

# Computer Interactive Tech.:

## Embedded and variable outcomes

Digital and non-digital interactions

Mediating cultures

Geography and “community”

Saskia Sassen (Univ. of Chicago)

(Athens 6/03)

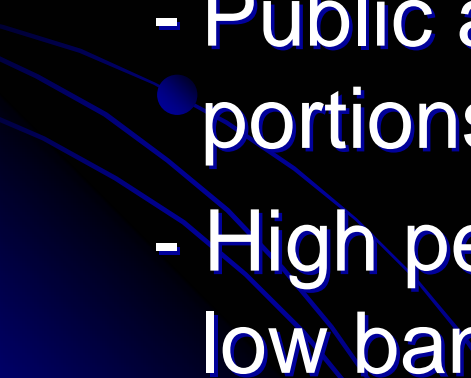
# The limits of technology

- Technological readings of the technical capacities of the new ICTs
  - Leads to flawed interpretations and forecasts (An error with most new technologies)
  - Leads to the notion that digital space is neutral –a purely technical event
  - Leads to assumption that the new technology will replace all older technologies that are less effective than the new technology

# Embedded and variable

- “Digitization” as embedded: Shaped by social, economic, political, cultural context. (“D”: computer tech centered interactive domains, outcomes, transfers)
- Much of what happens in digital space would lack meaning or purpose without the non-digital meanings/purposes at work.
- Because of the above, digitization can be derivative, transformative or constitutive.

# Cybersegmentations

- Digital space itself is increasingly structured and differentiated:
    - Private networks of wholesale finance vs. public access Internet
    - Public access Internet vs. privatized portions of Internet
    - High performance networks vs. slow low bandwidth networks
- 

# Imbrications of digital and non-digital elements

- Capital hypermobility requires massive concentrations of material resources (infrastructure, office buildings, human talent –partly mobile)
- Transformations of material resources (e.g. buildings) into liquid digital events (e.g. financial instruments) alters the meaning of the material: that building is no longer the same once it is also digital

# Mediating practices/cultures

- It is not only a matter of access to the technology— also crucial are the cultures through which use happens: from very specific (e.g. human rights activists vs. specific corporate intra-nets) to very general (western style consumer practices vs. wholesale global finance)
- Among current non-users it is important to enable them to develop or recognize their possible cultures of use (e.g. SPARC network)

# New forms of politics

- Global scale

  - Supranational organizations

  - Global systems

- Local scale on global networks

  - Microenvironments with global span

  - Non-cosmopolitan forms of global politics

- Organizational complexity

# Two cases where digitization has been transformative/constitutive

- Key aspects of global financial market today (which makes it different from earlier phases of global finance): orders of magnitude, centrality of transactivity, level of complexity of instruments (software). Has given Fin. Enormous added power over govts.---a new normativity..
- Resource poor-organizations can become part of global politics in ways that construct a politics of the global centered on localities.Non-cosmop.

# Parallels between both cases

- Key features of digitization are critical in these two very different cases (tech.properties provide the utility in both cases).
- 1. Decentered (distributed) participation/outcomes and simultaneous integration. But achieved through different socio-economic encasements of the technology: public access, private/dedicated
- 2. Threshold effects are critical in both
- 3. Values, projects, applied outcomes are different: distributed power vs. concentrated power

# Digital Formations

- Structurations in digital space that reflect both a) the endogenous technical properties of computer centered interactive technologies and b) the endogenized social logics at work.
- Not all digital networks or spaces are such fmts
- Purpose of developing such an analytical category is to allow us to go beyond the prevalent notion of “impacts of” ICTs on familiar objects of study. Whole new domains are being constituted and should become such objects of study. Going beyond the ind/dependent variable