Davies, J. S. & Spicer, A. (2015). Interrogating networks: towards an agnostic perspective on governance research. Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy, 33(2), pp. 223-238. doi: 10.1068/c11292

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Interrogating Networks: Towards an Agnostic Perspective on Governance Research

Jonathan S. Davies and André Spicer
Environment and Planning C
February 2013

Jonathan S. Davies
Professor of Critical Policy Studies
Faculty of Business and Law
De Montfort University
Leicester
LE1 9BH

+44 (0)116 257 7818
E-mail: jsdavies@dmu.ac.uk

André Spicer
Professor of Organisational Behaviour
CASS Business School
City University
London
EC1Y 8TZ

+44 (0) 207 040 0140
andre.spicer.1@city.ac.uk

Abstract

Networks have rapidly become the dominant trope in governance theory and practice. While scholarship highlights important benefits, there has been insufficient systematic interrogation of the potential pathologies in network governance. This paper addresses the lacuna. We begin by discussing different kinds of network analysis and distinguishing the specific claims of network governance theory. We then pull together the scattered critically oriented literatures on the topic, identifying major problems with network modes of governance: hypocrisy, distrust, marketization, subjugation, anti-proceduralism, fragmentation, and 'netsploitation'. We finally argue for a more agnostic approach to governance research, capable of taking account of these pathologies and thereby putting networks in their place. This means avoiding the fetishization of particular modes of governance and giving more careful attention to the settings in which they each can be useful.

Introduction`

Amidst the variety of governance mechanisms, one tends to become increasingly salient in specific historical conjunctures (Polanyi, 1944). During the late 19th century, the market was the dominant mechanism through which social life was governed. In the mid-20th century, the state and corporate hierarchies became far more prominent. During the last quarter of the 20th century there was, again, a notable return to celebrating markets as the most efficacious governance mechanism. Over the past 20 years, however, networks have for the first time been deemed the most legitimate way of organizing social and political life. Today, it seems, networks are everywhere; in "military organisations, social movements, business formations, migration patterns, communication systems, physiological structures, linguistic relations, neural transmitters and even personal relationships" (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 142). This paper develops a critical assessment of what we see as excessive claims for the spread and efficacy of networks in the governance system.

A network is basically "a set of nodes and the set of ties representing some relationship, or lack of relationship, between nodes" (Brass et al, 2004: 795). Our target is not the idea of networks so-described, but the specific meanings accorded to them in contemporary governance theory, especially political science and public policy. First, networks are purported to be beneficial because they provide a better 'fit' with macro-environmental changes such as globalization, the restructuring of the state, individualization, and knowledge capitalism. Second, these conditions are perceived to have led to the massive proliferation of networks (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006: 59). Third, the characteristic considered to distinguish network governance from other modes of coordination is that it is based on the ethical virtues of 'trust'

(Thompson, 2003), fostering more open, fluid and flexible forms of association. Finally, trust-based networks are considered by many to be the basis for better governance, avoiding the dead weight of bureaucracy as well as the fickleness of the market (Stoker, 2004). By bringing citizens into the process of governing, networks are credited with having the potential to increase the legitimacy and responsiveness of governance mechanisms (ibid). Their popularity throughout the spheres of government, business and civil society has even led some to argue that the network is now the "hegemonic" (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 280) mode of governance, signifying the emergence of a new 'orthodoxy' (Marsh, 2011).

In this paper, we do not deny that networking is an important mode of governance, possessing strengths and advantages. Our argument is rather that much of the existing literature provides an excessively one-sided perspective, accentuating the more positive and socially palatable aspects. Consequently, the pathological or problematic dimensions of network governance tend to be at best seen as an after-thought. This tendency continues to fuel an unrealistic image of network governance, and a myopic understanding of practices of governance as a whole. Our central contribution is to address this lacuna and, in doing so, put networks in their place. We do so by exploring multiple pathologies of network governance and then suggesting an alternative approach that is far more agnostic towards the prevalence and virtues of networking. To do this, we begin by sketching out the existing literature and highlighting the central benefits attributed to networks. We then proceed to explore the limitations of networks, arguing that they generate a variety of pathologies including hypocrisy, distrust, marketization, subjugation, anti-proceduralism, and 'netsploitation'. Given these problems, the final part of the paper

explores how the analysis of network governance might be reconfigured. We argue

for an agonistic approach, in which claims for networks are treated in a more

circumspect way. With a view to opening up debate, we begin to develop an

alternative approach to theorising networks. This rests on the intuition that we should

stop according precedence to the network, recognizing it simply as a conventional

mode of 'governance as usual' and delimiting situations in which it might be the

most appropriate mechanism (Crouch, 2005). Our premise is that hierarchies,

markets and networks routinely combine in everyday governance processes and that

we therefore need more dispassionate research about the prevalence and efficacy of

networking for particular goals. We suggest that conceiving of hierarchies, markets

and networks as building blocks – inputs as well as outputs – can contribute to a

better assessment of strong, but contrasting claims for the proliferation and

appropriateness of networks: that they make for better governance, are part of the

hegemonic apparatus of neoliberalism, or are the best vehicle for insurgency and

emancipation.

The Development of Network Governance Theories

The study of networks became intellectually fashionable in the 1980s, but it has a

much longer history. It is also a many-headed beast with a distinguished lineage in the

social sciences. For example, Borgatti et al (2009) charted the development of

network analysis throughout the 20th century, citing sociometry in the 1930s as the

precursor to the popular and influential technique of Social Network Analysis (SNA)

today (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003). The analytical premise of SNA is that 'as social

animals, people network and that our networking affects social outcomes'. SNA

'makes no special claims for networking as 'the good' or as the emblem of social

change' (Davies, 2011: 10). It is rather adept at discovering patterned social relations, which protagonists may or may not describe in the language of 'networks'. Early SNA highlighted the role that networks play in shaping broader dynamics of social life (such as choice of marriage partners). Interestingly, it has also been used to challenge the premise of what Grote (2012) called the 'horizontalist expectation' in network governance theory. His study of networks in the European regions revealed that they were actually sustained hierarchically.

It was only in the last 30 years that the concept of networks rose to prominence as a way of exploring governance in what is conventionally understood to be an increasingly 'disorganized' economy and society (Offe and Keane, 1985). It became increasingly influential in theories of the changing dynamics and relationships that predominate in (post)modern capitalist societies (Castells, 1996). Capturing the zeitgeist, Hardt and Negri argued that the network 'has become a common form that tends to define our ways of understanding the world and acting in it. (…) The tendency of this common form to emerge and exert its hegemony is what defines the period' (2005: 142). This is not altogether an exaggeration, as a vast body of theory has been incorporated into the networks milieu; from the theories of reflexive modernisation (Beck, 1992) and the information age (Castells, 1996) to the 'strategic relational' theory of Jessop (2007) who, while professing agnosticism, arguably errs towards the vocabulary of networks.

With the backdrop of growing skepticism about theories of 'imperative coordination' by a command state, a significant body of researchers began exploring the importance of networks in the governance system. The early collaborative work of Marsh and

Rhodes (1992) described policy networks as a structure of resource-dependent organizations. If anything, the 'resource dependency' tradition was grist to the mill of elite theorists and Marxists, showing how the interdependence of state and non-state actors sustained and reinforced power asymmetries in important policy areas (see also Marsh, 2011 for reflections). It therefore did much valuable work to highlight the role of networks as power structures (also Benson, 1977), and made no claims about the alleged proliferation of networks, the question of trust-based coordination, or their utility for 'good government'. They saw In other words, this literature recognized that networks are a powerful organizing tool, but accorded them no special potential.

Our target here is not, therefore, the techniques of network analysis or approaches that use them to show how power relations are produced and sustained across sectors. It is rather what we call network-boosterism; the tendency to attribute excessive analytical and normative weight to the role of networking in organizing and regulating relationships between governments, corporations and citizens.

Following his 'postmodernist' turn, Rhodes (1997a) was perhaps the most prominent political scientist aligning himself with social-theoretical claims that networks are increasingly significant (e.g. Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994), even going so far as to conflate governance with networks – an elision he acknowledged in reflections on his career as editor of Public Administration (Rhodes, 2011: 198). It is the additional significance attributed to networks in recent governance theory that we seek to contest. These approaches are distinguished from earlier traditions of network analysis by four inter-related claims, made more or less forcefully by different scholars.

First network governance theory is rooted in prominent assumptions about social change in the post-war period. Perhaps most notably, globalization is perceived to have undermined the command power of nation states – their capacity to govern either citizens or markets. In this world, the ability to learn the arts of networking is increasingly essential for successful (meta) governance (Pedersen, Sehested and Sørensen, 2011). In addition, after the late 1970s New Public Management reforms further dissipated state capacities creating additional coordination problems, for which networks were conceived as the best, albeit imperfect, solution (Rhodes, 1997a). In the late 1960s and 1970s, network theorists also began arguing that the emerging knowledge economy was creating unprecedented information flows, which could not be subordinated to command power. Such flows could only be channeled through networks (Castells, 1996).   At the same time, processes of individualization were perceived to be gathering pace because of the irretrievable breakdown in the institutions, traditions and solidarities of modernity – e.g. family, unions, faith, gender relations and deference to hierarchy (Beck, 1992). In societies with high levels of individualization and unfettered information flows, command strategies were deemed increasingly futile and networks as the most effective mechanism for coordination and regulation.

The second prominent claim of network governance research is that in these conditions, there has been a vast quantitative increase in networking. Bevir and Rhodes (2006: 59) summarized as follows: 'Social scientists typically describe contemporary governance as consisting of something akin to a differentiated polity characterised by a hollowed-out state, a core executive fumbling to pull rubber levers

of control, and, most notably, a massive proliferation of networks'. These are utilized to counter fragmentation and the control-deficits described above.

Third, whereas command and competition are the primary regulative mechanisms in hierarchies and markets, networks are commonly distinguished by the degree of 'trust' they engender (Thompson, 2003). According to Frances et al (1991: 15), '[i]f it is price competition that is the central co-ordinating mechanism of the market and administrative orders that of hierarchy, then it is trust and co-operation that centrally articulates networks'. The capacity of networks to realize the benefits of trust arises from the claim (e.g. Giddens, 1994: 192) that we now live in conditions of relative abundance, emerging concurrently with fragmentary processes of de-traditionalization (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994: 195). For Giddens, post-scarcity emancipates the subject from the insularity he associated with the struggle for subsistence in all previous human societies, creating conditions in which more trusting relationships, and thus networks, can flourish. The purported benefit of trust-based governance is that it avoids the heavy-handed bureaucratic rules of the state as well as vagaries of the price setting mechanisms associated with the market (Powell, 1990). The potential for networks based on trust is therefore regarded as crucial for resolving the governance challenges associated with de-traditionalization and individualization (Bauman, 2002: xvi). As Davies (2012: 2690) argued moreover, the degree of trust in any process is 'a good benchmark of its efficacy for network governance'. Conversely, if the distinguishing characteristic of trust is lacking or in short supply, it is difficult to sustain claims for the proliferation of networking.

Finally, there has been considerable investment in the alleged social benefits of cultivating networks based on trust. Thompson (2003: 40), for example, argued that networks depend on 'ethical virtues: 'co-existent attributes such as sympathy, customary reciprocity, moral norms, common experience, trust, duty, obligation and similar virtues' of the kind that Giddens associated with post-scarcity.   Gilchrist's study of community empowerment exemplifies the normative commitment to network governance. She concluded (2009: 175):

> In a world characterized by uncertainty and diversity, the networking approach enables people to make links, to share resources and to learn from each other without the costs and constraints of formal organizational structures. Empowerment is a collective process, achieved through compassion, communication and connections.

These purported qualities make networks highly adaptive and able to innovate, shift and change. They are liable to form and dissolve, bringing together a fluid plurality of interests in pursuit of goals that are also likely to be in constant flux. In other words, while they can anchor cooperation, they are also better able to adapt to the fast-changing preferences of those constituting them, than clunky command or instrumental contract relationships.

In sum, there has been a powerful tendency in the contemporary governance literature to represent networks as both newly significant and value-adding mechanisms. This tendency rests on three common assumptions: network governance proliferated massively in the changing social and economic conditions of the late 20th and early 21st centuries; networks are based on and can cultivate trust; and they are uniquely

adaptive, making them more effective for governing complex societies than other devices. They represent an attractive alternative to the command and contract modes of coordination because they fit with increasingly fragmented societies and provide more flexible and fluid co-ordination. These benefits have been widely articulated within the literature, and we do not by any means dismiss them. However, there has been far less reflection on the potential pathologies of networks in the governance literature. It is to this lacuna that we now turn.

The Pathologies of Network Governance

The rise of networks has not been uncontested. Many theorists are more or less sceptical towards claims for a radical transformation from more traditional bureaucratic mechanisms of co-ordination towards networks (e.g. Davies, 2011; Marsh, 2011; Stoker, 2011).   Issues discussed in the critical literatures include the insipid pluralism and ignorance of social structures characteristic of the 'orthodoxy' (Marsh, 2011), the inability of network theories to explain change (Richardson, 2000) and the tendency to exaggerate de-traditionalization (Callinicos, 2007). At a higher level of abstraction, the foundations of network theory have been critiqued by scholars such as Atkinson (2007) and Callinicos (2007), who argue that the phenomena Beck, Giddens and others interpret as signs of reflexive modernization, are conjunctural, contingent and reversible. Here, however, we focus specifically on the pathologies of networks as a governing mechanism.

Networks-scepticism has tended to be discussed in a fragmentary way, and in the following paragraphs we draw together the heterogeneous strands. We argue that taken together, they point to serious pathologies in network governance. We identify

seven: hypocrisy, distrust, marketization, subjugation, anti-proceduralism, fragmentation, and 'netsploitation'. We consider each of these charges in turn.

Hypocrisy

The first problem with celebrations of network governance is that they are frequently based on hypocrisy. By this we mean that there is a frequently a gulf between rhetoric and practice (Brunsson, 1989). For example, many networks are only such in name. That is, they are often 'organized', created by some official body (such as national government, a corporation, or a local council). Research on these bodies rarely finds the characteristics purported to distinguish networks from other modes of governing, such as high levels of trust (e.g. Guarneros, 2008). There are two prominent facets of this critique.

First, networks are represented as mechanisms that both enable governing resources to be coordinated in a fragmented polity and enable participating citizens to influence elites in face-to-face dialogue. However, it is well established that they tend to privilege the interests of powerful state and market actors to the detriment of subaltern groups (Davies, 2007). For example, in addition to problems of legitimacy associated with the disconnect from democratic processes (Mathur, Skelcher and Smith, 2005), the governing network commonly excludes organized labour and other potential malcontents.

Furthermore, organized governing networks are often very bureaucratic and prone to perpetuating exclusions. Davies's (2007) study of the micro-dynamics of state-led partnerships in Dundee and Hull provided a glimpse of how these mechanisms can undermine networking. First, he found a centralizing dynamic, where state managers

sought to structure out dissent and debate in the interests of efficiency in delivering government policy. Second, he found value conflicts between public officials and citizen activists and that these conflicts were closed to conscious deliberation. 'Partners' displayed 'mutual incomprehension' despite sharing a common vocabulary of goals, such as 'social inclusion'. This lack of mutual understanding contributed to explaining why government officials sought to control the collaborative process and access to it. In addition, where governing networks begin with a degree of openness to a plurality of political perspectives, there is evidence of a trend towards 'closure', such as in the 'flagship' New Labour regeneration programme, New Deal for Communities. According to Lawless, 'the original assumption that partnerships should be given a strong degree of local flexibility and freedoms has been steadily eroded' (2004: 383).

A similar story emerges in a study of networks in the healthcare sector. Researchers examined a range of clinical networks between healthcare providers and research institutions in response to a government initiative (Addicott et al, 2007). They found the network was largely a paper-based phenomenon. Members of the network continued to relate in a way which was heavily shaped by aspects of the traditional professional hierarchy found in the medical community. In this case, it appears, the network model was largely used to build legitimacy with the government and extract resources, rather than to transform relationships. Beneath the rhetoric of connectivity, participants continued focusing on their organizations, much as before.

In sum, while the discourse of network governance may sound appealing, a range of careful empirical studies have demonstrated there is often a significant disconnect

between rhetoric and reality. The idea that the discourse of networks obscures or legitimizes hierarchical practices now has widespread international currency (e.g. Guarneros, 2008). It suggests that far from representing a radical departure from bureaucratic modes of governance, networks may often be a form of window dressing designed to make them look more legitimate, attractive and up to date. This strand of the critique anchors our agnosticism towards the claim that network governance is necessarily proliferating, discussed further below.

Distrust

A second potential pathology is that networking may actually breed distrust. If levels of trust in society are low and declining, as Cook, Hardin and Levy (2007) suggested in a comprehensive study, it poses a challenge of logic to the notion that networks are proliferating and capable of fostering cohesion. For example, despite New Labour's enthusiasm for networks, Stoker (2002: 432) argued that its governing strategy was infused not by trust, but fatalism, 'a widespread but not universal culture of paranoia that sees enemies all around'. More recently, the Demos 'Progressive Conservatism Project' found that front-line staff in the public sector were trapped in a 'vicious circle' of falling status and low morale, are treated like 'untrustworthy teenagers' and experience a 'crippling' lack of trust from middle management and Whitehall.[1]

Stoker (1998: 22-3) saw the journey to self-governing networks, the 'ultimate' partnership activity, as contingent in the first instance on governmental incentives. The problem this perspective poses is that instead of superseding them, networks appear to be rooted in hierarchies (also Grote, 2012). Moreover, as Guarneros-Meza (2008: 1035) put it, state-organized governing networks can generate 'no trust'. If

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[1] http://www.guardianpublic.co.uk/frontline-staff-bureaucracy. Accessed 7th September 2012.

trust is the distinguishing characteristic of network governance, but actually existing

networks are often characterized by distrust, the obvious conclusion is that they must

be sustained by other mechanisms such as command, resource dependency and

instrumental cooperation.

Marketization

The mismatch between the rhetoric and practice of networks points towards a third

major pathology: they are used as a front for the extension of marketization of social

life, rather than as an alternative. Orthodox accounts of network governance argue,

like Frances et al, that they are neither markets nor hierarchies (Powell, 1990).

However, a number of studies find that the cultivation of network mechanisms has

driven the extension of market relationships. Moran (2010: 34), for example, pointed

to affinities between the perceived virtues of 'light touch' regulation in network

theory and the small-state ideologies of neoliberalism. The cultivation of networks

has also been associated with the growing involvement of corporations in decision-

making, for example on various partnership boards. While in the past governance

actors were assumed to play the role of deciding in the broad public interest,

representatives from business are expected only to promote their own interests and

positions (to act as 'representatives of business'), which in the dominant political

culture are conflated with the interests of society as a whole. The result is that they

often act as the collaborative face of cold and calculating growth strategies (Alonso,

2001).

This point can be extended by considering the significance of Boltanski and

Chiapello's (2006) New Spirit of Capitalism, who explore the celebration of networks

by corporate managers. Boltanski and Chiapello's point of departure is that

corporations succeeded in appropriating the 'artistic' dimension of the critique, which inspired many of the social movements during the late 1960s. In place of the moribund Fordist system, they argue, capitalism reinvented itself, producing a new 'connectionist' or networked paradigm centred on the knowledge economy. Whereas Fordism was all about routine, repetition and standardization, the knowledge economy relies on creativity, adaptability, communication and the art of connecting laterally in project-based teams built on trust. This appeal to networks was vital in legitimizing the global capitalist renaissance preceding the crash in 2008, which was imbued with the 'connectionist' spirit described by Boltanksi and Chiapello. If capitalism is capable of generating and sustaining inclusive and affective network-based associations and innovations, then there is nothing to fear from the roll-forward of markets. From this perspective, networks actually drive marketization rather than offering an alternative. Like 'hypocrisy' and 'distrust', this dimension of our critique suggests scepticism towards the proliferation and efficacy of networks.

Subjugation

A fourth major pathology of network governance is that it can cultivate subjugation. By this we mean the pervasive discourse of network-based governance prescribes a particular form of selfhood that should be occupied and displayed by users of that discourse. This is captured by Foucauldian approaches, which cast light on how new subjectivities, rationalities and rules for the 'conduct of conduct' emerge through networks. This work posits a shift from a society based on disciplinary technologies to those based on bio-political regulation or self-control (Bang, 2011). They contend, somewhat pessimistically, that these governmentalities render actors complicit their own subjection.

Neoliberal regimes and their intellectuals have been remarkably candid about using acculturation strategies to counter de-traditionalization, without obvious concern for democratic legitimacy. According to Bentley and Halpern (2003: 75), for example, the conjuncture demanded 'serious changes in people's everyday behaviour. (…) The success of progressive politics relies even more on creating a sense of shared responsibility to motivate certain kinds of behaviour and to generate causes and identities with which people are willing to engage'. For Messner (1997), it is not 'only institutional structures and organisations but also systems of social values and action orientations that will have to be cultivated, modernized and advanced', what some call 'culture governance' (cited in Newman, 2004: 80) or alternatively 'responsibilization' (Clarke, 2005).

Governing networks potentially play a very important role in subjugation. Taking part in a state-led 'partnership' entails, at least tacitly, acknowledging fellow interlocutors as 'partners' rather than, say, 'adversaries'. One notable consequence of recognizing the interlocutor as a 'partner' is that working class activists, otherwise written out of history, reappear in the guise of déclassé 'community representatives'. In this role, they are accorded largely symbolic rights of representation in return for activism mobilized in pursuit of a 'shared' governing agenda. As Dean (2002: 171) argued, because it 'posits in advance a unified community', the legitimating function of networks 'withdraws the revolutionary energy long associated with claims to universality'. While it remains an open question how far networks successfully nurture governmentalities, the Foucauldian account highlights the dark side of the trust-based relationships celebrated in the orthodoxy: trust is not axiomatically good

and 'distrust' is a 'very healthy fact of our condition' (Cook, Hardin and Levy, 2007: 60).

Anti-Proceduralism

Networks can also destroy aspects of governance vital to ensuring fair and rational procedures. As we have seen, the basis of many accounts is the attempt to do away with formal and rule-bound governance embodied in Weberian principles of bureaucracy. Indeed, Stoker (2004) celebrated the potential of networks to replace bureaucratic proceduralism and rationality with what he sees as the re-politicization of governance. While this may sound like an attractive prospect, some have sounded stringent warnings. Rhodes warned that 'accountability disappears in the interstices of the webs of institutions that make up governance' (2000: 77). Others point out that network-based systems of governance can lead to problems of diffuse or non-existent responsibility for decisions (Bogason and Musso, 2006). While these criticisms represent such problems as soluble, or at least manageable, such as through democratic anchorage or metagovernance (e.g. Sørensen and Torfing, 2009), others are far less sure.

In his defence of bureaucracy and rational proceduralism, Paul Du Gay (2000) illustrated how transparent, formal and rational structures that support equity and create space for deliberation are fundamentally threatened by network governance. He argued that some of the central problems arise from the decline of formal procedures and the cultivation of an ethos of enthusiasm and interest within governance arrangements. This means that instead of making impartial judgments, public officials are corralled into emotive passions and sectional interests. The result, Du Gay warns,

is that governance becomes increasingly dominated by officials acting without the constraints of measured deliberation and accountability. This means already dominant groups can push their own interests even further without having to negotiate the checks and balances that, in Weberian analysis, were so important to the functioning of modern government. Elites are able to consolidate their power with little reference to any other mechanism but 'trust' between them and other elite actors.

In addition, Du Gay argues that that encouraging governance mechanisms based on managerial enthusiasm can be dangerous if there is conflict between groups with different goals. Reliance on informal mechanisms, such as trust, means that networks are unable to mediate conflicts, leading to often questionable and problematic outcomes. Unable to cope with conflict, network actors retreat to a de-politicized discourse of conflict avoidance, what Laclau and Mouffe (2001: xv) called the 'sacralization of consensus', which only serves to institutionalize power inequalities. Devoid of procedural checks and balances, asymmetric power within networks risks compounding the problem. Hidden from democratic scrutiny, what passes for benign mutualism under a network lens may disguise exploitative relations. Although Weberian bureaucracy is vulnerable to powerful criticisms, Du Gay's defence highlights that an all too rapid embrace of networks can lead to managerial partiality and the increased influence of special interest groups.

Fragmentation

A further potential pathology of networks is that they can foster social fragmentation by undermining solidarity. One particularly interesting tension in network theories is between the claims respectively that networks foster long term 'embedded' relationships (Podolny and Page, 1998), or that they adapt and change given different

circumstances (Piore and Sable, 1984; Castells, 1996). Usually this paradox is resolved through the claim that embedded social relationships create trust, which allows networks to adapt without endlessly dissolving and forming anew. The mechanisms which bring people together, while allowing this flexibility and adaptability, are generally informal, restricting access to the community, macro-cultures, collective sanctions and reputation (Jones et al, 1997).

Again, this proposition might appear attractive, but it also comes with significant problems. Perhaps the most important is that the kinds of deeply embedded networks and relationships celebrated by proponents rarely match the fickle and opportunistic 'network building' which takes place in their name. What network based governance often means in practice is a set of actors with more or less congruent goals coming together momentarily and being bound by nothing more enduring than a limited set of social pleasantries. In his critique of the 'fluid modernity', Bauman (2003) points out that longer-term social relations overlaid with a deep sense of meaning, are frequently destroyed by transient networks.

He highlights two disastrous outcomes. The first is that as deracinated individuals are compelled to participate in networks, they become increasingly used to treating networking opportunities in an instrumental and cold fashion. Building a network is a form of labour and human relationships become the focus for this work. They are something to be carefully managed. While this may seem sensible in a network age, Bauman argues that it results in us manipulating relationships strategically (also Illouz, 2007). No longer is the relationship based on enduring social bonds providing

a sense of conviviality and commitment. Instead, it becomes a conduit for useful information, resources and favours.

This gives rise to a second problem –the network 'logic of flows' makes it very difficult, indeed sometimes impossible, to sustain social relations over time. The result is a notable lack of commitment and attachment to longer-term relationships and identities that were typically associated with collective identities, such as class or nation. Instead, people adopt temporary affiliations that change rapidly on the shifting sands of social life. Indeed, some have argued that the possibility of solidifying these relations into anything that implies long-term commitment has been eroded (Beck, 1992: 101). The lack of formal binds, together with the purported desire of networkers to keep moving in pursuit of changing goals, means that many networks are unstable and often fleeting. One of the great tragedies of this, Bauman argues, is that social relations come to be seen as eternally temporary and effectively evacuated of meaning. If network governance is only a temporary achievement (which many networks are), then it becomes difficult, if not impossible to invest it with the meaning and depth of experience that is usually associated with a governing institution. All the network provides is a thin set of relations and a promise of constant and repeated change, leaving people with a yearning for more enduring forms of mutualism coupled with an instrumental attitude towards standing commitments.

Bauman's insights are a clue as to why state-organized networks maybe prone to hypocrisy, morphing into hierarchies as corporations and governments try to impose order on the chaos unleashed by neoliberalization. The upshot maybe, as suggested

earlier, that it is very difficult to sustain and stabilize networks without recourse to the mechanisms they are meant to supplant. The central point against the orthodoxy is that rather than necessarily being the basis for affective and trust-based relationships, networks can actively undermine them.

'Netsploitation'

A final pathology is the new patterns of exploitation networks give rise to. Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) call these forms of 'netsploitation'. As we have already pointed out, they argue that the so-called 'project-oriented justificatory regime' is distinguished by the connectionist 'spirit' of our time. For them, social discourse establishes the image of a connected world, where networks and networking are all important. The worthy person is one who is ceaselessly able to establish social connections and networks through being consistently reflexive, mobile and engaged (2006: 127). They then go on to point out that one of the major questions about this regime is who gets access to networks and who does not? Indeed, we have already highlighted that networks can cement and increase the power of states and corporations. Through simultaneous connection to broader networks, the successful connectionist may enjoy the external benefits of these activities (by putting their name to and enjoying certain reputational capital), often without running the risk of investing in the work or taking responsibility for it. Thus exploitation comes from the differential capabilities of those who are able to maintain mobility and the capacity to connect and those who cannot.

While Boltanski and Chiapello are concerned largely about exploitation within the labour market, the lessons are highly salient for other spheres. In particular, governance networks often involve powerful bodies (such as central state agencies)

building connections around smaller organizations, such as NGOs, that were already doing the tasks a network claims before it was actually formed. By establishing a network, the central node is then able to take much of the credit for work that was already occurring. Moreover, when claiming credit, they do not have to make serious or enduring commitments to other actors. The current UK government simultaneously demanding greater voluntary action and cutting voluntary sector budgets is arguably a good case of a nodal broker 'moving on' when the political and financial weather makes it expedient (Davies and Pill, 2012). In other words the central node is able to exploit much of the value created by other organizations. When benefits no longer flow, it is able to move swiftly on, sometimes destroying the network in its wake. Financial movements exemplify, precipitating what Harvey (1978) called 'switching crises', as capital abandons spaces mined of their profit potential for new markets.

Discussion: Putting Networks in their Place

In short, networks maybe a valid, if limited, response to de-traditionalization but they do not resolve, and may aggravate, enduring power asymmetries. Far from being subject to minor problems, our critique suggests that network governance is linked with a number of serious and far-reaching pathologies. It begs the question of what responses to the networks orthodoxy might be appropriate. In this discussion, we look at three broad responses: disposing of networks, radicalizing them and a more agnostic approach that seeks to put networks in their place alongside other modes of governance. We argue that the third option holds out the greatest potential as a way of addressing the pathologies of networks without exaggerating them.

One potential response involves disposing with the vocabulary of networks, based on the intuition that they are irredeemably problematic. This approach seeks to cast off not just the language, but also the broader social discourse associated with networks. Proponents typically seek to replace the notions of network based governance with an alternative vocabulary recovered from previous political struggles. For instance, Davies's Gramscian approach argues that the networks movement should be understood as a key element in the hegemonic projects of neoliberalism – what he calls its 'visionary regulative ideal' (2012: 2688). Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) suggested that an alternative language of social and economics rights and solidarity may serve as a meaningful alternative to network forms of governance. As was commented earlier, Paul du Gay (2000) continues to make a compelling case for rational bureaucratic proceduralism as an alternative to network governance.

What we think is crucial here is not the specific lexicon of governance offered by any particular author. Rather, it is the idea that notions of networks should be vigorously questioned and resisted. While such approaches represent an important note of scepticism, they also tend to assume that the vision of network based governance is dangerous and has no place in the contemporary lexicon of governance. This can have the effect of ignoring both the undoubted acuity of traditional approaches to network research, as well as the potential benefits of networking in particular situations.

A contrasting reaction is to 'radicalize' networks. Proponents of this position argue that the central problem with contemporary approaches is that they do not go far enough. The paradigm example of this perspective is the proliferation of 'horizonalist' social movements in response to the global economic crisis – such as

Occupy Wall Street (Mason, 2012). Their intuition is that it is therefore necessary to replace 'fake' governmentalized institutions with radically (de)structured networks that are more authentically egalitarian. For them, networks are entities that overflow attempts to control them and involve ceaseless and unending connections (Hardt and Negri, 2005). However, for reasons explained in the preceding critique, we see no reason to think that social movements are less vulnerable to the seven pathologies than state-led governance mechanisms.

To summarise; we believe that disposing of networks is wrong - the reverse error of excessive enthusiasm. We agree that networks may have many benefits for different social groups and as governing technologies. But at the same time, in a power-laden society radicalizing the approach in the manner of Occupy would not itself overcome the pathologies. We suggest that when there is an excessive emphasis on networks as the only appropriate form of governance we risk falling into 'network fundamentalism'. This involves wilful blindness towards alternative forms of governance. It also entails an excessive attachment to network forms – often in the face of the pathologies produced by that very form.

We therefore conclude by suggesting a much more agnostic and measured approach. Challenging the excesses of both network fundamentalists, and network rejectionists involves recognizing that governance is multi-modal and that network-based forms of governance maybe appropriate in particular settings, and only when they are buttressed by other modes of governance. The starting point suggested by our critique is the intuition that concrete governing processes synthesize different elements of hierarchies and markets as well as networking. When Rhodes (1997b)

argued that it was the 'mix that matters', he had in mind that networks were arising alongside, and perhaps displacing, other modes of governance. Subsequently, there has arguably been a tendency to essentialize governance processes by categorizing them as either one thing or the other – such as by subsuming state-business-civil society partnerships to the category of networks. We suggest that in reality, governance processes are constituted from all three: fluid, variable and evolving configurations of simultaneously hierarchy, market and network. Many of the studies we discussed earlier highlight the uneasy synthesis and evolving configurations of trust, command and contract relationships within institutions labelled 'network'. Moreover, Grote's (2012) study found not only that relations typically described in the vocabulary of networks were organized hierarchically but also that simplistic characterizations such as hierarchy = command, market = contract, networks = trust, were misleading. He demonstrated that markets can just as well be based on command, networks on competition and hierarchies on trust.

The analytical implication is that we should abandon simplistic formulae for integral and inductive analysis – a more sensitive approach to revealing the different configurations in play and their trajectories in governance mechanisms of all kinds. We describe this approach as agnostic and inductive. The crucial feature is that it represents hierarchy, market and network as 'inputs' or building blocks rather than 'outcomes' or 'types' of institution. Conceiving of governance in this way has considerable potential for assessing the vast array of claims for and against networks. It by no means rules out the possibility that certain governance practices are indeed network-intensive. For example, Issett et al (2011: i166) highlight how informal networks tend to connect actors with strong cultural and interest-based affinities,

excluding others in order to avoid conflict. Networks of this kind, based on the congruence of goals, can generate high levels of inter-personal trust, as the literature on policy communities highlighted (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992). Trust-based practices of this kind have the benefit of providing stability and continuity, but are also liable to replicating the power asymmetries discussed in our critique.

Questions for research might therefore be how far the rise of the ideology of networks is a rhetorical sleight of hand that obscures historic continuities in power relations and governing strategies – an instance of what Du Gay (2003) called 'epochalism'? To what extent, following Davies (2011), does networking serve a hegemonic function, seeking to strengthen the integration of state and civil society, holding out the prospects of a flexible mutualism within the neoliberal project? Or, does neoliberalism both promote and undermine networking (Bang, 2011)? Are trust-based networks predominantly exclusive, or is diversity compatible with cultivating additional trust? Equally, our agnostic approach poses questions of committed social movement "horizontalists" (Mason, 2012: 45). To what extent do they cultivate 'genuine' networks constituting Deleuzian 'zones of intensity' and creating enduring connections between different social formations (Chesters and Welsh, 2006: 196)? Do they really overflow and outflank the coercive and disciplinary modalities of neoliberalism or become recuperated?   Ultimately, what kinds of processes are most conducive to high levels of trust-based networking, and how do configurations of hierarchy-market-network evolve over time?

To develop a more agnostic and inductive approach finally entails revisiting the question of 'appropriateness'. Crouch (2005, 2011) maintained that good governance

has always required a mixture of different mechanisms, including hierarchies markets and networks. This is both for reasons of resilience (if one mechanism fails then others will take its place) and access (different governance mechanisms guarantee different actors access). Thus, networks maybe appropriate for some aspects of social life, but not others. For example, civil society groups maybe better placed than governmental agencies to organize and coordinate themselves through networks and, in doing so correct or balance the instrumental and oppressive practices of states and corporations (Crouch, 2011). Studies influenced by Habermasian discourse ethics suggest that networks can create a space between state and market in which deliberative politics can flourish. By doing so, they may extend the public sphere, empowering communities and forging spaces for inclusive policy making (Fung and Wright, 2001: 25). In a Habermasian interpretation, networking is prone to recuperation – the 'colonization' of the lifeworld - and thus it is most likely to flourish behind 'restraining barriers' erected within civil society. However, it is important not to treat civil society as an undifferentiated or progressive totality either. Like social movements, other forms of civil society network maybe prone to the pathologies discussed earlier.

The actual and appropriate balance of networking and other regulative mechanisms is therefore a contextual question, depending on the goals in question. When it is pushed too far and applied in inappropriate situations, we have seen that a range of serious problems begin to appear. Fragile and informal relations begin to take the place of more sturdy and established bases for social relations such as rules and laws. Normatively, as well as analytically, it is important to assess both the strengths and limitations of networking in relation to particular social contexts and problems.

Conclusion

In this paper we have questioned Castell's (1996) claim that the 'network logic' now dominates social life. Instead of joining celebrations of network governance, we instead hold it up to critical scrutiny and ask vital questions about the nature, viability and desirability of network practices. Our analysis makes clear that while networks are important, they create a range of significant problems. For us, these pathologies are deep-seated and cannot be solved with a few tweaks. However, instead of committing the opposite error of rejecting networks, we suggest a cautious, circumspect and agnostic approach. This involves putting networks in their place and conceiving them as part of a broader range of modes of governance. Simply, networks are likely to involve elements of hierarchy and contract, while hierarchies are likely to involve elements of both contract and networking. Our agnostic approach encourages us to both reconsider the appropriateness of networks in different contexts and assess continuity and change in real-world governance processes of many different kinds. It provides a way of avoiding both the liberating and oppressive potentialities in networks, while recognizing that command and contract relationships remain integral to everyday practice.

The strategy proposed in this paper is by no means the only way the debate can be opened up. Rather, we hope it is a thought-provoking starting point for a thoroughgoing rethink of dominant understandings of network governance, a rethink that contemporary scholarship increasingly demands. Our challenge does not mean we think network governance cannot flourish and be beneficial in some circumstances, or that theories of network governance are devoid of insight. On the contrary, if proponents tend to fetishize the network it is important that we learn

lessons and do not fetishize the critique. All we are attempting to do is to open up the space for a critique capable of better understanding the nature and efficacy of networking in contemporary governance.

We also hope to open new avenues for research. One possibility is to consider more systematically and empirically the conditions in which the problems we identify actually occur. This question can be answered through cross-sectoral comparison of different kinds of networks. A second avenue might be to bring together alternatives to network analysis, developing detailed cases and models of how, when and where each has the greatest purchase. A third avenue would involve sketching out criteria which provide a good sense of when governing arrangements might usefully be built on networks and when not, drawing inspiration from the tempered approach developed by Crouch and others. The final and we think most pressing challenge is to begin developing a broader lexicon of theoretical concepts with which to think about human association and governance beyond the orthodoxies of past and present. We hope this paper suggests some fruitful avenues for colleagues to pursue.

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