Citizenship and Agency Under Neoliberal Global Consumerism

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A Search for Informed Democratic Practices

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Abstract

This article situates the ethics of information professionals within its contemporary public and political settings. An information ethics so contextualized can help promote the kinds of democratic and global citizenships that are the basis of this special issue of the Journal of Information Ethics. While this paper cannot fully canvas the issues raised, it can take us some way in balancing our perspective on the political issues packed inside the goals of an informed, global citizenry. It proposes a coherent network of concepts about the political context of the contemporary world by mapping its challenges. The article reviews the political and public content of the concepts of global and globalization, citizen and citizenship, and discusses the implied agency of the informed global citizen. It concludes with a discussion that draws out some of the broad responses to these contexts.

The call for papers for the Information Ethics Roundtable 2014 conference describes global citizenship as the possession of “knowledges, skills and attitudes that make it possible … to be actively involved in local, national and global institutions and systems that directly or indirectly affect their lives” (University...
Within this statement lie a number of political concepts that call for investigation. For instance, as Murdock and Golding note, citizenship is "no longer simply about participation in the political process," but includes debate and action that contributes to "conditions that allow people to become full members of the society at every level" (1989, p. 182). Agency is thus implied, pointing to ideas about informed ethical responsibility and the act of democratic citizenship. The statement is thus deeply entangled with information ethics. Since the scholarly enterprise of information ethics intersects with democratic politics, it is productive to unpack the meaning of these key concepts and their political context. This will not be an exercise in political philosophy (pondering the definition and relationship between concepts like order and power) but an examination in the practical vein of democratic theory where "issues are addressed because of their public importance [in an] attempt to compose a coherent network of concepts in order to analyze what is going on in the contemporary world" (Wolin, 2004, p. 504). These concepts are "always articulated within pragmatic and contentious political contexts" (Mara, 2008, p. 21). This article is thus an exercise in proposing a coherent network of concepts about the political context of the contemporary world in order to foster a potential form of informed agency in a global context. This will be accomplished by mapping its challenges through constructing a "rough pragmatic resemblance to immediate reality that any analysis must have if it is to be translated into successful political strategy" or action (Hofstadter, 1948, p. 114). In this spirit, this article reviews the political content of the concepts of global and globalization, citizen and citizenship, and lastly the implied agency of the informed global citizen. The conclusion will seek to draw out some of the broader challenges and responses to these contexts.

#### On Global and Globalization

A great deal nests inside these concepts. First, "global" has come to be both highly significant and meaningless. The concept is "decidedly hollow[;] although the global impinges on our local lives, we lack the ability to orient ourselves within it as a space of action" (Miller, 2013, p. 429). This is because planet-encompassing and deeply compelling issues of trade and finance, the environment, media and communication, and terror and violence, are primarily linked by globally "united financial markets" (Brosio, 2013, p. 276). Appadurai (1998) characterizes globalization's basic ideas:

> The word globalization ... marks a set of transitions ... since the 1970s, in which multinational forms of capitalist organization began to be replaced by transnational, flexible, and irregular forms of organization, as labour, finance, technology, and technological capital began to be assembled in ways that treated national boundaries as mere constraints or fictions [p. 907].
Though not identical, many scholars treat “neoliberalism [as] synonymous ... with globalization” (Foshee, 2007, p. 754, and for practical purposes, they are tightly interwoven (see also Sniegocki, 2009). Processes of cultural globalization (Appadurai, 2002; 1995) imply marketing, advertising (and their media), and consumption:

A massive productive and financial corporate infrastructure across the world stokes up the hot house incubator of global fashion trends: but to be realized in the market, they have somehow to acquire the aura, and become the signifiers, of “personalized” “choice” and consumption through an equally massive process of marketing and advertising [Hall, 2011, p. 722].

This process has been under way for some time: Lefebvre saw the fundamental shaping of twentieth century life via street advertising in the urban setting and the penetration of glossy magazine ads into rural locales as “capturing” space and “invad[ing] experience” (Miller, 2003, pp. 55–58). Neoliberal globalization has greatly accelerated these changes and significantly extended their reach (Buschman, 2012). Neoliberalism is a set of interlocking propositions which contend that “human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2007, p. 22). Neoliberalism is a dominating policy and economic discourse with a parallel cultural aspect in which fluid consumption is core to the world economy (Harvey, 2007; Bauman, 2001; Bourdieu, 1998). Put at its most basic, globalization — the context within which an informed citizenship is to be exercised — is currently most thoroughly articulated as neoliberalism driven by consumption and the relentless extension of markets.

Globalization poses a set of political challenges core to the special issue’s positing of an active citizenship engaging institutions and systems locally-to-globally in order to democratically influence them. “The she size of modern systems, the remoteness of power and the dispersion of responsibility” (Bowring, 1997, p. 107) poses an immediate challenge. Neoliberal globalization creates both power outside formal democratic state control (the influence of transnational capital) and simultaneously creates focused power within democratic states (well-funded lobbying and policy influencing efforts). Very often this limits democratic influence: a “constriction of politics ... narrowing the points of entry so that only the pressure of money can gain political access” (Wolin, 2004, p. 588; see also Elkin, 2006; Warren, 2006). Miller puts his finger on a set of dilemmas relevant to these concerns:

- “Our ability to carry out meaningful social and political actions [is] increasingly dependent on our individual ability to sustain them” (2006, p. 174) almost completely outside of community or collective action;
- Whether we like or acknowledge it or not, “we have become global
actors” (2010, p. 109). On a personal, daily basis this has profound impacts on our actions. The choice of a fast food burger implicates a feed lot with cattle knee deep in their own feces in Kansas or Brazil (2008a). A stuffed toy comes from a Chinese factory where “over-work death” (2003, pp. 16–17) occurs. We lack an ethical framework adequate to the nature and scale of these profound impacts on our political and consumption choices (2013);

• Neoliberal globalization both homogenizes (the single culture produced by marketing and advertising or the efficiencies food monoculture) which destroys the resources of the local, and heterogenizes (custom-made digital identities and cultural niches like music and news) (2008b);

• Thus “holding the local and the global together remains one of the most pressing political challenges of our age” (2013, p. 434).

Habermas is sharply critical of the culture and politics produced under global neoliberalism. At its most basic, his thesis is that democracy began in discourse: he “conceive[s] of the democratic procedure as the legal institutionalization of those forms of communication necessary for rational political will formation” (Habermas, quoted in Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 214). The public sphere steadily developed via the interests of the newly self-conscious merchant class, coming to fruition in the eighteenth century through dialogue and discourse over government authority and its legitimacy in the new public spaces of the time: coffee houses, salons, and the intellectual public press. The public sphere and notions of individual rights, the supervision of and necessary consent to state authority (a “public” in the modern sense), and written constitutional limitations on power were all self-constituted together (Habermas, 1974; 1989). Habermas thus strongly infers an ethic of information and exchange—an information ethics—in the healthy functioning of democracy (Buschman, 2012; 2013). However, the formerly critical press was “relieved of the pressure of its convictions” and publishing rediscovered its origins as a commercial undertaking (Habermas, 1974, p. 53). From there the industry followed a steady path toward economic concentration and technological development, shifting to a forum for advertising, and finally becoming a form of advertising and public relations while managing the public sphere: “Issues of political discourse become assimilated into and absorbed by the modes and contents of entertainment” (Habermas, 2006, p. 422; 1989).

Such a communicative and economic environment has resulted in politics “redefine[ed] ... in market categories” as the competition of interests instead of rational will-formation (Habermas, 2006, p. 422; see also 1974). It is the illusion of democracy—public opinion and the rituals of voting and elections—which now predominates: “critical [political] discussion ... tends to give way to ‘exchanges about tastes and preferences’ between consumers” and formal parliamentary politics itself becomes a “stylized ... show” and “staged display”
In broad terms, this is Habermas's transformation of the public sphere: away from the public and communicative rationality, which produced (and still underwrites actual) democratic politics (Brookfield, 2005). Under neoliberal globalization a discoursing, informed citizenship is under severe stress from media, marketing and public relations:

We are witnessing an increasing substitution of images for words, and also that inter-mingling of categories such as advertising, politics, entertainment [and] information ... promot[ing] the neon-lit re-enchantment of a de-realized reality. The banal coalesces with the unreal [and] de-differentiated customs blend with high-tech style, and the ruins of popular cultures with the highly personalized, consumeristically polished bizarre [Habermas, 1985, p. 97].

These are the conditions of "systematically distorted communication": social, political, and economic arrangements persist and "maintain their legitimacy despite the fact that they could not be validated if subjected to rational discourse" (Schroyer [1973], quoted in Held, 1980, p. 256). The very concept of "public" itself is fundamentally challenged within the context of the global and neoliberal globalization:

... what is of common concern, ... what matters to the whole society or belongs to the whole society, or pertains to the instruments, or institutions, or loci by which the society comes together as a body and acts. So plainly the political structure of a society is public ... [operating in] what one might call public space [Taylor, 1990, p. 108].

Put simply, there is a "declining publicness" (Baldock [2003], quoted in Clarke, 2004, p. 27) under global neoliberalism, "a system devoid of actors, entirely moved by power structures" and characterized by a fundamental de-integration and absence of society (Touraine, 1998, p. 126). Politically, neoliberal "market rationality effectively strips commitments to political democracy from government concerns and political culture" (Brown, 2006, p. 695).

Appadurai describes the global outcomes:

- Culture is cut loose from place ("the transnational movement of the martial arts") as well as ethnicity, resulting in "new cultures of masculinity and violence" (ethnic conflict) that can now play themselves out on a world scale (2002, p. 56; see also 1998);
- "National boundaries [are now] mere constraints or fictions" in the global flows of finance, production and especially people (laborers, migrants, refugees, the sex trade, arms and war) (1998, p. 907); at the same time "states find themselves pressed to stay open by the forces of media, technology, and travel that have fueled consumerism ... and have increased the craving, even in the non-western world, for new commodities and spectacles" (2002, p. 56);
Meanwhile the “relationship between globalization and current forms of critical knowledge” is characterized by a “growing disjuncture” (1999, p. 229): We lack the conceptual tools to analyze the results of our political and economic policy choices.

Informed, global citizens involved in the institutions and systems that directly or indirectly affect them imply a public capable of social commitments for the common good and the political capacity to act on those commitments. Contemporary global scales of the issues and neoliberal globalization pose direct political challenges to each of the concepts. We turn next to the person charged with inhabiting this political role.

On Citizen and Citizenship

Democratic citizenship classically involves the “task … to contribute to the enterprise by debating … interests and values in order to create a common viewpoint,” and thereby to bring a “moral intelligibility [to] state action” (Kelly, 1979, pp. 24, 28). In practical terms it means “free speech, the election of public officers and the right to combine together, to change things, big and small; or to prevent undesired changes” (Crick, 2007, p. 243), and this is certainly the spirit of the special issue. But in practical political terms citizenship requires a context to guarantee rights (Benhabib, 2005, p. 24), and that context exists “only within political communities,” which is to say democratic states “and not as a member of a general humanity” (Castiglione, 2005, p. 21) as globalization implies. It is “when we are excluded … [that national citizenship’s] importance … becomes clear” (Castiglione, 2005, p. 21) as the case of undocumented immigrants in the United States illustrates. The meaningful exercise of rights still requires a democratic state: As Miller (personal communication, January 8, 2009) put it, “citizens are citizens of somewhere … a state [or a public] with various infrastructures of debate and decision,” but global flows and neoliberal policies liquefy the ground of those ideas. The state is classically involved in the exercise of power (hence the importance of consent and democratic control), but under neoliberal globalization “power is simultaneously concentrated and disaggregated” challenging even the basic concept of the state and “not least … the role of the citizen and the prospects of democracy” (Wolin, 2004, p. xxi). The neoliberal response to the mid-century theorization of the extension of citizenship rights to social welfare has been economic globalization, suggesting the “impending empirical irrelevance of citizenship in the nation-state” (Howard, 2006, p. 6; Marshall, 2009; see also Somers, 1993).

The global regime of consumption has become so central as to be equated with civic action and citizenship itself: Two months after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, President George W. Bush took pains...
to link a letter from a 4th grader that said "if we're scared, we are giving the terrorists the power" to the context that "people are going about their daily lives, working and shopping" as the "repudiation of terrorism" the 4th grader sought ("President discusses war on terrorism," 2001). Put at its most basic, "it's patriotic to spend [and] it's how we fill our time" ("Spending," 2008). Habermas's critique is that consumer autonomy is merely the "façade of possessive individualism" and the resulting polity consists of nodes of "civil privatism" (1975, pp. 83, 61). Corporations actively conflate the idea of consumption decisions with citizenship, and thus "the state has to 'address' its citizens like consumers" (Habermas, 1989, p. 195), directly challenging the meaning and content of an informed and active citizenship. Consumer and market research has come down to the "undemanding act of voting," further equating it with purchasing and eviscerating the political content of the role of "citizens and their participation in the practice and control of governance ... [and] the meaning and substance of the political as well [as] the questions of who dominates politics and who has responsibility for ... civic life" (Wolin, 2004, p. 598; see also Cohen, 2003; Westbrook, 1983). This conflation of roles posits citizens as "both sovereign and passive" (Gitlin (1978) in Schudson, 2006, p. 194), and it is ongoing. The active role of a global citizenship the special issue envisions surfaces numerous practical and political problems, not least in terms of the concept of agency.

On Agency

For our purposes here, agency has a particular political inflection. That is, thorny problems of intention or mind are not dismissed, but they are not central to our purposes. Broadly, agency is "human volition; [the] ability to act in order to change society and nature" (Brosio, 2000, p. 341). It is entangled with autonomy: free will, "some amount of control over one's life history" (Warren, 1993, p. 215), critical judgment, moral responsibility, and democratic citizenship. Any meaningful concept of citizenship therefore implies a form of agency (individual and collective), since "without [it] there is no telling what events ought to count as an expression of the people's will or the people's judgment.... Yet because the space of the negotiation is the space of democratic agency, agency stands to be constricted by whatever would constrict the negotiation space" (Michelman, 1997, p. 1539). It has been argued here that neoliberal globalization has transformed the role of the democratic citizen into the consumer inside the global flows of finance, advertising, and culture. In turn, Miller (2003) frames the core issues around the consumer and agency: the pessimistic account "presumes that it is as superficial as the mass culture offerings of the commercial culture industries" (p. 9). While he is not pessimistic he recognizes "profound constraints": when the elements of agency and resistance are so thoroughly
commodified, what “they fund is less likely to be surprising or subversive ... since it is built with elements that offer little resistance to shallow appropriation” (Miller, 2003, pp. 158, 162). In other words, when *everything* which has an effect on production — including feedback from marketing and advertising to help shape the product itself — and consumption is planned (Slater, 2003, p. 106; see also Mackay, 1995), agency is by definition compromised. Thus the conflation of citizenship and consumption has accelerated under neoliberal globalization and further undermines the bases of meaningful volition, control, and identity.

The problem goes further in the postwar rise of the single-family home as the site of a fundamentally changed set of family and developmental dynamics, an insulated space of selecting and deploying commodities (Miller, 2003; Cohen, 2003; Buschman, 2012). A prominent result is the stunted and unindividuated person who lacks an inner life, over-relied on outside expertise, and defines himself through others along with the messages of advertising and the processes of consumption (Lasch, 1976; 1977a; 1977b; 1984). For Miller (2003), this context “promoted a relation between consumption and fulfillment,” (p. 87) and it is not a significant leap from there to the postmodern claim that what we consume is “profoundly consequential for our identities” (Slater, 2005, p. 180; see also Zukin and Maguire, 2004). Habermas (1995) insists that “citizens can make adequate use of their public autonomy only if, on the basis of their equally protected private autonomy, they are sufficiently independent” (p. 851). In other words, if they possess agency, then an agency enacted through consumption is “linked with a normatively diminished concept of the person ... who [no longer] determines her will through an insight into what is in the equal interests of all those affected [or as] the citizen of a republic, who participates in the public practice of self-legislation” (Habermas [2001] quoted in Brown, 2006, p. 703). The global consumer-as-citizen has difficulty with social solidarity and community and collective political action and enters into democratic politics with compromised democratic agency.

**Toward a Conclusion (and the Implications for Information Ethics)**

In a famous passage Putnam (1993) talked with regional Italian politicians about the centuries-in-the-making divide between the north and south that accounted for the differing levels of social capital and trust, and thus, democratic and economic performance between the two regions of Italy. The response was dramatic: “This is a counsel of despair! You’re telling me that nothing I can do will improve our prospects for success” (p. 183). This political parsing of the concepts underwriting the theme of information ethics and global citizenship is *not a counsel of despair*; our challenges are not casual. They certainly

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cannot be waved away and/or meaningfully addressed by a “subversive” consumerism:

The idea of a stable, rule-oriented self is rejected in favor of the freedom to invent and reinvent the self ... [and is combined with a] punctured ... idea of authority [leaving] a parochialized ... idea of community [so] as to leave its champions eulogizing bowling leagues as memorials to a lost vibrancy [and an] individualism easily satisfied by technological ingenuity that invites consumers to “customize” their selections according [to] prearranged menus [Wolin, 2004, pp. 584, 605].

It is in this vein (and the analyses which preceded it) that the concluding portion of this article will examine some potential productive resources to address these challenges. First and foremost we must recognize that many of the ideals driving the goals sought in an informed global citizenship spring from the same historical rootstock as the problems noted. If neoliberal globalization reifies property rights, property “shaped the moral imagination of liberal theory” (Benhabib, 2005, p. 24) as an originating source of democratic rights and practices. Locke (1996) famously noted that “preservation of property being the end of government,” it is the reason “men enter society” (p. 266) and he rooted rights, consent of the governed, and the primacy of the power of the (representative) legislature in it. Tocqueville (1850) followed suit: liberty in the modern sense began with the “ancient and necessary privilege of property” (p. 401) and the aristocracy’s interest in uniting “for the purpose of checking the Government” (p. 209). Habermas (1974) is instructive as well: “With the expansion and liberation of ... the market, commodity owners gained private autonomy” and in so gaining constituted “the bourgeois public sphere as ... private individuals assembled into a public body [to] debate ... public authority ... in their ... privatized yet publically relevant sphere of labor and commodity change” (p. 52). Cohen (2003) writes on progressive facets of the 20th century American citizen consumer in safeguarding food and “prodding government to protect the rights, safety, and fair treatment of individual consumers” (p. 18), in drives for black-owned businesses and cooperatives countering vicious segregation and the quality of goods available, boycotts to work where one shopped, and in targeted rioting responding to exploitative merchants (pp. 18–53). This history teaches us not to “overstat[e] the coherence, power, and achievements” (Clarke, 2004, p. 29) of neoliberalism and instead seek the pragmatic “value of keeping multiple dynamics in view — rather than assuming the analytical and political superiority of one standpoint and its conception of what has happened to citizenship” (Clarke, 2005, p. 455). In other words, the same political motivation and force — private property — has always resulted in cross-cutting political impulses.

Second, in theoretical terms, a search for agency in consumption posits neither “the actor as the fully conscious maker of social meaning, [n]or merely
as the slave to various external forces” (Lee [1993] quoted in Miller, 2003, p. 153) like commodification or marketing. There are real inequalities within our consumption regime: the distancing of commodity production results in a “political economy of [environmental and labor] degradation” (Miller, 2013, p. 431). The postmodern wish to “somehow turn the power of the system against itself” (Slater, 2005, p. 178) by “slyly resisting cultural hegemony” (Miller, 2003, p. 219) is an inadequate response. Nevertheless, “consumer choice is political ... [and] political choices are ... complex matters of family, ethnic, and religious tradition [with] emotional links to one brand rather than another, based on limited information and limited experience ... [which are] not unlike a great many consumer decisions” (Schudson, 2006, p. 197). At the same time that global consumption, finance and communication form a hegemon, they also distribute risk: “Consumers see risks everywhere [and thus] incalculable consumer markets ... can destroy billions of dollars of investment overnight [since they] consume the risk others produce” (Beck, 2001, pp. 269–270). Think of the effects on tourism and travel when SARS or Ebola erupt or there is political violence in a region/country, or the effect on imports when lead is found in the paint on toys, or beef exports when mad cow disease is found. In the risk society even “banal consumption” (globally sourced food and fused cuisines, for instance) blurs borders and creates a kind of cosmopolitanism (Beck, 2001, p. 265): “local and national cultures are forced into awareness of the global whole by threats that neither originate, nor can be resolved on the local or national level” (Miller, 2013, pp. 431–432). A transnational discoursing “public that knows no frontiers” is created through the synergies of media, uncontrollable migrations, and the simultaneity of events and trends (Beck, 2004, pp. 149–152; Miller, 2013). This clearly implicates a flow of informing and information ethics as well, but it changes their meaning: initially “directed toward what should not exist” (Beck [2004], quoted in Miller, 2013, p. 432). While this approach is not particularly pointed toward democratic discourse and control, the results can nonetheless be new forms of political agency in non-consumption: “rest[ing] on... the power to say... ‘no,’ to refuse to make a purchase. This weapon of non-purchasing cannot be delimited” (Beck, 2007). These ideas have a direct analogue in the refusal to engage in democratic discourse. As an environmentalist sits down to discuss policy with an energy company he concedes that some amount of fossil fuels will be burned, accepting the power differentials inherent in the negotiation context (Young, 2001). Habermasian political agency still exists in some nascent form in these situations since communicative rationality retains its persistent “power ... renewed with each act of unconstrained understanding” (1982, p. 221; see also 1989). Neoliberal economic globalization has both triumphed and produced a potential global and cosmopolitan counterpower (Beck, 2005).

Third, it is tempting to read too much potential for resistance and change in these developments, but they do have a political resonance: globalization
has clearly revitalized the political idea of cosmopolitanism (Scheuerman, 2006). With its long history rooted in Kant’s (2003) ideas of international peace and reason, and his strong welding of those to an ethic of informing and discourse (Alfino, 2013), cosmopolitanism has a strong appeal within an information ethics framework that engages the global politically. The prism of Habermas offers two promising and illuminating political venues that can be sketched here. A Habermasian and cosmopolitan deliberative democracy is theorized to be particularly adept at addressing the fluidity of our global situation: “the virtues of relatively abstract forms of cross-border communication [and] the realization of ... new forms of transnational democratic decision-making subject to global civil society” (Scheuerman, 2006, p. 91) which can not only accommodate high speed communication technologies and global diversity, but can draw strength from them. The idea is not without its significant theoretical and practical challenges, and a thorough review of the issues is beyond our scope (see Dryzek, Honig, and Phillips, 2006), but global challenges—environmental degradation and the conditions which produce terrorism to name the two obvious examples—fundamentally seem to demand “democratic structures at these suprastatal levels” (Saward 2006, p. 408; see also Scheuerman, 2006) (like the European Union which Habermas has theorized over the years). Below this level is the second venue of the flexibility of Habermas’s notion of the public sphere as encompassing new social movements (most often of protest) in differing configurations of interest and commonality. If the state is no longer the primary site of political discourse and action, then the phenomenon of “people meeting together to discuss their collective problems, raise critical claims about action, and act together to alter their circumstances” (Young 1996, p. 493) nevertheless revitalizes the idea of the public sphere, often around transnational and global issues, but on a more distinctly democratic and manageable scale.

This is most clearly seen in the growing protests over global warming, world economic meetings, and human rights violations, but also war, justice, education, gender, disability, marriage equality, health care, and racial issues. In political terms, while the rights that these protests posit may have been first instantiated in liberalism and the resulting democratic states, they “are not ... sovereign in interpreting [their] own compliance with human rights” (Benhabib, 2005, p. 25): They draw legitimacy from global and cosmopolitan standards which can also assist in globalizing rights like the support for educational, informational, and library rights that draw specifically on international conventions (Mathiesen, 2013; Samek, 2007). Democratization, as Warren (2002) notes, takes place in just these venues of the new public spheres: organizations, social relations, institutions (libraries, schools, universities), and associations—all arguably closer to a scale which can be influenced by individual agency and perhaps more important to everyday life and the polity since “democratizing society democratizes the state” (p. 692). Closing the circle, agency/autonomy
is a “distinctively political, even democratic capacity ... [that can] develop through ... politicized awareness of difference and social connectedness” within these contexts (Warren, 1996, p. 257). In other words, it is often what politics was formerly not that is now important in democracy (Warren, 1999). For instance, Eliasoph’s (2002) work investigates parents’ conversations in and around their children's schools that are very rich in democratic content, subtext and implications, but are often smothered (and ironically articulated most often by the bureaucrats who run the schools). In either setting, the informational-ethical implications of a Habermasian cosmopolitanism is never far from the surface.

In sum, this article sought to situate the ethical responsibilities and choices of practicing information professionals within its contemporary public and political settings (Capurro, 1985; Montague-Smith, (1993), in Rootes, 2003). Touraine (2005) states flatly that “it is out of question to admit that our rapidly changing societies have only negative effects on their members” (p. 204)—and he adds a corollary political insight: “we are surrounded by norm-creating administrative, economic or cultural organizations” (p. 207) which are within human scale and which do have democratic effects—for good or ill (Buschman, 2012). An information ethics informed by this political context can help promote a democratic citizenship that is not limited to borders. While these perspectives do not fully answer the issues raised, they take us some way in balancing our perspectives on the political issues inherent in the goals of an informed, global citizenry and recognize that in the end, all solutions are contingent—including the hegemon of neoliberal globalization. Hofstadter (1948) is again instructive: we will not “achieve a static solution for a dynamic situation” (p. 115).

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