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Asia, 'Media' and U.S. Foreign Policy

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Abstract:

Most contemporary analyses of ‘media’ and U.S. foreign policy apply a relatively limited analytical framework, usually concentrating on the assumed effects of mass media and transnational information and communication technologies (ICTs). As reflected in debates concerning ‘soft power’ and ‘cultural imperialism’, these also tend to conflate information with knowledge, i.e. the assumption that particular kinds of information flowing or exchanged through mass media or ICTs lead to some ideas and ways of thinking over others. In the context of a post-Cold War, post-9/11 American-centered neo-imperialist world order, this paper critiques recent U.S. ‘public diplomacy’ and related initiatives. The paper goes on to argue that there is now an analytical and strategic need to pursue a more ‘holistic’ and ‘historical’ approach involving a more sociologically rigorous conceptualisation of ‘media’ to include the technologies, organisations and institutions affecting decision-making capacities and daily ‘realities’. Also, through the use of what are called ‘conceptual systems’ and by applying the indices ‘space’ and ‘time’, what follows identifies a number of tensions and contradictions now at play. In sum, through a broadening of conceptual parameters and an explicitly dialectical-historical approach to the subject of ‘media’ and U.S. foreign policy, this paper demonstrates why academics, activists and policy officials might want to re-tool how they address and assess this subject.

Many have suggested that the September 11 attack on America was payback for U.S. imperialism... [and the] United States must become a kinder, gentler nation...[,] must become...a republic, not an empire... [T]his analysis is exactly backward: The September 11 attack was a result of insufficient American involvement and ambition; the solution is to be more expansive in our goals and more assertive in their implementation... America now faces the prospect of military action in many of the same lands where generations of British colonial soldiers went on campaigns... Afghanistan and other troubled foreign lands cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided by self-confident Englishmen... Killing bin Laden is important and necessary; but it is not enough. New bin Ladens could rise up to take his place. We must not only wipe out the vipers but also destroy their nest and do our best to prevent new nests from being built there again.

-- Max Boot, 'The Case for American Empire' (Oct.15, 2001)

In 1997, David Rothkopf, then managing director of Kissinger Associates, wrote that it is in the interest of the United States that a particular kind of global culture be promoted. English, of course, should remain the world's common language. Technology, safety, and other commercial standards should reflect those in America. And, Rothkopf said, the values promoted in a prospective global civil society should be ones that Americans are comfortable with (Rothkopf 1997).

Critical analysts of such views, especially when addressed alongside Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power' and the Bush Administration's post-9/11 'public diplomacy' initiatives, tend to see them in terms of a Washington-based cultural or media imperialist agenda.¹ At least since Herbert Schiller's *Mass Communications and American Empire*, published in 1969, some have assumed that this purposeful 'Americanisation' of the world is a well-established component of U.S. foreign policy. Of course propaganda and related information-based activities have been implemented by various (and sometimes dubious) agencies and personnel over the past sixty years *but*, as I have documented elsewhere (Comor 1996), the evidence used to substantiate their assumed importance in the complex of U.S. foreign policy is largely anecdotal and, conspiratorial or functionalist arguments aside, little has been done to pinpoint their dynamics.² But having said this,

the status of and the resources being put into soft power/cultural imperialism *have* increased very recently and significantly.

More remarkable than this are recent public utterances of the i-word ('imperialism'), especially after September 11, 2001. Echoing the self-assumed benevolence of the British in the nineteenth century, and Rome after Augustus, proponents of a U.S. empire now emphasise America's 'responsibility' and strategic need to disseminate the market system and, with it, the virtues of liberal democracy. Richard Haas, special assistant and member of the National Security Council under the first President Bush, and the Director of Policy Planning in the State Department under the second Bush, argued, one year *before* 9/11, that the United States should embrace its role as an imperial power. America, Haas argued, not only has before it the strategic opportunity to 'extend its control' over world affairs, it has a moral responsibility to 'grace' the globe with its model of 'free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known' (Haas 2000).

Such *public* statements – unthinkable just years ago – constitute frameworks in which to promote what George Soros calls 'market fundamentalism'. Market fundamentalism is a political-economic project whose main planks include lowering taxes, the institutionalisation of pro-growth regulatory reforms, and the selective (and often asymmetrical) opening-up of national markets for investment and trade. Market fundamentalism is, in fact, the kind of world order idealised by transnational corporate executives and neo-classical economists; a world of universal production flexibilities, declining costs, and market access promoted and enforced by the American state involving international organisations such as the IMF and WTO.

Following the Seattle protests of 1999 and then the attacks of 9/11, the concept of empire as America's twenty-first century grand foreign policy is being seriously debated. In the face of opposition to market fundamentalism, some argue that this empire would be good for everyone – even those violently opposing it. Beyond militarily destroying the nests that breed the terrorist 'vipers' (as Max Boot calls them in the opening quotation), through the assertiveness of American leadership, the free market itself will liberate, democratise and deliver 'the good life' of economic growth and a consumer lifestyle to all.³ It is in this context that Nye's soft power thesis – in which U.S. information products

and cultural contacts should be used to promote American values and perspectives in order to reduce international opposition – recently has been officially embraced in a pared-down form called ‘public diplomacy’. The establishment of The White House Office of Global Communications in January 2003, for instance, grants \$200 million a year towards the coordination of American state propaganda efforts, funding overseas advertisements, magazines, libraries, educational programs and other initiatives targeted mostly at Middle Eastern and Islamic populations. According to the recently released *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (better known as ‘the 9/11 Commission’), America ‘has to...defeat an ideology, not just a group of people’ (The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004: 376).

From official Washington’s perspective, U.S. efforts to universalise market fundamentalism and related reforms are not *really* the subjects of terrorist and other forms of anti-Americanism. Instead, many believe that these reforms have not gone far enough and that poor public relations are to blame for turning people against such universally-beneficial changes and, ultimately, against America.⁴ We thus appear to have arrived at an important historical juncture; *one in which an explicit cultural or media imperialist agenda has at last found its way into the Washington mainstream*. But despite this stamp of approval, it must be said that these efforts entail some rather dubious assumptions and, in their implementation, significant limitations. Moreover, many critical scholars following Schiller’s lead, tend to address cultural or media imperialism using analytical generalisations and, indeed, sloppy leaps of logic. A naïve and narrowly conceptualised public diplomacy agenda in Washington *and* the limitations found in much of the critical scholarship responding to it *reflects and exacerbates* a dangerous situation, both for neo-imperialists and their opponents.

What follows is a broadly sketched assessment and response to this state of affairs. It examines some of the assumptions held by pro- and anti-cultural imperialism/soft power theories, particularly in terms of how both assume that people come to conceptualise reality (e.g. America is ‘good’ or ‘bad’) and, in relation to this, frame what is or is not desirable, feasible, and even imaginable. There is, I will argue, a fundamental need to clarify the relationship between information and knowledge; the process through which what people are exposed to and experience is related to what they

know. Through historical references, I proceed to explain that recent cultural shifts in Asia and elsewhere are related to developments that go well beyond changing sources of information and the adoption of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Indeed, a core part of my argument is that a far broader understanding of ‘media’ than those employed in mainstream and most critical analyses is crucial if we are to accurately assess the important but by themselves limited roles being played by mass media and ICTs.

This is not to say that satellite television, the Internet, the local press and other such media and technologies, whether publicly or privately owned, controlled by community or foreign interests, are not variously influential. Mass media and ICTs can play demonstrably significant roles in stimulating cultural change, influencing civil society and, under some circumstances, assisting efforts to make powerful interests accountable to publics.⁵ My focus here, instead, is on media *broadly defined* to include the institutions, organisations and technologies used in everyday life – a conceptual change that helps us to contextualise mass media, ICTs and related U.S. foreign policy developments. It also underlines, among other things, the obvious but often neglected fact that different media in different places and times entail various and complex implications. Rather than generalising the effects of mass media, ICTs and U.S. policies in Asia and its constituent countries, herein I aim to emphasise and suggest tools to accommodate the historicisation of this work and, hopefully, promote relatively holistic and reflexive analyses.

INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

Schiller defined cultural imperialism as the ‘sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system’. Moreover, he consistently argued that the American state represents the interests of cultural imperialism’s primary agents – multinational mass media corporations (Schiller 1976: 9).

There is certainly something to this definition. It identifies both structure (‘the

system') and agency (primarily mass media corporations, but also a country's ruling class and state personnel). Schiller even recognises the role of institutions that serve to promulgate the values and structures of the American/Western/corporate imperialists. But having said this, the concept has not been substantially developed since first articulated more than three decades ago. It remains, I think, polemically useful but analytically weak.⁶ Among other things it assumes the presence of some kind of orchestrated relationship among agents, particularly representatives of the American state and mass media, consciously or systemically seeking to transform foreign cultures but is limited in explaining how, specifically, this takes place.⁷ Moreover, criticisms stemming from students of cultural studies that the cultural imperialism thesis tends to treat the audiences receiving messages as largely inert certainly have varying degrees of merit, depending on the specific critique and case study. The seductive power of Hollywood blockbusters, one's virtual interactions on the Internet, or the addictive qualities of a video game, it is assumed, are overwhelming, while the workers and peasants of the world, if they have access to these, apparently soak up associated messages and values as if they possess the intellectual qualities of a sponge.⁸

Rothkopf, Nye and others influencing the White House Office of Global Communications and related initiatives, while encouraging soft power/cultural imperialism as a necessary tool in the war against terrorism and the task of promoting market fundamentalism present similarly thin arguments. Audiences, they believe, are largely receptive to 'superior' information sources and irresistible American values and production techniques. Mass media corporations and other transnationals are the essential agents of this effort while state agencies such as the United States Information Agency, the CIA, the State Department, and now the Office of Global Communications, fill in the gaps, reaching populations that have little access to CNN or, indeed in the case of some, too much access to culturally offensive information products.⁹

Rather than a well informed Machiavellian campaign to get others to 'think like us', these recent initiatives can be better described as a kind of quickly thrown together stew whose main ingredients include post-9/11 desperation, off-the-shelf references to soft power, and the lobbying efforts of firms seeking contracts to produce American propaganda,¹⁰ all generously spiced with a large pinch of ignorance. As for the latter,

beyond a demonstrably simplistic theorisation of how individuals and cultures come to think what and how they think (as addressed in the next section), understanding what is or is not considered to be ‘legitimate’ thinking within U.S. policy circles goes some way towards explaining why particular public diplomacy initiatives have been pursued. While soft power and public diplomacy have only recently been taken seriously by Washington’s foreign policy mainstream (and funded accordingly), this acceptance has come at a price.

The institutional dominance of positivist social science, especially in U.S. policy circles, is well known and, among foreign policy intellectuals, *the* analytical approach is called neo-realism. The primary unit of analysis used by neo-realists to assess international relations is the state. They generally assess the state as an ahistorical entity engaged in explicit or implicit conflicts with other states on behalf of ‘national interests.’ Neo-realists also focus on measurable resources such as a country’s military and economic capabilities and the quantifiable results of their implementation. Because the behavioural implications of soft power resources such as Hollywood films or Internet networks are difficult to measure, they stand largely outside of the epistemological parameters of neo-realist analyses and, as such, most U.S. officials have great difficulty conceptualising soft power and public diplomacy initiatives that are hard to quantify. In defending these efforts, for example, Christopher Ross, the State Department’s Senior Adviser for Arab World Public Diplomacy, is compelled to reference techniques used by marketing firms to sell commodities:

...in the case of the Shared Values documentaries of U.S. Muslims, we conducted careful pre-campaign attitude and message testing through polls and focus groups – as well as an intensive follow-up assessment of their effectiveness, most notably in Indonesia. When we tested Indonesians for the levels of recall and message retention, we found them to be significantly higher than, for instance, those of a typical soft drink campaign...(Ross 2003).

Even in the policy-making sub-culture of post-9/11 Washington – one in which foreign policy analysis supposedly is no longer ‘business as usual’ – public diplomacy initiatives

have been framed within positivism's limited conceptual boundaries. This, in part, is because their legitimacy (and their funding and intra-state support) depends on empirically discernable methods, such as those taught in a MBA marketing class. Moreover, any attempt to restrict exporting information products containing messages that could undermine the 'positive dialogue' promoted by public diplomacy – such as pornography, violent video games, or situation comedies that (perhaps unfairly) demonstrate the stupidity of the average American – is unthinkable. The only thing one is not free to discuss in the United States (or so it seems) are challenges to freedom of commercial speech.

Washington is, of course, the nodal point *par excellence* of today's global political economy. The historically structured parameters of policy-making in this capitol, involving an unflinching faith in marketing and commerce, certainly contributed to the too-incredible-to-be-fiction appointment of Madison Avenue advertising executive Charlotte Beers (famous for her successful Uncle Ben's Rice campaign) to lead the State Department's public diplomacy efforts. Beers' appointment in 2002 marked the beginning of current efforts to *sell* America and its 'principles' such as market fundamentalism to the world as a kind of *brand* – just like Coca Cola or McDonalds.

Several critical points can be tabled here, of course, including the fact that overseas audiences usually understand this branding of America for what it is – propaganda – and that foreign views of the United States often stem, to some degree at least, from people directly or indirectly experiencing the results of its policies. Either way, buying into American values is not the same thing as grooming consumer loyalty to a brand of instant rice. As one woman in Indonesia put it, 'We're not stupid or blind or deaf. We read your intention not by what you say, but what you do'.¹¹

Not unpredictably, one year after initiating its global public diplomacy program, the United States found itself hated possibly more than ever before. According to the most comprehensive multi-national survey of its kind – the Pew Center's 44-country public opinion poll – most outside of the United States believe that the American invasion of Iraq was more a product of its interest in securing oil and dominating others than part of its war against terrorism. As of March 2004, in Pakistan, Jordan and

Morocco, 65%, 55% and 45% of their respective publics viewed Osama bin Laden ‘favorably’ while 7%, 3% and 8% held the same view of George W. Bush (The Pew Research Center 2004).

CONCEPTUALISING CULTURE

U.S. officials involved in public diplomacy consistently demonstrate a simplistic theorisation of the main object of their efforts – *culture*. In Washington, culture is routinely assessed as the sum of how people think and act. As Bacon, Locke and others assumed, human beings are thought to possess the innate ability to make sense of their accumulated information and experience. For these classical empiricists, and for most in Washington today, knowledge (or what is known) is little more than the outcome of these. People, through their accumulated wisdom, ‘rationally’ act on behalf of their own (and somehow known) interests. As a logical extension of this argument, to change the ways in which others think therefore involves the dissemination of more of the ‘right’ information – information that will enable others to use their God-given capacities of rational thought thereby seeing, at long last, the (American/market fundamentalist) light.¹²

To clarify matters beyond these assumptions, we might begin by assessing a culture (or sub-culture) as a kind of context; one in which behavioural norms, ways of thinking, and inter-subjective meanings are discerned, defended and sometimes challenged. Rather than the accumulated results of information and experience, any given culture (and certainly cultural imperialism) needs to be viewed as a complex process, one in which power is facilitated by affecting behavioural norms and shared ways of thinking.¹³

According to Raymond Williams, the word *culture* itself originally served as a metaphor for cultivating soil (from the Latin ‘cultura’) and, in its original meaning, implies the ongoing development of human capacities. The question therefore that needs to be addressed, particularly in relation to public diplomacy, soft power and cultural imperialism, is *what capacities are being cultivated, by whom, how, and toward what end?* While culture, to borrow from Williams again, can be most generally defined as a

whole way of life,¹⁴ the cultural process itself is characteristically dynamic yet also lumpy and sticky – a process in which power is everywhere and historical structures, as expressed in ‘normal’ ways of thinking and acting, are variously entrenched.

Cultures also can be assessed in terms of their spatial-temporal characteristics. Space and time, after all, are the most fundamental indices of our existence. All human beings live in a place, rely on the earth and actively shape the many spatial aspects of their lives. People also live in the context of time – we are born, we live moment-to-moment in accordance with certain temporal structures and, of course, we all die. Because space and time are both universal and essential, and because different cultures organise and conceptualise space and time in their own radically or minutely different ways, assessing how various social formations construct space and time is an important means of understanding why some ways of thinking and acting are cultivated or suppressed in relation to others: ‘How we represent space and time in theory matters’, writes David Harvey, ‘because it affects how we and others interpret and then act with respect to the world’(Harvey 1989: 205). By addressing culture as both a process and power-laden context involving how space and time are organised and conceptualised, we can evaluate mass media and ICTs in terms of the kind of complex, historical whole that is literally unfathomable in most U.S. foreign policy circles.¹⁵

People are not innately gifted with the capacity to sort out information and experience in terms of some kind of natural or ‘rational’ spatial-temporal mindset. Instead, we all *learn* to make sense of information and experience through what have been called ‘conceptual systems’.(Carey 1975: 27-59) Rather than understanding the mind to be some kind of information-absorbing organ, our selection and processing of information and experience into what is known is a learned, integrated and socialised undertaking. Information, as represented by words or light waves for example, cannot *in itself* mean anything. As Robert Babe puts it, ‘the word “chair” signifies an object or a class of objects but is not itself that object or class of objects’(Babe 1995: 12). To repeat, missing in public diplomacy and many accounts of cultural imperialism are precise assessments of this process – of *how* information and experience are related to, or processed into, understandings, identities, and realities. Without this theorisation, neither neo-imperialists nor their opponents will have much luck in explaining, let alone actively

pursuing, cultural domination or resistance to it. Once we recognise that human beings actively learn and develop particular ways of interpreting and making sense of their world (beginning, most profoundly, in the period known among sociologists as ‘primary socialisation’), *conceptual systems* can be identified as core objects of policy and strategy.¹⁶

With this in mind, we need to examine conceptual systems in relation to cultural capacities and, through this, theorise why and how, at any given place and time, experience and information are ‘known’ in some ways rather than others. Only then can we comprehend the thoughts and responses of farmers in India, workers in Korea, and retirees in Australia to U.S. foreign policy and related developments.

Conceptual systems are shaped by a broad range of media, particularly those affecting the information available to people as well as our experiences in daily life. As with all forms of knowledge, conceptions of space and time also are forged, processed and sometimes challenged through these learned systems. How then can we evaluate the probable effects and wide-scale use of contemporary mass media and ICTs whose messages and applications are assumed to reform traditional notions of the spatial and temporal? Although there cannot be a universally applicable answer (as all individuals and cultures must be evaluated in terms of their own histories, contexts and capacities), I think it is safe to say that while the information gathered through various mass media and ICTs usually have some effect on conceptual systems, the information garnered through early-life socialisation and day-to-day experience warrant existential priority (Tomlinson 1996: 63-87).

At one level, this distinction between the effects of one’s mediated experiences versus mass media and ICT-based communications can be simplified in terms of the direct versus indirect (i.e. relatively mediated) qualities of each. As I have implied, there is, of course, no such thing as a human relationship that is *unmediated*. At the very least, some form of language or, more basically still, some shared meaning is required (such as a common understanding of what is indicated by a facial expression or hand gesture). Socialisation, cultural context and, of course, conceptual systems always are employed in the mediation and construction of reality. Moreover, different relationships are

qualitatively different and a distinction should be made between those involving communications that are *relatively direct* (such as language, family, work, etc.) and those that are *relatively indirect* (such as film, magazines, the Internet, and so forth). At the core of this difference lies the relative (but not absolute) importance of face-to-face relationships in the formation and shaping of conceptual systems (i.e. you can turn off the TV but you can never ‘turn off’ your mother).

The essential roles played by what sociologists call our ‘significant others’ during infancy forever impress upon us the need for some amount of intimacy in our relationships. The quality and quantity of such relatively direct relationships and experiences constitute the bases of our conceptual systems. This is not to say that hours of book reading, Internet surfing and even exposure to U.S. public diplomacy adverts do not have varied and sometimes significant effects on what we think about and how we think (as most students of cultural imperialism also would assert). Instead, it is my view that *our more mediated relationships are relatively limited in their potential to directly shape conceptual systems*.

Relatively mediated forms of communication such as those lauded by Charlotte Beers and feared by Herbert Schiller tend to play an *indirect* role in that they usually have roundabout rather than direct implications. Most importantly, there is little question that they hold the potential to at least open up new possibilities or what might be called ‘lifestyle options’. Again, this is because of the primacy of pre-adult socialisation processes in forging conceptual systems *and* (in light of the work of those communication scholars demonstrating that audiences are active) the fact that information and experience garnered through everyday life/media (i.e. family, work, religion) are generally taken-for-granted rather than consciously dealt with as part of the ‘external’ world. Some awareness of how others live undoubtedly opens some conceptual doors, particularly among a culture’s youth. One indirect result, arguably, has been the formulation of innumerable cultural hybrids.

The lifestyle demonstrations, seductions and new associations garnered through mass media and ICTs usually affect conceptual systems over time and in limited or indirect ways. Not only are there usually material limits to such mediated possibilities but, as John Tomlinson observes, ‘such ...choices are made within an experiential

context that remains, in important ways, stubbornly local' (Tomlinson 1996: 63-87). By this, Tomlinson is arguing that relatively unmediated relationships (inevitably part of one's daily, geographically local existence) tend to prescribe the cultural contexts through which more mediated influences are interpreted and potentially adopted. At the risk of being labeled an 'essentialist', how we live is relatively more affecting than what we read, see or hear in shaping the conceptual systems used to process information into what is known. Information from afar or our experiences as adults can affect how people think and live their lives. Think, for instance, about the impact on American public opinion of films showing U.S. soldiers engaged in atrocities during the Vietnam War or, more recently, the solidarity and support provided through virtual communities emailing and 'chatting' online. But, to repeat, the conceptual systems through which information and experience are processed into knowledge are most profoundly rooted in 'ways of life' based on personal biographies and locally structured, broadly defined media.

In the context of contemporary global capitalism and market fundamentalism as a core policy component, *through their integration into everyday life a broad range of media reflect and modify conceptual systems and cultures*. Media promoting the naturalness or inevitability of globalisation and market fundamentalism have been (or are being) structured in ways that facilitate corporate expansion and control over various spatial-organisational aspects of our lives and environments. These also are being employed to challenge rigidities related to established practices and perspectives, particularly those related to temporal norms affecting production time, distribution time, turnover time, time to think and, indeed, time to organise and resist. As in life, 'there is no such thing as a free lunch' because *all* political economies and cultures are made up of mediated structures that entail costs, including costs related to the cultivation of some spatial-temporal capacities at the price of others.¹⁷

CULTURAL IMPERIALISM IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

'[K]nowledge is not simply information...' writes James Carey, 'There is no such thing as information about the world devoid of conceptual systems that create and define the world in the act of discovering it' (Carey 1975: 45). In line with contemporary U.S.

foreign policy, conceptual systems *must* be reformed in much of Asia and other parts of the world to accommodate market fundamentalism. But given the speed and scale of contemporary capitalist developments, and the relatively entrenched and complex characteristics of cultures and conceptual systems, this cultural project – *what we can, at this stage of the argument, reasonably call cultural imperialism* – is bound to face resistance and systemic contradiction. The history of capitalism is instructive here. Decades and centuries of people's work being relocated out of homes and into factories, disciplining labour to produce more in less time (now generally referred to as 'increased productivity'), deskilling the workplace and trivialising individual and collective skills-based identities, all involves consciously implemented policies and resistance. As E. P. Thompson reminds us in the case of England, 'by the division of labour; the supervision of labour; fines; bells and clocks; money incentives; preachings and schoolings; the suppression of fairs and sports – new labour habits were formed...' (Thompson 1967: 90).

Free trade, neo-liberal regulations, the rise of consumerism, the implementation of digital technologies and other similarly 'modernising' developments are not neutral, apolitical constructions having no discernable impact on the intellectual capacities of the billions directly or indirectly affected by them. They are power-laden developments – forged, reformed or disassembled in the context of particular structural conditions by human agents *applying their conceptual systems*. A fundamental institution in capitalism – private property – illustrates this point. As a state-enforced claim structuring human relations, property is a medium forged by historical conditions and conceptual norms. In periods and places of relative stability, property, as an institutionalised concept, tends to be a shared 'common sense'. But in periods and places of relative instability, disjunctures often emerge between the institution and changing conditions. Reforms, writes C.B. Macpherson, develop from 'changes in the purposes which society or the dominant classes in society expect the institution...to serve' (Macpherson 1978: 202). The Aboriginal peoples of the world, for example, held radically different spatial orientations than did European settlers. The subsequent conflict and near annihilation of the former directly involved the inability of varying concepts of space, as expressed through conflicting territorial/property claims, to coexist in a single political-economic

framework. In the early twenty-first century, we are witnessing an enormous expansion and acceleration of capitalist private property claims into what have been, until recently, relatively unaffected locations and social relations.¹⁸

As Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* demonstrates, capitalist history also entails changes in the organisation of production through the scientific management of workers. The institutional, organisational and technological media used to restructure the workplace and the worker include aptitude tests, the assembly line, Taylorism, bookkeeping, computers, instruction cards, business schools and, more generally, innumerable corporations and state agencies. A similarly diverse list of media used in efforts to shape the structural and conceptual frameworks of workers can be generated from other studies including, of course, Thompson's. What these histories emphasise is that such developments, while unfolding in the context of systemic dynamics, take place as a result of living, breathing, *thinking* human beings compelled to resist or modify thoughts and behaviours sometimes against the grain of established inclinations.

Another example further illustrates this point. In the early twentieth century, the final 'moment' of the production process – consumption – became the subject of strategic reforms crafted, in part, to dampen worker solidarity and militancy through the 'carrot' of consumer goods. As means of generating market growth and reflecting attention away from the coercions experienced in the factory, the mine and the office, consumption, like production, was restructured (Ewen 2001). The medium that has emerged – the institution of contemporary consumption – now plays a central role in contemporary history, including cultural imperialism.

Beginning in the 1920s, advertisers and marketers responded to urbanisation, industrialisation and Taylorist methods of organising production by associating commodities with cultural security, love and friendship. Resistance to an emerging consumerism by referencing pre-existing orientations such as frugality and concerns with community were countered as the institution was reformed through marketing, the department store, the commercial mobilisation of Christmas and, of course, the growth of disposable income and credit. Consumption, like production, thus has been the subject of much institutional change and, in relation to this other media have been altered also. The

overall result, at least in relatively ‘developed’ political economies, has been the structuring of conceptual systems that, among other things, normalise the association of commodities with happiness and a meaningful life. Through its deepening presence in family relations, child-rearing, sexuality, recreational pursuits, religion, and other media, immediate gratification, individualist satisfactions and related short-term ‘me-first’ ways of thinking and acting have become cultural norms in much of the world.

In parts of Asia the urgency of improving management and marketing techniques requires that influential media be recognised and modified. A number of general truths, based on polling and survey data, and ‘scientifically’ supported by the academic sub-field called cross-cultural communication, inform these efforts. Compared to Westerners, most Asians are said to be collectivist rather than individualistic; many have disdain for extreme self-confidence; and, more generally still, traditional Asian cultures are past-oriented instead of focused on the here-and-now. Yet, as a caveat to these, there is a growing recognition that the rate of economic and social change taking place in much of the region renders such pat descriptions to be unreliable.¹⁹ The question for managers and marketers, therefore, is how to best accelerate and mold desired spatial-temporal changes? According to the International Council of Shopping Centers, modern consumption norms, for instance, are being successfully promoted in Asia through, among other initiatives, seasonal Christmas displays and the related promotion of commodified forms of gift giving even among non-Christians (Thorne 2001). ‘In mature capitalist society’, Thompson reminds us, ‘all time must be consumed, marketed, put to *use*; it is offensive for the labour force merely to “pass the time”’ (Thompson 1967: 91-2) *unless*, of course, this time is spent consuming commodities.²⁰

Still another important (but generally neglected) medium of cultural change and imperialism is the legal institution called the contract. As a complex division of labour emerges, various communal, patron-client relationships tend to be replaced by contractual agreements. Over time, these provide organisational efficiencies in the face of multiplying impersonal relationships. And because they are relatively malleable and, formally speaking, entered into ‘voluntarily’, contracts constitute essential consensual frameworks in which to construct emerging power relations.²¹

In light of recent market fundamentalist reforms, often implemented as a kind of social-economic ‘shock treatment’, many workers and peasants have been compelled to enter into such arrangements often with limited bargaining powers – powers paradoxically needed to make such contractually-mediated relationships ‘obviously’ legitimate. The scale and speed in which capitalism has become a widening and deepening part of everyday life thus has dampened the effectiveness of contracts and other strategic media, at least in the short-term. Some of the media used to facilitate capitalist relations – including private property, the price system, consumption and contracts – have been of limited use in promoting universal consent due to the speed of their development in conjunction with the relatively ‘fixed’ characteristics of cultural formations and conceptual systems. As a Marxist might recognise, innumerable base-superstructure and forces-relations of production disjunctures have emerged. This, I believe, is a point of much importance, particularly if we are to adequately deal with our emerging world (*dis*)order – a world characterised by uncertainty, volatility and, tragically, relatively reactionary policies by those promoting *and* opposing neo-imperialism (Mousseau 2002: 96-124).

CONTRADICTION AND REACTIONARY RESISTANCE

In the Pew Center’s international survey involving 44 countries, large majorities in 42 of them believe that their traditional way of life is under threat from foreign influences and thus need to be protected. The study also finds many resistant to quickening time frames. In South Korea, for example, just 36% say they like the pace of modern life (The Pew Research Center 2003). In China, there are approximately 48 million people officially experiencing mental illness. Government representatives admit that more people in China have a neurological disorder than those with cancer, heart and respiratory diseases combined. According to Dr. Xu Haoyuan, a psychiatrist who runs the Heart to Heart psychological health education center at Beijing’s Qinghua University, ‘The sharp increase in mental problems is the natural result of the market economy... When Britain went through the Industrial Revolution, people felt anxious too, but it is much worse in China, which is developing so fast’.²²

Historically and conceptually broadening the canvas on which we examine both culture and cultural imperialism enables us to grapple with questions concerning complex processes in this period of U.S. public diplomacy and market fundamentalism. Without idealising or reifying human resistance, conceptual systems that value tradition and longevity in the face of mediated forces compelling immediacy and efficiency can be said to persist (at least at the cultural margins) as a result of the use and support of particularly affecting media. How do love, anti-consumerism, socialist ideals and collectivist resistance activities (all involving the structuring and conceptualising of space and time in ways that are sometimes antithetical to market fundamentalist policies) persist in an overwhelmingly competitive, impersonal and volatile world (dis)order inundated with me-first, short-term orientations and messages? For Schiller and others, there is no specific explanation beyond some kind of natural proclivity to resist, while for U.S. foreign policy analysts, resistance usually is seen to indicate a ‘backwards’, misguided or misdirected public.

A more precise explanation involves the fact that information and experience are never mechanistically transformed into knowledge, and alternative media – such as anti-status quo organisations, traditional familial norms, the non-commercial uses of various ICTs (all possible due to the tangible support of individuals and groups) can survive, evolve and influence ways of acting and thinking. Far from essentialising ‘the human spirit’ or an innate need for community, the persistence of such orientations largely depends on implicitly or explicitly oppositional media.

Paradoxically, conceptual systems that hold onto ‘pre-globalisation’ spatial structures such as community and nation, and those facilitating sometimes out-of-fashion temporal structures (including concerns with inter-generational needs and the environment), also have been promoted by agents of capitalism, including corporate officials. For example, organisations such as advertising agencies and institutions like contemporary consumption, while promulgating short-term, here-and-now ways of thinking and acting also reproduce values that the production process and workplace usually do not: advertisers and marketers (not to mention political leaders marketing themselves and their policies) typically attract audiences by associating commodities with non-market desires such as love, friendship and community – *desires perpetuated and*

manipulated as a means to sell commodities and promote vested interests. Different ways of organising and conceptualising space and time survive, even in capitalism's cultural centres like New York and Tokyo, in part because predominant media, purposefully or not, help to keep such alternative ways of processing information and experience alive. In Asia and elsewhere, populist political appeals against the incursions of globalisation in defence of traditional values, against the presence of U.S. military installations, and so forth, although sometimes reactionary and serving status quo interests, help to keep concepts such as 'our land', 'our history' and 'our community' present in the collective mind.

Today, a decline in the ability to sustain market fundamentalist reforms through mostly consensual means is reflected in the questioning of some development policies promoted by the United States and many international organisations. Vested interests, through various means including the American state, have been compelled to respond by destroying, re-structuring, or constructing strategic media in order to re-assert their agenda and, eventually they hope, re-establish consent. In recent years, for example, some relatively developing countries have mobilised to compel the lowering of domestic subsidies and improve their corporations' access into wealthy markets. By making limited concessions through the WTO, for instance, the U.S. and other dominant states have been able to maintain free trade as an institutionalised medium of market fundamentalism. As the 9/11 Commission recognises, commerce, 'especially international commerce, requires ongoing cooperation and compromise, the exchange of ideas across cultures, and the peaceful resolution of differences through negotiation or the rule of law' (The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004: 378). Under the banner of globalisation, such economic policies and related media must be interpreted as 'desirable' or 'inevitable'; conceptualisations that probably would be widely challenged if international trade-based organisations broke down. Constructing the consensual framework in which to proceed now involves some give-and-take – acceptable to status quo interests *as long as these negotiations are safely contained within the parameters of the market fundamentalist faith and project.*

Beyond these threats, the most explicit point of resistance is Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. To generalise, Muslim cultures typically are interwoven with a range of

alternative media whose fabric generally resists significant U.S.-led spatial-temporal ‘deviations’. Less explicit but, in the long-term, more devastating for neo-imperialism and market fundamentalism are contradictions involving *daily life* and what can be referred to as the *space-time dialectic*.

Contradictions involving daily life are innumerable as most of humanity is engaged in various conscious and sub-conscious struggles related to the rapid compression of space and time. These involve what growing populations ‘need’ to think and do to survive in a market fundamentalist (dis)order. Emigration to urban centers in search of work and money often fragments essential family and community networks; an increasing focus on immediate needs such as food and shelter simultaneously tends to undermine longer-term agricultural and ecological necessities; looking for meaning and happiness through commodities by embracing consumerism usually leads to a neglect of relations with other human beings and, sometimes, the imprisoning treadmill of debt.

As the lengthy excerpt below illustrates, drawn from an article on the conflicts facing a young Malaysian named Donald Jagau, the benefits of one’s participation in global capitalism involves cultural implications that cannot be isolated from the political, economic and psychological:

Born in the jungles of Borneo, a descendant of a peaceful rice-farming tribe called the Bidayuh, Jagau was chopping down trees in the forest a few years back when he heard an announcement on his portable radio. An American company needed workers for a new plant in Kuching, located about three hours from Jagau’s village... [Eventually, Jagau left] his wife and three children...[to work in] Silicon Valley, where he stunned his trainers by rapidly mastering the essential skills of machine maintenance. The 27-year-old proved especially adept at troubleshooting – making small changes in the machine in order to optimize output...

[H]e now lives and works at the company’s new Malaysian factory. I expected to find a happy man... While he misses the U.S., and talks of returning, he has a steady job that pays decently. He has just moved into a new suburban tract home. His children are in good health, and his wife, also a Bidayuh from the country, is getting comfortable in the city... Yet Jagau is bitter. His experience of working in the U.S. – and for an American company abroad – has changed him. Wittingly or not, he’s embraced the American ethos. He feels no loyalty to the bosses who have trained him. He’s consumed with the idea of joining another American company...

Hearing Jagau complain makes me think about what the company

executives have done. In taking him into their hive, they thought they would get the stereotypical Asian worker – docile, grateful, and loyal to his detriment. Instead, Jagau is a budding rebel with an inflated sense of his own value. How classically American...

Jagau's individualism is admirable in many ways. He's not afraid to stand up to his bosses, and he proudly maintains his Bidayuh allegiances, even refusing to convert to Islam, which would make things easier for him in Muslim Malaysia. At the same time, Jagau's desire to please himself, stoked by his year in the U.S., is worrisome. He tells me that he is weighing how to spend a housewarming gift he's received from a friend in the U.S. The money totals about \$200 in Malaysian ringgit, enough to cover the cost of a refrigerator, which he knows his wife covets because their home lacks one. But he wants to apply the money toward the down payment on a motorcycle. He assures me that buying it would not be a selfish extravagance. With a motorcycle, he reasons, he could get to and from work more quickly and plow the saved time into shopping for groceries for his wife...

I'm not persuaded. The motorcycle, it seems to me, will become the means for Jagau to leave his family behind. Lucy, his wife, never attended school and cannot even read her native language. Kuching still bewilders her, and her dependency on her husband is profound. I recall, too, that before leaving the U.S., Jagau confessed to me that he feared he would find Lucy less attractive on his return. 'I am modern', he told me then. 'She is not'. While he remains committed to her, he sees her as a person of the village, a relic from his old life. Having a refrigerator, I believe, will empower Lucy and present her, to a small degree, in a modern guise, making her more appealing to him. For two hours, as we go from one motorcycle shop to another, we argue. Finally, he decides to buy the fridge, though he seems unhappy about it...

The next morning, asleep in a Kuala Lumpur hotel, I am awakened by the telephone. I say an unsteady 'hello' into the receiver and hear Jagau's voice in reply. 'Lucy is so happy', he says, then adds: 'I start filling the refrigerator today'. For a moment, I want to give him suggestions on what to buy, but then I check myself. Won't anything I say simply abet the very process of Americanization...? (Zachary 1999)

In this example, Donald Jagau and family, seizing opportunities presented to them, are experiencing mixed results. In the context of globalisation, new possibilities and insecurities have emerged. Media such as radio, the transnational corporation, the wage labour contract, Western consumption norms, refrigerators, motorcycles, and others, serve to modify or reinforce aspects of the family's established conceptual systems. The 'traditional' Malaysian, to the corporation's simultaneous delight and regret, has become

a modern 'me-first' individualist. The monetary and consumerist rewards of his success both benefit and undermine his family and community. Economic security comes with unforeseen costs and, for most involved, it entails some undesirable implications – not just personal and, for his employer, economic costs, but societal ones as well.

As for more profound contradictions involving the space-time dialectic, what I am referring to is the tendency of vested interests dominating political-economic social formations to structure, through media and conceptual systems, some ways of conceptualising and organising space and time at the cost of others. American neo-imperialism, for example, is characterised by a drive to control space or, in the context of capitalism, labour, resources and markets. These typically involve costs related to duration and stability. Through the market fundamentalist project and strategic media, change takes precedence. The Roman Empire was similarly oriented towards spatial expansion and control but, through the media of citizenship, welfare, and others, its cultural orientations involved at least some interest in duration. The agents of neo-imperialism now, however, emphasise transition over continuity; geography over history; efficiency over sustainability; science over religion; the 'legal' individual over the 'organic' community; global coordination and asymmetrical access over autonomy.

In light of capitalist dynamics and U.S. foreign policy (not to mention the abject hopelessness festering in some of the world's political-economic peripheries), temporary solutions to spatial control problems tend to produce more entrenched, less resolvable crises. Terrorist attacks and uncertain energy prices, for instance, are disruptive to global corporate planners and to America's consumer-fueled political economy. Prior to 9/11, the neo-realist hawks running the Bush administration saw a new Iraq as a priority. Ridding the country possessing the world's second largest proven oil reserves and the Middle East of the uncooperative and potentially aggressive Saddam Hussein was seen as the first domino *en route* to a more stable Middle East and the reform of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Rather than just access to oil, putting in place a regime friendly to U.S. interests is meant to send an explicit message to Saudi Arabia (the world's largest oil producer) and others (including the potentially problematic Chavez government in Venezuela) that oil must be priced and supplied in accordance with the needs of global capital and Washington's market fundamentalist project.

Moreover, the threat of lower oil prices made possible through Iraq's potential withdrawal from OPEC would, it is assumed, compel the Saudi royal family to reverse its long-standing tolerance (and purported financing) of Al Qaeda and other such organisations.²³ Rather than repairing the historical-material roots of terrorism and reforming an oil-dependent economic system through media that promote economic-ecological sustainability and security for all, neo-imperialist policies focus on relatively short-term strategies that, while *appearing* to its agents to be in their own 'long-term' interests, paradoxically enrich the soils from which destabilising forces emerge.

It is the speed and intensity of market fundamentalism's encroachment on various 'traditional' economies and cultures that brings to the fore stark disparities and conflicts among people living varied lives, employing different media, using a range of variously entrenched conceptual systems. Problems, disjunctures, and even political, economic and cultural crises emerge also *when (relatively speaking) the rate of mediated political-economic change far exceeds established ways of thinking and acting*. The perpetuation of space-controlling and time-diminishing media (such as the price system, trade agreements, military technologies, and a range of electronic entertainments) will almost certainly sharpen already conflicting and contradictory spatial-temporal orientations *long before they can fulfill any public diplomacy dream of a homogenised, 'Americanised' world culture*.²⁴

Use of the American military to overthrow potentially oppositional regimes is an extension of less explicit neo-imperialist policies. Disruptions to the forward march of market fundamentalism cannot be tolerated. Terrorist attacks and uncertain energy costs disrupt corporate strategies. Because of their own historically structured emphases on spatial control and the immediate, agents of U.S. foreign policy tend to promote institutions, organisations and technologies in accordance with these very orientations. But by globalising what is, in effect, their neglect of time, such strategies exacerbate existing problems.²⁵

CONCLUSIONS

America's response to 'Islamist terrorism', concludes the 9/11 Commission, will not be won or lost through military means. Instead, better intelligence and the skilled use of

mass media, advertising, cultural exchanges and other soft power resources must be front-and-center. If the world is to be safe for market fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalists must be modernised and their embrace of ‘backwards’ spatial-temporal conceptualisations smashed (The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004).

Such conclusions constitute another affirmation of Joseph Nye’s pitch to mobilise soft power as a primary means of getting ‘desired outcomes because others want what you want’ (Keohane and Nye 1998: 86). Even if this strategy and the premises upon which it is based were not so easy to disassemble, the spatial-temporal orientations structured into such a worldview and subsequent policies constitute the bases of contradiction and collapse. The success of cultural or media imperialism is *not* primarily represented by the global popularity of Baywatch, McDonalds, or Madonna. Nor is it straightforwardly the outcome of capitalism as a kind of systemic-cultural tidal wave. Instead, cultural imperialism – as reflected by the contradictory necessity to focus on the individual and here-and-now – is being promoted or resisted through an array of relatively intimate everyday media. While, for capital and neo-imperialism, a core long-term contradiction lies in the structuring of short-term orientations, for those refusing to conform the primary concern should be to preserve or construct institutions, organisations and technologies that facilitate collective memories, reflexive thinking and sustainable modes of resistance. Without these, anti-imperialist activities are likely to become more reactionary and, ultimately, may splinter on the rocks of shrinking attention spans and immediate gratification modes of dissent. A kind of deadly spiral of particular spatial-temporal orientations now threatens the capacity of political, economic and cultural peripheries to construct sustained and progressive counterweights to neo-imperialism. Conceptual systems oriented to produce timely results should be structured with caution.

Both neo-imperialists and anti-imperialists will continue to make use of conceptual systems based on mediated sources of information and, importantly, mediated life experiences that are more tangible and profound than either commercial mass media’s version of the ‘good life’ or some kind of idealisation of ‘traditional life’. Among several contradictions is the fact that market fundamentalist reforms have made the existence of many less secure, poorer, or both. To its analytical credit, the 9/11 Commission recognises economic development (and, from my perspective, related media such as

contracts, property law, and others) to be essential in redressing the roots of anti-American radicals, 'A comprehensive U.S. strategy to counter terrorism', it says, 'should include economic policies that encourage development, more open societies, and opportunities for people to improve the lives of their families and to enhance prospects for their children's future' (The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004: 379). But current trajectories, bound as they are to faith in market fundamentalism, are unlikely to deliver this in a shared and comprehensive manner. Without the prospect of enjoying advanced capitalist consumption norms, or when faced with sudden unemployment spikes due to ICT applications and capital mobility, or as a result of sickness and death stemming from declining state healthcare or ecological neglect, or, in the case of Donald Jagau, faced with the insecurities of rapidly changing ideals and identities, traditional and alternative media may well be embraced as a kind of cultural mooring. Pushing forward market fundamentalism thus, in a given place and time, may strengthen established or alternative media such as religion, community-based organisations, unions and non-commercial forms of mass media *but*, depending on cultural orientations and capacities, such responses may be as reactionary as the policies being resisted.

Also complex are the contradictions entailed in the conceptualisations of space and time held by corporate elites and Washington's foreign policy officials. These tend to be reinforced through a variety of media 'naturalising' or promoting the systemic drive to control space (to control organisational and conceptual aspects of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption) and the accompanying neglect of time. With this ongoing expansion and speed-up of virtually everything, the time frame of political, economic and military decision-making declines and, with it, qualitative dimensions as well. While I have recognised space and time to be indices of existence that are relative rather than objective, I am not saying that falling spatial barriers and shrinking decision-making time frames are not empirically significant. Instantaneous and transnational information flows, whether they involve commodity prices, live webcam news reports, or satellite observations of military activities – alongside the quantitative growth of information – predictably affect decision-making capacities. Indeed, as governments, corporations and activists are compelled to evaluate and act more quickly, using more data, their reliance on established 'tried-and-true' conceptual systems likely will increase.

Media that facilitate truly progressive rather than reactionary responses thus need to be cultivated.

A ‘global village’ of seemingly seamless information flows, particularly in the context of a competitive and violent world (dis)order, is unlikely to lead to qualitative improvements in understanding and ‘rational’ thought. We see this almost everyday, not just in terms of the ascendancy of what has been called ‘casino capitalism’ (Strange 1997) but also in light of a general inability to develop and implement policies with their long-term, ecological and inter-generational implications squarely in mind. It is this neglect of time – reflected, for instance, in the sensual and shock-focused characteristics of most commercial mass media and ICT developments – that are the seeds of market fundamentalism’s eventual fall.²⁶ It might be helpful to remind ourselves that, centuries ago the barbarians, in the end, defeated Rome despite an advantage held by Rome’s Emperors over America’s Presidents: in Rome a slave was charged with the task of repeatedly whispering in the Emperor’s ear, ‘you are mortal’. In line with the view articulated at the outset of this paper by Max Boot – that September 11 ‘was a result of insufficient American involvement and ambition’ and that ‘the solution is to be more expansive...and more assertive’ (Boot 2001) – the invasion of Iraq and its consequences now demonstrate contradictions that come with empire. In response to a question regarding how history will judge his decision to invade, George W. Bush responded ‘We won’t know. We’ll all be dead’.²⁷

For all involved, a broader, more historical and dialectical re-framing of cultural and media imperialism now is strategically crucial.²⁸ For Washington, the task is to develop and sustain popular consent for market fundamentalist interests primarily through the re-structuring capabilities of the American state. By promoting media that are far more affecting than those used in contemporary public diplomacy initiatives, the agents of U.S. foreign policy may succeed. In the long-term, however, fatal contradictions will only deepen. To take liberties with Marx, although people – including the powerful in Washington – make their own history, this rarely involves conceptual systems of their own choosing.

NOTES

- ¹ Cultural imperialism can be defined as the sum of forces and processes compelling the promulgation of cultures that facilitate asymmetrical international power interests. Media imperialism, more narrowly, can be viewed as the use of various forms of mass media to achieve the same goal. Both mainstream and critical analysts of media and cultural imperialism recognise that ‘a form of domination exists..., not just in the political and economic spheres but also over those practices by which collectivities make sense of their lives’ – John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p.7. Soft power is, from my reading, largely identical to cultural imperialism but, predictably, represents asymmetrical power relations as necessary and universally desirable in the cause of U.S. leadership and international stability. Soft power has been defined as ‘the ability to get desired outcomes because others want what you want’ – Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, ‘Power and Interdependence in the Information Age’ in *Foreign Affairs* 77:5 (Sept/Oct 1998), p.86.
- ² In addition to Schiller’s work, a typically imprecise analysis is Cees Hamelink, *Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications* (New York: Longman, 1983).
- ³ According to its 2002 National Security Strategy, ‘The concept of “free trade” arose as a moral principle even before it became a pillar of economics. If you can make something that others value, you should be able to sell it to them. If others make something that you value, you should be able to buy it. This is real freedom, the freedom for a person – or a nation – to make a living’ – The White House, *National Security Strategy* (2002) at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>
- ⁴ Prophetically (or so it appears), Rothkopf, in 1997, argued that ‘it is not mere idealism that demands that we work for integration and in support of a unifying global culture ensuring individual rights and enhancing international stability: It is also the ultimate realpolitik, the ultimate act of healthy self-interest... [T]he choice is between leading a more peaceful world or being held hostage to events in a more volatile and violent one’ (Rothkopf 1997).
- ⁵ Efforts to limit news media freedoms, for example, certainly constitute core components of Chinese Communist Party’s political power and, more recently, such strategies have served the interests of Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and other regimes.
- ⁶ Perhaps the classic example of cultural imperialism as polemic is Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck* (New York: International General, 1975).
- ⁷ Several examples of this can be found in Kaarl Nordenstreng and Herbert Schiller (eds), *National Sovereignty and International Communication* (Norwood: Ablex, 1979). A thoughtful critique of cultural and media imperialism is John Tomlinson’s *Cultural Imperialism*.
- ⁸ Having said this, assumptions such as cultural or media imperialism are sub-sets of a more comprehensive imperialist project, that capitalist security and expansion involves the promotion of cultural constructions such as consumerism, and that ‘the corporate economy is increasingly dependent on the media-cultural sector’ clearly warrant investigation. Herbert Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire*, p.61.
- ⁹ This general approach was first applied in U.S. policy in the 1950s-1960s through the mass media-produced ‘development’ theories of Daniel Lerner Ithiel de Sola Pool and others.

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- ¹⁰ Just weeks prior to the establishment of the Office of Global Communications in 2003, the Washington-based Council on Foreign Affairs released a report calling for an aggressive public diplomacy initiative (see <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/22.htm>). Its authors include executives from audio-visual production companies, media consultancy firms, public relations companies, and even representatives of seemingly unrelated interests such as pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, Inc.
- ¹¹ 'Aida' quoted in *Online NewsHour* 'Public Diplomacy' (transcript from PBS television program January 21, 2003) at: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june03/diplomacy_1-21.html
- ¹² One logical and empirically verifiable response to this position is the fact that quantity and quality rarely coincide. More information and experience do not necessarily lead to more or better knowledge. A snappy advertising slogan or a precise scientific formula can, for instance, affect millions of lives far more profoundly than even the most comprehensive collection of erudite PhD dissertations.
- ¹³ This way of thinking about culture as both complex process and power-laden context also helps us escape the tendency to idealise indigenous cultures as relatively more essential, more humane, more 'natural' than the culture(s) of the American/Western/corporate imperialist. Culture is not simply a kind of social environment that is either 'pure' and indigenous (and thus 'good'), nor 'impure' and imposed from without (and thus 'bad'). Culture instead involves a range of power interests and structured influences and this, in turn, compels us to question such indigenous-foreign, good-bad dichotomies, '[I]f we can take anything for granted about a culture', writes Tomlinson, 'it is that it is not a natural phenomenon. Culture is entirely – even definitively – the work of human beings' – Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p.23 (emphasis in original).
- ¹⁴ See Raymond Williams 'Culture is Ordinary' in A. Gray and J. McGuigan (eds) *Studies in Culture* (London: Arnold, 1997) pp.5-14.
- ¹⁵ Those implementing Washington's public diplomacy initiatives instead tend to see culture as something that is apolitical and somehow 'natural' or something that can be imposed. Rather than a complex process, mediated through a broad range of institutions (such as language, the law, religion, educational systems, consumption norms, and many others), organisations (including governments, corporations, unions, local clubs) and technologies and techniques (the Internet, the automobile, literacy, technical skills, and so forth), these various analysts emphasise mass media and ICTs. Critical students of cultural imperialism who tend to dichotomise culture as either natural-hence-good or imposed-therefore-bad include R. Salinas and L. Paldan 'Culture in the Process of Dependent Development' in Nordenstreng and Schiller (eds) *National Sovereignty and International Communication* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1979), and A. Mattelart, *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979). Relatively sophisticated critical assessments related to cultural imperialism include, J.O. Boyd-Barrett, 'Cultural Dependency and the Mass Media', M. Gurevitch et al. (eds), *Culture, Society and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp.174-95, and P. Golding and G. Murdock, 'Ideology and the Mass Media' in M. Barrett et al. (eds), *Ideology and Cultural Production* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp.189-224.
- ¹⁶ Our senses are constantly deluged with information, and from the moment of birth we are engaged in the task of learning how to cope and make sense of it. What is relevant and new must be sorted out from what is seemingly irrelevant and routine. In this way, human beings

learn to cope with the incalculable number of sights, sounds, odors, tastes, textures and, of course, new experiences inundating us. The alternative to this socialisation process – this process of learning how to process information and experience – would be madness. As we learn to process information in our particular cultures and relevant sub-cultures, we also learn to sort out what information is ‘useful’ and what information is ‘useless,’ what is ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’, ‘realistic’ and ‘unrealistic.’

¹⁷ Personal thanks to Ian Parker.

¹⁸ ‘Increasingly’, writes Stephen Gill, ‘patent rights over human genes and tissue, plants, seeds, and animal hybrids are obtained routinely by pharmaceutical and agricultural corporations, including the DNA of “endangered peoples” (that is, aboriginal or native peoples). These private “intellectual” property rights are being internationalised and extended into the legal regimes of the world...’ – Gill, ‘Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism’ in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 24:3 (1995), p.409.

¹⁹ See, for example, Asia Pacific Marketing Federation’, Marketing Research in the Asia-Pacific’ (n.d.) at: www.apmf.org.sg/Topic7.pptfile:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Administrator/Local%20Settings/Temporary%20Internet%20Files/Content.IE5/QDXUEFPO/263,2,Introduction

²⁰ Complementing these efforts to expand and deepen the commercial mediation of culture (and the social fragmentation and promotion of immediacy that tend to accompany it) is the price system. So long as the individual – through the similarly isolating and individualising wage labour contract – has money, she can buy anything, anytime. Unlike the gift economy (in which one needs to be an intimate member of a community to receive the goods and services needed), or the barter system (in which some direct and relatively friendly relationship with another human being was advantageous), money, credit cards and ICTs no longer require human beings to know or, indeed, even care about one another. Through the development of capitalism generally, and fixed prices as a medium of exchange, money mediates cultural developments. Fixed prices tend to fragment communities and money itself becomes a universal arbiter of even non-commodity values.

²¹ Organisations such as the World Bank and IMF, of course, also play essential roles. Leo Panitch, for one, has documented that the World Bank does not view itself (nor most other international organisations) as substitutes for nation-states. Rather, the mandate of such international organisations in recent years has been to push forward the restructuring of the domestic state laws and regulations in such a way that, according to the Bank, ‘a mechanism for countries to make external commitments [is instituted], making it more difficult to back-track on reforms’ – quoted in Panitch, “‘The State in a Changing World’: Social-Democratizing Global Capitalism?” in *Monthly Review* 50:5 (October 1998), p.20. Moreover, armed with the power to float or drown many indebted nations, the IMF consistently demands ‘client states’ to enforce contracts, respect private property and, more generally, promote conditions favourable to foreign investment such as business-based infrastructure projects, the privatisation of public services (including many involving the mass media and ICTs), and the elimination of a broad range of domestic subsidies. The cultural implications of these activities often involve the promulgation of an every-person-for-themselves, here-and-now way of life.

²² Quoted in Lijia Macleod, ‘Pressures of capitalism put Chinese in therapy’ in *The Independent* (May 13, 2001), n.p. Demonstrating the disjuncture between China’s rapid development and its

limited resources and more slowly changing cultural mores is that the ratio of psychiatrists to the populace is 1:100,000, whereas in the United States it is 1:1,250. Article at: http://news.independent.co.uk/world/asia_china/story.jsp?story=71893

²³ Philip J. Carroll, the oil industry executive selected by the Department of Defense to coordinate Iraq's post-war Ministry of Oil, favours the country's withdrawal from OPEC. According to the Business Section of *The Washington Post*, 'Flows of Iraqi oil to the world market unconstrained by OPEC quotas could further erode the cartel's already limited ability to set prices and might even trigger a price war, eating into profits of its member countries. Such an outcome would surely delight the Bush administration as well as buyers of gasoline in the United States, the world's largest oil consumer. With this in mind, commentators...have contended that the real purpose of Bush's war in Iraq was to put in place a government that would break OPEC. Such an outcome would dismay the world's largest oil producer, Saudi Arabia...' – Peter S. Goodman, 'U.S. Advisor Says Iraq May Break With OPEC' in *The Washington Post* (May 19, 2003), pp.E1-E2.

²⁴ In sum, what we are witnessing, both in terms of cultural imperialism and resistance to it, is the outcome of historically structured media mobilised to hasten capital's systemic drive for spatial expansion and the compression of time. Through consumption and its impact on human relations, to name just one core medium, immediate gratification and individualist satisfactions are promoted to the extent that short-term 'me-first' orientations now play a significant role in the common sense of most Western cultures. Consumption, arguably, is the most seductive of variously influential media, emphasising the short-term over the long-term, the sensational over the intellectual, and the here-and-now over the organic and collective. Through its complex integration into daily life, community, and identity, and through the daily experiences of human beings as consumers, consumption is a core node of both neo-imperialism and resistance to it. This is not to say that its ideals and more fantastic promises are passively embraced. One of the more overlooked reasons for the ongoing growth of marketing and advertising expenditures, as well as consumption's penetration into traditionally less-commodified institutions like childhood, spirituality, or humanity's relationship with the ecosystem, is that people often resist. Nevertheless, consumption and other media are influencing the conceptual systems of even those who resist it. Individual and collective efforts to defend traditional ways of life or construct alternatives must not be romanticised and assumed to be voluntaristically 'progressive'. Indeed, in recent years, resistance has tended to be temporally fragmented and, particularly in relatively wealthy cultures, prone to the vagaries of fashion.

²⁵ This contemporary neglect of time is derived from Harold Innis, 'A Plea for Time' in Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), pp.61-91.

²⁶ Illustrating the implications of this way of thinking and conducting foreign relations is illustrated by a State Department memo, issued in the 1980s to justify support of Saddam Hussein as a counter-force to Islamic fundamentalism, which begins, 'Human rights and chemical weapons aside, our interests run parallel to those of Iraq' (qtd in Power 2002). When this kind of thinking and policy is possible in a democratic republic - when human rights abuses and the use of chemical agents are trivialised when applied to non-Americans - and when such thought processes affect the lives of billions of human beings worldwide, the outcome is predictable.

²⁷ Bush quoted in Evan Thomas, 'I Haven't Suffered Doubt' in *Newsweek* (2004) at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4767542/>

²⁸ Moreover, rather than focusing on satellite television and its influential messages, or assessing Coca Cola as a consumer product with lifestyle implications, we need to situate all media (whether narrowly or broadly defined) in terms of state policies, labour struggles, marketing strategies, environmental implications, and others, and the complex cultural capacities and processes these affect both in relative spatial-temporal terms and in the context of the place and time being assessed.

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