

Globalization: Theoretical Perspectives
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Lecture 33
Castells: Information Age

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Castells : Information Age



Welcome back to the class, we are continuing our discussion on Manuel Castells and in the previous two sessions we had a slightly elaborate discussions on Castells's ideas or rather arguments on time as well as space. So, we saw that he comes up with some very original arguments which very qualitatively advances the already made arguments of Giddens and Harvey to a completely different realm when he talks about the spaces of flows as a new materiality that ensures the kind of a global, the new network society that he argues.


So, I hope you would have understood and then appreciated the significance of Manuel Castells as one of the foremost thinkers of globalization, who has a very profound theory on time and space, and especially he when he follows Leibniz the German philosopher when he looks at both the time as well as space as relational rather than absolute.

So, when you look at the time, the space as a relational, as the kind of space in between things, and when you look at time as the kind of sequence in between events, they are all very relative understanding of time and space. So, with that kind of a relative understanding, he is able to very strongly argue that these two categories are historically contingent, and they are historically produced, and they are in a sense, result of the changing social conditions.

So, we discussed how he argues about this network society about this, about the whole idea of nodes and hubs and other things. So, in this class, we are concluding Castells's arguments are together arguments and by having a broad overview of this information trilogy, basically focusing on this argument about this Information Age. So, we know that Castells is widely known for his argument about this network society and also his argument about this information age.



And these two aspects, he would argue, that has taken the whole world into a qualitatively next level and he would, very strongly argues that this network society and information age is something quite new, something different from the conventional way in which both society and economy have been evolved since the 19th, the 20th century.

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The Information Age trilogy

- A new macrosociological theory about the paradigmatic shift from the industrial age to the information Age, and to back up his theoretical considerations with a vast body of empirical evidence.
- The first volume of Castells' trilogy, 'The Network Society', concentrates on providing an overview of the major economic and cultural developments which have been instrumental in making networking a major pattern of social organization.



So, the Information Age trilogy, we mentioned about these three books that was published in quite succession, and they look at different aspects, if one is on technology, the other one is on identity and the third one is on social movement. So, these books are considered to be very important, and we do not have the space or time to go through each of these books in detail.

So, what I am planning to offer here is to give you a summary of the broader arguments. So, a new macro-sociological theory about the paradigmatic shift from the industrial age to the information age, and to back up his theoretical considerations with the vast body of empirical evidence. So, it is very evident that what Castells aims at is a huge project, it is a very ambitious project.


And we know that even in the previous class, I was constantly referring to the point that many point seems quite far-fetched, many points seem quite exaggerated, especially when he talks about, timeless time and other things, they all look very farfetched, but we understand these as his attempt to create a macro sociological theory, a meta theory that is kind of capable of explaining a huge scenario or huge type of social change.

And he provides quite a lot of examples from economy, from culture, from polity to backup that thing, so this is the kind of overall argument of all the three books. The first volume of Castells's trilogy, *The Network Society*, concentrated on providing an overview of the major economic and cultural development, which have been instrumental in making networking a major pattern of social organization.

So, we saw that this is the point where he is talking about the spaces of flows as significantly redefining the spaces of places. I am not repeating these two concepts, we have done it elaborately in the previous class, how the spaces of flows are becoming more dominant and then thereby redefining the role and character of spaces of places.

So, and that leads to the kind of necessity to look at the modern society as a network society, where social interaction and social organizations are passed through these forms of social network. And, in his first one, he elaborates this basic argument and cultural developments which have been instrumental in making network a major pattern of social organization.

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- In the second volume, 'The Power of Identity', Castells examines the social movements of our time and the challenges facing our political systems based on nation-states.
 - In the final volume, 'End of Millennium', Castells focuses on developments in global geopolitics, and the new actors and institutions that are shaping the end of the millennium.
 - Centrality of globalism and informationalism- the emerging economy is informational in that productivity and success in competition essentially derive from the ability of economic actors to create, handle, master and apply information



In the second volume, *The Power of Identity*, Castells examines the social movements of our times and challenges facing our political systems based on nation-state. So, this is also very interesting arguments about the different types of identity, different kind of movement, how there are transnational movements emerging, which really questions the kind of some of the taken for granted the assumptions of first modernity, especially environmental movement, we will discuss that in detail.

So, Castells was a very strong believer in the potential of social movements for fostering a global consciousness, for fostering a global identity and he believed that this social movements will be able to influence the way in which the world is moving and social movements also is facilitated by this kind of very strong network infrastructure.

And in the final volume, *The End of Millennium*, Castells focuses on developments in global geopolitics and the new actors and institutions that are shaping the end of the Millennium; new transnational agencies, new kinds of collectivities and new formations that are truly transnational in its character. And we have discussed several times the kind of differences between international and transnational. So, you will see that kind of argument very prominently in the study of Manuel Castells.

So, two major things, he says, as with something defined the nature of contemporary society. One in the centrality of globalism and second one is this informationalism. And globalism, we know that Castells was maybe, you could say that he was an optimist of a globalization theory.


Though he did not really argue about the theories of globalization, he was somebody who was well convinced that the world has become globalized or there is no going back to that and we require a fundamental, redefinition of our conceptual and our disciplinary frameworks and our understanding about what is happening around us. So, he was a very strong advocate of globalization, he was extremely optimistic about globalization.

So, for him globalism was kind of taken for granted, that is why he was able to talk about arguments like timeless time or people will have to live without any predominant type of temporality, all these arguments. And the second one, he says, of course, connected with that it is informationalism, the emerging economy is informational, in that productivity and success in competition essentially derived from the ability of economic actors to create, handle, master and apply information.

So, here information becomes the most important driver of economy and this point is extremely clear, we made reference to this several times, because that is what you understand or you call in differences as post-industrial society. The industrial production, the production of material things that happen on the shop floor, material production that happens in an industry.

That seems to be the most important economic driver or the mainstay of economy during the period of modernity, maybe say eighteenth, the nineteenth and twentieth century. But Castells argues that era is over, does not mean that industrial production will disappear, it doesn't. But information age is a completely different or completely a new capitalist system, with the economic actors who were able to create and handle and master and information emerges as the most important mainstay of economy. So that is why he calls it as an informationalism.

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- There were three distinct and initially separate processes which began to mould history at the turn of the 1970s.
1. Revolution of information technology.
 2. The second historical process was initiated in the political realm in the early 1970s, when historical capitalism, and also socialism, or statism, as Castells calls it, drifted into deep crisis. The expansion of capitalism beyond nation-states and the collapse of Communism.
 3. Blossoming of social movements, originated in Paris in the 1960s, culminated in the US- Feminist, anti-war etc



So, there were three distinct and initially separate processes which began to mould history at the turn of the 1970. So, we know that in the previous class also he identifies this particular period of, he calls it as a threshold period, it has emerged from the 1980s onwards. So here, he takes it to 1970s and he argues that there are three very different separate processes, but all are together, they really mark the emergence of a new era.

The first one is the revolution of information technology, especially the kind of the technological ecosystem that was established in the US, in what we all now, are known as the Silicon Valley. A host of companies get established there, and then they all become major players in the new world economy. So, we know that the most important, the most powerful countries, the largest companies of our times, they are all information-based companies.

They are not the kind of, whether it is Google or Apple, of course, Apple has this market, this manufacturing thing, but Google and Facebook and a host of other companies, they are making use of the possibilities of information. So, this new information technology, that particular ecosystem that was established in the US, especially in the Silicon Valley, from late 1970s and then, so that really paved the way or that sowed the seeds for a completely new kind of economic activity.

Second one, what he talks about is, the second historical process was initiated in the political realm in the early 1970s when historical capitalism, and also socialism, or statism, as Castells calls, drifted into deep crisis, the expansion of capitalism beyond nation state, and the collapse of communism.

So, two things, one is the kind of liberalism, the kind of capitalism that has been followed after the second world war, that undergoes significant transformation and then takes its shape as, what we today call it as neoliberalism, especially during Margaret Thatcher's and Ronald Reagan's time, Margaret Thatcher in UK, and Ronald Reagan in the US.

So, this particular argument or this particular philosophy of economics, it actually gives a completely new life to capitalist production and the neoliberalism was able to refashion capitalism into a completely different thing, the capitalist expansion became more important, multinational companies began to emerge, and they began to spread across the national boundary. So, it becomes extremely important.

At the same time, this was also the period when we witnessed the collapse of another rivalling political ideology that is communism. So, we know the whole story of cold war., we know that decades old competition between these two political philosophies were rival or very antagonistic political and economic philosophies.

On the one side, you had the US lead capitalist countries and on the other you had the USSR, lead Soviet, communist countries. And so, this kind of a competition and cold war, many times actually been threatened to a full-blown war. So, by 1990s, you see that is completely disappears and communism, as a dominant ideology gets collapsed and Soviet Union disintegrates, Berlin Wall falls, so all these things happen.


And the third one, sorry, so this should be read as two, and this must be the third point. So, the third is the blossoming of social movements that originated in Paris in 1960s culminated in the

US, that is feminist. anti-war and a series of cultural movement. So, this is a realm where Castells focuses on the cultural realm of social change.

We know that those who are familiar with the social movements, so there was a major, the 60s in Paris, and then 1970s and 80s in the US, that was the time where a host of new social movements including feminist movements, including identity politics, including anti-war, there was major youth uprising against the American involvement in the Vietnam War.

So, all these things really brought about new political sensibilities, new political arguments, new political ideologies and then that Castells identifies as a very important thing. So, these are the three major changes. One in the technological realm, second one in the economic level, economic realm, third one in the realm of culture.

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- At the heart of Castells' metaphysics lies a polarity of the Net and the Self. The Net signifies the multitude of globalizing networks of power, wealth and information, equipped with information technology.
 - At the other end of the axis there is the Self, which signifies the totality of individual and collective identities who seek to sustain their lives in the turmoil of increasing global flows.
 - It is the deep-rooted disjunction of the Net and the Self where the battles of class struggle are fought in the Information Age. According to Castells, the core of this struggle is cultural, and these battles are waged in the networks of information and symbol manipulation.



So, Castells elaborates these three major changes and then he argues that there is a very deeper fundamental kind of transformations have taken place after this 1970s or 1980s. So, at the heart of Castells metaphysics, lies a polarity of the net and self. The net signifies the multitudes of globalizing networks of power, wealth and information equipped with the information technology.

So, he makes it as a very interesting axis in which there is a very interesting, dynamics between the net and the self. So, the net, it is not only the internet that he talks about, it indicates the kind of networks it indicates the kind of an entangled connections that spread across the global scenario. So, globalizing networks of power, wealth and information are equipped with information technology.

At the other end of the axis, there is the self which signifies the totality of individual and collective identities, who seek to sustain the lives in the turmoil of increasing global flows. So, on the one side, you look at this in entangled networks of wealth, information and power and the other side, you come down to the individual, you come down to the question of the

individual and the collectivity and the community who are completely at lost who find themselves completely at lost in this new social order.

Because, we have seen that especially when we discuss Giddens and then others, we saw that there is a drastic fundamental transformation taking place in our own understanding about who we are, how to organize our own life, how to look at the past, how to conduct your own present, and how to prepare for the future.

So, all these things appear to be more and more problematic for an ordinary individual in the contemporary times. So, we hope you remember our discussion about Koselleck, Koselleck argues that the past no longer provides you the kind of guidance or assurance that it used to for your present as well as for your future endeavours. So, this self and the net, he finds it as a very interesting way to make sense of the global scenario.

It is the deep-rooted disjunction of the net and the self where the battles of class struggle are fought in the information age. According to Castells, the core of the struggle is cultural, and these battles are waged in the networks of information and symbol manipulation. So, Castells looks at the kind of collective mobilization and the kind of class struggle as we see in the conventional Marxian system, as people who own the means of production and people who do not own the means of production.

So, that definition is significantly transformed in the contemporary society where you, either you are part of this cultural flows or you are not part and even when you are part of this cultural flows, this net itself or this cultural flow itself provide you with the opportunity for mobilization for thinking about visualizing about an alternative world.

So, that is why you had very powerful social movements, especially during 90s and early 2000s, which really visualized or for an alternative world, an alternative world which is less exploitative, which is less cruel, which is less focused on exploiting the natural resources, which is more just. So, these imaginations were possible because they were able to make use of the or opportunities offered by globalization.

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- The blurring of the boundaries between human life and technological systems through innovations in biotechnology and genetic engineering may also compel us to reconsider seriously our relationship with natural system.

- Castells distinguishes three forms of collective identity. The first is legitimizing identity, referring to the collective movements that were instrumental in building the modern welfare state: labour organizations, co-operatives, political parties, and so on.



The blurring of the boundaries between human life and technological systems through the integration of biotechnology and genetic engineering may also compel us to reconsider seriously our relationship with natural system. So, he argues that in this information age, unlike any other previous system, previous age, technology is going to define interfering in our personal life, on our body, in our private life in our something which we use to, consider something so close to our own body and our own life.

The relationship between nature and culture and that is how you used to look at it that, the genetic is given to you and that is how you have this color you have this particular skin color, your height, your weight, your chromosomes are the one which actually decide, and on the other side, you have the cultural things.


So, this dichotomy seems to be kind of blurring between human life and technological systems, we are able to, especially biotechnology and computer enabled research is really able to bring in revolutionary possibilities of genetic engineering or new reproductive technologies or systems that might maybe successfully stop aging, then you know that there are quite a lot of very interesting research taking place over that.

How can we ever stop the process of aging? Can we maintain or can we retain our youthfulness even at the age of say 80 or 100? Or can we live as people without death. So, these are the kind of research that is going on. So, definitely we are entering into the realm of the nature, of the things that we traditionally considered as things that cannot be entered into things that cannot be interfered with, things that cannot be, manipulated are now increasingly falling under the domain of human expertise.



Genetic engineering, you know that, can be very effectively used in treating quite a lot of deadly diseases and then deformities. So, that he argues as a very important feature of informationalism. Then Castells distinguishes three forms of collective identity. The first is legitimizing identity by referring to the collective movements that were instrumental in building the modern welfare state labour organizations, cooperatives, political parties and so on.

We know that, at least one of the conventional forms of human collectivity, human identity, where people come together and this organization, labour organization, corporate, these political parties, women's groups, so these were the kinds of groups that are used to provide the legitimizing identity, especially in your attempt to bargain with the nation state.

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- The second form of identity is resistance identity, which Castells describes as the 'exclusion of the excluders by the excluded'. This is the currently dominant form of social movement, born out of a resistance to the global flows of the new economic order.
- The third kind of identity in Castells' scheme is project identity, which is potentially able to reconstruct elements of a new civic society. Especially environmental movement as one which may grow from resistance identity to project identity, ready to build a positive identity of its own and use the technological (telematic) and social (networking) tools of the Information Age.
- New temporality, ideas of glacial age and Anthropocene



And he identifies two more important term identities, the second form of identity is the resistance identity, which Castells describes as the exclusion of the extruders by the excluded. This is the currently dominant form of social movement born out of a resistance the global force of the new economic order. So, here the excluded people are excluding the excluders. So, it is a play of the words.

So, he argues the people who have been traditionally excluded, traditionally exploited are now coming together and they are trying to resist the people who used to exploit them or people who used to exclude them. So, he points at a series of human organizations or movements especially by indigenous people, by tribals, by farmers, by other sections of people who are resisting the imposition or resisting the exploitation of the multinational company.

So, that kind of a resistance identity, especially, we know that this whole discourse about the indigenous rights has emerged as a very important term, very important legitimate term. So, he argues that this has emerged as a very important form of identity. And third kind of identity Castells' scheme is project identity, which is potentially able to reconstruct elements of a new civic society.

Especially environmental movements as one which may grow from a resistance identity or to project identity, ready to build a positive identity of its own and use a technological telematic and social networking tools for the Information Age. So, if that resistance identity was from the powerless people to stop their further exclusion, he is seeing something project identity as a positive one. As a positive one, as a global as attempts that span across the globe, of people who want to create an alternative world.


As I mentioned earlier, a more just world. A world which is not extremely exploitative. A world that is not completely preoccupied with the question of making more and more money or making more and more profit. So, among these movements, he identifies environmental movement as particularly powerful.

Because we know from 1970s onwards, environmental movement has now become so powerful across the globe, there is a very strong environmental consciousness, whether it is about global warming or greenhouse gases or vehicle emission or pollution or whatever be the kind of environmental issues, there is an increased consciousness. So, he is visualizing or he is projecting a possibility of a project identity where people are able to build a positive identity of its own using technology in Information Age.

And he argues it brings in new temporality, the ideas of glacial age and Anthropocene. So, this brings in new frameworks, new ideas, especially, that this whole idea of glacial age and the Anthropocene. Anthropocene has a very alarming kind of an argument that maybe for the first-time, human beings are able to interfere in this glacial age and then we have to identify that we are human beings are being able to create a particular time or a particular time period needs to be identified because of our own activity.

We have been able to that very strongly, negatively been able to interfere in the working of the whole planet earth and thereby the activities of human being will have to be identified as the Anthropocene with very disastrous consequence.

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- Information Age as representing a new era in the relationship between Nature and Culture.
 - The first era was marked by the dominance of Nature over Culture, when natural conditions were crucial for continued human existence.
 - The second era began at the dawn of the modern age, when Nature was subjected to industrial Culture, which aimed at increasing human welfare by harnessing natural resources through the use of technology.
 - According to Castells, we are now entering the third period where 'Culture refers to Culture, having superseded Nature to the point that Nature is artificially revived ('preserved') as a cultural form.



So, he is somebody with a very positive expectations about the possibilities of a social movement. So, Information Age as representing a new era in the relationship between nature and culture. So, this is a very again interesting argument that he put forward. The relation between nature and culture is significantly changed in the Information Age and that is yet another reason why he argues that Information Age represents something different.

The first era was marked by dominance of nature over culture, when the natural conditions were crucial for continued human existence. So, he is talking about maybe the very initial period of human evolution, before modernity came in, before we became more progressed, before we started, cultivation or other thing, we were completely dependent on the nature, we have to, we the human beings had to deal with the vagaries of the nature.

So, and that was so, natural condition was so crucial for the continued human existence, the very existence of human beings was predicated on a favourable natural situation, whether it was climate or availability of water or other things. The second era began at the dawn of the modern age, when nature was subjected to industrial culture, which aimed at increasing human welfare by harnessing natural resources through the use of technology.

So, this again is a familiar point, we know with the dawn of modernity, with the invention of new technologies and then machines, we started looking at nature as a resource, almost a kind of a resource which will never dry up, a resource which will never end.

So, we invested, we invented machineries and technologies to exploit the nature whether it is water or timber or minerals or air or natural, other natural resources, flora, fauna. So, we basically believed that our human progress is possible, we are the masters of the whole world and we have the wherewithal we have the technological know-how to exploit the nature for our own our own well-being.

So, you know that till 1970s, you would not have even heard the term environmentalism. Environment was never a matter of concern, nobody spoke about cutting down, against cutting down trees. Trees were cut down forests were cleared for building other houses and other infrastructure. So, this consciousness, this awareness, this understanding is a much later understanding.

And according to Castells, the third one what we are seeing now is entering the third period, where culture refers to culture, having superseded nature, or to the point that nature is artificially revived as a cultural form. So, now we are in a very desperate situation to protect nature as a cultural form. So, that is why there is so, much of importance, about preserving the nature, about the natural the preservation of the nature, protection of nature, environmentalism has become a major thing.

So, we are trying to restore a host of damage that we have done. So, that understanding of nature has now emerged, has now come into our realm of culture. So, restoring the nature has become a cultural product and nature has become a kind of a cultural force. So, he brings in all these dimensions basically to make these very strong argument that informationalism really represents a novel form of existence.

It is a definitely, of course an evolution, but it is also a marked difference into another other mode of existence. So, what I presented here is a very broad summary of his information trilogy, just to give you some idea about what were his major arguments. So, as I began this session on Manuel Castells, there have been quite a lot of criticisms you can refer to some of these books, especially the book *The Key Thinkers*.

It has a section where the scholar looks at Manuel Castells more critically, saying that many times he, these theories or meta theories, many times he is not able to come up with substantiation, so justification. But in spite of all these, I am not going into the detail criticism, but in spite of all these criticisms, we must say that Manuel Castells has been one of the most influential scholars of globalization who is very creatively was able to engage with these debates about temporality, space, time and other things.

So, we are stopping the class here and we have some more discussion on this particular topic probably with an interview with one of my colleagues. So, I am stopping here, see you for the next class. Thank you.