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The open spaces of global communication[1]

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Do contemporary advances in global communication serve mainly to strengthen and extend international power relations already in place, or do they offer realistic opportunities to transform those tendencies into a more humane and harmonious world? Can the enormous barriers posed by fundamentalist thought eventually be overcome through intercultural contact? How might the technological and cultural developments that are sweeping the world today bring about positive results by creating reflexivity and public dialogue on a global scale? Any success that can be brought to fruition in the open spaces of global communication will depend on further expansion of a de facto global civil society that embraces profound technological and cultural change. This potentially transformative project develops in seven overlapping stages. I will now describe seven stages of the open spaces of global communication, starting with a summary analysis of the characteristic conditions of the Communication Age and ending with a hopeful vision of its full potential.

Key words: global communication, interculturality, civil society, communication age.

Os espaços abertos da comunicação global. Os avanços na comunicação global servem para reforçar e estender as relações internacionais de poder já existentes ou podem oferecer oportunidades realistas para a transformação dessas tendências em direção a um mundo mais humano e mais harmonioso? As enormes barreiras impostas pelo pensamento fundamentalista podem ser ultrapassadas pela via do contato intercultural? Como os desenvolvimentos tecnológicos e culturais que se espalham sobre o mundo podem ter resultados positivos, gerando reflexividade e diálogo público em escala global? Qualquer sucesso que possa vir a termo nos espaços abertos da comunicação global dependerá da expansão de uma sociedade civil de facto, que abrace a profunda mudança tecnológica e cultural. Este projeto potencialmente transformador se desenvolve em sete estágios sobrepostos. Serão descritos, nesse artigo, os sete estágios dos espaços abertos da comunicação global, começando por uma análise sucinta das condições que caracterizam a Era da Comunicação e terminando com uma visão esperançosa de seu pleno potencial.

Palavras-chave: comunicação global, interculturalidade, sociedade civil, era da comunicação.

Los avances en la comunicación global sirven para reforzar y ampliar las relaciones internacionales de poder ya existentes o pueden ofrecer oportunidades realistas para la transformación de esas tendencias hacia un mundo más humano y más harmonioso? Las enormes barreras impuestas por el pensamiento fundamentalista pueden ser superadas por vía del contacto intercultural? ¿Cómo los desarrollos tecnológicos y culturales que se diseminan por el mundo pueden tener resultados positivos generando reflexividad y diálogo público en escala global? Cualquier éxito que pueda venir a término en los espacios abiertos de la comunicación global dependerá de la expansión de una sociedad civil de facto, que abrace el profundo cambio tecnológico y cultural. Ese proyecto potencialmente transformador se desarrolla en siete instancias sobrepuestas. En ese artículo, se describirán las siete instancias de los espacios abiertos de la comunicación global y se presentará un argumento que empieza por un análisis sucinto de las condiciones características de la Era de la Comunicación y se finalizará con una visión esperanzada de su pleno potencial.

Palabras clave: comunicación global, interculturalidad, sociedad civil, era de la comunicación.

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Any success that can be brought to fruition in the open spaces of global communication will depend on further expansion of a *de facto* global civil society that embraces profound technological and cultural change. This potentially transformative project develops in seven overlapping stages. I will now describe seven stages of the open spaces of global communication and present an argument that progresses from one stage to the next – starting with a summary analysis of the characteristic conditions of the Communication Age and ending with a hopeful vision of its full potential.

Stage 1: Cultural technology, industry, abundance

The astounding amount of information being produced and transmitted today, the rapid development of communications technology that facilitates worldwide transmission and connectivity, and the pervasive social interaction and cultural diffusion that result from these developments all combine to define the Communication Age and create robust possibilities for the future. The number and diversity of cultural forms available and the ease of access with which more and more people engage information and connect with others put the positive potential of contemporary global communication in motion. Information is power, Joseph Nye reminds us, "and today a much larger part of the world has access to that power" (Nye, 2004, p. 105).

The sheer amount of information now being produced has enormous consequences in and of itself. Worldwide information production increased by an astounding 30 percent *each year* between 1999 and 2002, with the greatest growth showing up in telephone and email communication (Lyman and Varian, 2003). The trend continues unabated. More than twenty-five years ago "the computer" was honored as *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year." At that time, 1982, "computer" and "connectivity" were not associated with each other in highly-integrated ways. Ten years later, the synergy between computational functionality, information production, and human communication on a global scale became clear. As Anthony Smith commented when the internet burst onto the world scene in the 1990s, information becomes the "transforming, paradigmatic idea" of our time. Like DNA, Smith said, information functions as "the organizing principle of life itself" (Smith, 1996, p. 66).

The metaphor of genetic determination is not overstated. The need to connect and communicate is hard wired into human experience (Manyard Smith and Szathmáry, 1999). People seek effective ways to communicate with others in order to manage environmental uncertainty to best advantage. The neural flexibility of the human brain (Clark, 2003) resonates with the nature of communications technology to create the necessary resources to survive and develop by expediting what all people share – the need to interact with each other. Among the technological advances associated with information technology that have contributed much to the process are:

- improved capacity, speed, and quality of communication technology (e.g. *wireless access, broadband, ultra wideband, video and audio streaming, global real time*);
- increased technical resolution and fidelity (e.g. *digitalization, high definition video and audio, liquid crystal display monitors*);
- increased technological reach, access, storage, and user-friendliness (e.g. *miniaturization, portability, affordability, utilitarian design, modular convergence*).

But we are mainly concerned with the larger issues that have opened up the spaces of global communication:

- a rapidly increasing number and variety of mass media outlets worldwide;
- extraordinary growth and diversification of the culture industries;
- industrial and consumer blending of information technology and the internet with hardware and content of the traditional media and culture industries;

- the rapid rise and adoption of personal communications technologies and the multiple levels of connectivity they facilitate;
- convergence between technological and non-technological aspects of everyday life, and;
- an enormously expanded number and range of individuals and groups participating in cultural production and consumption.

The growth of communications and cultural technology provides new opportunities for a broad range of interested parties. Many of the primary benefactors include the familiar players (Time Warner, Disney, Murdoch, Viacom, Bertelsmann, etc.) and a more recent assortment of powerful information technology and communications enterprises (e.g. Microsoft, Nokia, Comcast, Sony, Oracle). But profits from the production of contemporary communication and culture are not all paid in money, and the gains don't just accrue to the usual array of industrial forces. Technological development always has unintended consequences. Beginning with the printing press, the telegraph, and the telephone, the development of communications technology has always challenged the established brokers of social power.

We have progressed from the age of "old media" through "new media" to "we media" (Gillmor, 2004). By 2003 nearly half the adult users in the United States had employed the internet to "publish their thoughts, respond to others, post pictures, share files, and otherwise contribute to the explosion of content online" (Gillmor 2004, p. 162). Blogging, podcasting, and voice over internet protocol (VOIP) became popular forms of communication that avoid the usual corporate intermediaries. Empirical data from around the world presented by the United Nations makes it clear that "especially in developing countries, most ordinary citizens have many more sources of information (both in quantity and diversity) to turn to than they did 10 years ago. And less of that information is subject to rigid state control" (UNDP, 2002, p. 6, 76). Popular access to basic information and cultural resources worldwide facilitated by today's "technologies of diversity" brings about greater cultural self-determination for individuals everywhere (Cowen, 2002, p. 126-127). This is what the United Nations' Development Programme calls *cultural liberty* (UNDP, 2004).

Two important historical examples of cultural liberty stand out. People throughout Eastern and Central Europe were provoked by the growing, ultimately uncontrollable access they had to unofficial media channels and other informational resources which exposed the profound cultural and political limits of the communist system at the end of last century. With media and popular culture blanketing the world after World War Two, "more people became more aware of other people at a distance, of different ideologies and sets of beliefs" (Rantanen, 2005, p. 45). Specifically, "Soviet audiences watching films [...] learned that people in the West did not have to stand in long lines to purchase food, did not live in communal apartments, and owned their own cars. All this invalidated the negative views promulgated by Soviet media" (Nye, 2004, p, 49). The revolts that resulted themselves became striking media content that was made globally visible, encouraging others to resist and eventually overthrow their state systems too.

The People's Republic of China went through much the same process when, beginning in the early 1980s, the national telecommunications system was greatly expanded, international satellite television arrived, and a series of critical films made by young Chinese filmmakers were shown. Unofficial popular culture (including much pirated music, video, and film) became available to city residents and international tourism became more widespread. All these developments changed the popular consciousness and there has been no turning back (Lull, 1991). The Chinese government still has to accommodate cultural change in order to maintain political power today.

Stage 2: Global visibility and transparency

When the United Nations oversaw the national elections being conducted in Afghanistan in 2004 it set up television monitors in outdoor locations throughout the country so people could see for themselves what was happening in the delicate and complex voting process. This approach – the "Witness Project" – was designed to defuse the rampant rumors and conspiracy theories that infect politics everywhere, but especially in the Middle East where democratic elections are so unfamiliar and little trusted.

In the 1980s rock musician and social activist Peter Gabriel formed WITNESS, an organization that exploits the power of global visibility and transparency to expose human rights abuses around the world (WITNESS, 2005).

By using video technology and the distributive power of the internet, WITNESS and its NGO partner groups in many countries have brought global attention to various struggles for the rights of indigenous peoples, the use of child soldiers in Africa, gender violence in Mexico and elsewhere, and environmental destruction that directly affects human communities everywhere, among many other issues. The organization's website says the group "empowers human rights defenders to use video to shine light on those most affected by human rights violations, and to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools of justice." In order to impact the global consciousness, WITNESS depends on mainstream mass media to circulate their work. WITNESS's partner video footage appears on mainstream media outlets like CNN, BBC, ABC, CBS, and PBS among many other television outlets, and is presented in major film festivals around the world.

To routinely know much more than we have known before has become an expected, even natural, state of mind for people in many parts of the world. As former World Bank chief Joseph Stiglitz observed, "in successful democracies citizens regard transparency, openness, knowing what government is doing, as an essential part of government responsibility. Citizens regard these as *rights*, not favors, conferred by the government" (Stiglitz, 2002, p. 51, his italics). Or as David Brin argues, "In a transparent society, citizens [...] will refuse *not* to know" (Brin, 1998, p. 270).

Stage 3: Platforms for participation

In a classic essay that analyzes the role of television in democratic societies, Newcomb and Hirsch (1987) describe the visual medium as a "cultural forum" that encourages public expression and discussion of all kinds of topics and ideas, even the most controversial and unpopular ones. Of course that's not all that television and other electronic and digital media do. Commercial mass media have many other purposes and effects, not all of them life enhancing by any means. But among its many roles and influences, television uniquely and powerfully performs as a platform that generates widespread public awareness, reflection, discussion, and debate of countless social, cultural, and political issues.

The ability of media and information technology to facilitate public discussion is also captured nicely by the idea of the "global commons" (Commission on Global Governance, 1995). In Great Britain, the commons referred originally to centrally-located tracts of land set aside in communities specifically to foster shared public communication – the issuance of political and cultural announcements and the conduct of informal debates. The American equivalent of the commons is the town square or the town hall meeting. Today's global commons "define and are defined by the availability in media and cyberspace of spectrum or network space free of direct control by the forces of capital or the state" (Silverstone, 2001, p. 14). The cultural forum and the global commons emphasize the roles of mass media, information technology, personal communication technology, and popular culture in the production of public discourse that transcends national borders and creates diverse and democratic participation in the global public sphere. A clear and striking example of this phenomenon is www.chattheplanet.com, a global chat room that facilitates robust discussion of international issues on the internet.

The decentralization of authority in global communication is perhaps best represented by the turn-of-the-century phenomenon of blogging. Blogs give rise to countless voices and opinions and serve as global outposts for fact checking. Any purported factual information disseminated by governments, religious groups, corporations, NGOs, media outlets, or other agencies or individuals immediately become subject to intense scrutiny and response from bloggers. When bloggers uncover errors or mistruths, their reports are picked up and further circulated by mainstream media insuring another level of discussion. In this way, blogs and diverse media function are considered together as system-correcting mechanisms on a global scale.

The cultural forum and the global commons should not be thought of only in terms of news and politics, however. The entire range of media content – entertainment television, talk radio, contemporary literature, comedy, and popular music, for example – raise themes and provide points of view that provoke widespread deliberations too. Pop culture stars to play a crucial role in setting the critical agenda. To name but a few examples, think of Bono's efforts promoting Third World debt relief, U2's world tour advocating universal human rights, George Clooney's work in the Middle East and his Arab-friendly film *Syriana*, and Angelina Jolie's political activism in Sudan and Chad.

Considering how the cultural forum and the global commons tend to blend together, one metaphor has been used often to describe the hopeful quality of today's global communication. It is the "conversation". Kwame Appiah argues that transcultural "conversations" facilitated by technology are what we need "to live together as the global tribe we have become" (Appiah, 2006, p. xiii). Technology journalist Dan Gillmor points out that instead of the customary "top-down, manufactured" production of information by institutional news media, we have entered the age of an "edge-center, infinitely complex conversation" that has created an "inherent messiness that will open communications in ways that benefit everyone" (Gillmor, 2004, p. 46, 158, 67). And Thomas Friedman refers to "global conversations" about religion, terror, culture, and the future as part of the "flat world" phenomenon he believes defines life in the twenty-first century (Friedman, 2003, 2005).

The complementarity and convergence of media and communications technology expand the power of the conversation, further unleashing the multi-channel potential to communicate. The flexibility of asynchronous communications like email and blogs make it possible for great numbers of people to participate. The social circulation of information, images, sounds, and opinion by mobile phone, email, web pages, message boards, blogs, and chat rooms allows diverse individuals and small groups to organize their initiatives and mount their responses to global events on their own time schedule from anywhere (Lessig, 2004). Open sourcing challenges the hegemony of established protocols and interests in business, politics, religion, and culture.

The populist potential of modern electronic and digital media is not limited to the liberal democratic nations of the First World. When China rushed to develop its telecommunications system in the early 1980s, unpredictable, often negative reactions to the government's didactic information and dull entertainment programming were expressed by viewers. State authorities found that while they could effectively supervise production of most television programming, they could not control viewers' responses. Less than a decade after playing the lead role in the plan for national modernization, television and popular culture provoked a civil unrest that led to the standoff at Tiananmen Square (Lull, 1991). As information and communications technology have evolved and become more widely accessible since then, ordinary Chinese citizens now communicate and express themselves much more freely than ever before. Although personal comments on politics are not allowed in China, simple participation in online discussion boards, blogs, and podcasts has proven to be liberating: "the mere idea that you could publicly state your opinion about anything – the weather, local sports scene –felt like a bit of revolution" (Thompson, 2006, p. 70-71). Today's cultural "freedom fighters" are "a half-billion mostly apolitical young Chinese, blogging and chatting about their dates, their favorite bands, video games – an entire generation that is growing up with public speech as a regular habit" (Thompson, 2006, p. 156). If the cultural forum and the global commons represent platforms for entering the open spaces of global communication, then public speech is the process those platforms enable and inspire.

An unprecedented "social infrastructure of communication" has also opened up a "world of Muslim opinion, discourse, talk, and teaching" that facilitates interaction within and among Islamic groups, including links between Islamic diasporas throughout the world and their homelands (Eickelmand and Anderson, 2003, p. x-xi). The new satellite television networks in the Middle East have been crucial in creating space for discussion. A "new Arab public" is emerging today because of Al-Jazeera's willingness to "put almost every issue – social, economic, cultural, political – under fierce public scrutiny" and the audience's enthusiasm for thinking about and discussing these topics (Lynch, 2006, p. 241). The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) translates media content from the Arab region into the major languages of the world and posts it on the web, creating additional opportunities for dialogue across language and cultural groups.

Stage 4: Global consciousness and public opinion

The fourth stage of global communication refers to two interrelated phenomena: the increasing common awareness that develops when enormous numbers of people engage novel information and cultural forms, and the power of public opinion that emerges from that awareness.

People organize and evaluate their cultural vistas as located individuals and members of various groups. They ponder their intercultural encounters in moments of conscious and subconscious reflection. They discuss

new ideas with others. To borrow a term that grew from similar developments in the spread of media, culture, and politics in the stressful 1960s, today's accelerated contact with information and cultural resources stimulates a global "consciousness raising."

Worldwide "interpretive aggregates" also develop from the massive exposure. These impromptu groups are composed of globally-dispersed individuals who don't know each other personally but interpret known-in-common themes similarly. They are not (warm) communities or even (cold) networks. Interpretive aggregates are *ad hoc* issue-by-issue coteries of widely-scattered individuals whose opinions on controversial matters of common interest happen to coincide. Global consciousness raising and the forming of interpretive aggregates reflect two potent, interconnected consequences of media globalization – the global mass audience and global public opinion.

The notion of the mass audience has a long history in traditional critical theory. The mass audience, according to the Marxist view, is a media-manipulated artifact of the "mass society". Human beings are considered to be isolated, powerless, alienated persons who have no choice but to depend on the media for information, entertainment, and companionship. They become dominated by the mass media and other impersonal institutions that surround them. This view does not make sense today, if it ever really did. Large, anonymous audiences should not be equated with passive audiences (Webster and Phalen, 1997, p. 116). To the contrary, the very size of the global audience empowers the persons who form it in ways they could not achieve as individuals acting alone or as members of small groups. The collective awareness and opinion of the global audience greatly influences political decisions and cultural trends. Global public opinion – researched, interpreted, packaged, and circulated worldwide by commercial polling companies, international news agencies, the culture industries, and the internet – grows in direct relation to the access people have to information.

Aggregated responses to world developments become part of the developments themselves and subsequently modify the discourses that are produced about them. World opinion anticipating and responding to the United States invasion of Iraq, for instance, reinforced and spread resistance to the military assault and occupation. Antiwar sentiment that emerged later in the United States was bolstered by the results of global opinion polls. Global pressure about human rights ended apartheid in South Africa. World public opinion forced the Mexican government to stop abusing its indigenous population in Chiapas. The government of Mynamar has had to defend itself against world opinion in the case of dissident Aung Son Suu Kyi. Tremendous external pressure is being brought to bear on Israel today to end its occupation of Palestinian territories and for China to withdraw from Tibet. Global opinion even quickly condemned American TV evangelist Pat Robertson's call for the assassination of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez in 2005, forcing him to backtrack and apologize publicly. World public opinion uniquely shapes major decisions and then further interprets the outcomes of events in a back-and-forth process of monitoring and display.[3]

Stage 5: Global wisdom

In an interview with CNN's Larry King in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade

[3] Although global public opinion often develops in unmanaged ways to challenge the influence wielded by the world's political-economic power holders, purposeful attempts are also made by the powerful to shape global opinion for strategic reasons. Aid given by the United States to the victims of the tsunami disaster in Indonesia in 2004, for example, became an opportunity to show compassion and generosity. The fact that so many aid recipients were Muslim was promoted by American foreign policy makers to demonstrate that the country harbors no religious prejudice against Islam. Promoting this kind of influence is a completely reasonable thing to do. Joseph Nye argues that the United States and other Western nations should in fact do much more of this in order to cultivate favorable global public opinion by using soft power – "the ability to shape the preferences of others [...] the ability to attract [others to culture and political ideals]" rather depending on sheer economic and military might to achieve their goals (Nye, 2004, p. 5-6, x). It is not easy to assess the success or failure of attempts to manufacture agreeable public opinion. Many have argued, for example, that the Cold War was won by the attractive force of Western symbolic forms like music and movies and a vision of personal freedom. But people living in Europe's communist states already had much in common ethnically and culturally with the outsiders who were trying to influence them and were vulnerable because of the lack of religious ideology in the system. By comparison, American officials who design and implement the Middle East propaganda strategy say that the Cold war conducted against a "godless enemy" in the twentieth century was much easier to win than the one being waged now.

Center and Pentagon in 2001, Queen Rania al-Abdullah of Jordan offered an important perspective on the tragedy. She said that the shock of 9/11 has the potential to produce a global "moral consciousness". Precisely because it took place in the age of global electronic and digital media, September 11th was first and foremost a symbolic event with tremendous emotional consequences. No other event in world history compares with its multimediated, intertextual reach and impact. Has anyone anywhere not seen at least one visual representation of 9/11?

What Queen Rania was suggesting when she spoke of a worldwide moral consciousness has to do with what has occurred discursively *since* the Twin Towers fell and *after* the immediate circulation of television images, internet visuals, still photographs, reports, and commentaries. Her great hope – which has already begun to play out on the world stage – is that the terrorist strikes against modernity, secularism, America, and the West have stimulated a profound, transcendent, global process of soul-searching. Because people come to such introspection with widely-varying motivations and goals, the existential journey to shared moral consciousness will never finally end. But the process itself inspires reflection across cultural boundaries. That imperfect undertaking itself can promote greater global wisdom. Cultural introspection has been made *possible* by modern communications media, technology, and industry, but it has been made *necessary* by contemporary political and cultural history. The shared base of commonly-held information that is growing so rapidly around the world today begs for ethical interpretation.

No meaningful introspection or extensive elevating of moral consciousness can evolve without the global force of mass media, the culture industries, and the internet. The very program on which Queen Rania appeared, CNN's *Larry King Live*, attracts middle-class viewers in more than 200 countries. Newsmakers everywhere eagerly accept invitations to appear on CNN and other high-profile television networks. The mix can be impressive. One edition of *Larry King Live*, for instance, featured Pakistan President Pervez Musharaf, former Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, Prince Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia, *Washington Post* editor and journalist Bob Woodward, and various representatives from Al-Jazeera – all connected by satellite from around the world – discussing the consequences of 9/11.

In their form, media discussions about the moral issues of the day do not resemble anything close to pure participatory democracy, rhetorical or political, not even among the invited participants. Guests appearing on *Larry King Live,* even when the program is carried by CNN International, must speak English. CNN International appeals mainly to global middle class residents, tourists, and business travelers. CNN, BBC International, and other international broadcasters transmit by satellite and cable whose subscription costs lie beyond the economic grasp of the vast majority of the world's population. Al-Jazeera, Abudabi, Al-Arabiya, and other Arab television networks likewise use satellite technology to reach their middle-class viewers in the Middle East and around the world.

The very fact that the necessary elements of a global forum have materialized at all is unprecedented and positive. And while the international English-speaking middle class may be the social group best able to take advantage of global media and information technology, it is also true that people who fall into this category wield disproportionate influence over political and cultural developments through their direct involvement and the influence of their opinions. Moreover, while subscriptions to cable and satellite television and the internet may be the privilege of the global middle class primarily, many of the same images and discussions circulating about key news stories, issues, and controversies also appear on common terrestrial broadcast stations. Essentially the same discussions take place in many other languages and on other media and the internet. The content of all mass media – particularly major news stories – also circulates rapidly through the unmediated networks of social groups representing all socio-economic levels and cultural orientations. It is the cumulative weight and significance of all these aspects of media and cultural globalization taken together that carry such great significance.

At the heart of the process lies not only elevated awareness of the events and issues that define world history, but also *awareness of that awareness* and of its consequences for moral decision making. People everywhere know that they know more than they ever knew before. They also know that others share the same basic information and that these others know that the information they possess is widely held. These interconnected realizations combine to influence what people do with shared information and how they feel about it. The very fact that people everywhere can ponder, reason, and emote over key world events together, unrestricted by the limits of time and space, has become a powerful influence on the contemporary imaginary in general and on perceptions of individual events in particular.

Only the intercultural dialogues that are created through global communication have the capacity to evolve into a loosely convergent global wisdom – an intangible but forceful development that can shape moral thinking in an enlightened way and positively influence the political decisions that result. If this scenario plays out successfully on the global stage, then David Brin, may be right when he says:

> *[...] civility just might make a comeback, after all. But not as something exhorted, or enforced from on high. Rather, it may return as a byproduct as we all learn to live in this new 'commons', a near-future society where wrath seldom becomes habitual, because people who lash out soon learn that it simply does not pay (Brin, 1998, p. 169).*

Stage 6: Institutional channels

Authors of the United Nations' *Human Development Report* (UNDP, 2002, p. 75) concluded that "a civic forum, giving voice to different parts of society and enabling debate from all viewpoints" is absolutely necessary for "deepening democracy in a fragmented world". The United Nations document primarily addresses the plight of developing nations. Essential to making human progress in those countries, according to the international experts who wrote the report, are further development and diffusion of communications technology, the expansion of media channels, and the growth of effective civil societies.

Throughout this book I have emphasized the influence of market-driven channels of influence more than official channels and government. But the United Nations, its ancillary organizations, and other international bodies continue to play decisive roles in these processes too. The UN charter formally mandates that the organization function as "an instrument at the service of humankind, a mechanism which links us all in our efforts to build a better world" in part by encouraging open and equitable communication within and among nation states (United Nations, 1999, p. 2).

In order to do this, the UN has constituted an Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) Task Force to "bridge the global divide, foster digital opportunity, and thus firmly put ICT at the service of development for all" (United Nations Information and Communication Technology Task Force, 2005). The International Telecommunications Union, another UN organization, set out a Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action at the first World Summit on the Information Society held in Geneva in 2003 and followed it up with a meeting in Tunis two years later where the recommendations were put into practice (International Telecommunications Union, 2005). The idea of the internet as a "global resource" requiring fair and responsible growth and management was passionately and repeatedly stressed. About the same time – late 2005 – the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization overwhelmingly passed a resolution stemming from its Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity to "protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions" and "to create the conditions for cultures to flourish and to freely interact in a mutually beneficial manner" (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2005).

The United Nations General Assembly, Security Council, and associated organizations like UNESCO are not the only institutional channels through which essential transnational and transcultural negotiations take place. The World Economic Forum (WEF), incorporated as a nonprofit foundation in Switzerland with UN endorsement (and much maligned by many anti-globalization forces), functions as a "global knowledge hub" that advocates "entrepreneurship in the global public interest". As a top priority responding to the current global crisis, religious, business, and political leaders of the WEF created the "Council of 100" in their 2004 meeting in Davos as an attempt to bridge the rift between the Islamic World and the West. Representatives from many developing countries have created the World Social Forum – where activists and agents from non-governmental organizations discuss alternative globalization policies and practices. And the independent Commission on Global Governance met in 1995 to stress the need for shared values, a global civic ethic, and enlightened leadership to help create a "global neighborhood".

Building on initiatives like these, David Held and his colleagues (Held *et al.*, 1999) describe a visionary "global civil society", a proposal Held further develops in subsequent writing (Held, 2004). By enacting international policies in economics, politics, and law that reliably reflect the ideals of a global social democracy, Held believes a "new global covenant" can emerge to promote greater social solidarity and justice worldwide (Held,

2004). Held maintains that "the conditions facilitating transnational cooperation between peoples, given the global infrastructures of communication and increasing awareness of many common interests, have never been so propitious" (Held *et al.*, 1999, p. 5).

As the material and symbolic conditions of life have changed over the years, so too has the notion of a civil society. Just thinking of civil society as a global phenomenon represents a conceptual migration away from its traditional and more parochial meaning toward what Held calls an "internationalism relevant to our global age" (Held, 2004, p. 178). But beyond the generally positive connotations the term inspires, exactly what constitutes a civil society and how it should function have never been widely agreed upon. The civil society can be considered part of the state apparatus or separate from it. It may be connected to the market or be excluded from it. In secular nations, civil society generally refers to the pro-active involvement of citizens in their communities through voluntary associations, foundations, and religious organizations; in theocratic societies the civil society is almost always equated with religious ideals and practices.

By any definition, civil society develops through willing contributions made by people to nurture the healthy growth of their communities. The civil society originates and matures in a cultural space that commutes between personal independence and social interdependence. As modern societies develop, individuals engage with others to pursue their private interests. For those societies to advance, however, the pursuit of private interests must be counterbalanced by active commitment to social responsibility and community. So while many individuals in the modern world acquire their identities by declaring their relative independence from others, they also manifest "a sense of shared interests in which individuals recognize both the duty they have to support themselves and their duties toward one another" (Edgar and Sedgwick, 1999, p. 63).

Stage 7: Utopian potential

On a warm summer day in 2005 many of the world's most famous pop musicians staged the Live 8 benefit concert calling for debt relief and the eradication of AIDS and poverty in Africa. According to the organizers, Live 8 was viewable by 85% of the world's population. The concert originated in Europe and the United States and was transmitted in real time around the world via satellite television and the internet with an estimated audience of more than two billion viewers. Text message lotteries determined who got tickets to the live performances. Donations to the cause were accepted by mobile phone and the internet. DVDs, CDs, and audio and video downloads of the event are still being sold and Pink Floyd fans continue to buzz about the group's brief reunion. Live 8 – a true twenty-first century communications event –was the most successful international pop music event in history. The global spectacle facilitated an extraordinary outpouring of financial contributions and clearly influenced the political agenda at the G-8 world economic summit that was held in northern Scotland the following week.

The G-8 summit of 2005 was dramatically influenced by another global event that originated that summer in Great Britain: the bombing of the London transport system by Islamist terrorists five days after the concert ended and just before the G-8 meeting began. The juxtaposition of these highly symbolic events vividly illustrates both the utopian potential made possible by the open spaces of global communication and their enigmatic vulnerabilities.

Making genuine progress toward a more humane global coexistence requires that imbalances and injustices in international economic and political relations be rectified (Held, 2004). Just as vital to human development, though, is the need for improvement in global *cultural* relations, a less discernable project that cannot be reduced to military might, politics, or economics and is far less amenable to political negotiations and policy mandates. In the search for whatever common bonds of humanity we might call upon to unite us and achieve greater social justice, a broad commitment to promoting greater cultural understanding will be essential. The pen ultimately may not be stronger the sword when push comes to shove in geopolitical struggles, but the force of cultural transparency, expanded awareness, global public opinion, and the counter-hegemonic force of symbolic power in general have become influences that no nation, religion, culture or high-profile leader today, no matter how dominant or confident, can ignore.

A cultural literacy fitting for the Communication Age requires that people sincerely question the limits of their traditions and political positions, respect cultural differences, accept diversity, and continue to develop multiple and complementary personal identities (UNDP,

2004, p. 88). Global citizens everywhere have much to learn about recognizing and relativizing their cultural biases and about harnessing the counterproductive, sometimes devastating, tendencies and consequences those biases can bring. The evolving presence of global discourses and the capability of enhanced communication tools make cultural introspection, discussion, and dialogue technically and emotionally feasible. Individual initiative and the desire for a more cosmopolitan consciousness will be key. As Terhi Rantanen argues, while "the ideal of united nations is not realistic, the ideal of individuals united beyond nation states is emerging" (Rantanen, 2005, p. 158).

Religious fundamentalists, nationalists, and unabashed advocates of the "free market" all promote a particular kind of unity that serves their particular interests. Those projects are no longer viable. The open spaces of global communication promise not unity, but opportunity for meaningful dialogue and nurturance of the global public sphere. Cultural negotiations that global media inspire will do much to determine the "moral future of civilization" by influencing how the world is understood by its citizens (Silverstone, 2006). The challenge that lies ahead is formidable, but the opportunity for meaningful change is real. As Dan Gillmor observes: "we tend to be bound by our past, even when we can imagine the future. Yet sometimes we are transformed, and media can be at the center of how we see these changes" (Gillmor, 2004, p. 236). He might have added, "and *how* we make the changes come about". No doubt, the lives of global citizens everywhere have been dramatically impacted by the sheer amount of information that fills the open spaces of global communication, the diverse sources that create it, and the undetermined uses to which it is put.

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