. The concept of networked individualism however has important implications for the polity and democracy in specific. Cass Sunstein, goes to show how such individualism (with individualized tailor-made solutions being offered by the Internet) actually results in a dilution of the public forums which are in turn critical to loco-centric deliberative democracy.[52] In a sense therefore individualism of this sort can breed increased intolerance – both political and socio-cultural and have important political implications as well.

Maybe these are not central to Castells' main hypothesis in his broader scheme of understanding *freedom*, but a holistic picture as he provided in his previous works might have added a little more to what is already an excellent introductory work, given the importance of

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[47] *See generally*, ITHIEL DE SOLA POOL, TECHNOLOGIES OF FREEDOM (1984).

[48] A process which some refer to as 'benevolent tyranny'. *See,* Lloyd Morrisett, *Technologies of Freedom*, *at* <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers/morrisett-tech.html> (last visited September 29, 2003).

[49] Eduardo Ulibarri Bibao, *Technologies of Freedom and Systems of Repression*, *at* <http://www.humanrights.jrn.msu.edu/articles/99conference/bibao.htm> (last visited September 30, 2003).

[50] The leading proponent of this idea is of course Noam Chomsky. *See,* NOAM CHOMSKY, DETERRING DEMOCRACY (1992); EDWARD S. HERMAN AND NOAM CHOMSKY, MANUFACTURING CONSENT: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE MASS MEDIA (2002); NOAM CHOMSKY, MEDIA CONTROL: THE SPECTACULAR ACHIEVEMENTS OF PROPAGANDA (2002).

[51] *See generally,* LESSIG, *supra* note 6.

[52] *See* SUNSTEIN, *supra* note 17.

the Internet. According to Castells, the Internet as a medium of communication is here to stay, as the medium of the newly created network society. No doubt it is sure to stay, but in what form and with what fundamental values, remains the critical question.