Outer space, capital & moments of struggle: contested communications

• Theory: Harvey on economic crises and ‘spatial fixes’
• Current crisis and the rise in outer space investments
• Some observations on communications and the ‘Arab Spring’
• ‘Sousveillance’ - power from below
• Assessing Castells: ‘The Network Society’
Harvey: capitalism, crises and ‘spatial fixes’

Profitability crises: over-production, under-consumption

Capital seeks profitability with new ‘spatial fixes’: suburbs, roads etc. (state-mediation)

‘Outer spatial fixes’: satellite communications, military investments... (state-mediation)
Contemporary crises: capital’s ‘outer spatial fixes’

‘The space economy continues to grow for the fifth year in a row, seemingly unaffected by the economic turmoil that brought losses to many other industries at the height of the recession.’

The Space Report 2011
Social movements: internet as key to Arab uprisings?

- ‘Facebook and elsewhere is where people saw and shared horrifying videos and photos of state brutality that inspired them to rebel’.

- ‘These sites are where people found out where and when to go’.

quotes from Libyan activists on Net
Internet important for uprisings?

• Jan 2011 Egyptian authorities cut off internet
• Jan 2011 Chinese authorities cut off internet coverage of Mid-east uprisings.
• May 2011 Libyan state cuts off internet

• ‘As rebels close in on Gaddafi Internet flickers back to life’. August 2011
Fomenting revolution by cutting satellite communication?

‘Forget Twitter and Facebook this is a satellite TV revolution’

‘I have been watching BBC and Al-Jazeera for the past two weeks. I think cutting off the net and phones was a very serious mistake – people recognised the government was scared and came onto the streets’.

Libyan activist on net

Satellite dishes on Cairo rooftops.
Satellite media and cultural power

• Neo-liberal economics: rise of ‘media oligopolies’
  (Time Warner, Walt Disney, Sony Corp., General Electric, Viacom)
  at expense of public broadcasting (e.g. BBC)

• More broadcasting to ‘developing countries’.
  (e.g. Latin America, Middle East)

• 4 geostationary satellites cover the world – ‘TV direct to home’
Satellites can bring access to political/social alternatives

( Libyan state TV, AlJazeera, BBC, CNN.....)

But nation states can block access to satellites by uploading rogue interfering signal
Sousveillance: subverting the technology
Videos from hand-held phones circulated worldwide via email/mainstream networks. Blocked websites and satellite TV circumvented.

Neda Agha-Soltan, Young Woman Murdered in Iran: She is Voice of Freedom

Posted by DR. CLARISSA PINKOLA ESTÉS, Managing Editor of TMV, and Columnist in International
Jun 22nd, 2009 | 16 responses
Subversion of technology (2): Gadhafi-owned cellphone network rewired to support rebels’ operations
Conclusion: some areas of debate

• Network society = ‘a social structure constructed around (but not determined by) digital networks of communication.’ Manuel Castells *Communication Power*, p.4

• But power-struggles not only about opposing groups using networks - also about subverting/resisting/blocking use.

• In what sense a network *society*? More a *capitalist* society using networks? (c.f.Harvey)