TOWARD A CRITICAL THEORY OF THE MEDIA IN

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Critical theories have in the last decade become one of the dominant approaches in the field of international relations (IR). However, with their focus on discourse, critical theorists seem to be unable to appropriately account for the impact that media, or communication technologies, are having in the international realm. This paper tries to lay the groundwork for the development of a more comprehensive critical theory of the media in IR. The argument of this paper is that such a theory can be formulated by relying on the comparative media theory (CMT) developed by Ian Angus, a critical theorist himself. In developing this argument, the paper first reviews critical IR theories, followed by a critical assessment of Ronald Deibert's work. Deibert is the only scholar who has addressed this problem encountered by critical theorists, and put forward his own approach to international politics at the center of which lies the media. Deibert's work, however, suffers from limitations of its own, seen from a critical perspective, because of its individualistic ontology. The paper then will attempt to introduce Angus' CMT, which is based on a holistic ontology, to rectify Deibert's problem, and to suggest future lines of research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

In the past ten years, the scholarship of international relations (IR) has

experienced the "sociological turn." Consequently, at the beginning of the twenty-first

century, critical theorists have become an influential school of thought. These scholars

include Richard Ashley (1987), David Campbell (1998), James DerDerian (1987), Jim

George (1995; with Campbell 1990), Necati Polat (1997), Ann Tickner (1997), and Rob

Walker (1989; 1993).[1] These scholars have attempted to import the insights of various

theorists form other disciplines such as humanities, literary criticism, or philosophy to

account for various changes, particularly those associated with the end of the cold war

(Ashley, 1987; Walker, 1989). By doing so, they have adopted a novel conception of

discourse, in order to point to some propositions previously taken for granted while

raising new questions. Overall, most of these scholars have been eminently critical of

mainstream approaches – all considered in some ways variants of the dominant

(neo)realist approach.[2]

These contributions notwithstanding, major limitations remain. The main

limitation encountered by critical approaches to IR is their general inability to account for

the importance of communication technologies or the media. Indeed, most critical

scholars rely on methods imported from discourse analysis or literary criticism, and are

stuck within what one could term the paradigm of the text (Osterud, 1996, pp. 385-6).

In their analytical framework, the only difference between two very distant historical

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[1] These scholars are also called postmodernists in the IR field. I do not include (conventional) constructivists such as Alexander Wendt. Good reviews of constructivism can be found in Adler (1997), Price and Reus-Smit (1998), and Fearon and Wendt (2002).

[2] Reviews can be found in Ashley and Walker (1990), Devetak (1995), Georges and Campbell (1990), Hoffman (1987), Lapid (1989), Linklater (1986, 2000). Osterud (1996) offers a criticism of post-modern approaches.

periods critical theorists can identify (e.g., between the middle ages and the twenty-first century) lies within the dominant discourses, not with the technological environment in which these discourses arise. There are no established conceptual tools to assess the differences between parchment and the Internet, for example. Because of this inability to account for the media, or the material dimension of social arrangements more generally, critical theorists' overall account for the nature of communication remains at least incomplete.

This is an important problem that needs to be addressed in order to further the critical agenda in the study of international politics. Unless this problem is dealt with properly, critical theory might loose its relevance in a world where communication technologies are constantly being innovated, and where novel modes of communication are changing social and political relations on a world scale. The proclaimed goal of critical theorists, namely the emancipation of oppressed groups, requires a thorough understanding of contemporary issues, as well as the available possibilities for transformation.

The purpose of this paper is to take the first steps to systematically address this problem. In other words, the paper attempts to lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive critical theory of the media in IR. More specifically, it performs two tasks. First, it critically assesses Ronald Deibert's contribution.[3] Deibert is the only theorist who has attempted to systematically address the role of the media in IR. To the best of my knowledge, there is no review of Deibert's scholarship despite its importance in the field of IR. Thus, this first task will fill the void in question, and at the same time

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[3] Deibert is currently an associate professor at the Political Science Department, University of Toronto.

it will present a "state of the art" assessment on the question of the media in IR.[4]   This

paper will focus specifically on Deibert's main work, namely his monograph *Parchment,*

Printing, and Hypermedia (1997a), and will consider some works published around the

same period.   While sharing some concerns with critical theorists against mainstream IR

theories, Deibert relies on the insights from medium theorists, Marshall McLuhan and

Harold Innis most specifically, in order to develop his own media ecology theory (Deibert,

1999, pp. 273-4).   This move allows Deibert to criticize the prevailing understanding of

communication in IR by focusing on the medium of communication rather than the

content.   Furthermore, he innovatively revises the traditional media theorists' holistic

ontology of actor-media environment relations and replaces it with a more individualistic

(i.e., actor-focus) one.   However, seen from a critical theory perspective, Deibert's work

has problems of its own: it does not analyze appropriately a core concern for critical

theorists, that is the relations of domination embedded in the constitution of society

generally, and the role media might play in the institutionalization of these power

relations in particular.   This problem, as will be elaborated later, stems precisely from

Deibert's individualist ontology.

The paper's second task is, therefore, to rectify Deibert's weakness by

reintroducing a holistic ontology.   The paper does so by borrowing the insights of Ian

Angus (1997, 2000), a critical theorist.[5]   Angus' comparative media theory (CMT),

based on a holistic ontology, is an excellent conceptual framework to analyze how power

relations are embedded in society through the media.   This paper suggests in a first-cut

fashion the effectiveness of this remedy with the hope that CMT-based studies of the

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[4] I have searched the databases at the SFU library, and have not found any reviews of Deibert's work.
[5] Angus is currently a professor at the Humanities Department, Simon Fraser University.

media in IR will be pursued in the future.   The logical structure of this paper is shown in Figure 1.[6]

Given the purpose of this paper, the rest of the paper is arranged in the following way.   The first section will review both the achievements and limitations of critical theories in IR, in order to establish the framework of later discussions.   The second part will then thoroughly assess Deibert's work.   After positioning Deibert in IR scholarship, this section will show the contributions Deibert has brought to the field of IR, and point to limitations of his work.   The last section will briefly present Angus' CMT, and suggest the ways in which it can be used to overcome Deibert's problems.   The paper will conclude by suggesting future research directions.

| CRITICAL THEORY Strength: Discourse analysis Weaknesses: Inadequate analysis of the media | DEIBERT (INDIVIDUALISTIC ONTOLOGY) Strength: Media ecology Weaknesses: Inadequate analysis of the power relations embedded   in   the media environments | ANGUS (HOLISTIC ONTOLOGY) Strength: CMT |

The first steps for building a CMT-based critical theory of the media in IR
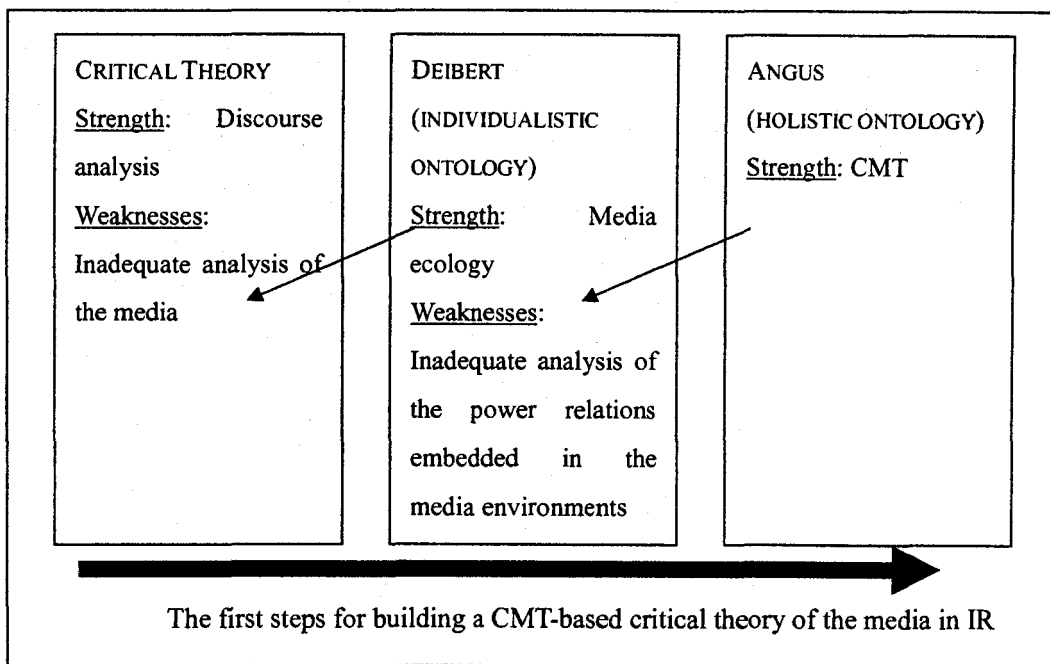
Figure 1: The logical structure of this paper

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[6]In my view, this avenue of research is the most promising.   There are however potential alternatives. While medium theory is one of the directions the analysis of the impact of communication technology on society might take, there are other approaches to the media, such as functionalism, cultural studies, Marxism.   For an overview see Mattelart and Mattelart (1995).   To the best of my knowledge, no one has applied these prospective approaches to communication to the study of IR.

CRITICAL IR THEORY:

Critical theory in social sciences

Mainstream social science, whether it takes the form of positivist and empirical research, or an interpretive one similar to Weber's *verstehen*, is committed to an understanding of social reality in accordance with the basic axiomatic premises of the Enlightenment. In other words, mainstream social science is dedicated to an understanding of social reality where object and subject are distinct, and where the goal of the study therefore becomes the investigation of "unquestionably real dimensions of the social world": the world is comprised of ready made facts awaiting discovery (quote in Linklater, 1986, p. 308; also see Hoffman, 1987, pp. 232-3).

Critical theories arose from the problematization of these facts as formulated by various proponents of essentialist doctrines. Critical theories seek to question what had hereto been taken as natural, by showing the historically constructed character of social institutions, and by uncovering the patterns of oppression and domination masked by these universalistic conceits (George and Campbell, 1990, pp. 271-8; Hoffman, 1987, pp. 233-6). All critical theories focus on the centrality of meaning in social affairs, and its construction of social reality. Rather than seeing language as neutral, every utterance contains within itself traces of authority, oppression, and exclusion.[7]

Two main points emerge from critical theories. The first is the attack on the notion of objectivity, where the knowing subject is separated from the object known. This, in turn, leads to the conclusion that the Kantian notion of critique – characterized by the distinction between legitimate (read "real") and illegitimate modes of knowing –

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[7] For examples, see Barthes, 1957; Derrida, 1967a; Foucault, 1993

should be abandoned. The goal for critical theories becomes to unearth the historical

steps that lead to the constitution of certain forms of knowledge and practices and their

modes of acceptability, not to attempt to uncover some unalterable truth regarding the

essence of specific objects (Foucault, 1990, pp. 47-50). The second point is the critique

of structural linguistics, where the sign is composed of a signified and a signifier, the

latter referring to the former (Saussure, 1967, pp. 147-58). Critical theorists argue that

the Saussiran conception of the sign is itself a product of writing (Derrida, 1967b, p. 26),

and that there is nothing outside the text; signifiers gain meaning only in relation to other

signifiers, not signifieds that would lie outside the text (Barthes, 1970, pp. 9-20). This

focus on discourse leads critical theorists to emphasize the hermeneutical task associated

with the interpretation of social reality. The text is seen as the paradigm of social reality,

and textual analysis becomes the privileged mode of social inquiry (Ricoeur, 1977).

Critical theory in IR

For nearly two decades now, due in part to emerging trends in social inquiry and

a critique of the dominant approach in IR theory – namely realism, a form of the

positivist-empiricist paradigm – there has been a search for alternative ways of

conducting the study of world politics (Hoffman, 1987, p. 231; Lapid, 1989, p. 236;

Devetak, 1995, p. 27). Critical IR scholarship imported the insights from the previously

mentioned theorists to attack mainstream IR on two fronts. First, on an epistemological

front, the basic realist conception of science gives way to more reflexive approaches.

Second, on an ontological front, the state and the intrinsic nature of the international

system are questioned. From these points, two main postulates of international critical

theory emerge. The first is the insistence on the constructed nature of international

actors and practices. The second is the emphasis on the power relations that are embedded in the construction of these international actors and practices.

Following the distinction introduced by Robert Cox, one can distinguish in the field of IR problem-solving theories from critical theories. Whereas problem-solving theories are ahistorical, value-free, and naturalize the prevailing social order and power relations, critical theories seek to understand how a given order came about, as well as expose the perspective, or framework, within which the analysis evolves (Cox, 1986, pp. 207-9). In that respect, all critical theories reject approaches that seek to establish universal truths, based on an embrace of foundationalism and an Archimedean point (Linklater, 2000, p. 13; Price and Reus-Smit, 1998, pp. 261-2). Stated otherwise, critical approaches reject the application of methods taken from the natural science – or positivism – to the analysis of social relations.

This novel understanding of theorizing is accompanied by a rejection of the traditional binary oppositions, such as subject and object, and fact and value. Furthermore, knowledge is seen in critical theories as an integral dimension of social relations, and knowledge is connected to power (George and Campbell, 1990, pp. 271-81). Institutionalized vocabulary tends to impose linguistic patterns of domination, and to silence minorities. This accounts for the contestation of the main discourse in the field of IR as instituting boundaries, and the emphasis on "dissent" in the early works of critical theorists of world politics (Campbell, 1998, p. 9; Ashley and Walker, 1990). Hence, the analysis of world politics cannot be seen merely as a reflection of a pregiven order. Rather, it is an act that involves the scholar, and the distinction between theory and practice is blurred while empirical analysis is no longer a

criterion for the evaluation of knowledge claims (Campbell, 1998, pp. 17; George and Campbell, 1990, p. 269-70; Walker, 1989, p. 181).[8]

The focus on language that animates critical IR theory's epistemological concern is also at the basis of its ontological critique of realist approaches. Indeed, critical scholars of world politics argue that discourse is constitutive of social reality. There is no prediscursive identity; identity is constructed by the language games embedded in society and reproduces given power relations (Campbell, 1998, pp. 9-12; Adler, 1997, p. 332). From this perspective, it cannot be said that some actors or practices are immutable aspects of international life. Rather, they are all products of an open-ended, contingent historical process that must be retraced. Furthermore, these constructions are not seen as socially neutral. Every social form contains within itself traces of oppression, and creates or reproduces specific power dynamics found in society.

As such, critical approaches to world politics attack what mainstream approaches consider immutable facts of IR. Two main postulates of mainstream approaches are criticized. The first is the centrality of the state as the main actor of world politics. The second is the transcendence of power politics as the driving force of international relations. Let us elaborate these points in order.

First, the discipline of IR in its entirety is based on the distinction between

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[8] Associated to the notion of theory as practice, as well as that of the convergence between knowledge and power, is the rise of normative concerns in the study of world politics (Spegele, 1995, pp. 211-2). Realist approaches are bounded by the "egoism-anarchy thematic" and cannot escape the power-politics framework that limits their ethical significance. Since knowledge is never neutral, but always related to a given social setting, realist approaches tend to support a conception of world politics dominated by a power-politics logic, and give legitimacy to great power dominance (George, 1995, pp. 195-8; Devetak, 1995, p. 36). Critical international theory – especially the postmodern variant – attempts to escape this "ethical nakedness" by making ethics one of its prime concerns and going beyond this "egoism-anarchy thematic." The emancipation of oppressed groups is at the forefront, while the boundaries of the possible are continually reassessed (Devetak, 1995, p. 40; George, 1995, pp. 201-207).

domestic and international politics, or the inside/outside dichotomy (Walker, 1989, p. 180; Polat, 1997, p. 453). The state, by establishing boundaries and closing the discursive field of world politics, represents the biggest exclusionary force in international affairs (Devetak, 1995, pp. 39-42). However, the state is a product of the early Renaissance, and conceptions of politics based on a strong sense of territoriality – such as those promoted by the modern state – have not always predominated (Ruggie, 1986). Considering the order at the center of which lies the state as immutable is to foreclose any possibility of thinking another possible order. As Polat writes (1997, p. 452): "Realism puts the modern state and its insecurities at the center of its concept of the global." In order to fulfill its goal of emancipation, critical IR theory must question the social basis of the state, and the patterns of oppression generated by it in order to "shift from a concern with the a priori assumptions of agency and pregiven subjects to the problematic of subjectivity and its political constitution" (Campbell, 1998, p. 222).

Associated with this critique of the state lies the second criticism of critical theorists on the nature of global life. The questioning of the state leads to a novel understanding of world politics, where the practices of power politics are no longer seen as natural characteristics of social life, and the subject of emancipation is no longer the modern citizen – product of the state – but rather the individual. Therefore, questioning the state leads to a questioning of the practices it implies as well as the nature and location of the political community (Walker, 1989, p. 168; Devetak, 1995, p. 39). While realist scholars tend to consider the system as inherently anarchical, and elements of an international community as merely transient, the concept of community is central to

critical theorists, who focus on the practices that account for the existence of a conflictual space, and attempt to formulate a novel definition of community as the basis of emancipation (Devetak, 1995, pp. 36-9; Ashley, 1987, pp. 403-4). Ashley qualifies the international community as "a never completed product of multiple historical practices" that is the product of struggles where power and domination are normalized and political subjects emerge (Ashley, 1987, p. 411). In this sense, the practice that mainstream scholars see as universal, i.e., power politics, must be problematized, and a focus on the concept of community allows to think the limits, and alternatives, to such practices.

In sum, critical approaches to IR contest most of the claims made by mainstream theorists. Critical scholars argue that theory is not an act of contemplation, but rather a social action that is embedded within specific relations of oppression and domination. Critical theorists also share a different conception of the object of study. Whereas mainstream analyses reify certain categories, such as the state or the anarchy of the international system, the questioning of those two concepts is the starting point of any analysis from the critical school.

Weaknesses of critical theory in IR

The discursive turn in the philosophy of the human sciences opens an avenue for a more reflexive analysis of cultural forms. Unfortunately, few are the critical scholars who expressly address the question of technology and its relation to society and the power dynamics within it. Rather, it appears that critical IR theory focuses on discourse, with very little concern for other factors. As Angus pointed out, critical theories in general cannot discriminate adequately between the effects of different media. To these theories, in other words, the fact that a specific discourse is written or broadcasted on TV

is not directly relevant to the study. All of the critical theories used in IR follow a primarily hermeneutical method derived from literary criticism, where communication technologies – or the medium – are not considered to be a central feature of the communicative process. This position leads to some rather counter-intuitive conclusions, such as the main differences being found between the middle ages and the twenty-first century lying in the constitution of different types of discourses, rather than any other changes that obviously occurred in the material dimension of social life. As Angus writes: "the materiality of the medium of communication is, from the viewpoint of discourse studies . . . secondary to the content, or meaning, constructed in the discourse." This, in turn, leads to the "inability to determine the relation of rhetorical interventions either to 'material reality' or to the social formation as a whole" (Angus, 2000, p. 15).

This generic criticism holds true in the context of IR as well. For example, critical theorists are very good at discussing the various discourses that lead to the institutionalization of a certain understanding of sovereignty, the citizen, but they cannot consider the communication technologies, that were employed to implement these discourses. One can wonder what role communication technologies like parchment or print might have in the institution of social forms, what type of power relations these technologies bring about, and what the relation between media and discourse is on world affairs. Consequently, although critical theorists address the question of embedded power, they cannot fully explore that issue with their current methodological tools.

The examples of this problem can be found scattered around the literature of critical IR theory. In Ashley's discussion of the "anarchy problematique," for example the main point of focus is the discourse of such a problematique

11

(Ashley, 1988, pp. 227-9).   In accordance with the tenets of critical theory, Ashley does

not consider anarchy as an isolated sign, but rather as a unit of meaning that gets its value

in relation to the total system.   As such, anarchy gains meaning in relation to the

discourse of sovereignty.[9]   However, since Ashley only discusses the discourses, there

are no explanations for the rise of this particular discourse, and no necessary conditions

are specified for discourses to arise.   By focusing on the media, one could account for

the technological environment, and show how different media created a space where the

control that lies at the basis of sovereignty was made possible.   Without such an analysis

on the media, Ashley's argument remains incomplete at best.

In a similar fashion, Campbell discusses the constructed nature of security, and

more specifically the discourses of danger that are the product of a discriminating state

identity.   He further goes on to argue that there is nothing outside of discourse, and that

the study of world politics must follow the lines of literary criticism (1998, pp. 1-8).

This position precludes Campbell from considering the impact the media might have,

regardless of the message being communicated.   Indeed, one could argue that there

needs to be a specific environment in order to perceive what is considered a threat in the

first place.   The time and space range of a medium greatly influences what can be

perceived, as well as the reaction time to that.   In this sense, the scope of a social

environment, as well as one's reaction to it, cannot be adequately assessed by approaches

that rely solely on discourse analysis.

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[9] For a more thorough and general discussion of the value of the sign, and its relation to the system of meaning, see Barthes (1985).   One can notice at this point that these discourses are taken as whole units of meaning rather than *syntagmes*, and these discourses interact with each other in a bigger system that could be related to a mythological system.   For a discussion of myths and mythological systems see Barthes (1957).

In summary, this section reviewed both the contributions and limitations of critical approaches to IR. As previously mentioned, critical IR theories refuse the "billiard ball" conception of world politics, where only monastic states interact in an inherently conflictual environment. Critical theories posit that social reality is constructed, and that there are no immutable identities; identities are the product of historical struggles. However, while critical theorists criticize mainstream approaches for focusing only on warfare and material capabilities, they appear to encounter the opposite problem, namely that of focusing on the ideational dimension of world politics and overlooking any material capabilities. Whereas for mainstream approaches ideas and norm either do not count or are subordinated to the distribution of material capabilities, most critical theorists argue that material factors are subordinated to the ideational construction that precedes it (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 41-3). This problem partly is due to critical theorists' understanding of communication. Indeed, critical theorists only focus on the discourses that underlie international practices – all communication is reduced to the paradigm of the text, and analyses follow methods borrowed from discourse analysis. When one talks about the state or the citizen, it is only that discourse which is elaborated upon, and no reference is made to material factors, and communication technologies more specifically (see Campbell, 1998; Devetak, 1995; Ashley, 1987).

Aware of this key problem, Deibert attempts to provide an alternative by developing an explanation of world politics based on an enhanced understanding of communication and media. Let us then turn our attention to Deibert's work.

DEIBERT AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN WORLD POLITICS

Deibert's scholarship expresses a justified dissatisfaction with the field of IR regarding its inabilities to account for changes, and to consider the role played by communication technologies in world politics (Deibert, 1996, pp. 29-30; 1997a, p. 1). Deibert's objective is to rectify this problem with a novel understanding of communication while taking into account media, or the material dimension of communication. Deibert wants to go beyond the state-centric (neo)realist paradigm and account for the emergence of new actors on the world scene. Where most critical scholars import insights from various fields – such as post-structuralism or social constructivism – Deibert attempts to adapt to the field of IR the findings of media theorists such as McLuhan and Innis in order to formulate his "therapeutic redescription" of the discipline (Deibert, 1999, pp. 273-4).

This section argues that Deibert made a valuable innovation in our understanding of the media in IR—but at some heavy costs. His innovation is at the level of ontology, that is, ontology of actor-media environment relations. He replaced the traditional media theorists' holistic ontology of actor-media environment relations—what he sees as technological determinism—with a more individualistic one, so that he can more effectively analyze the dynamic behavior of individual actors in changing media environments. But his individualistic ontology diverts his attention away from what critical theorists would hold as a key dimension of media-based society: power relations embedded in the media environment. With its holistic ontology, a critical theory applied to the analysis of the media would see inherent and structural inequality in the media environment itself (independent of actors). Replacing the holistic ontology with an

individualistic one, therefore, is highly problematic from this perspective.

This section will first establish that Deibert shares critical theorists concerns. Then it will outline both his conceptual framework and its application. It will conclude by analyzing his weaknesses.

Positioning Deibert's work in IR scholarship

Like critical theorists, Deibert argues that mainstream social science adopts a realist epistemology, or a "spectator theory of knowledge." According to this perspective, language is neutral and merely represents reality, which is "out there," independent of language. A basic distinction between object of knowledge and knowing subject is postulated, and successful theories are those that best represent the world as it is. From this perspective, "truth" is a relationship between a subject and an object of knowledge, and is independent of the cultural environment in which these discourses arise. In this vein, progress in social sciences in general, and in IR in particular, is seen in a meliorist fashion, where the descriptions of reality become more and more accurate (Deibert, 1997b, pp. 169-71). The main inconvenience of this approach lies with its conception of language. By overlooking the role of language, and by establishing a distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning, mainstream approaches to IR cannot think social institutions as the product of a historical process, and are unable to redescribe their object of study, as the vocabulary employed becomes an "ontological binder." These approaches are what Deibert calls, following Cox, problem-solving theories as they are ahistorical and cannot question the assumptions on which they are based (Deibert. 1997b, pp. 171-4). As Deibert argues, "the elements of international politics which mainstream rationalist approaches presuppose to be 'natural', 'essential',

15

and 'unchanging' are, in fact, the products of historical contingencies and thus subject to change over time" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 7). In the case of realist approaches, the main assumption is the priority of the state in world politics, and the associated dynamic known as the balance of power. Even though these postulates are out of touch with the new forces and dynamics at play in world politics, mainstream approaches do not have the inclination to think radical changes or the vocabulary to account for new social forces and dynamics (Deibert, 1997b, pp. 168; 176).

In order to reformulate the basic premises that dominate mainstream IR, Deibert shies away from a "spectator theory of knowledge," or the realist theory of science, and explicitly wants to "socialize epistemology" (Deibert, 1997b, p. 187). Language occupies a central role in the works of Deibert, for it constitutes social reality and orients both thought and practice (Deibert, 1997b, p. 177). Therefore, truth claims regarding world politics cannot be considered independently of the language games that constitute social reality. This conception, that Deibert terms "holist," highlights the value-laden character of theory and sets different standards from the correspondence between discourse and the world for the evaluation of truth claims.[10] As Deibert notes: "we are essentially linguistic creatures, and as language is essentially a social phenomenon, we cannot help but perceive that world around us through an intersubjective, historically and culturally contingent set of lenses" (Deibert, 1997b, p. 178).

His pragmatic philosophy of science places emphasis on the rhetorical construction of reality, and the metaphorical dimension of language. Language, rather

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[10] What Deibert calls a holistic epistemology refers in fact to what is termed in other debates pragmatism. For a discussion of the different approaches to the philosophy of science, see Laudan (1990). In order not to confuse this approach with the ontological approach known as holism, the term pragmatism will be used when referring to Deibert's epistemology.

than simply representing reality, is a tool that shapes both theory and practice. Theories and concepts are no longer evaluated in the light of their accuracy, but rather in light of their usefulness regarding practice (Deibert, 1997b, pp. 169-77). As such, a novel account of the field of IR entails a new understanding, as well as a change in character of the field of world politics. Furthermore, the emphasis on the social embeddedness of cultural institutions calls for an approach that relies mainly on contingency. Rather than relying on any "laws," or "master variables," Deibert's critique of realist epistemology calls for an open-ended historicist approach where contingency primes as a factor of change, thereby linking this type of approach to a "historical narrative" (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 7-17). By adopting such a stance, Deibert distinguishes himself from mainstream approaches to IR.

Yet at the same time, Deibert distances himself from critical theory. True, both constructivists and postmodernists argue that reality is socially constructed, and that one must consider social changes as the product of a contingent and open-ended process. According to Deibert, these approaches tend to focus on the ideational dimension of society and world politics at the expense of the material factors (Deibert, 1999, p. 288). Thus, Deibert's alternative to mainstream IR combines these two dimensions in a "historical-materialist perspective" (Deibert, 1997a, p. x), and in this sense he stands between conventional critical theory and mainstream theory in IR.

Deibert argues that the pragmatic conception of social sciences encompasses a wide array of approaches – including, but not limited to, postmodern and poststructual approaches (Deibert, 1997b, p. 178). Adapting outside influences to the field of IR is an immense benefit for it contributes towards the "therapeutic redescription" promoted by

Deibert. The works of Innis probably represent the greatest influence on the works of Deibert. Innis' many concern fit well with the current debates in IR theory, and provide the basis to formulate the "medieval metaphor" (Deibert, 1999, pp. 273-5). First, Innis' work lies in the pragmatic tradition necessary to a novel understanding of any academic field. However, Innis' work surpasses most other works in that he does not limit his studies to the merely discursive dimension of reality, but rather interweaves both ideational and material factors by focusing on the media. Second, Innis' historicism privileges change over continuity, and recognizes the socially constructed character of all human institutions, thereby denying a role to any laws in social affairs or the existence of pre-social identities (Deibert, 1999, pp. 277-9). Finally, Innis' discussion of time and space, and the associated biases inherent in every social formation, points to the variable dimensions underlying power relations in society, and where one should look for sources of change (Deibert, 1999, pp. 286-8).

The new metaphor Deibert proposes is that of the Middle Ages – an age characterized by "multiple and overlapping authorities" (Deibert, 1997a, p. ix) – in order to better accommodate the new actors and dynamics that are emerging in world politics. Again, this redescription is in no ways associated with changes in the *nature* of world politics, but is merely a strategic decision (Deibert, 1997b, pp. 184-5). One main point of contention between Deibert and mainstream IR theory lies in the role of the state. However, Deibert does not claim that the state is disappearing, but rather that the various changes on the world scene modify the role and significance of the state in the twenty-first century. The analogy with the Middle Ages allows to associate the global-liberal paradigm with the authority of the church in the Middle Ages, as well as to

invert the binary opposition between high and low politics, without however denying a specific role to the state (Deibert, 1997b, p. 185).

In sum, Deibert's work starts from the recognition that fundamental changes are occurring in the realm of world politics, and that existing approaches in the field of IR have been unable to account for these changes. In addition, IR theorists have been little interested – at best – in the role of communication in society; and when IR theorists have problematized the role of communication, it has been done along the lines of discourse analysis or cybernetics. As has already been pointed out above, critical theorists have been the only ones in the field of IR to give a central place to communications, but they mainly rely on an understanding of communication formulated by discourse analysts, where the paradigmatic medium is the text. Deibert has made an important contribution to rectify this problem, which will be reviewed below.

Deibert's contribution

Deibert's main contribution stems from his reading of previous media theorists, and his reformulation of media theory in order to apply it to the field of IR. From his understanding of the media, Deibert is able to draw a novel understanding of world orders at the center of which stand the media. Deibert's theory of world orders is illustrated by his narrative of the transition from the medieval to the present world order. Let us now look at these points in more detail.

1) Media theory

The works of previous media theorists are the starting point for Deibert's account of the changing world order. A long lineage of scholars have reflected on the

importance of media in society. The main argument of media theory is that it is not the content of the communicative process that matters, but rather the medium that makes communication possible. Media theory takes the media as the main agent through which to consider society. As such, media theorists explicitly adopt a holistic ontology where all aspects to society are considered as a whole, and related to communication technologies.

The main areas of study initially consisted of the comparison of oral and literate cultures, and the cognitive and social changes associated with the emergence of new media. Havelock (1986) studied the impact of the alphabet on Greek cognition, and the changes in cultural forms due to the novel ways of storing and retrieving cultural information. Goody and Watt (1963) have considered the differences between "primitive" and "developed" cultures, and have attributed these differences to the technology of writing. Similarly, Ong provided a detailed account of the differences between orality and literacy, as well as a discussion of the educational changes in the high Middle Ages due to the emergence of printing (1961; 1982). Although these scholars have not for the most part considered media other than the book, their emphasis on orality provides the decisive standard from which to evaluate the impact of any medium on the social and cognitive sphere. In this scholarly tradition in the media, two scholars stand out most: Innis and McLuhan. Both Canadian scholars have gone beyond the "orality-literacy equation," and explored in their own way the effect of media environments on culture and cognition. While Innis was primarily concerned with macro-structures, McLuhan was chiefly concerned with patterns of perception (Heyer, 1989, p. 32; Carey, 1967, p. 15). The impact of Innis and McLuhan on media

theory has been enormous, mainly because they have expanded their analyses to media other than just writing, and, perhaps more importantly, because they have provided some of the major tools to think about the interaction of different media, and their impact on the social environment.

2) Deibert as a media theorist

Before developing his theory of world order, and his narrative of the transition from the medieval to the modern, Deibert starts by reformulating medium theory to the needs of IR. Changes in the dominant medium in a given society leads to certain changes, and Deibert links these changes in media to the changes in the international realm (Deibert, 1997a, p. 2). Deibert's main argument is that "Changes in modes of communication – the various media by which information is stored and exchanged – have significant implications for the evolution and character of society and politics at a world level" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 2).

The biggest limitation of medium theory as classically formulated is its tendency towards technological determinism (Deibert, 1997a, p. 7). In order to get closer to the historicist vein of the discipline, Deibert first of all shows what he calls the "social embeddedness" of technology (Deibert, 1997a, p. 29). Second, Deibert articulates more explicitly the nature of the effects of the media (Deibert, 1997a, p. 26). Let us elaborate these two points.

First, most media theorists have been criticized for their tendency towards technological determinism due to their lack of consideration given to any factors other than the dominant medium (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 27-9). On the contrary, Deibert argues that "a new mode of communication is not an 'agent' but rather a passive, structural

feature of the technological landscape in which human beings interact" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 31). Social actors and norms are considered to exist independently of the media, and are put to the forefront of Deibert's analysis. Media are considered above all as environments, and the use of a Darwinian evolutionary theory allows us to reconcile a conception of media as constituting social environments and a contingent understanding of social processes.[11] Whereas for Darwin environmental changes favor certain species, media environments will favor certain social forces and ideas over others (Deibert, 1997a, p. 30).

From this media ecology perspective: "medium theory offers neither an explanation of the genesis of particular social forces, nor why they were animated by particular interests as opposed to others. Its purpose is to explain why those forces flourished or withered at a particular historical juncture" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 67). This passive and contingent view of the impact of the media places an important role on the unintended effects of media; groups that might be advantaged by the emergence of a given technology might be disadvantaged later (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 29-30). In short, with his departure from conventional media theories Deibert has embraced an individualistic ontology – in contrast to the holistic ontology of the conventional media theorists.

The second contribution of Deibert to medium theory lies in his elaboration of the various effects of the changes in communication technologies, namely "distributional changes" and "changes to social epistemology." Every communication environment has a different logic, which will favor certain groups attempting to pursue their goals or

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[11] A similar understanding of the agent-structure relation can be found in the writings of Kenneth Waltz (1979).

interests. Distributional changes are changes in the relative power of social groups as a result of the change in media environment – or changes in the modalities of and access to information. Groups will be affected differently depending on their fitness with new modes of communication (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 32; 67-8).

Changes in social epistemology refer to changes in the ways of thinking (Deibert, 1997a, p. 33). As Deibert writes:

> social epistemology refers to the web-of-beliefs into which a people are acculturated and through which they perceive the world around them. It encompasses all of the socially constructed ideas, symbolic forms, and cognitive biases that frame meaning and behavior for a population in a particular historical context (Deibert, 1997a, p. 94).

On this point, medium theory shares a close affinity to sociology of knowledge while adding a materialist dimension. Furthermore, studying the link between communication technologies and social epistemology moves this dimension of the study towards semiotics (Deibert, 1996, p. 40). There are three cultural units considered by Deibert, or three "memes." First, there are individual identities, or how the self is conceived. Second are spatial biases, or the way in which space is ordered. Finally come imagined communities, or the way group identities are perceived (Deibert, 1997a, p. 36). These three dimensions of social epistemology are considered throughout the various media environment, and changes in the dominant medium of communication lead to a change in the understanding of these three memes.

All these changes offer a version of medium theory where contingency reigns, and which call for an analysis along the lines of a "thick description"

(Deibert, 1997a, p. 34). In order to apply these findings to the field of IR, Deibert develops the notion of "world order" borrowed from Cox. Whereas mainstream IR focuses on monastic states and their interactions – a diplomatic understanding of world politics – more critical approaches focus on the grounds that make international relations possible in the first place. World orders do not necessarily refer to the planet as a whole, but rather to regionally based groupings. A world order is "the structure of political authority or system of rule found in a specific world at a particular time in history" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 8), where political authority refers to the capacity to "set the rules of the game" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 9). In this respect, it is not the day-by-day interactions between political actors which is considered, but the nature of these actors and the environment in which they evolve. From this perspective, and in accordance with Deibert's epistemology, media, rather than being master variables that unlock the processes of social transformation, provide a useful "lens" to view the transformation of political authority (Deibert, 1997a, p. 110). This type of understanding of the field of IR, coupled with a historical understanding of media and their impact on society allow to study the changes occurring at a world level in conjunction with changes in the means of communication. Long periods of time are considered to account for the given changes, Deibert using the term "longue durée" to illustrate the historical scale used to contrast different world orders (Deibert, 1997a, p. 10).

In sum, Deibert's conceptual framework, media ecology, has two components. First, he insists on the social embeddedness of technology. In this view, communication technologies do not determine actors and the goals that animate then. Rather, media emerge in a preexisting environment, and change the structure of opportunity costs of a

given society.   Second, Deibert develops more comprehensively the effects of the media, by elaborating two categories: distributional effects, and social epistemology.   In other words, Deibert's conceptual scheme departs from previous media theorists in the senses that he shies away from a holistic ontology to develop his own individualistic conception of media and society.   Let us now review how he applies his conceptual framework to the historical development of world orders and communication technology.

3) Deibert's narrative

Deibert starts his historical analysis by pointing out what would appear to be an anomaly from the perspective of mainstream IR: that of the power of the Roman Catholic Church despite its lack of an army or significant material wealth (Deibert, 1997a, p. 48). Deibert argues that the power of the Roman Catholic Church was supported by the communication environment of the Middle Ages, and that it superseded the Roman Empire – then based on the papyrus rolls – with the advent of parchment (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 52-4).   It is in this communication environment centered on the parchment that the Church managed to gain "dominance over institutional processes of ideological production" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 48).   The medieval world order in which the Church strived at the height of its power was one based mainly on oral communication; writing was limited to the Church, the only group that could reproduce and store parchment. Furthermore, sacred writings were in Latin, which could only strengthen the hold the Church had on the dominant medium.   The medieval world order was one of multiple and overlapping authorities based on the oath (Deibert, 1997a, p. 81).

Up to the sixteenth century, pagan writings were neglected, and counter-hegemonic forces could not gain an audience big enough to contest the Church's

dominance (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 56-60). These emerging challenges created pressures to improve the existing means of communication – or render them more amenable to the interests of groups located on the margins. The invention of paper in the twelfth century was made more useful with the advent of the printing press. Print, as a result of ever-growing social pressures, represented the breaking point that was to bring about the transformation from the medieval to the modern world order by introducing cheap and mass produced documents (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 61-6).

With the advent of printing, feudal social relations gave way to modern contractual relations, as a result of the emergence of two main social forces, namely the Protestant Reformation and currents associated with scientific humanism. Whereas pre-print dissidents were silenced by the Church, the Protestant Reformation – as a movement emerging from pre-existing socio-economic turbulences – could use the printing press as a very efficient tool to pursue its interest. With printing, Protestants could reach a large audience with concealable and inexpensive materials written in the vernaculars (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 69-74). The other social movement to contest the cosmology of the Church was the movement of scientific humanism. Printing allowed the consolidation and propagation of the "esprit de système" which sustained the need for that group to catalog and organize relations with the natural world (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 75-8).

The change in the social environment brought about changes in social epistemology, where the fitness of certain preexisting memes made them rise to a position of dominance. The hierarchical view of society and the self in the Middle Ages gave way to an atomistic understanding of the self, where liberal individualism and

26

sovereignty were favored (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 95-9). Spatial biases came to encompass a more rigid demarcation of political space. The visual bias and linear representation favored by print gave a meaning to political authority in terms of spatial exclusion, where only "mutually-distinct, contiguous territorial spaces" could be holders of political authority (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 101-3; quote p. 102). Furthermore, print, by allowing the vernaculars to be circulated, helped to fuse distinct regional languages with a sense of common identity that gave rise to nationalism, the defining feature of the modern European world order (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 104-7). All these changes led to the transformation of the medieval world order to the modern one, characterized by "the practice of dividing political authority into territorially distinct, mutually exclusive sovereign nation-states" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 137). This change from the oath to the contract saw an emerging urban bourgeoisie and centralized state bureaucracies – who were able t o use print as an efficient tool – attain a position of dominance in concert, which were at the center of the modern world order (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 79-92).

The modern world order, which was to remain untouched until the nineteenth century, shattered the medieval world order and pushed towards the demise of the Church. Deibert calls the new dominant mode of communication "hypermedia." Hypermedia refers to "a complex melding and converging of distinct technologies into a single integrated web of digital-electronic-telecommunications" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 114). While the digital convergence began in the 1960s, the roots to this new media environment date to the nineteenth century, where the first electric media improved long-distance communication of complex messages as a response to the emerging "control crises" of the industrial revolution (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 114-5). Where the early

innovations were linked to economic imperatives, the military took the lead in the field of research and development following the Second World War, government being the prime consumer of electric media. By the late 1960s, changes in the market for computers and other electric media made the influence of the military in research and development decrease while increasing that of corporate players (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 119-4). The private control of most of the research and development in the media industry has led to the improvement of three areas crucial for the hypermedia environment, namely digitalization, computerization, and improvement in transmissions capabilities with the advent of fiber optics (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 124-7). In Deibert's words, "the result of these technological innovations, in conjunction with social forces, has been a convergence of both media and industries into a single, integrated planetary web of digital electronic telecommunications" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 128). While hypermedia does not correspond to one single medium considered in isolation, the Internet represents the paradigm of this new world order (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 131-4).

The distributional changes stimulated by the emergence of the hypermedia environment favor three major groups. First come, through the transnationalization of production and a globalization of finance, transnational firms (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 138-54). The second group is transnational civil movements. Hypermedia allows for "transnationally organized political networks and interest groups largely autonomous from any one state's control" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 157). Where social movements in the nineteenth century were oriented towards labor issues, the emergence of a politically educated middle class means that a multiplicity of heteronomous networks of political social action co-exist, with the Internet as the backbone of these groups. In this new

political field, social movements define their interests and goals independently of any reference to "sovereign-territorial" boundaries (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 157-63). The last group that fits the new hypermedia is what Deibert calls "negarchies." The post-modern world order requires a problematization of security, previously considered as given by mainstream approaches. In the new environment, where information flows tend to invert the classical dichotomy between high and low politics, "real states" – the product of the modern world order based on a closure from the outside world – are no longer favored. Rather, negarchies seem to be the best suited to meet the new political challenges associated with the flow of information and decentralized social actors. Negarchies represent the ideal-type of liberal democracies, based on openness and integration with the outside world, and where the free flow of information is favored (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 164-5). While some argue that hypermedia will bring an increased surveillance by the state, most of the properties of the Internet in particular, and hypermedia in general, tend to illustrate the fact that the hypermedia world environment cannot easily be supervised from a central authority (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 166-71). Furthermore, the example of contemporary China shows that while some measures might be implemented to limit the access to certain information, ways around these limitations exist, and in the end regulatory measures prove to be counter-productive (Deibert, 2002). All these changes point to a post-modern world order where open political regimes are favored, and where the purpose and form of states themselves change. In this new world order, multiple and overlapping layers of political authority emerge and coexist, in a non-territorially defined environment (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 173-5).

In this new world order, the changes to social epistemology that will be favored

will be associated with postmodernism – understood as a current of thought rather than as a method of inquiry (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 177-8). Contrarily to the modern view of the self fostered in the modern world order, the post-modern world order is characterized by a decentered self, considered as historically constituted and continuously restructured around multiple poles. Where the notion of authorship characteristic of modernity is no longer valid, personal information is dispersed along decentered computer networks, thereby providing a conducive environment to postmodern discourse (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 181-6).

Spatial biases in the post-modern world order also display novel features. Rejecting realism and representationalism, post-modern spatial biases are marked by the use of pastiche and collage. Uniform and homogenous spaces give place to the coexistence of pluralistic worlds and multiple realities. Again, the Internet represents the paradigm of this new conception of space, the different windows appearing on the computer screen being echoed by this new spatial bias (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 187-94). Finally, imagined communities no longer conform to the modern idea of the nation. The demise of the broadcasting paradigm – where a center emits to the masses – means that "hyperpluralistic and fragmented" communities become those with which individuals associate. Geographical proximity is no longer the basis for group identification, as "communities coalesce around shared interests in the 'virtual space' of the hypermedia environment" (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 195-8; quote p. 198). Nationalism gives way to what Deibert calls "nichelism," or the "polytheistic universe of multiple and overlapping fragmented communities above and below the nation-state" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 198). This new world order does not correspond to McLuhan's "global village," but rather to "a

pastiche of multiple and overlapping authorities" (Deibert, 1997a, p. ix).

Deibert predicts that in this new world order, most of the features of the modern world order will be changed. Rather than having structures of authority centered solely on nation-states that reflect the territorial conception of politics, the post-modern world order will see a dispersion of authority to various sites. Accordingly, future conflicts should not be expected between states, but rather within and across them (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 204-8). In this sense, the medieval metaphor seems justified.

The clear winners in the hypermedia environment appear to be the transnational firms, encouraged by the free flow of information and capital. In this new environment, loyalties are shifting from a home country to a specific firm. Furthermore, this reshuffling of the political landscape reverses the previously taken-for-granted dichotomy between high and low politics. Economics tend to precede security matters, as states more and more define their interests in relation to the interests of capital (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 206-16). However, this reshuffling of authority on a world scale does not mean that states as actors in international affairs are withering away. Rather, the new world order will see a change in the nature and role of states, these being animated by different values. States in the post-modern world order will still remain an essential part of this global architecture by their enforcing of contracts and maintaining their monopoly of force (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 212-3).

In sum, Ronald Deibert's work on the successive transformations occurring in the various world orders deserves praise. Indeed, his narrative of the transition from the medieval to the post-modern highlights the socially constructed and open-ended character of social environments. Rather than following mainstream IR theorists in reifying

specific actors or practices, Deibert illustrates the ways in which the modern state came

to be. Furthermore, Deibert, by his focus on the media, goes beyond critical

perspectives that concentrate on discourse to the expense of the materiality of social

arrangements.

Deibert's epistemology is in accordance with the main premises of critical

theories. Rather than seeking to establish nomothetic laws of social evolution, Deibert

seeks to account in a non-deterministic manner for the various changes taking place at the

level of world orders. History is essentially contingent and open-ended, and social

institutions are the product of collective action (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 202-3). Deibert's

historical narrative surpasses previous critical theories in the sense that, by focusing on

the medium rather than the message, he can intertwine together both ideational and

material factors (Deibert, 1999, p. 282).

Furthermore, Deibert is highly critical of approaches that seek to reify the state,

and of the basic dichotomy that lies at its foundation, namely that of the distinction

between the domestic and the international realm, or the "inside/outside" dichotomy.

Deibert's historical analysis points not only to the fact that the modern state is a historical

product of the early Renaissance, but also to factors that make this transition coherent and

relate it to the social environment (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 79-92). Deibert also addresses

the notion of community, and the changing structure of authority and loyalties that are

associated with it. Nationalism is shown to be associated with the rise of printing, and

the emergence of the hypermedia environment signifies the demise of this pole of group

identification (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 194-8).

Deibert's weaknesses

His immense contributions to existing debates in the field of IR notwithstanding, Deibert fails to address one of the two issues of central importance to critical theorists, namely the relations of domination embedded in the construction of social spaces. Although Deibert does talk about power relations in society, they are merely side effects of the main dynamics at play, rather than being constitutive features of media environments. According to Deibert, in other words, the roles within the media environment do not imply certain relations of domination.

This limitation can be traced back to Deibert's ontology. It is Deibert's use of an individualistic ontology that prevents him from giving the media a constitutive role, and placing the media at the center of the relations of domination and oppression that shape society. Unless this issue is addressed, one cannot fulfill the goal of developing a critical theory of the media in IR.

Deibert explicitly claims to reconfigure medium theory in order to make it more amenable to the academic field of IR. The first change brought to medium theory is the refusal of technological determinism. In this sense, media are not "master variables" that unlock all of human history, but rather are a useful lens through which one can understand the transformations occurring around the structures of authority (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 26-7; 202). These changes seem to be in accordance with critical theories, which see historical processes as contingent and open-ended.

Associated with this historical conception of the media comes one of the more controversial aspects of Deibert's understanding of the media. Deibert places great stress on making clear that media do not constitute social actors and ideas, but merely

constitute the environment in which social actors thrive (Deibert, 1997a, p. 31). This conception of the media environment, while in accordance with a non-deterministic epistemology, is at the root of Deibert's inability to identify the relations of domination embedded in the constitution of any given environment, or to imbue his analysis with any normative claims. Since media are independent of social actors and norms, as well as their genesis, there are no concepts in Deibert's framework to account for the relations of domination institutionalized in society via the media.

This shortcoming is made most evident when one looks at the relations between dominant medium and economic power. Indeed, Deibert points to the fact that in both the modern world order and the post-modern one, some economic groups were privileged over others (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 79-92; 138-57). Furthermore, he depicts media environments in which this power asymmetry came to emerge. However, he does not systematically consider the role media might play in the institutionalization of these social inequalities. For example, in the print environment, Deibert does not deal with the relations between bourgeois and proletarians from a media perspective, or say what role the media play in shaping these social asymmetries. Also, one wonders about the "losers" in the hypermedia environment, and the way the media account for the link that exists between different social groups within a same space.

Contrarily to most medium theorists, Deibert argues that media are passive structural features, not active agents.[12] By doing so, social actors and the ideals that animate them are considered to be independent from the media environment.

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[12] For comparison, one can look at comments made by both Deibert and McLuhan to illustrate this fact. Deibert views media as "passive structural feature of the technological landscape" (Deibert, 1997a, p. 31), McLuhan writes: "environments are not passive wrappings but active processes" (McLuhan, 1965, p. vi).

The environment only favors certain groups, but does not have in itself any social bias. Media, and the environments they generate, are not considered to be charged with any political, ethical, or social dimension. Rather, the social structure is what the actors – favored or not in a given environment – make of it. To a certain extent, Deibert sees media in an instrumental rather than a constitutive way. In order to solve this problem, and to harmoniously combine the critical project with a concern with the medium of communication, another understanding of communication and media must replace Deibert's. That is, media must be related more adequately to the construction of social forms, as well as be imbued with a social and political significance. This, in turn, means that we have to restore the holistic ontology of actor-media environment relations.

To summarize, Deibert's discussion of world systems is highly innovative and coherent. As such, Deibert laid all of the necessary foundations to pursue the critical project while at the same time assessing the impact of media in world politics. His conception of the media, however, proves to be problematic when one tries to understand the relations of domination embedded in society – relations of domination that take an economic form more particularly. Angus' discussion of the media can help point to ways in which Deibert's limitations might be addressed by offering a picture of the media and world order in accordance with a holistic ontology.

CMT AND WORLD ORDERS

Tenets of CMT

Throughout his studies, Angus – like all critical theorists – emphasizes the fact that communication is "the constitutive process of social life" (Angus, 1997, p. 61). However, his novel theorizing of the media and communication allows us to go beyond previous critical theories, shying away from perspectives that view media as neutral channels. In this perspective, media are ethically and politically laden (Angus, 1997, p. 63; 2000, p. 64). Angus continues:

> Technology and communication are . . . two sides of the same organization, with
> technology indicating a focus on the output or consequences of the organization
> of human abilities and communication emphasizing the social relations that are
> required in order to accomplish this output – the construction of social identities
> in definite relations (Angus, 1997, p. 62).

It is this conception of the relation between social identities and communication technology that represents the biggest contribution of CMT to both critical theories and previous media theories.

CMT considers mainly the material dimension of communication. However, this concern with materiality should not be considered simply in physicalist terms, or with a conception of materiality of the "dead body" (Angus, 2000, pp. 36-7). Indeed, referring back to Innis, Angus points out that it is not merely physical attributes that are considered when evaluating different media, but rather the manner of dealing with the object (Angus, 1997, p. 59; 2000, p. 22). In this sense, the close relationship between media,

36

technology, and social relations is clarified. Media are viewed as both a technology and a social relationship simultaneously. A medium of communication refers thus to a relation rather than an inanimate object, a relationship that mediates a "social identity and the world" (Angus, 1997, p. 60; quote in Angus, 2000, p. 51):

> Though related to technology, a medium is not simply a technology, but the social relations within which a technology develops and which are re-arranged around it. A medium is thus a mode of social organization, defined not by its output or production, but by the relations obtaining within it (Angus, 2000, p. 37).

By considering communication – or expression – as the key to understanding human societies and their constitution, CMT inquires into the relationship between media and the body – the "root phenomenon of expression" – in order to provide a constructive criticism of the present state of affairs (Angus, 2000, pp. 30-1; 54). Therefore, media are understood – not unlike McLuhan's theory of the media – as extensions of bodily "kinaestheses," and "animated modes of expression" (Angus, 2000, p. 37).

Angus's CMT represents an attempt to go beyond the insights of critical theorists by developing a perspective of the media that centers on the materiality of communication, or the media in other words. This perspective of the media enhances previous critical studies of society and culture by stimulating a concern for the materiality of social life. Angus defines culture as such: "Culture should be understood in an inclusive anthropological sense to encompass both ideology and material conditions insofar as they are united within a form of life" (Angus, 1997, p. 3). This combination of material and ideational factors in a cultural realm justify the use of Gramscian

concepts of authority and hegemony to account for the political dimension of social life (Angus, 1997, p. 17; 2000, pp. 51-2).

In this conception of culture, the dimensions of space and time are not understood in their Kantian formulation as transcending dimensions of experience, but rather as social constructs. In this regard, modern society can be said to have emerged from a radical transformation of space and time (Angus, 1997, p. 12). Conversely, social identities are also understood as a product of communicative processes. Angus continues: "all social identities are constructed within the field of social power, and thus no social identity could ever be immune to manipulative and dominating uses" (Angus, 1997, p. 17). This point illustrates the fact that Angus' CMT is in accordance with critical theory, inasmuch as it postulates both the constructed nature of society, as well as the power dynamics embedded in this institutionalization. Furthermore, media are at the heart of these processes, since their use implies a set of social identities.

This thorough definition of particular media is in turn the basis to consider the main object of study, namely media environments, or the interaction within a social space of various media (Angus, 2000, p. 48). This conception of the relationship between media and society accounts for the focus in CMT on the constitution of all the dimensions of social life, whereby media open a space where communication can occur. Accordingly, as a critical theory of media and society, CMT not only inquires into the institution of new social forms, but also the limits of experience and the alternatives to a specific mode of social organization (Angus, 2000, pp. 35-8).

In accordance with its anti-foundationalist stance, and its understanding of the relation between power and social identities, CMT adopts a historical perspective in order

38

to formulate its assessment of the present situation.   As such, Angus explicitly addresses the issue of the need for reflection of the dominated groups (Angus, 2000, pp. 25; 52-3). The need for active social movements, who can contest the present order and offer alternatives, are crucial for the instauration of new social identities, and critical studies of communication must consider the various strategies of resistance available (Angus, 2000, pp. 132-6).

The recent explosion in the means of communication has lead to a change in the nature of politics, and the emergence of identity politics, or the politics of identity-formation (Angus, 1997, p. 3; 2000, p. 64).   It is this explosion of communication media that has lead to both the emergence of consumer society, and the increased role of social movements as opposed to the economy/market and the state (Angus, 2000, pp. 77-9).   In today's society, although there are a plurality of sources of dependency and oppression, it is mainly the monopoly-capitalism system of production that constitutes the cultural code through which social identities are constituted (Angus, 1997, p. 45; 2000, p. 115).   This cultural code of consumer identity is a self-enclosed code with no outside.   In this sense, authenticity is lost, and social identities are defined in relation to staged differences – or simulations to use Baudrillard's words (Angus, 2000, pp. 77-83; 115-20).

CMT and Deibert

Now that the main tenets of CMT have been outlined, let us clarify the differences between CMT and Deibert's theory of the media.   The fundamental difference between Deibert and Angus lies in their different ontology; Deibert relies on an individualistic ontology, whereas Angus uses a holistic epistemology.   This difference

39

appears in two main dimensions. First, the relationship between media and social forms is considered to be different. Because of his reliance on methodological individualism, Deibert argues that social actors and norms exist independently of, and prior to, media environments. On the other hand, CMT posits in a holistic fashion the interrelationship between social actors and their environment. For Angus, one cannot understand a given actor in isolation from other actors, or in isolation from the social system. Second, power relationships are seen as a side effect for Deibert, while they are considered to be embedded in, and are a central component of, media environments from a CMT perspective. Since Deibert can only account for individual behavior, and not the nature of these relations, he has no conceptual scheme to account for relations of domination that are the product of an environmental bias rather than of individual behavior. Angus, in contrast, can rely on his holistic ontology to point to the fact that social roles themselves are the product of a biased environment. See Table 1 for a summary of these differences.

	Deibert	Angus
Ontology	Individualistic	Holistic
Relations between media and actors/social relations.	Actors/social relations independent of the media environment.	Media environments imply certain social relations.
Link between power relations and media environments.	Power relations as side effect of the media environment (*ad hoc* explanation of power relations).	Power relations embedded in media environments – central components of the media environment (systematic explanation of power relations).

Table 1: Comparison between Deibert's and Angus' conception of the media

Angus' work starts from a discussion of culture, which allows combining material and ideational factors. Angus' use of Gramscian concepts shows the parallel that exists between Deibert's works – focusing on world orders, derived from Gramscian concepts – and Angus' conception of politics (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 8-11; Angus, 1997, pp. 11-47). Angus consistently points to the social embeddedness of the media, as well as their ethical and political dimension. In this conception of media and society, media open the space in which groups might exist. In accordance with a holistic approach, Angus relates each component of the social body to the social whole. No aspect of society can be understood in isolation. The construction of the social body has within itself traces of oppression and domination, and identifying the source of oppression leads to the evaluation of the present state of affairs, as well as the formulation of alternatives (Angus, 2000, pp. 127-39). Where Deibert explains power relations in society in an ad hoc fashion with a focus on monadic actors, CMT offers a systematic explanation of these relations. This is the case because Angus considers every dimension of social life, including the power relations among actors, in relation to the social whole. In this sense, relations of domination are integral to, and built in, the media environment: accordingly, various social roles imply certain relations of domination as long as they emerge in the environment. In contrast, Deibert focuses on individual actors when accounting for their behavior and their mutual relationships that establish themselves between different social actors. The environment helps to assess how actors are doing individually, but not to explain the relations that take place between them.

Relying on CMT rather than Deibert's theory of the media thus gives us a slightly different understanding of world orders, and of the transition from the modern to

the post-modern world orders. Indeed, by pointing to the relations of domination embedded in society, Angus revives one of the concepts Deibert left aside in his analysis. One main direction to look at in this context would be to consider what Gramscian approaches to IR term "hegemony," or medium theory calls "the center" (Cox, 1983, pp. 162-70; Angus, 1997, pp. 48-74). By doing so, one could simultaneously identify the construction of social institutions, as well as the groups that benefit from that process. For example, Deibert would consider the rise to power of a mercantile bourgeoisie in the late Middle Ages, or of a transnational one in the current hypermedia environment, to be a merely peripheral phenomenon. In contrast, relying on CMT puts these factors at the center of the narrative retracing the transition from the modern to post-modern. Where each new dominant medium opens up the possibility to a new world order, it also corresponds to a new hegemony. This hegemony can be contested when coming from the outside of the world order.

Now that the differences are pointed to, we are prepared to suggest a future line of research. The scope of this paper does not allow to develop a full operationalization of CMT to IR. Instead of seeking to demonstrate to the fullest extent the usefulness of CMT to IR, let us suggest future lines of research. In this context, a review of Deibert's work will illustrate what a CMT theory of IR would look like.

Deibert's theoretical discussion of the media is at times not always accompanied by a thorough discussion of the properties of the media. Furthermore, he leaves aside the question of monopoly of knowledge discussed by both Innis and Angus. As Innis writes (1986, p. 117): "An appraisal of a civilization based on a medium of communication demands a recognition of the significance of the particularities of the

medium." A more thorough discussion of parchment would not change Deibert's conclusions regarding the primacy of the church in the medieval world order, but would rather offer a more systematic explanation for their position of dominance. Following CMT's insistence on the embeddedness of social relations in the use of media, one can see from the properties of the parchment what social relations are implied by the use of that medium. Parchment, by its nature, ability to be stored, and layout, lent itself to religion. Furthermore, the modalities of redaction on parchment, and the procedures associated with its conservation, implied and required an educated group that would hold a monopoly of production and retrieval of knowledge (for a more thorough definition of parchment, see Innis, 1986, pp. 117-23). From a CMT perspective, the Church did not rise to a position of dominance by following the appropriate strategy as Deibert would suggest. Rather, the social environment opened by the parchment cannot be understood without a group such as the Church. Furthermore, it could be added that "the Church" as a social actor did not have an identity that would remain unaltered in the transition from high Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Rather, in a holistic fashion, the identity of the Church was interrelated to the parchment world order, and it can only be understood in that context.

The same holds true for the modern world order. Deibert depicts the rise to power of the bourgeoisie/state binome as the issue of various strategic moves (Deibert, 1997a, pp. 79-92). A CMT theory of IR would start by looking at the properties of print, and see to what extent the bourgeois state is an integral part of the print-based world order. Printing, as a medium, implied a centralized actor at the heart of the social space it opened (McLuhan, 1962). The bourgeois state corresponded to the center implied in

the institutionalization of a print-based society.

The last area where one would look for comparisons between Deibert's account of IR and a CMT based theory of IR would be the current time period. Immediately, one is confronted to interesting issues that were raised by many previous debates. Indeed, Deibert posits the rise to power of a transnational economic class. In a similar fashion, Angus points to the domination of an economic class that holds a monopoly on the cultural code of the emerging consumer society (Angus, 2000, pp. 115-20). A link between the modern bourgeois class and the current transnational class seems evident. However, the link between economic and social power and cultural hegemony has up to now rarely been investigated with the systematic analysis of the media in IR context.

CONCLUSION

This paper has laid the groundwork for a critical theory of the media in IR. The main argument was that conventional critical IR theories lack an adequate theory of the media, and that the currently only existing (i.e., published) alternative to this position – namely, Deibert's theory of world orders – is unsatisfactory. The paper brought in Angus' CMT as a remedy and suggested ways it could develop in the future. In short, the paper pointed a CMT-based research agenda as a promising avenue for critical IR theory.

Critical theories were shown to share two main postulates. The first is the constructed nature of social institutions, and the second is the awareness of the power dynamics at the heart of these historically constituted societies. Although critical theories of IR have up to now contributed to a better understanding of the study of world

politics, their emphasis on discourse at the expense of all other media has seriously limited the value of their claims. In an era where technologies of communication are booming and taking center stage in social life, an inability to account for their importance represents a major problem.

Ronald Deibert has attempted to address this problem with his own theory of the media and world order. By presenting his narrative of the transition from the medieval to the present world order, Deibert shows the importance of the media in world politics. He appropriately gave a central role to the media in the constitution of social institutions, and linked changes in world orders to changes in the dominant communication technologies. However, Deibert's work suffers from its inability to account for the relations of domination embedded in society – this is a serious problem from a critical theory perspective. This inability to account for the power dynamics embedded in society stems from Deibert's individualistic ontology of actor-media environment relations. In other words, Deibert cannot link the media to the relations of domination *embedded in media-based society*.

This paper concluded by suggesting one promising way of going beyond these problems. With a holistic ontology, Angus' CMT goes beyond previous discussions of the media (including Deibert's), in that while considering the intrinsic properties of the media, it also considers the media in the relation to the social setting as a whole, including the relations of oppression and domination at the heart of social forms. From a CMT perspective, media open the social spaces in which different actors come to exist and evolve. In a holistic sense, all the parts are understood in relation to this totality. Accordingly, media are not considered autonomous forces, but are politically and

ethically imbued.

By substituting Angus' understanding of the media for Deibert's, one can start to elaborate a critical theory of the media in IR. The operationalization of CMT to IR will await later works. But some basic directions for that task were suggested. Using a CMT understanding of the media will require, first to consider in an extended fashion the properties of the different media, and second to compare and contrast all of the social actors in relation to the social whole. In addition, more explicit synergy between CMT and the Gramscian analysis of hegemony may be promising. While this paper has focused on issues surrounding the conceptual framework of studying the media in critical IR theory, furthermore, there are other important issues. One of them is the normative question. By focusing on the media, the broader discussion of social justice and emancipation can be furthered in novel ways in the future.

The media are nowadays penetrating every aspect of social life. The Internet is changing many aspects of society, from the way we consume to the way global actors interact with the world. As such, a concern with the media should not be seen as merely a trend, but as a necessity. Understanding our world and the changes it will experience will require to focus on the media. With the cold war now over, looking into the various media that surround us might prove to be the way to assess the future trends of the international system.

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