Governance as Subversive Bricolage in the 21st Century

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“How might a new literacy of cooperation look?”

Howard Rheingold

Introduction

The shift from a geo-government based on the old trinity of state-nation-territory to a new and more fluid, mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive geo-governance has created new challenges. In this new game where geographical space plays a lesser and different role, where the state has lost its full grip on governing, and the nation and various other territories of the mind have woven a multiplicity of powerful reciprocal extraterritorialities of determining consequence, the game is without a master, and collaboration is the new imperative.

This is eminently subversive since it amounts to nothing less than an expropriation of the power base of most of the traditional and well-established potentates. Whatever might be the pretenses of state (national or territorial) leaders, they are faced with a turbulent environment marred by much disconcertion and conflictive equilibria where each group recognizes that it cannot rid the systems of either its partners or opponents but has to live and compromise with them to survive.

While this state of affairs may be perceived as a challenging novelty in certain countries, it has been a leitmotif in the history of Canada. Canada’s identity has been shaped by a sequence of failed top-down planning efforts by French and British colonists (Paquet and Wallot 1987). Such failures yielded a fragmented world of groups with limited identities and very incomplete interaction, that has generated “the many-coloured but miraculously coherent, if restless, pattern of the authentically Canadian nationhood” (Ross 1954: x-xi). Underpinning this baffling Canadianism is a creative and dynamic irony “opening outwards against – and through -- a world of shut-ins. A hope confronting both the anarchic and the totalitarian” (Ross 1954:xii).

However, the powers of dynamic irony and self-organization do not guarantee good governance. I have explored the immense difficulties in achieving good governance in a turbulent world in a book on Governance Through Social Learning a few years ago (Paquet 1999a), and in another one, a bit later, in which I tried to respond to friends and foes in a debate about about the strengths and weaknesses of the governance problematique developed by l’Ecole d’Ottawa (Cardinal and Andrew 2001).

But it is only over the more recent past that I have become convinced that the amount of subversion required to effect a suitable transition to 21st century governance ( and the amount of institutional carpentering needed to operationalize it) might be much greater than had been anticipated. The powers of creative irony are corrosive but may be more feeble at times than what might be necessary to overcome the high degree of inertia and dynamic conservatism embodied in existing structures (Schön 1971). These forces may be sufficient to prevent the organic emergence of the new order.
If the new evolving order may not emerge organically as easily as it should, it cannot be scripted ab ovo either and installed ready made by a coup d’état except temporarily. Modern socio-economies are complex adaptive systems that are always in a process of emergence. Consequently, much of their evolution cannot be deterministically designed: they co-evolve with their environment. The evolutionary process may proceed smoothly but it may also get stalled and freeze the socio-economy in a dysfunctional state. When such is the case, the governing apparatus of the socio-technical systems in place must be destabilized significantly in order to ensure that the emergence process is not brought to a halt.

Much has been written about these traps, blockages and pathologies, and about the ways to shake social systems free of them. We have explored these themes from different perspectives in three documents that have helped shape the nature of this paper (Paquet 2003a, 2003b, 2003c).

In the first section, I sketch briefly the two basic conclusions one may draw from this extensive set of analyses: a pessimisme mesuré about what can be accomplished by social scientists at this time, and the presumption that one might benefit from using a mediological approach in tackling the challenges ahead – i.e., an approach attempting to understand and to intervene mainly through an appreciation of the mechanisms and shared spaces underpinning the key social ligatures and the ways in which ideas get translated into actions (Debray 1991, 1994, 1997). In the following sections, this provisional diagnosis is buttressed by a broad introduction to the dynamics that is underpinning the drift from government to governance in our socio-technical systems; then by an analytical framework emphasizing mechanisms as primus inter pares among the tools one might use to guide modestly the redesign of the governance apparatus such a transition requires. In the following section, I sketch briefly the contours of some key terrains where investment in missing mechanisms may have the highest returns. In the final section, I illustrate how such mechanisms may be used in the construction of technologies of collaboration.

1. Pessimisme mesuré and missing social learning loops

After our different forays into the always subversive and often pathological world of governance, two robust propositions would appear to emerge.

First, there is no satisfactory theory of governance providing a guide to good governance. Governance and geo-governance remain a series of challenges that have elicited only imperfect responses. One cannot even gauge the full extent of the repairs needed to the existing order to reach better governance. Indeed, we do not even know how to ascertain what is the optimal amount of subversion that may be required, or what terrain one might have to prospect to gain a good basic understanding of the underlying forces defining the necessary and sufficient conditions for social learning to proceed quickly and effectively. For now, complex adaptive systems are simply beyond the grasp of our understanding and of our social engineering.

Some have suggested that these difficulties are temporary, that it is only a matter of time before we can come up with rules of good governance for our social systems since we already have been able to suggest simple rules governing complex systems in the animal world (Reynolds 1987; Resnick 1994). Others are more pessimistic and suggest that, in the case of truly complex adaptive systems like human societies, emergence is a constitutive dimension of reality, and one cannot ever hope to do more than to intervene lightly in the spirit of experimentation: governance through social learning, learning a bit along the way, coping with the obstacles to good geo-governance through bricolage, tinkering with existing processes, structures, mechanisms and rules. We tend to side with the pessimistic lot on this issue.
Second, in this sort of bricolage that we seem to be condemned to practice, central attention should be given to the installation of missing mechanisms likely (1) to limit the negative impact of the inertia associated with dynamic conservatism and neutralize the sources of these undesirable results or (2) to broaden the basis of experimentation and to catalyze the innovative forces at the root of the evolution of the institutional order.

The focus on mechanisms and “social technologies”, i.e., forms of coordination arrangements rooted in some particular physical support but shaping social relations, may appear at first to be less effective than focusing on principles, rules or structures. Mediology has underlined the importance of paying attention to the technical support per se but only as a mean to probe and understand forms of social coordination and mediation, and their evolution. One is interested not so much in the details of the postal network but in the ways in which such a network has shaped the nation.

Principles are powerful instruments but their generality is measured by what they ignore. They are often nothing but a mask for reductive ideology and their reductionism is a major impediment to social learning (Fish 1999). Structures are also somewhat utopian devices: an approach built on structures presumes that it is sufficient to modify structures to transform behavior. It is a bit chancy to so presume. The focus on processes has on the other hand proved too myopic as the process re-engineering literature has amply demonstrated. Finally, it would appear premature to attempt to develop rules at this time since we do not have yet a good theory of emergence. As for culture, it is such a diffuse entity that it cannot provide a useful grip for transformative action. Cultural change is more likely to be an outcome or a cooperation-amplifying outgrowth than a direct lever for action.

Mechanisms offer a much less precise instrument, but an operational one. They lend themselves to improvisation and experimentation. Consequently, it is not that we feel particularly well served by mechanisms, but they are one of the few workable levers we have. Indeed, when one reflects on some of the broad features of the new ligatures that have been found particularly useful in seeking to construct good governance arrangements, in practice, mechanisms would appear to be the operational unit most likely to be of use in our social architecture endeavor.

As Schön (1971) suggests, structure, theory and technology are closely intertwined: any change in one these three components of existing social systems triggers modifications in the others. New mechanisms usually transform the array of possible choices by extending the zone of possibilities. This in turn shapes choices differently and generates new patterns of habituation and values. So new technological supports impact on organizational forms.

But individual priorities being transformed by changes in the array of possibilities represents only one sort of the learning loops. There are also ways in which new technologies modify the structures and views of the world, and, through double-looped learning redefining both means and ends as experience brings forth new information, transform both the ways in which individuals and organizations learn (Kim 1993).

In the next sections, we probe the reasons why one is condemned to operate on such a modest scale: the essentially turbulent nature of the environment and the lack of other meaningful levers likely to have the requisite revolutionary tipping effect.
2. From government to distributed governance

The management science approach to governing has traditionally presumed that public, private and civic organizations are strongly directed by leaders who have a clear understanding of their environment, of the future trends in the environment if nothing were done to modify it, of the inexorable socio-technical rules of the game they have to put up with, and of the goals pursued by their own organization. This view of the world is an echo of the days when the social sciences were still Newtonian, and pretended to explore a world of deterministic, well-behaved mechanical processes where causality was simple because the whole was the sum of the parts. The coordination and governance challenge was relatively simple: building on the well-defined goals of the organization, the game was to design the control mechanisms likely to get the organization where its leaders wanted it to be.

Many issues were clearly amenable to this approach, and many still are. But as the pace of change accelerated, and as the issues grew not just more complicated but more complex, private, public and civic organizations were confronted more and more with “wicked problems” where goals are not clear and means-ends relationships are most uncertain (Rittel and Webber 1973).

In complex adaptive systems, agents may act in ways that are not always predictable and their actions are interconnected in deep ways. As a result, non-linearities abound, novelty and emergent features are the new reality. This is a Quantum world (Becker 1991). In dealing with such problems, inquiry (in the Deweyan sense) can only mean "thinking and acting that originates in and aims at resolving a situation of uncertainty, doubt and puzzlement" (Schon 1995:82), and designing new ways to respond to problems that materialize through iffy mechanisms, and wide space for experimentation and innovation.

(a) more local, transversal, informal

The erosion of the power and legitimacy of the state that has materialized as a result of these new circumstances has had two important impacts: first it has shifted attention to the non-state authorities, to other loci or sources of power; and second, it has brought non-purposive action and unintended consequences to the centre of the stage (Galston 1998).

A number of recent important studies have explored these different sites of power and tracked down the ways in which much of the state authority has become diffused to non-state agents in economy, polity and society (Horsman and Marshall 1994; Held 1995; Strange 1996; Jackson 2000; Rosenau 2003). This has given rise to a new distributed (and consequently not entirely purposeful) governance shared among the different stakeholders as the new emerging social technology.

It has also become clear that in times of rapid change, organizations can only govern themselves by becoming capable of learning both what their goals are, and the means to reach them as they proceed by tapping the knowledge and information that active citizens possess, and getting them to invent ways out of the predicaments they are in. This leads to a more distributed governance that deprives the leader of his or her monopoly on the governing of the organization: for the organization to learn quickly, everyone must take part in the conversation, and bring forward each bit of knowledge and wisdom that he or she has that has a bearing on the issue (Paquet 1992; Webber 1993).

Distributed governance does not mean only a process of dispersion of power toward localized decision-making within each sector: it also entails a dispersion of power over a wide variety of
groups from the private, public and civic sectors, for the best learning in a context of rapid change emerges through decentralized and flexible teams woven by moral contracts and reciprocal obligations negotiated in the context of evolving partnerships (Nohria and Eccles 1992).

This means that the geo-governance arrangements are not only embedded in formal procedures and protocols (as is too often presumed) and embodied in rigid legal, institutional and organizational sets of rules. They are also echoing the mix of fragmentation and integration – what Rosenau (2003) calls “fragmegration” – and tend to generate mobius-web type governance patterns. The texture of such patterns is made of informal moral contracts built on pluralistic situational ethics and rooted in cardinal virtues like temperentia (the sense of limits), fortitudo (a capacity to take into account context and the longer time horizon), prudentia (the sense of pursuing practical objectives) etc. (Paquet 1991-2). Global formal geo-governance procedures tend therefore to drift toward mixed formal-informal structures and different sorts of global informal covenants (Jackson 2000).

Distributed governance is therefore not only embedded in a set of organizations and institutions built on market forces, the state, and civil society, but also nested in transversal links relating these three families of institutions and organizations, and allowing them to be integrated into a sort of neural net. These transversal links neither echo the traditional, functional top-down organization, nor the matrix form of organizations, where vertical-functional and horizontal-process rapports are supposedly keeping one another in check. In this mobius-web governance, processes and mechanisms are dominant. The reaction to external challenges is for the different stakeholders to coalesce laterally to create informal links and multi functional teams capable of promoting faster and more effective learning (Tarondeau and Wright 1995).

This esprit de corps or culture, when it exists, fosters a most fertile ground for social learning. It is based on the existence of a social capital of trust, reasonableness, and mutual understanding that facilitates the debates, and generates a sort of basic pragmatic ethic likely to promote interaction and synergies among the many potential partners from each of the three families of organizations particularly in shared spaces. This entails a mobilization of all participants through a wide array of coordination maps that may prove much more difficult to construct than is usually presumed.

(b) networks

The addition of a major component of associative governance to the more traditional state and market governance mechanisms has triggered a major qualitative change in our way of thinking about governance. It introduces the network paradigm within the governance process (Cooke and Morgan 1993), and this paradigm not only dominates the transactions of the social sector, but also permeates the operations of both the state and market sectors (Amin and Thrift 1995).

For the network is not, as is usually assumed, a mixed form of organization -- existing halfway along a continuum ranging from market to hierarchy. Rather, it is a generic name for a third type of arrangement, built on very different integrating mechanisms: networks are consensus/inducement-oriented organizations and institutions (Kumon 1992).

Networks have two sets of characteristics: those derived from their dominant logic (consensus and inducement-oriented systems) and those derived from their structure.

The consensus dominant logic does not abolish power, but it means that power is distributed. A central and critical feature of networks is the emphasis on voluntary adherence to norms. While
this voluntary adherence does not necessarily appear to generate constraints per se on the size of the organization, it is not always easy for a set of shared values to spread over massive disjointed transnational communities: free riding, high transaction costs, problems of accountability, etc., impose extra work. So the benefits in terms of leanness, agility, and flexibility are such that many important multinationals have chosen not to manage their affairs as a global production engine, but as a multitude of smaller quasi-independent units coordinated by a loose confederated structure, because of the organizational diseconomies of scale in building a clan-type organization (O'Toole and Bennis 1992; Handy 1992).

The structural characteristics of the network complement nicely the collaborative, and adaptive network intelligence (Kelly 1994: 189). The network externalities and spillovers are not spreading in a frictionless world: they cast much more of a local shadow than is usually presumed -- "space becomes ever more variegated, heterogeneous and finely textured in part because the processes of spatial reorganization ... have the power to exploit relatively minute spatial differences to good effect" (Harvey 1988). So a network does not extend itself boundlessly: it tends instead to crystallize around a unifying purpose, mobilizing independent members through voluntary links, around multiple leaders in overlapping and superimposed webs of solidarity. This underscores the importance of "regional business cultures" and the relative importance of small and medium-sized enterprises' networks as a source of new ideas (Putnam 1993; Lipnack and Stamps 1994; Hine 1997).

Reciprocity, based on voluntary adherence, generates lower costs of cooperation, and therefore stimulates more networking as social capital accumulates with trust. Not only do the networks generate social capital and wealth, they are also closely associated with a greater degree of progressivity in the economy, i.e., with a higher degree of innovativeness and capacity to transform because networks cross boundaries. Indeed, boundary-crossing networks are likely to ignite considerable innovativeness because they provide an opportunity for reframing. In the face of placeless power in a globalized economy, seemingly powerless places, with their own communication code on a historically specific territory, are fitful terrains for local collaborative innovation networks.

(c) cautious sub-optimization, étapisme et bricolage

In the transition period from the present nation-state-dominated era to the newly emerging era of distributed governance and transversal coordination, there will be a tendency for much devolution and decentralization of decision-making, i.e., for the meso-level units in polity, society and economy to become prominent, and for the rules of the game of the emergent order to be couched in informal terms. Moreover, the emergent properties of the new order (be it a public philosophy of subsidiarity, or something else) are likely to remain relatively unpredictable as one might expect in a complex neural-net-type model (Ziman 1991; Norgaard 1994; Paquet 1993, 1995).

This multi-layered structure is something very like a neural net of the kind found in a living brain: a layered system of many signal-processing units interacting in parallel within and between layers. This sort of system can learn (i.e., transform) in reaction to external stimuli, and develop a capacity for pattern recognition and for adaptation through experience. Indeed, the resiliency of the neural net (in the brain or in an organization) is due to the redundancy of connections which allows the information flows to circumvent any hole or lesion. The sort of transversal coordination constantly in the making may not suffer as much as some fear from the loss of central control and the weakening of the national state imperium. This wealth of potential connections is an invitation to the exploration of very diverse workable arrangements – any loose web of agreements to ensure compatibility among open networks will do (Guéhenno 1993).
Canada has chosen to face the challenge of intervening in this complex maze of relationships in a rather idiosyncratic way that has been inspired by much disappointment with grand theorizing. Canadian history has been plagued with magnificent failures of grandiose attempts at socio-political architecture (from Colbert plan of a prefabricated society in New France to the Meech and Charlottetown non-accords). This Canadian emergent strategy has taken the form of a semi-passive semi-active stand allowing the resolution of social problems to emerge largely as a result of self-organization with interventions being planned mainly as ways to eliminate blockages, to catalyze processes that would appear to be unduly slow, or to add missing links likely to straighten the sometime crooked incentive reward system.

As a result, the modifications of the governance practices have proceeded à petits pas, par morceau et par étapes, often in informal ways. This eclectic approach has catalyzed obliquely a certain range of compatible but different principles, structures, processes, mechanisms, cultures, and rules through the land that have ensured a sort of coordination that may appear at first rather inefficient (in a static sense) but has proved dynamically efficient, i.e., capable of much resilience and innovation.

Governance through social learning has therefore generated an ensemble or assemblage of arrangements that lacks the coherence and integrity of an integrated top-down governing initiative since it is the result of the emergence of meso-level solutions to “regional” / “sectoral” problems. In the face of such mobius-web governance, one must be satisfied with effecting modest improvements to the governance of the socio-economy as a learning system. This entails less focus on “big ideas” and more attention to mechanisms likely to provide an acceleration of the process of social learning. Much of this sort of interventions has been built on very simple lessons that would appear to have been learned unwittingly: incentives matter, markets fail, etc. (Heath 2003).

3. **An analytical framework emphasizing mechanisms**

Given the state of development of the social sciences, in matters of governance, one can only build “analytical frameworks” – sets of relationships that do not lead to specific conclusions about the world of events. In analytical frameworks, the “parameters are not sufficiently specified to lead to conceivable falsifiable conclusions” (Leibenstein 1976:17). An interesting example of analytical framework is the supply and demand scheme used by economists: it simply suggests (1) that the quantity supplied and the quantity demanded depend on price, and (2) that price is determined by the interactions between these two relations. As such – i.e., without further specification – events cannot contradict the confluence of these two relationships, and predictions about prices cannot be made.

An analytical framework represents at best a toolbox from which one may draw the instruments to design the specific contours of the governance scheme likely to be effective in a particular setting.

The sort of analytical framework we have used to deal with geo-governance is an amalgam of some guiding metrics like opportunity costs, a few complementary basic principles (importance of true price-cost relations, subsidiarity, competition, maximum participation, multistability, etc.), enabling structures (markets, hierarchies and networks), efficient processes, etc.– without minimizing the role of culture -- and of a few mechanisms to ensure appropriate dialogue,
inclusion, deliberation to help working things through, moral contracts, etc., and some social rules as conventions or norms.

This baroque apparatus has been used to analyze the governance of various transnational, national and intra-national socio-technical systems in a companion book (Paquet 2003a,b,c). It has been used to construct the sort of social architecture and the panoply of ligatures, principles, structures, processes, mechanisms and rules likely to weld together assets, skills and capabilities into complex temporary communities of practice (Wenger et al. 2002), capable of generating both the requisite coherence and as many degrees of freedom as possible. Such experimentation often entails the construction of missing mechanisms linking otherwise less well connected nodes or providing for richer interaction.

This cautious approach – it is worth repeating – should not be interpreted as an abandonment of the quest for principles or rules that might hold the key to human complex adaptive systems (Gell-Mann 1994). But we still lack a full-blown theory of emergence, and a second-best strategy would appear to start with mechanisms (Holland 1998).

Yet, mechanisms are most unreliable links: they may as easily work in one direction or another. This elusiveness is best captured by Jon Elster’s formulation -- “if p, then sometimes q” (Elster 1998: 52). Much depends on circumstances and situational features. For instance, an increase in opportunities may either increase the level of satisfaction of a group, or (if aspiration levels increase faster than the opportunities) generate discontent. This explains why economic progress sometime causes contentment and sometime ignites a revolution.

The choice of a mediological (mechanism-based) approach is however not easy for social scientists still haunted by the dream of grand theories and ‘magnificent macroscopic dynamics’ applicable to all circumstances, this still eludes us most of the time in social sciences. During the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, social sciences have been obsessed by the challenge of building some sort of “social physics”. It is only of late that this sort of ambitious program has been revised to fit better with the sort of practices in good currency and with the sort of results they can reasonably be expected to produce: probing the mechanisms at work that underpin middle-range phenomena and mechanisms of communication and mediation as building blocks (Hedstrom and Swedberg 1998).

For example, we have explored the dynamics of inter-cultural relations through the lens of three interacting mechanisms: cumulative causation à la Myrdal, the link between egalitarianism and envy à la Tocqueville, and the mechanism of mimesis and violence à la Girard (Laurent and Paquet 1991). This represents an experiment in the small that has revealed how interacting mechanisms may hold the key to a better understanding of the emergence of complex phenomena like intercultural relations.

Our objective in this paper is to suggest that this strategy can be generalized somewhat to a large number of subassemblies of mechanisms capable of (1) inducing dialogue, (2) amplifying cooperation, and (3) fostering emergence.
4. **Some subassemblies of mechanisms**

A useful way to probe mobius-web governance patterns might start with four broad components of governance: partnering (P), accountabilities and ethics (AE), leadership and trust (LT), and the nexus of enaction, control and stewardship (ECS) ensuring collective intelligence and social learning. These components are in turn composed of a variety of sub-components – principles, structures, processes, mechanisms, culture and rules.

The families of ligatures needed for effective governance are not exhausted by PAELTECS, and the subcomponents of each of these ligatures are not exhausted either by our list of bonds. However, we feel that the interfaces revealed by this provisional framework are the loci of the major sources of blockages and pathologies.

### Table 1

**An analytical framework for subversive intervention**

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In each case, we have tried to identify the reasons why the particular type of ligature is of crucial importance, what functions the missing mechanisms might perform, and how one might make good use of it to provide the requisite subversion.
First and foremost in the new geo-governance is the need for **partnerships**, for there can be no effective coordination if the different stakeholders do not find ways to work together. This in turn calls for two different sets of specific mechanisms that we have labeled P-mechanisms: the Yankolovich mechanism and the Sacconi mechanism.

The first P-mechanism pertains to dialogue, i.e., the forum or agora for deliberation. In order for partnership to be formed, there must first be a place where the stakeholders can struggle to reconcile their viewpoints and can work through their relation to others and frame reconciliation via dialogue (Yankelovich 1999; Rosell 2000).

The second P-mechanism pertains to the basic conditions for a partnership to work. While the specific conditions may vary widely from situation to situation, two fundamental requirements stand out in a workable “social contract”: ensuring that all parties gain from the arrangement, and that each party is provided with the incentives to honor its obligations even when such is not the preferred option (Sacconi 2000).

The P-mechanisms required (to ensure the existence of a place for deliberation and the appropriate social contracts to ensure interest and compliance in the accord) are often missing. So it will be necessary to design some version of it in line with the feelings, values and moral convictions of all parties – as we have illustrated in our discussion of ocean governance (Paquet and Wilkins 2002).

This entails creating the requisite agoras (information sharing places, shared spaces, consultation/negotiation tables, and the like) for clusters of stakeholders in different sectors or regions. These agoras often suffice to trigger the conventions modulating the interactions among the partners. Such innocuous “territories of the mind” acquire their own dynamics and often generate an expanding set of richer and deeper interactions. What was at first a simple information exchange mechanism at the origin of the world weather network has become the basis of extensive and deep partnerships and binding agreements (Cleveland 2002). Yankelovich-Rosell-type mechanisms would appear to generate the conditions for the emergence of Sacconi-type mechanisms.

The information commons that is usually the launching pad for such arrangements explains why the integration is done bottom up, piecemeal and stepwise. It builds on a perceived limited zone of common interests that may take time to develop and to take hold, and may not be amenable, anywhere but locally, to the sort of loose monitoring that generates the incentive not to shirk.

Quite clearly the creation of loci for multilogue and deliberation is not an instrument that will necessarily ensure that particular objectives will necessarily be met. These mechanisms are only providing for better communication and interaction and therefore for potential accelerated social learning. It is likely to produce an array of new and resilient forms of collaboration but without ensuring that this collaboration will take the form or lead to the results that some of the opinion-molders would favor. Social learning will thereby be improved and consequently collective intelligence, but not necessarily the pursuit of objectives favored by officials.

A recent example (in the Summer 2003) of a missing mechanism being proposed and put in place is the proposal by Premier Jean Charest of a Council of the Federation that would provide a permanent forum for Canadian Premiers to meet and sort out their zones of agreement and differences. No one can really ascertain what may emerge from such a new mechanism of coordination but it is most certainly much more than another layer of bureaucracy – an evaluation that unreflective journalists were quick to propose (Cohen 2003).
Second, one must also ensure that the appropriate mechanisms of vertical, horizontal and transversal accountability and ethics are in place so that the requisite feedbacks and social learning operate well, that the system stays within the bounds of acceptable behavior, and good governance ensues. This calls for a multitude of AE-mechanisms ranging from routine feedbacks and rendering of accounts to ethics-based mechanisms.

Such mechanisms of accountability cannot be solely based on financial accountability to superiors. Accountability is a much more complex concept than is usually presumed. And one has to recognize that only “softer forms” of accountability are plausible when most agents are faced with 360-degree accountabilities and a rendering of account in many dimensions (financial, administrative, operational, etc.).

The development of an effective pattern of accountabilities is the most important challenge of the new geo-governance. In a game without a master, the very multitude of accountabilities has led some cynics to suggest that anything goes. Such is not the case. But the new constellation of accountabilities calls for a multitude of mechanisms delivering feedback and providing the basis for the constant process of construction of trade-offs among these various dimensions (Juillet, Paquet, Scala 2001).

Such accountabilities are embodied in moral contracts that can only be couched in most general terms. Covenants of that sort, though vague, are binding. However, they are binding only to the extent that a battery of moral and social control mechanisms gives force to them. For accountability without feedback and discipline does not mean much.

It is the very multitude of reference or “focal points” generated by the 360-degree accountabilities that makes the collective decision-making process so complex: the guideposts for effective feedback and social learning are numerous and pull in different directions, and yet their conjunction stewards the socio-technical system.

There is much resistance to the very notion of soft accountability and to the deployment of 360-degree accountabilities – and therefore to the abolition of one over-riding accountability – as a foundational feature of the new geo-governance. As a result, very little work and effort has been invested in developing a clearer notion of what they are and of the ways in which they might be operationalized. It is even more difficult when one attempts to gauge the workability of “moral contracts” according to their ethical content. Depending on the reference points used in defining the “ethical mechanisms” (fear of punishment, satisfaction of personal needs, need to be approved by others, respect for law and authority, moral contract obligations, broad principles of justice and universal rights) there can be a significant difference in the nature of the corridor of acceptable behavior (Kohlberg 1981).

The “moral contract mechanisms” perform therefore a dual task: to provide a working definition of expectations for the different actors vis-à-vis the different stakeholders, and a rough definition of the boundaries of the corridor of acceptable behavior. Again, these constraints do not ordain specific results but limit or shape the acceptable outcomes somewhat. They also provide levers for intervention that may be determinant since they construct the foundation for new accountabilities or redefine the feasibility boundaries of the bargaining zone.

One may easily imagine how new consultation and bargaining mechanisms underlining different accountabilities or ethical focal points within the federation or within continental groups might completely transform the game.
However weak might be the mechanisms at work in buttressing the Kyoto Protocol or the weak moral power of a Fair Trade Organization (à la Monbiot 2003) charged with debating the ways in which gains from trade are shared, they would generate an incentive to take into account the full impact of the present sharing of gains from trade, and would inevitably lead to some accommodation. It might have the same impact on amplifying the negotiation space that ensues when accounting procedures do not simply measure returns on capital investment of the shareholders but establish clearly — as la méthode des surplus does (Perrin 1976) — how the surplus generated by the operations have been shared among the stakeholders.

(c) Third, one must ensure that the geo-governance scheme provides the required leadership and trust to shepherd the socio-technical system in a manner that will ensure a sustainable and workable state of affairs likely to satisfy all parties. We have labeled these LT-mechanisms are of two types: those eliminating or attenuating rivalry and envy à la Myrdal-Tocqueville-Girard (MTG) and those building social capital and trust à la O’Toole.

These mechanisms are geared (1) to eliminating he blockages preventing the appropriate degree of listening and open-mindedness to other parties in the forum likely to lead not only to deliberation but to the overcoming of rivalry and (2) to generating the requisite degree of trust for solidarity and followership to blossom.

The first family of LT mechanisms pertains to the overcoming of rivalry and envy that always threaten the possibility of cooperation. We have explored elsewhere the ways in which intercultural relations are corrupted by the MTG mechanism: (1) according to Gunnar Myrdal, cultural differences create transaction costs among groups, this leads to intra-group networking and social capital accumulation that accentuate intercultural differences through a cumulative causation process and create blockages to cooperation; (2) such differences can only be further exacerbated by the “decreed equality” that has become the staple of democratic societies: as Tocqueville suggests, the passion for equality in a world of increasing inequalities can only generate envy; (3) such envy in turn, as René Girard has suggested, can only lead to competition and violence (Laurent and Paquet 1991).

Many stratagems and mechanisms of concealment or sharing have been used to tame these destructive forces, but the only workable schemes would appear to be based either on a certain degree of segmentation and social distance or on the development of a certain civil theology that would allow, through new solidarities and citizenship, the requisite degree of trust to emerge that would minimize envy and therefore the probability of un-cooperation and violence.

Neutralizing MTG type mechanisms at work in geo-governance will require tinkering with existing structures that are fundamentally undemocratic. As long as the United Nations general assembly is dominated by the security council’s permanent members and their veto, as long as major decisions at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank require an 85% majority and the U.S. holds 17% of the votes, a few can veto any resolution they dislike (Monbiot 2003). One must therefore create mechanisms capable of circumventing these formal structures or ensuring that they will operate in fairer ways: the invention of the Summit of Spouses of leaders of the countries in the Americas and pressures to democratize the UN general assembly are examples of such strategies.

The second family of LT mechanisms pertains to the degree of effective orientation one may impart to collective action through mechanisms of respect. Tact, civility and rituals are the foundation on which respect often rests. There can be no agreed acceptance of leadership and
therefore consensual followership unless the roots of envy and violence have been eliminated, and respect reigns.

These trust-building mechanisms are the foundation of robust leadership and underpin the whole institutional order (Fukuyama 1995; Thuderoz, Mangematin, Harrison 1999; Braithwaite and Levi 1998; Solomon and Flores 2001). They are at the foundation of a variety of stratagems used to build system trust – i.e., trust not only in individuals but in socio-technical systems like ISO 9000.

James O’Toole (1995) has shown that all true leadership is based on a good measure of listening and that respect is the foundation on which trust is built. Leadership mechanisms are indeed based on a foundation of trust and respect. However building trust requires the development of routines and practices that allow confrontations and engagements, commitments and promises, offers and requests in an atmosphere of “civility”. Civility is the word Vaclav Havel has used to connote the respect necessary for the appropriate listening by leaders who want to earn the trust of their followers. The mechanisms of civility are often underestimated, but they are most powerful.

An example of the most effective use of such a lever is the experiment with the enforcement of the use of “vous” instead of “tu” in some French-speaking Quebec schoolyards. Schoolyard violence was reduced dramatically.

(d) Fourth, as a matching set of mechanisms congruent with the constellation of accountabilities/ethics mentioned above, one must have in place a constellation of feedback mechanisms to ensure social learning. We have labeled these mechanisms that are the flip side of the accountability/ethics mechanisms – enaction, control and stewardship mechanisms or ECS-mechanisms. They are self-regulation mechanisms that provide the requisite feedbacks at the source of collective intelligence and social learning, and contribute to its evolution.

These mechanisms are of four sorts.

The traditional Wiener-type mechanisms (Wiener 1948) are strictly self-correcting and stabilizing feedback mechanisms that are meant to ensure some degree of self-conservation. A good example is the usual automatic stabilizers like transfer payments that have been used in economic policy.

A second group of Arthur-type mechanisms (Arthur 1994) are feed forward or amplifying mechanisms that generate cumulative causation. This family of mechanisms brings the system beyond certain thresholds and may generate discontinuities. The mechanisms are not necessarily disruptive, for they may also be amplifiers of cooperation and therefore a source of stimulation to social learning.

Often the mechanisms in place operate well within the corridor of normal times, but fail when cumulative causation feeds abnormal circumstances. What is required then is the installation of mechanisms that operate only in abnormal times and are triggered by the system being dragged beyond certain thresholds. A good example is the switch in codes of conduct in wartime.

A third group of Varela-type mechanisms (Varela 1988) are geared to guide the evolution of the socio-technical system through a process of enaction or creative “faire-émerger” that springs from the cognitive process itself.
It contributes to the creation of “new worlds” through articulating and integrating the interactions between the context and the cognitive capabilities as they have emerged from history. These meaning-making schemes change the “visions of the world” of actors and groups and the frames or reference they view the world through.

Failure to put in place such mechanisms would slow down considerably the work of the social learning cycle and therefore the capacity to transform of the socio-technical system. Such reframing capabilities may come from neutralizing the deafening impact of ideology or from mind-expanding experimentation or from the design of new ethical guidelines. Often, such transformation of the cognitive process is generated by the emergence of guidelines like those suggested by Canada on July 14, 2003 (at the summit on progressive governance) to sketch somewhat a code of responsibility to intervene in violation of national sovereignty arrangements when human rights violation would appear to warrant such ingérence.

A fourth group – Wright-mechanisms – transforms the very nature of the game: these mechanisms inject a new dynamics into socio-technical systems, act as cooperation amplifiers, and point to the progressively greater use of more and more complex metatechnologies (like money, charters, etc.) to enable humans to transform zero-sum games into more and more complex non-zero-sum games (Wright 2000).

The new mobile communication and pervasive computation are clearly such metatechnologies capable of elevating the degree of non-zero-sum game playing, and thereby contributing to better geo-governance (Rheingold 2002).

These four subassemblies of ECS mechanisms are at the core of the governing of the socio-technical systems. They underpin the resilience of the system, i.e., its capacity to spring back vibrant and more or less transformed after it has experienced all sorts of shocks. Each of these subassemblies of mechanisms is a different regime of self-organization – from the simple self-correction, to self-stabilization and regulation, to self-re-organization, to self-re-creation.

*   *   *

The temptation to intervene in only one of the four pillars (P, AE, LT, ECS) or to do so only at the most general level (sermons on principles or culture) is very high. Focusing in this way on only one domain and only on evasive thinking about it, enables one to avoid the tedium of designing the assemblage of mechanisms, structures, processes and rules that might incentivise high standards of governance.

For even though in the beginnings are mechanisms, it is not possible to restrict one’s attention exclusively to mechanisms: they are the most important lever but they cannot be insulated from principles underpinning their use or from processes, structures and rules they are meant to subvert. Consequently, the sort of “hybrid governance” likely to ensue from tinkering with mechanisms is often not lending itself to neat and tidy descriptions. What we are faced with is often an “ecology of governance” – “many different systems and different kinds of systems interacting with one another, like the multiple organisms of an eco-system” (Anderson 2001:252). And the result is a sort of institutional metissage that may not be peaceful, stable and efficient (in a static sense) but a baroque assemblage that is in a continual process of learning and changing and responding to feedback (Jacquet et al 2002; Hubbard and Paquet 2002; Paquet 2003d).
5. Ecology of governance and cooperation-amplifying mechanisms

While one may find examples of particularly creative and fruitful confluences of mechanisms that have triggered important surges of cooperation, one of the great tragedies of the governance world is the fact that such confluences are relatively rare. It is more often the case that the required effective mechanisms are either missing or failing to live up to expectations or neutralizing each other. There is either (1) no place for dialogue and deliberation, and for collaborative arrangements to be negotiated; or (2) no way to neutralize and overcome rivalry and envy; and little possibility to build much partnering and leadership on inexistenct trust; (3) or little in the way of intelligent mutual accountability mechanisms; or (4) not much about the requisite enaction, control and stewardship mechanisms for effective social learning. As a result, geo-governance is floundering.

At a time when one is reflecting on the best way to intervene in this nexus of forces, it becomes clear that the only way to be successful in catalyzing somewhat the social learning process is to build on the dynamics at work within the ecology of forces presented earlier.

(a) a sort of cascading effect in the innovation commons

One of the most important aspect of this dynamic is a sort of cascading effect among these mechanisms: when a place for dialogue and deliberation emerges, collaborative arrangements blossom, trust is built, intelligent accountabilities materialize, and enaction, control and stewardship mechanisms materialize that allow the socio-technical system to evolve meaningfully. There is also a “thickening”, so to speak, of this string of mechanisms: they overflow into process but also structural and cultural changes, and coalesce into new principles and rules. Well-designed interventions have therefore an impact (not always conscious or deliberate) that promotes an amplification and a deepening of cooperation both horizontally and vertically.

While we do not fully comprehend the dynamics of this innovation commons, it is clearly at work. We have observed it in the Gulf of Maine and in smart communities; Harland Cleveland has noted it in the world weather system; Howard Rheingold has tracked it down in a variety of areas. New mechanisms lead to a reverberation throughout the organizational space of forces (described in tableau 1) that underpin collective intelligence and social learning.

Some have suggested that one should focus on mechanisms grafted onto the state.

The state has a useful role to play, but it may be counterproductive to ascribe to states the whole responsibility for such anchoring. In modern democracies, the sort of citizen participation entailed by the mechanisms sketched above is a challenge to the usual method of representation: it short-circuits the usual processes through which the collective will is supposedly expressing itself in the polity – the ballot box (Cardinal et Andrew 2001). The mechanisms that promote dialogue, partnering, leadership and the like are the very fabric of governance, but have a subversive impact on the state.

The Economic Council of Canada and the Science Council of Canada – instruments of direct group intervention via advisory bodies – were quickly seen as challenging the views of elected governments – whatever the merits of the messages they voiced. These interesting Canadian mechanisms of communication between interest groups and governments were abolished because they were opening channels of unwelcome communication.
The proliferation of roundtables on all sorts of issues that have fizzled out of existence after a few seasons should serve as a cautionary tale. The same may be said about carefully designed task forces that have simply been ways for government to forcefully express its views through third parties. Neither approach is promising.

(b) civil society as the main source of contestation and subversion

Both the private and the public sectors are somewhat limited by the prevalence of a dominant logic – the logic of profit and the logic of power. Civil society is more unpredictable. It may generate the most varied initiatives rooted in a wide array of constellations of interests and based on quite diverse logics. This very unpredictability prevents or slows down the development of counter-powers, and this may prove at times an important asset.

Green Peace is an interesting constellation of members with quite different concerns that has been able to articulate radical positions and to engineer daring methods of intervention. It has probably had a potent impact on environmental policy in most industrialized countries. Countries that were trying to counter Green Peace – like France – had to engineer covert operations leading to explicit violence. Yet these efforts proved futile.

Civil society partnerships elicit bottom-up leadership based on trust, and are able to fend counter-attacks largely because of their very fuzziness and diffuseness. States are often forced – en dernière instance – to fight them through various forms of restriction on their financing. For instance, the legal requirements for charity status from national revenue agencies – and for the consequent right to collect financial support that will be tax deductible – put very stringent limitations on the advocacy role of such groups. Similar sorts of constraints are constantly generated to paralyze the citizenry and prevent civil society from reclaiming its primacy (Gairdner 1996).

One of the main ideological sacred cows used to prevent civil society from having its way is the phony presumption that if the key social concerns like education and health are not handled by the state, (1) it will either not be handled at all or (2) if it is, it will be done inequitably.

The first contention is disproved daily by the ingenious ways in which citizens deal pragmatically with a variety of coordination problems through mutual agreements and contracts. Ostrom (1990) and McGinnis (2000) have provided numerous examples of such effective coordination in polycentric games.

As for the inequity argument, it is an ideological one used to prevent the citizen from minding his own business by promulgating as a foundational tenet the bizarre principle that “if some cannot have something, nobody should be allowed to have it”. By making egalitarianism into such an icon, and by denying that mutuality can lead anywhere, the state edicts that only coercion works, and that loyalty to the state should prevail over accountability to one’s neighbor.

Yet, this statist argument fails to persuade. And if the idea of a global societas appears somewhat utopian, there is no reason to believe that a global civil society is not in the making. It may emerge par morceau and informally in the guise of a “covenant” but this is the very best way for it to immunize itself from the centralized mindset and control of global state institutions.
(c) centralized mindset versus prototyping

One should not presume that circumnavigating the state means that it will not be generating predicaments to social learning through intervention to promote centralization and standardization in the name of egalitarianism.

Two interesting bottom up initiatives in Canada – a new way to structure discussions among the federal, provincial, and local levels of government around the notion of fiscal imbalance, and a new agora in a Council of the Federation – have been recently dismissed out of hand by the Canadian federal government and its epigons – largely on ideological grounds because of the fact that the liberal constitutional project pretends that only the federal government knows best (Carter 1998).

The first initiative was a way to cast the raw power debates among federal, provincial and local agencies in a new light by examining the match or mismatch between fiscal resources and responsibilities. Many federal cabinet ministers reacted immediately by propounding that a fiscal imbalance could not logically exist in Canada because the different levels of government can always raise more tax money if they need it. This is not only intellectually dishonest but analytically wrong. Any first-year economics student would recognize that the citizen cannot be squeezed separately and independently by any one level of government without eroding the potential tax base of the others (Paquet 2002a).

The possible use of a framework for discussion likely to underpin a reasoned way to recast the contours of Canadian fiscal federalism was simply squashed because any such discussion could only lead to a shift toward a subsidiarity-based governance depriving the federal level from many of its powers (Paquet 1997, 1999b).

The second one is the proposal of a Council of the Federation that has been caricatured by the centralized-mindset tribe as nothing but an additional layer of bureaucracy and a ploy by the provinces to put pressure on the federal government (Cohen 2003). There is little capacity in the Ottawa-based chattering class to understand the importance of missing forums and mechanisms. Raw politics and the commitment to egalitarianism-cum-centralization would appear to be the ruling dogmas. The fact that educational issues, city issues, inter-regional trade issues cannot be resolved if the conversation cannot be carried out somewhere would not appear to be understood.

The lack of comprehension about the usefulness of dialogue is hardly surprising. The “liberal constitutional project” (as Stephen Carter labels it) is predicated on the belief that only the central government has the capacity to appreciate the nature of the problem and to suggest a meaningful solution to it. “Solutionism” or “ultrasolutionism” is indeed the name of the game: issues being interpreted as puzzles to which there is a solution rather than problems to which there may be a response. There is no place for social learning in the centralized mindset: the center already knows best (Paquet 2003e).

Social learning calls for exactly the converse – prototyping – i.e., the development of rough and ready arrangements around which collaboration and negotiations might be built. Schrage (2000) has shown that rough prototypes serve as social media and mechanisms to create dialogue and cooperation, and are the source of much of the innovations in all sectors. Prototypes create shared space, turn transactors into partners, are the platform of much co-development and evolutionary development, and tools for accelerated social learning. Indeed, it may even be said that prototyping is the basis of learning all over the place – from the learning of language to the learning of values (Paquet 2002b).
When Microsoft made 400,000 beta-version copies (the prototype of the final product) of Windows 95 freely available to organizations and individuals ready to detect bugs and flaws or to suggest improvements in exchange for receiving the product in advance and free, it has been suggested that it had created a shared space with this prototype and that it had probably received over $1 billion worth of value added from the counsels of its customers and potential users.

The modern comptrollership initiative under way in Canada may well provide an extraordinary experimental ground for the study of e-government, and a most useful introduction to the reconstruction of Canadian governance in a digital world if it were to make full use of prototyping. To the extent that it avoids the perils of the centralized mindset, while keeping fully in sight the possibilities of the new ICTs and the need to experiment with new HR regimes, the modern comptrollership initiative might be seen as 100 meaningful experiments to rethink the ways in which the federal government might help reframe its participation in 100 shared spaces. This might be sufficient to identify what works and what does not work, the best way to partition anew the public service to face the new network age, and the ways in which the new technologies may help not only in revamping Canadian government but in reframing Canadian governance (Paquet 2003e).

(d) the tipping effect of new accountability mechanisms

If prototypes may serve as a useful device to kickstart cumulative learning, how can one ever hope to trigger a coalescence of these mechanisms into a pattern that will strengthen the required “faire émerger” capabilities?

While there is a prima-facie case for putting in place shared space for multilogue as a most promising mechanism – for it may trigger a massive propagation effect in the subversive intervention tableau – the lack of predictability of the impact of agora-building has led impatient interventionists to search for better tipping points.

There can be no governance without accountability. And accountability has to do with who can request information when, from whom, about what, and under what conditions. One of the features of mobius-web-type governance – effective coordination when resources, power and information are in a multiplicity of hands – is the absence of a single focal point. This entails that there is no simple overarching accountability framework either. The absence of specific and specified links between the various elements of the system, coupled with the absence of a single focal point, suggest that one cannot expect to design ab ovo a governance/accountability scheme. The best one may hope for is the development of some performance report that would help into existence this governance/accountability scheme.

Much can be accomplished through performance reporting for it often has a trigger or tipping effect on the performance and governance of the system. To the extent that agents and groups are inserted into a cycle of reporting, monitoring and rendering of accounts, gaps become more visible, and one may expect such gaps being exposed leading to the development of mechanisms to fill the gaps.

As multiple accountabilities come to be regarded as a fact of life, and soft accountabilities as legitimate, there will be a recognition that effective coordination requires an array of informal mechanisms of collaboration, that trust has to be built, that collective intelligence and social learning are the underpinning of evolution.
Internationally, there has been much learning as a result of the GATT period. Those were the days when mutual accountabilities were the only ones. No executive power existed. As a result, the very notion of accountability (like the notion of property right) was considerably transformed: it became less “absolute”. In such a context, imperial powers are dwarfed, and the possibilities of a contagion of changes throughout the system as a result of specific interventions in engineering some accountability linkage are increased dramatically.

Conclusion

There is no truly general theory providing the necessary and sufficient conditions for good geo-governance.

Many observers have sketched plausible schemes from the most decentralized to the most centralized, but, as we have suggested earlier, these efforts at “grand scheming” are not very promising. What is most likely to materialize over time is the sort of stepwise integration that has been effected in Europe and is under way in the Americas. This is also in progress for oceans and for “territories of the mind”.

Such a “work in progress” is bound to be somewhat messy and always fundamentally incomplete. It is also bound to be only partially controllable and subject to bricolage at best. The fact that it will retain a baroque flavor is inevitable.

As for the chaordic nature of the geo-governance that is likely to ensue, that is in the making, it remains a hypothesis. However, it is one that would appear to meet less and less with skepticism as work progresses (Hock 1999; Rosenau 2003).
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