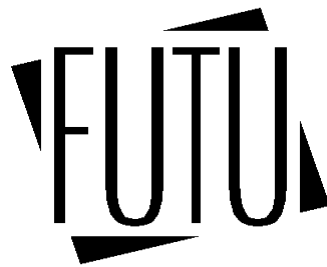


TURUN KAUPPAKORKEAKOULU
TULEVAISUUDEN TUTKIMUSKESKUS

TURKU SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
FINLAND FUTURES RESEARCH CENTRE



FUTU-publication 7/97

Theodore Becker & Christa Daryl Slaton

**TRANSFORMING MODERN
REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRACY VIA ADVANCED
TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

**Voting From the Home
Deliberative Polling
Electronic Town Meetings
The Internet**

The purpose of the research programme Citizenship and ecomodernization in the information society – the futures approach – is to study the social and ecological dimensions of emerging information society. Particularly we aim at assessing social impacts of new informational structures that are impinged on citizens. We also focus on analyzing the ways application of information technology influences on targets and realization of sustainable development. The study programme comprises of ten individual research project organized around above sketched themes.

Copyright © Theodore L. Becker, Christa Daryl Slaton &
Finland Futures Research Centre

Theodore L. Becker
Professor of Political Science
Auburn University
Alabama, USA

Christa Daryl Slaton
Associate Professor of Political Science
Auburn University
Alabama, USA

ISBN 951-738-888-8

UDK 321.7

324

654

681.324

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO TRANSFORMATIONAL POLITICAL THEORY	4
1.1. Resilience of Political Communications Systems	5
2. THREE THEORIES OF THE DECLINE OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY	8
2.1. Impact on the Average Citizen	11
3. WHY TRANSFORMATION, NOT REFORM OR REVOLUTION, IS NECESSARY AND POSSIBLE	13
3.1. On Reformist, Revolutionary and Transformational Change in Life and Politics	13
4. ELEMENTS OF A TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TELEDEMOCRATIC POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM.....	17
4.1. Visions and Theories of a Transformed Teledemocratic System.....	18
5. IN CONCLUSION	24
REFERENCES	25

1. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO TRANSFORMATIONAL POLITICAL THEORY¹

We live in a time of great, unique and extremely rapid change. In terms of human communications, we are experiencing a time of profound transformation. And though many predicted this epoch, even envisioned it, it still comes as a surprise. Because as is the case in any transformational era, one gets carried along with the completely unpredictable surge of events and how novel technologies are being used in totally new ways and with wholly unintended consequences.

Since there is so much happening at once in so many different places, everyone sees it from their own perspective and lives only a piece of the action. And so it is today with the evolution going on in the technology and techniques of communications in: our everyday lives; our families; our economic, educational, cultural, and political institutions. We know something extraordinary is happening. We know we are swept up in it, we all know we see so much that it is hard to describe, much less to do anything about.

One of the problems in trying to steady ourselves in this swirling hurricane of change is the fact that this change is not "logical" or linear...it is truly chaotic. Humans fear chaos and yearn for a sense of order. But if one looks at all past theories about profound change in human history, e.g., "revolutions," they are usually couched neatly in terms of cause and effect. That may help those trying to understand what happened retroactively, but those theories certainly didn't help the people who lived in those times dodge the shrapnel or calm their nerves.

Moreover, any theory that tries to limit, encapsulate, rationalize such turbulent times is, at best, partial and misleading. At worst, they are ideological rewrites of history. In order to most accurately theorize a time of fundamental transformation, a theory must include such factors as bewilderment, randomness and chance, unintended consequences of human

¹ Presented at the Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, Finland
And Swedish Institute for Systems Development: Stockholm, Sweden (May 1997)

behavior, "the tenor of the times that cannot be grasped by anyone who did not live through it," etc.

Thus, a new kind of theory is needed, one we call "transformational," one that does include such factors. In addition, transformational political theory, which has political factors at its center, understands fully that it is extraordinarily difficult to theorize on epochal change while it is going on, instead of from the comfort of 20-20 hindsight. At its very best, it can - in the best traditions of chaos and quantum theory - trace patterns of energy as they have already left their trail - and while doing so disturb where they might presently be and may yet go.

Also, as political theorists of the transformational persuasion, we understand that there will be many such theories being developed from many different vantage and disadvantage points. That is why the first book devoted exclusively to this subject distinguished transformational political theory from other political theories in that it does not try to explain everything, is not linear, but links each of these emergent theories into a "web of theories" and tries to demonstrate where they overlap. (Woolpert, Slaton and Schwerin 1998).

Another characteristic of this new type of theory is that it is self-conscious about its tenuousness and ephemerality. Since everything is changing so quickly, whatever patterns might be traced at one time might change trajectory and speed in an instant, disappear suddenly, or alter patterns dramatically in a blink of an eye...perhaps in part due to the interference of the observer/theorist him or herself.

In this paper, we present ourselves as such theorists of what we see as a period of epochal change in modern representative democracy. We can determine what we believe to be some clear, distinct but overlapping theories of this change. We can see ostensible patterns of fundamental change emerging. But we make no pretense at arriving at certainty or predicting where the emerging patterns of change will be in a year's time, e.g., whether they will accelerate, grow, disappear, mutate, be absorbed, etc.

1.1. Resilience of Political Communications Systems

Our interest here, though, as transformational political scientists (theorist/activists) is mainly in political communications, which is at the heart of any governmental system. Despite the almost unbelievable pace of innovation in communications and information technologies in the second half of the 20th century - the political communication system in all modern representative democracies has managed to stay pretty much the same as it was before all these dramatic inventions occurred.

Of course there have numerous adaptations of the prevailing system to the electronic technologies and social scientific methodologies in the latter part of the 20th century. Radio

became a staple of the system... then over-the-air TV and cable TV... then random digit scientific telephone polling... then focus groups...and now the most revolutionary invention of them all: The Internet.

But the prevailing political communications system remains immutable, inert, and intact. It remains a fundamentally one-way, downstream river of information, opinion and values... with a small tributary of superficial public opinion returning as usually non-binding feedback and occasional election of so-called "representatives" and leaders. All this data originates at and from an extremely tiny number of sources owned and operated by either large public or private entities. The owners of this communication system hire "gatekeepers" - reporters, editors, managers, anchors, directors, producers, media consultants, pollsters, focus group leaders, etc. - who decide what is or is not important or relevant to the public discourse but who are hired to support and endorse the values, interests and worldviews of the elites who own and/or run the system.

To cast such a system in its worst light, we need look no further than to the exalted analysis and articulate exhortations of a highly regarded conservative American political pundit of the first part of the 20th century, Walter Lippman. In his influential book *Public Opinion*, he noted that the public in a modern representative democracy was incapable of rising above its narrow, individualistic experiences and values and was unable to locate or define, among itself, any notion of the general or public interest. Only an educated and democratically-spirited elite could do that. Thus, the way to develop laws that would serve the interests of all was to have the political elites determine the proper agenda and policies and then use modern media to "manufacture consent" of the public to their program (Lippman 1921). Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky call this the "propaganda model" of democracy. (Herman & Chomsky 1989).

The irony is that as the new information and communications technologies have become more universal and sophisticated, the public has become somewhat sensitive to this manipulative process and, hence, more alienated from it. Opinion polls in the United States reveal a keen and swelling awareness of the close relationship between the private mass media and those in high corporate and governmental places. Additional evidence abounds, at least in the U.S., that the mass media have plummeted in public esteem in recent years and they are now placed at the same rung on the ethical ladder as politicians and used car salesmen. Moreover, the people are not insensitive to the superficiality and discouragement inherent in this system of political communication which, in turn, leads to a heightened sense of their own powerlessness within the confines of this system.

A similar sense of dissatisfaction was felt in the European social democracies with the way their public and political communications systems were being handled by government leaders and the bureaucrats who ran their systems. They, too, were not particularly responsive to the

interests and needs of the general citizenry. Service and performance standards and ratings were very low and slipping.

This led to calls for drastic change. The result was a melange of outright "privatization;" or the application of market principles and corporate "efficiencies" to public programming; or merging government telecommunications systems with with large private media companies from other countries, etc. Some have suggested that all this has really been the substitution of one elite with another or a recycling of the same elites. Thus, as far as can be determined at this time, this realignment of elites has not diminished a general sense of public dissatisfaction with the political communications systems in these countries either. In large part, it has "Americanized" a lot of the programming and corporatized the conscience and motivation of those who operate the systems. This hardly qualifies as any truly significant change in the basic structure of the system itself - as described above. It was not until the fall of the Soviet Empire in the late 1980s that modern representative democracy and its system of political communications became extremely vulnerable to widespread public criticism - a negativism now closely akin to the formerly out-of-the-mainstream political critique - and thus ripe for fundamental change. Why was the Soviet collapse such a landmark event? It was the final chapter in a turbulent and violent century that has seen many theories emerge that try to explain the decay of modern representative democracy and its political communications core. We present three for your consideration.

2. THREE THEORIES OF THE DECLINE OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Up to the fall of the Soviet Communist system and bloc, modern representative democracy had a myriad of faults and flaws and was deeply critiqued for them--but compared to the alternative, it still looked great! In fact, contrasted with any of the other political systems in the 19th and 20th centuries, i.e., monarchies, fascist dictatorships and Stalinism, representative democracy in any of its forms was a shining jewel. Compared to the others, it was a paragon of dynamic dialogue, political freedom and citizen participation. When put under a truly critical microscope and clearly revealed as a system in deep trouble, the bottom line was always: "Sure, the system is far from perfect, but it is by far the best system around." And who could really argue with that?

After the Soviet system disintegrated, Western representative democracy had to stand on its own two feet. It may have seemed like the "end of history" to some, but it was really just the end of one era of politics and the beginning of another. It was the end of the politics of the industrial age - characterized by the struggle between representative democracy and overtly autocratic and totalitarian first wave, mainly land-based political economic systems.

But it was also the opening for a whole new variety of politics that had been developing for some time but which was ignored and pushed to the fringes of public consciousness, i.e., that of the evolution of a new system of modern democracy, one with a transformed system of political communications between the government and the people...and better yet...between the people themselves.

Another way of putting this is that we have now moved into a new political era, to wit: the struggle between second wave, status quo representative democracy and nascent components of third wave participatory democracy.

Here's another paradox to digest. It was the radically new education and information systems of the new mercantilist system that was a major part of the engine that defeated monarchy and authoritarian systems. In addition, it has been the tight control of that information and communications system by this "aristocracy of manufactures" (as Alexis deTocqueville called them) that has allowed them to rule so successfully with the aristocratically manufactured consent of the masses of citizens (deToqueville 1956).

But now, due to the explosion of modern tele-information and tele-communications - this is the weakest part of the system of control in the modern representative democracy. Indeed, the reasons for this vulnerability lie in several major technological leaps in the 20th century,

transformations that have made representative democracy obsolescent in the new age of information and telecommunications.

There are a multitude of theories as to how and why this has occurred. For the sake of some brevity but to stimulate a thoughtful discussion on this subject, we will limit our analysis to three quite different, but highly provocative approaches. The first argues that there is a glaring epistemological error at the very foundation of representative democracy. The second argues that representative democracy was a manifestation of a phase of human development that is itself obsolescent. The third posits that it is the victim of an unprecedented political economic transmutation.

(1) Post-Newtonian Democratic Theory: According to Benjamin Barber, representative democracy, as an outgrowth of 18th century Liberalism, is based on a philosophy and epistemology that is only partially accurate. It is built, in part, from the philosophy of Descartes and the scientific theories of Newton. Thus, it is crafted upon a belief in universal knowable truths, objectivity, logic, a separation of mind and matter, etc. (Barber 1984).

Christa Slaton explains his position like this: "Benjamin Barber makes a strong case for how liberal democracy is rooted in Newtonian theory and then argues that the fatal flaw of applying Newtonian physics to political theory is that it begins with a pre-theoretical given of a worldview. This unquestioning of the starting point led to the major axiom of liberalism—humans are material beings in all they are and all they do (therefore, humans are governed by laws that correspond to the laws of physical mechanics). Barber states that this non-questioning of the starting point leads liberalism to resist systems that have activity, uncertainty, spontaneity, complexity, ambiguity, and process as major components. Liberalism (Newtonian politics, according to Barber) is wrought with 'pretensions to objectivity and philosophical certainty that have proved inimical to practical reason and to participatory political activity" (Slaton 1992, 10).

In the meantime, the 20th century has seen enormous strides made in the hard sciences...in terms of its theoretical development and in marvellous technologies and methods that have made important corrections in Newtonian physics and the philosophical assumptions of Descartes, John Locke, etc. But have these developments in the theory of relativity, in quantum theory, in quantum mechanics, in chaos theory, also been utilized to make major corrections in the theory of representative democracy? Not really.

Aside from a few books and articles pointing out the value to this approach (See Becker 1991), the principal institutions of liberal democracy continue to stand on a fundamentally unsound philosophical and knowledge foundation and those who hold the reins of power

therein do nothing to remedy the situation. So, with such a rickety intellectual underpinning, it is no wonder the structure of representative democracy is so shaky.

Barber's solution: transform this "thin democracy" into a "strong democracy" - in large part by teledemocratizing the political communications system.

(2) Third Wave Theory: Another macroview on the increasing deterioration of representative democracy is that shared by Alvin and Heidi Toffler, the noted and oft-quoted futurists (Toffler 1994). In their view, there are many dinosaur-like institutions that were part of "the second wave" of mass production industrialism that are being wiped out by the "third wave" of a "gigantic upheaval in the knowledge base of society."

In political terms, they see the present system of governance being overwhelmed by demands it cannot possibly satisfy. In the earlier part of the 20th century, the apogee of the second wave, "...the technicians of power were...continually compelled to recruit new blood to help them carry the expanding decision load." (p. 103) Now that load has been increasing exponentially... in part because of all the information and communications technologies, it has created an "implosion of decision-making... overwhelming our presidents, prime ministers and governments." (p. 103)

So the formula is: (a) the revolution in political communications and information technologies has geometrically increased the demands of citizenries in modern representative democracies; (b) the present system of political communications is overloaded and if it does not make revolutionary changes in itself it will (c) meltdown. In the meantime, a fair part of the citizenry is disgruntled, surly, restless, disenchanted - and growing more and moreso.

(3) Beyond Mercantilism: The third theory involves another major development in the 20th century, the emergence of the global corporate economy and its peculiar worldview, one we call "Beyond Mercantilism" - where the nation-state is now seen as being, at best, a junior and troublesome partner in the planetary operations of titanic global corporations.

What has occurred was foreseen and described in a seminal book written in the mid-1970s: *Global Reach*. According to its authors, Richard Barnet and Ronald Muller, what were then called "multi-national corporations" (MNCs) became something never seen before on the world scene. Not only were they vast in size and wealth and power (dwarfing many nation states' economies) - but they had two major enemies which were definitely products of the second wave, that is, nation states and organized labor forces. Their goal: to diminish the power of their foes in order to increase their own at the global and national levels.

Barnett and Muller interviewed a large number of the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of these corporations and quote them frequently. These corporate visionaries made no secret of their perspective and ambitions. The authors conclude from their first-hand research that "the world's leading corporate managers now see the nation-state, once the mid-wife of the Industrial Revolution, as the chief obstacle to planetary development" (p. 18). Quoting these high placed corporate chieftains, they report that the nation state is seen as "a very old fashioned idea and badly adapted to our present complex world."

Remember, though, that this was the early 1970s where these huge economic companies were but a seed compared to the enormous redwoods they have become at present. And they have been growing ever stronger at the expense of the nation states they have been attacking in large part via the global political and corporate transportation, information and communications systems that they own and use exclusively and effectively.

So, it is hardly surprising to find a new book, apocalyptically titled: *When Corporations Rule the World*. (1995) Written by David Korten, a former business school professor, it describes "... a crisis in governance born of a convergence of ideological, political and technological forces behind a process of economic globalization that is shifting power away from governments responsible for the public good and toward a handful of corporations and financial institutions driven by a single imperative - the quest for short-term financial gain. This has concentrated massive economic and political power in the hands of an elite few whose absolute share of the product of a declining pool of natural wealth continues to increase at a substantial rate." (p.12.)

2.1. Impact on the Average Citizen

So, if the proponents of these theories are reasonably correct in their description of at least a significant part of the problem - what would be the symptoms that they might expect to see among the populations of these representative democracies that supposedly govern their nation-states in the "public interest" with the public's consent?

What these analysts see is almost exactly the same as what many other, more practical political commentators have noted and what public opinion polls indicate quite clearly..

Citizens in most modern representative democracies are confused and perplexed by the situations they find themselves in. They continue to build a mistrust and distrust of their governments and the established parties, politicians and bureaucrats who run them. They see them as being corrupted by huge, organized, monied interests on an increasingly regular basis. Moreover, other than from the simple act of voting, they have little to do with their national governments other than being bystanders and observers via the political communications systems which provides them with endless, confusing debates among

quarrelsome political elites. This confusion is heightened by a surfeit of unconnected and disturbing information that is awash in sensationalized calamities and unsavoury or mindless entertainment. All this leads to a heavy load of frustration. Worse yet, due to the successful implementation of the agenda of the global corporations, what positive benefits government has offered them in the past are being curtailed and/or seriously threatened.

As workers in relatively successful and prosperous political economies, they feel equally distressed and anxious. They have precious little to say through the institutions of their representative democracies about this, even through the unions and socialist parties. The latter also appear to be too hierarchical, unresponsive to their experiences and demands, and co-opted by the same powerful interests who control the system. About the only direct impact they can see and feel is when large numbers of them take to the streets in protests or mass strikes... or when political leaders feel enough heat to hold a rare national referendum on some very major issue.

3. WHY TRANSFORMATION, NOT REFORM OR REVOLUTION, IS NECESSARY AND POSSIBLE

So what can be done? Obviously, the answer is not to return to a more authoritarian form of government. Dictatorships have demonstrated a strong tendency to make matters only worse at home and/or to wage useless and self-destructive wars abroad.

The next response is also familiar: we must reform representative democracy to make it more...representative... of the wishes of the people. But how can this be done? The answers again sound familiar. Let the other or another political party take over the reins of power. Make corporate influence on political campaigns and lobbying illegal and punish the offenders severely. Let government run all campaigns and dole out the money for them. Rotate public office holders by limiting their terms in office to only a few years. Decentralize the system by putting more power into the hands of regional and/or local governments and/or communities.

We believe that any and all of these proposals have some merit. However, we believe that even if all of them were institutionalized at once, that this would not change much about the structure or the outcomes of the present system. The system itself would remain much the same and would be capable of absorbing (and co-opting) these changes. And please note that none of them says much, if anything, about altering the prevailing system of political communications.

3.1. On Reformist, Revolutionary and Transformational Change in Life and Politics

If one really stops and thinks about it, the word "reform" itself says a great deal about why even an accumulation of them will not be enough to respond adequately in a period of pronounced and advanced transformational change. After all, reform means literally that the basic "form" of something remains the same, but that it must be remoulded, refitted, reconstructed... so as to correct some deficiencies.

If we speak of reforming a person, we mean that someone must change some attitude(s) and/or behavior. The basic self remains the same. Only some particular way of acting or

looking is altered. Included in this might be such things as: cosmetic surgery; hip replacement; drug detoxification; a 12-step weight reduction program; etc. All of these are good and positive reforms of a persona. They all improve the mind, the body, the quality and health of a person's life. But even if they are done simultaneously, is the person changed? No. The basic self remains the same.

It seems to us that what is meant by a transformation is a qualitatively different kind of change. The self transcends itself to become an entirely different human being. Or an institution evolves into a wholly new structure or process. Of course, much of the old self, old structure remains. But the essence has evolved into a better, more functional, more adaptable one.

In human terms, a good example might be the transformation of a person via a near-death experience or a religious revelation. They might look the same and do the same work afterwards, but their entire set of relationships to others and their place on earth will have been profoundly altered.

Another example is marriage. This is a relationship that works best when each party transforms themselves over time into a more giving, understanding, loving person than they could ever possibly have been in an unmarried state. Each person may look the same (albeit older)... and be as functional (or dysfunctional) as ever at work... but in their heart and soul a dramatic transformation has taken place. Each has become part of something greater than their own self. In a real sense, it is an evolution of the self into something more and better than what one was beforehand.

We've already discussed what we believe to be the nature of political reform in representative democracies (campaign reform, change of parties in power, faster rotation in office, etc.) So what would a political transformation look like? The key phrase is: real, authentic citizen empowerment - direct and indirect. There are many ways to do this... some classic...some entirely novel, particularly concerning the transformation of the political communications system.

However, before we get to that in the next section, we need to handle a question that begs for an answer: what about "revolution?" Isn't that what we're really talking about?

Actually, no. To our way of thinking, the word revolution does imply radical change, but both literally and in history, it hasn't lived up to that definition. First of all, strictly speaking a revolution means a 360 degree turn. That means that one may travel a good distance, but in reality one has returned to square one... the same place... the point of departure.

Let's see how that might work in political terms. Just think about all the "revolutions" in the 20th century. Haven't they all demonstrated Robert Michel's "iron law of oligarchy" (Michel 1956). Almost every single such revolution has been in the name of the people, the proletariat, or whomever. But what has been the actual result? To our way of thinking, we see the replacement of one elite with another. Just as Pareto predicted: the new organization

is soon characterized by a few leaders and a mass of followers. So, back to the point of origin: where the people are "led" for their own good, of course.

Isn't this what has happened in the Soviet Union, the "new Russia," Cuba, China, Iran, the Philippines? Are the African people better off under their home grown leaders than they were under those appointed and anointed by the colonial powers? Does the ordinary citizen in Latin America have more power under their new "democracies" than they had under their "caudillos?" Has there been any significant land reform in Asia, Latin America, Africa in their new "democracies"? If so, not much. Is there truly a better distribution of wealth in the new Russia? China? Do the people there feel empowered?

The truth is that in all cases of modern revolution, new elites control the agendas, the priorities, the policy-making process, the administrative and judicial processes, the educational system and - of course, the political communications system. They control the police and the military. And if they don't own them, they work closely with those who do...whether they are domestic, foreign or a combination of both. Also, there are frequently fights among revolutionary elites, but that holds true among the elites in representative democracy as well.

So, have there been any political transformations in the 20th century. In our view, yes. We believe that there was a post-World War II evolution of representative democracies in Western Europe. The basic self of the government and its policies underwent a major alteration, primarily due to the near annihilation of the political economies of these countries by the destructive forces of modern warfare. It was also a pragmatic, middle-of-the-road compromise between the carrot (the USA's Marshall Plan) and the stick (strong Communist Parties in many Western European nations).

Thus, we had the following innovations: (1) governments became major owners of many critical segments and sectors of the economy, including manufacturing, extraction and/or refining of natural resources, central finance and economic planning; (2) the elite base was greatly expanded to include direct ties to the working class and labor unions; (3) a substantial redistribution of wealth and personal security via the welfare state system. This was a far different system in most of those countries than what had existed prior to hostilities and qualifies to some degree as a political transformation.

However, even in these social democracies, if one looks closely, one still sees the ever-present and underlying form of a limited or somewhat expansive representative democracy, that second wave institution, with its small, ever-squabbling political elite that ultimately controls the agendas, priorities, policies, administration - and most importantly - the political communications system. We also see a heavy emphasis on materialism and consumption, much like the American model, the least social democratic and most limited form of representative democracy in the Western world.

So, what would the next step or a whole new phase of political transformation in modern industrial societies entail? First, we are not unaware that an authentic political transformation must coincide, at least in some part, with a more general transformation of most social, economic and personal values as well. But this is not the place to discuss that complicated interaction.

Second, we believe that we can focus on the political manifestation of that alone, that such a political transformation can occur piecemeal and in different places and paces than the other aspects of the general transformation also occurring in roughly the same places and time frame. After all, as we said earlier, the process of transformation is not linear, not cause-effect, but chaotic. So, we know it is only one piece of the action and we know we can observe and trace it, at least in part, in some isolation from related movements.

Ergo, we will now zero in on some transformational political developments that are readily identifiable, particularly those aspects of a new political communications system that truly helps empower citizens in this transformational phase of modern democracy.

4. ELEMENTS OF A TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TELEDEMOCRATIC POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

One of the most effective survival techniques used by those who control the levers of modern representative democracy is that of co-opting the terminology of transformational political theory and its scientific experimentation. Ignoring it doesn't make it go away. But using it to shore up the present system both confuses the public and makes the present system seem - progressive and adaptable.

Even the words "transform", "transformative" and "transformational" are becoming buzzwords in the corporate and political lexicons these days. But the key change in a truly transformed polity is that of genuine "citizen empowerment." (See Schwerin 1995). And those in power today, including the reform element of the power elites, are quick to use those words too in either completely status quo ways or to glorify a series of superficial reform efforts.

In terms of the political communications system itself, both the word "teledemocracy" and some of its components, like "Electronic Town Meetings" (ETMs), have been used often in the mass media to define or re-create politics-as-usual, with a dollop of interactive TV and sending e-mail to politicians.

Is televising a debate among politicians in front of a live audience and exercise in "teledemocracy?" That's what the mass media and many academics call it. Is having the audience call in a few questions at end of the debate an "electronic town meeting?" That's what a lot of media commentators say. And does letting citizens "chat" live with a politician or two online really change things? Is this truly "electronic deliberation?"

The answer is that none of these techniques, no matter what they are called in the presently elite-controlled mass media system, truly empowers citizens in any real or new way.

They are neither intended to do so or do they. They are designed to keep the system the same while using new communications and information technologies to create the illusion of a more advanced and empowering system.

However, many new technologies and techniques do exist and they do have the power to change the political communications system into one that is, in theory, ideology, deed and in fact, a much more powerful medium to facilitate large consensuses among the full range of citizens in all industrialized, high tech societies. Some transformational political seers, theorists, political scientists, and activists have seen this potential and have been developing

visions, theories and experiments for the past 25-30 years in order to help transform the system in "the future" - when the technology was refined enough - and the people ready enough.

4.1. Visions and Theories of a Transformed Teledemocratic System

The earliest such vision of which we are aware sprung from the mind of the famous futurist and inventor, R. Buckminster Fuller. In his 1941 epic poem, *No More Second-Hand God* (Fuller 1963), he envisioned a new kind of democracy, a true "electronic democracy," one where all citizens could sit and watch and listen to debate and discussion and then vote electronically for what they wanted to see their government do or not do. Such a system, in his view, was the "Firsthand God."

Essential to his vision, and to those visionaries who came after him, is the idea of linking the new electronic communications and information systems with direct democratic structures and practices, like initiative and referendum. So, in this regard, when transformational political theorists talk of "electronic democracy" and "teledemocracy," part of their vision and theory either includes, implies or is surely not resistant to such. Why is this so? Because there is no better way to empower citizens than to give them more direct power to set agendas, set priorities and decide laws than by referendum and initiative. Yet, this is antithetical and distasteful to the perceived interests of most of those who are leaders and/or powerholders in modern representative democracies.

Moreover, if one looks at some of the other earlier visions and theories, this is either patent or latent in what they are recommending. Thus, we find a wide array of allies like: Erich Fromm (1955), Hazel Henderson (1970), Tomas Ohlin (1971) and Amitai Etzioni (1975) all agreeing on the necessity of developing a new democratic communications system - one that is (a) interactive, two-way between the citizens and those in government and (b) interactive and lateral between the citizens themselves, individually and/or in communities. This is also quite explicit in the remedies recommended by both Barber (1984) and the Tofflers (1994).

Of course, this is not the only kind of political transformation seen or recommended. It is only one piece of the puzzle. The other is to give citizens more binding influence over what their representatives think and/or do. Thus, from a political transformational point of view, the new political communications systems must directly empower citizens within the representative democratic format itself. This does not mean merely giving them easier access to information and providing greater convenience (which can create information overload or "infoglut"). It means empowering them within the framework of the present system to strongly influence the leadership and the laws in new ways via the political communications system.

Teledemocracy Action News + Network (TAN+N): Transformational Theory + Experiments + Communication + Organization

So, where does one go to find this movement that is working to help transform modern representative democracy into a new form of participatory democracy? Has anyone brought together at least some of the visions, theories and experiments? How can this be a "movement" if there is no organization, no regular meetings? One answer to all these questions is in one node on the Internet. It is a website called The Teledemocracy Action News + Network or TAN+N... and its URL is: www.auburn.edu/tann.

This website makes it abundantly clear on its "homepage"; in its "editorials"; through its "guest homepages"; throughout all its subsections and hyperlinks; and through its computer graphics, animation, contemporary music soundtrack, and video clips; that its *raison d'être* is as an instrument for a truly democratic transformation that tries to involve the general public. There is even a "rating system" in the second editorial that classifies any experiments described or linked on the site as being somewhere on a 6-point continuum from reformist to transformational.

So, what kind of projects is included as being part of such a democratic surge of energy? There are at least four visible and distinct elements that seem to be emerging as major components of transforming representative democracies into much more participatory forms of democracy. Most of them use or plan to use telecommunications technologies and technique to assist in this task.

(1) Voting from the Home by Mail, Telephone, Computer: The first major component that we at TAN+N see emerging as a new form of citizen empowerment is the "voting from home" movement. There have been a number of highly successful experiments along these lines that are traced and linked on the website.

Interestingly enough, these experiments are often "real," that is, they are done in actual elections and have binding effect. For example, the State of Oregon conducted the first election of a United States Senator by mail a year or so ago via mail. They gave citizens a 3-week period to vote and there was absolutely no indication or claim of any fraud. The results: There was a record turnout of voters, nearly doubling that of any previous election of U.S. Senator.

In addition, several Canadian political parties at the provincial level have allowed registered members of their political party to watch their televised party conventions and then vote by telephone for the party leader of their choice. Again, no electoral fraud was reported

and the results indicated a far greater rate of participation in the process than in the usual face-to-face party-elite-only convention method.

There is every indication that this part of the teledemocracy movement is in its earliest phase. However, there is ample reason to expect that computer voting is near at hand and that citizens around the world will welcome this new method of citizen participation in the election process...whether of leaders, representatives or for voting on referenda.

(2) Scientific Deliberative Polling: The second element is "scientific, deliberative public opinion polling." In our view, conventional public opinion polling is an important part of the weakness of modern representative democracies. Rarely are they used to allow citizens to state preferences for political agendas or to set priorities. Questions are often superficial and alternatives are confined to a narrow range of choices determined by out-of-touch elites. And citizens who are civic-minded enough to respond are usually caught in the midst of their daily routines and were not thinking about the subject of the poll when they are asked to give their opinion on it.

Modern "deliberative polling" is clearly and rigorously structured to present a range of balanced information and expert opinion, in an objective format, to scientifically, randomly select samples of the public. In addition, each citizen is treated with great respect, is given abundant time to think about all this data and opinion and is provided opportunities to "deliberate" either privately and/ or publicly. The result is a far more in-depth, high quality breed of "public opinion," one that earns the description of being "informed and deliberated.

Some of these models use a face-to-face "jury" style procedure pioneered by The Jefferson Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Some use the telephone and have citizens deliberating in their homes (The Hawaii Televote model). Some use large face-to-face groups (N=300-400)--like Jim Fishkin's "Deliberative Poll" model. Some use small groups (N=16-24). All have been eminently successful, particularly in the responses of the participants who almost unanimously applaud the new methods of polling as "empowering" them.

Thus, from the viewpoint of TAN+N, this is an integral part of the transformational democracy burst of energy... with important experiments in this technique being reported in the USA, UK, Denmark, Germany and Spain. Given the fact that the new British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has already publicly promised to use a model of randomly selected citizen juries - developed by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) in London - throughout the United Kingdom on issues involving transportation and energy, it is highly likely to become more prominent in the near future.

(3) Electronic Town Meetings (ETMs). Over the past 15 years or so, there have been a number of authentic ETM experiments, those whose purpose is to emulate and improve on the traditional New England Town Meeting. Thus, there must be discussion, deliberation among ordinary citizens + a vote that determines the outcome. In addition, there must be some use of electronic media to facilitate this process.

Most of these experiments have tried to mix in several of the following components: interactive TV; interactive radio, scientific deliberative polling, telephone voting, plus a wide variety of face-to-face meetings including those facilitated by the use of electronic handsets. Some have been on issues, some have involved planning or envisioning processes. Most have been at local, state or provincial levels.

One of the most interesting--because it was to be binding on 5 members of Parliament, was conducted by the Reform Party of Canada in Calgary, Alberta. It used random samples of citizens in 5 parliamentary districts, who watched a televised debate on the important issue of "physician assisted suicide" (euthanasia) , and then voted by phone.

This part of transformational democracy also seems to be growing, mainly since it includes the others that are definitely gaining momentum. Also, it seems to hold promise as an alternative way of setting citizen agendas and priorities for various legislative bodies to follow and as an alternative method of putting referenda before the public--a tool of direct empowerment.

(4) Computer-assisted democracy. Most of the projects in this category, we label as being reformist in intent and delivery. As we have mentioned earlier, those who hold power in the present representative model, see the Internet as a way of making them seem more accountable and responsive to the public. So, there are countless government websites around... offering information, services, and electronic access to officeholders and officials.

In addition, there are numerous special interest groups - some corporate, some religious, some of labor unions, some environmental, etc. - all of which espouse their cause, try to recruit new members and even mount email campaigns to influence legislation. However, all of the above, it should be clear, are cyber-attempts to shore up the present system of representative democracy by those who directly participate in it right now. To the degree that they actually give more information to citizens, get more citizens involved in the present process, and get citizens to talk to government - they are reformist.

Of course, there are some truly transformational uses to the Internet as well that can assist in redesigning democracy and realigning power within it. Some of this work comes at the

community level, in response to the need to decentralize government and put political power closer to the citizen. So, there are several community development and community communication networks online that seem to have transformational potential (See Civic Practices Network and the Zapatista Movement websites). These are described and linked on TAN+N...and get higher ratings than the reformist modes of computer-assisted democracy described above.

(5) Synthesizing and Synergizing the Movement via TAN+N. Now, it is true that in the past, one way to have tried to organize and synergize such a new democratic movement, particularly one global in nature, and with so many submovements, would have been to write a book and/or edit one or two anthologies (some original essays + some reprints) with many of the most persuasive and successful theories and experiments detailed therein. This would take years to accomplish.

Then, one would have to find a publisher or two to edit and publish them. Another year or two. Then they would have to be distributed (globally)... and promoted. Another year or two. And by then, most of this material would be significantly outdated. And who would read all this material? And how would the theorists, experimenters, activists come together to discuss this? Who would pay their way? How many times could they do this? How could they afford global TV teleconferencing?

In other words, it would have been impossible to do. The Internet has changed all that because the Internet itself is the major democratic transformational medium of our time and of the immediate future. The Internet itself is a major method of "computer assisted democracy" for the transformational, teledemocracy movement.

Now, anyone owning or having access to a personal computer - at home, at work, in schools, in libraries, in freenet systems - can access a large part of this material - not only in an instant - not only cheaply (compared to buying a couple of hardcover books) - but in a visually attractive and easily readable style. In addition, they can jump from website to website to find out probably more than they need to know about these theorists, theories, experiments, and projects from the people responsible for them. No "Second-Hand God" here.

In addition, the coordinators of TAN+N make it accessible to anyone who wishes to contribute to it, join it, participate in developing the network. And there is plenty of lateral communication between the theorists, experimenters, and activists who are part of the network... and between citizens who wish to talk to them.

Through this medium, for example, Marcus Schmidt, the Danish national correspondent to TAN+N and author of *Direct Democracy in Denmark* (Schmidt 1993) came together with

Andreas Gross, a member of the Swiss Parliament and a co-editor of *Transnational Democracy* (Erne, Gross, Kaufmann, et al., 1995) to discuss their mutual concerns and collaboration in the future.

Through this network, Auli Keskinen, the Finnish national correspondent to TAN+N and the editor of the book *Teledemokratia* (Keskinen 1995) wrote a review for TAN+N about a major conference on the "Internet and Politics" held in Munich in March of 1997. It was subsequently forwarded to one of the Peruvian national correspondents of TAN+N who used it as the basis for a newspaper column he writes for a major newspaper in Lima, Peru.

Through this network, a 7th grade class in a suburb of Los Angeles, downloaded the site and become part of the movement in California to develop telephone voting on referenda issues.

Through this site, the CyberParty of Korea has been able to demonstrate to the National Assembly the possibilities of new methods of teledemocracy for their use in Korea.

The list goes on and gives every indication of growing exponentially.

5. IN CONCLUSION

The possibilities thus seem endless. They are constrained only by the limits of one's imagination. Fortunately, by being so decentralized and non-authoritative, TAN+N has no such limitations other than the growing number of people around the world who continue to join and think up new projects and expand the old ones. And that number = countless.

In the meantime, the visions + the theory + the experiments + the communications system + the looseknit organization seems the most feasible strategy to continue the development of the teledemocracy movement globally. It is and will remain chaotic and self-organizing. This, to our minds, appears to be an extraordinarily promising approach to transforming modern representative democracy around the world through and by telecommunications. It is a major part of a new democratic political communications system that includes televoting, deliberative polling, electronic town meetings and the Internet, one that is facilitated globally-via the Internet. Ironically, it has taken a totally new kind of electronic two-way + lateral + global information and communications system, one with truly democratic transformational potential, to accomplish this previously unreachable goal: the synergizing of a new, democratic telecommunications system...the first genuine alternative to that currently dominating and weakening modern representative democracies.

REFERENCES

Barber, Benjamin (1984) *Strong Democracy*. Berkeley, CA. University of California Press.

Barnet, Richard T. & Muller Ronald E. (1974) *Global Reach*. New York. Simon and Schuster.

Chomsky, Noam. *Manufacturing Consent*. Boston. Beacon Hill Press.

deTocqueville, Alexis (1956) *Democracy in America*. New York. New American Library.

Erne, Roland & Gross, Andreas & Kaufmann, Bruno et al. (1995) *Transnationale Demokratie*. Zurich. Realotopia Verlagsgenossenschaft.

Etzioni, Amitai (1975) *Participatory Technology*. Journal of Communications (Spring 1975), pp. 64-74.

Fromm, Erich (1955) *The Sane Society*. New York. Rinehart.

Fuller, R. Buckminster (1963) *No More Second-Hand God*. Carbondale, Ill. Southern Illinois University Press.

Henderson, Hazel (1970) *Computers: Hardware of Democracy*. Forum 70 (February 1970). pp. 22-24; 46-51.

Keskinen, Auli (1995) *Teledemokratia*. Helsinki. Painatuskeskus.

Korten, David (1995) *When Corporations Rule the World*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Lippman, Walter (1921) *Public Opinion*. Reprint: Glencoe, Ill. Free Press (1965).

Michels, Robert (1949) *Political Parties*. Glencoe, Ill. The Free Press.

Ohlin, Tomas (1970) *Local Democracy in the Telecommunications Age*. Svenska Dagbladet, August 8, 1971.

Schmidt, Marcus (1993) *Direkte Demokratie i Danmark*. Copenhagen. Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck.

Schwerin, Edward (1995) *Mediation, Citizen Empoerment and Transformational Politics*. New York. Praeger Publishers.

Slaton, Christa (1992) *Televote*. New York. Praeger Publishers.

Toffler, Alvin & Heidi (1994) *Creating a New Civilization*. Atlanta. Turner Publishing.

Woolpert, Steven & Christa Slaton & Edward Schwerin (eds.) (1998) *Transformational Politics*. Albany, NY. SUNY Press.

ABSTRACT

We live in a time of great, unique and extremely rapid change. In terms of human communications, we are experiencing a time of profound transformation. And though many predicted this epoch, even envisioned it, it still comes as a surprise. Because as is the case in any transformational era, one gets carried along with the completely unpredictable surge of events and how novel technologies are being used in totally new ways and with wholly unintended consequences.

PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS:

6/97 Masini, Eleonora Barbieri (1997) *Futures Studies and the Trends Towards Unity and Diversity*.

5/97 Kaivo-oja, Jokinen & Malaska (1997) *Kestävän kehityksen tietoyhteiskunta: teoreettisia ja käsitteellisiä näkökulmia*.

4/97 Kamppinen, Matti (1997) *Teknologian riskit ja tulevaisuus*.

3/97 Mettler, Peter H. (1997) *Sustainable Technology – Sustainability of What?*

2/97 Kamppinen, Matti (1997) *Cultural Models of Risk – The Multiple Meanings of Living in the World of Dangerous Possibilities*.

1/97 Malaska, Pentti (1997) *Sustainable Development as Post-Modern Culture*.