

From Davos to Beijing : the historical trajectory of the concept of sovereignty in Internet territories

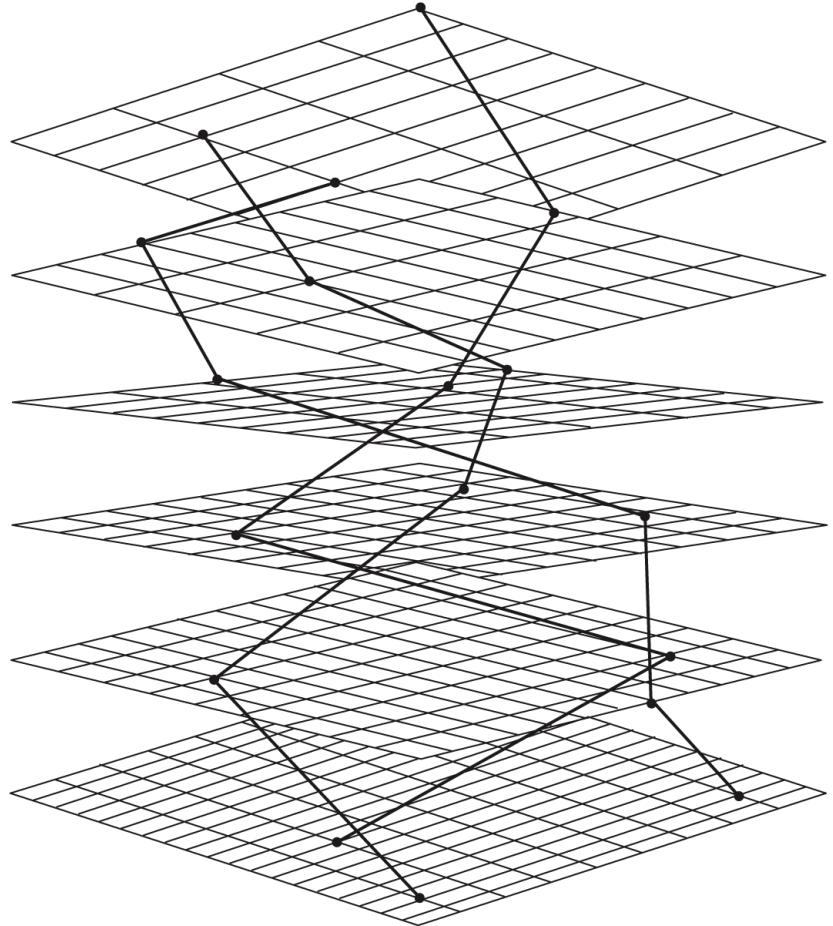
Clément Renaud
Institute for Area &
Global Studies,
EPFL

Grégory Bahde
Université Jean
Monnet
St Etienne

Digital Networks & Sovereignty

Concept of “sovereignty”
gaining momentum in the
discussions about Internet
and digital technologies

*“the means and ends of a specific
kind of platform sovereignty” -
The Stack*
(Bratton, 2015)



Methodology : Investigating networks narratives

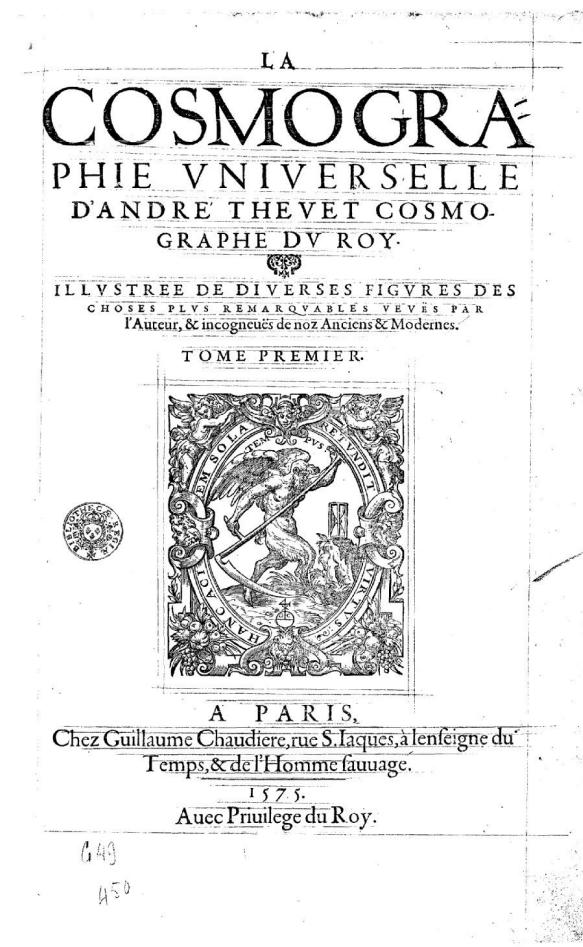
Hagiography of networks?

Computer networks tell their own (hi)stories

> mostly literature & secondary sources

National / global histories?

Focus on evolution of discourses across time and spaces



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Thevet, cosmographe du souverain (1575)

The pirate & the sovereign

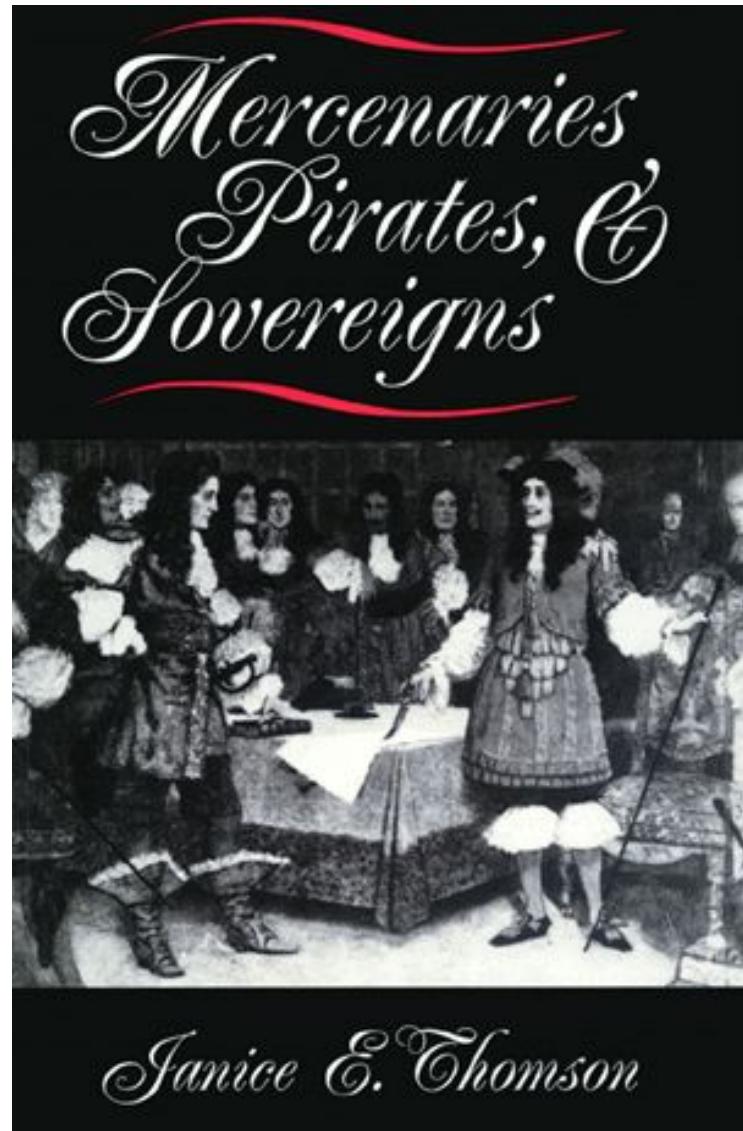
Peace of Westphalia (1648)

Pirates as *Hostis humani generis*

> Weber's state monopoly of violence and the mutual recognition of states

(Thomson, 1996)

> “*enemyship is a technique of governing*” (R.E. Mills, 2014)



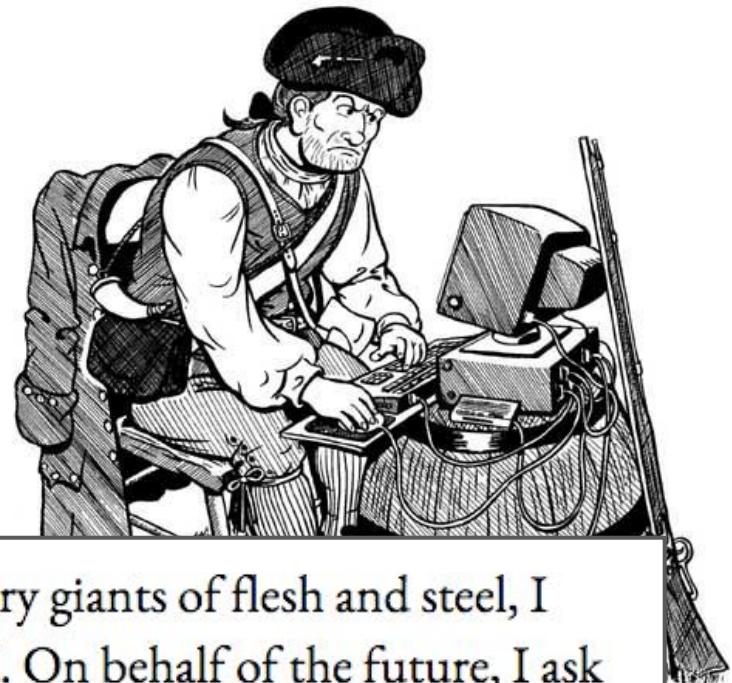
Cyber sovereignty as a form of activism

Internet as a threat to
sovereignty (Perreit, 1998)

US Telecommunications Act
(1996)

Published February 8, 1996
in Davos, Switzerland

A DECLARATION OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF CYBERSPACE BY JOHN PERRY-BARLOW



Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.

EXIT







EU-US controversy about ICANN governance

The EU claim for a new intergovernmental body to oversee ICANN is rejected by the US government
(Mayer-Schoenberger & Ziewitz, 2006)

“Balkanisation of the Internet” (Benhamou & Sorbier, 2006)

UN World Summit on the Information Society
(2003-2005)

7 November 2005
Condoleezza Rice letter to UK president to assert “*the historical U.S. role in authorizing changes or modifications to the authoritative root zone file*”

[1] [Read the letter that won the internet governance battle](#), The Register, 2 Dec 2005

US : is Internet regulable ?

States are unfit to regulate
“borderless” networks

(Wu, 1997 ; Wu, 2010)

“The code of cyberspace is itself a kind of sovereign. It is a competing sovereign.”

(Lessig, 1998)

Governement as platforms

(O'Reilly, 2010)

“Code is law.”

– Lawrence Lessig

Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace (1999)



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Europe : copyright & freedom of information

The “hackerism” generation

(Auray, 2010)

- Linus Torvalds (1969) : Linux
- Julian Assange (1971) : Wikileaks
- Ian Murdoch (1973) : Debian
- Xavier Niel (1968) : Free
- Bram Cohen (1975) : BitTorrent
- Kim Schmitz (1974) : MegaUpload
- Rickard Falkvinge (1972) : Swedish Pirate Parti
- ...



China : the Invention of the “Chinese Internet”



Fang Binxing - CCP's CTO

The Great Firewall
(Wired, 1997)

Is Internet in China
really different ?
(Kluver, & Yang, 2005;
Herold & de Seta, 2015)



The “Snowden effect” : enemyship and the pirate

2001 : *Patriot Act* and the 9-11 new normal

June 6, 2013 : Snowden revelations in Hong Kong

(Vaile, 2014 ; Brizé, 2014; People's Daily, 2014)

The United States need to put internet processes, policies, and procedures in place with real laws that forbid going beyond the borders of what's reasonable to ensure that the only time that we and other countries around the world exercise these authorities are when it is absolutely necessary.

— Edward Snowden —



Which “cyber sovereignty” for the EU ?

Geopolitics of cyberspace in Europe (Douzet, 2016)

“*Schengen Net*”

(Pohlmann & al, 2014)

“*EU is digital colony*”

(Morin-Desailly, 2016)

France and its sovereigns

(Bellanger, 2014 ; Brizé, 2014)



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China at the forefront of global stage

16 Dec 2015 : Xi Jinping at
Wuzhen about “cyber
sovereignty” (网络主权)
(Shen 2016)

*“It is a consensus of the
international community that
what applies offline, also
applies online.”*
([China Daily](#), 2016)



Can sovereignty be exported ?

Technological sovereignty

- Non-aligned
- Latin America (Kukutai & Taylor 2017)
- Ex. Atelier paysan (Grojnowski, 2017)

Facebook 'Free Basics' (suspended)
in Egypt and India
(photo : Wired, 2015)

Huawei appointed ICT advisor to
Tanzanian government
(photo : People's Daily, 2017)



Conclusion : How to rethink sovereignty?

Sovereignty is not only a question of infrastructure

- build representations of (with) digital technology
- projection of power (inside and outside)
- states, but also “platforms”

Imagine sovereignty in a “post-national” world?

> Who is the new pirate figure ?

> *“a new narrative of sovereignty”* multiple (cultural)
(Appadurai 2016)

to be continued...

Thank you

clement.renaud@gmail.com

@clemsos