

Whose Property?

Intellectual Property and the Challenge of Political Community in a Post-Industrial Age

Debates over the distinctive economic, political and social affordances of the post-industrial age converge in a constellation of intellectual property alternatives. This project maps four paradigmatic agendas for the production and ownership of immaterial property: Information Privatization, Immaterial Exceptionalism, Network Distribution and Ecological De-colonization. I define these paradigms through a tripartite rubric: their ontological foundations, their normative presuppositions and their institutional topologies. Grounded in these four alternatives for the production and ownership of immaterial property, I turn my investigation to the challenge of political community in a post-industrial age. Each paradigm poses a distinct challenge to traditional understandings of political community, as a theoretical proposition and empirical reality. The question of ‘Whose Property?’ emerges within the normative framework of Critical International Relations Theory. Within this tradition the challenge of political community is to address how political communities institutionalize and express modes of capitalist development. I pose the question of ‘Whose Property?’ for the purposes both of diagnosis and prognosis. My diagnosis speaks to the challenge of political community in an age of increasing global interdependency, shaped by the logics of post-industrial capitalism. The prognosis, I want to suggest, is that if we conceive political communities as a mode of collective political action, then the varied agendas for intellectual property may provide a powerful motivational argument underpinning emerging modes of political action. They may also offer institutional alternatives that can provide inroads to support the institutional realization of the emancipatory agenda of Critical International Relations Theory. By way of conclusion, this project leaves us with an overarching challenge. In looking at these approaches to intellectual property through the lens of political community, a key transformation manifests itself – the erosion of the Westphalian ‘public’ and rising demands for pluralized, distributed and globalized Post-Westphalian ‘publics’.