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# CAN DEMOCRACY SURVIVE THE WAR OF TRIBALISM AND GLOBALISM?

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*As the twentieth century draws to a close, such events as the demise of the former Soviet Union and the reunification of East and West Germany signal a renewal of democratic values on a global scale. The author here contends that two divergent social forces — the tendency toward parochial and tribal conflict (Jihad) and the simultaneous drive toward global homogeneity (McWorld) — are threatening democracy's very survival. Just as global markets undermine national sovereignty, so does nationalism impede the spread of global culture. Yet each is rendering democracy hollow and meaningless. Privatization, consumerism, and the centrality of the market — the markers of globalization — are causing our understandings of citizenship to fundamentally shift away from the culture of democracy. One of the most formidable challenges we will face in the twenty-first century, argues the author, is to preserve democratic values and sustain vibrant civil societies where deliberation about the common good can both be cultivated and contested.*

*À l'aube du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, certains événements tels le démantèlement de l'ex-Union soviétique et la réunification des deux Allemagne signalent le renouveau des valeurs démocratiques à l'échelle globale. L'auteur soutient que deux forces sociales divergentes — l'une poussant à la balkanisation (djihad) et l'autre à l'uniformisation planétaire (McWorld) — menacent la survie même de la démocratie. Tandis que les marchés mondiaux sapent la souveraineté des États, le nationalisme fait obstacle à l'expansion de la culture globale, chaque tendance vidant la démocratie de son sens. Essentiellement, les marqueurs de la globalisation (privatisation, consumérisme et centralité du marché) éloignent de la culture de la démocratie la compréhension que nous avons de notre citoyenneté. D'après l'auteur, l'un des formidables défis du siècle à venir consistera à préserver les valeurs démocratiques et le dynamisme de sociétés civiles où le débat sur le bien public sera à la fois cultivé et contesté.*

I am honoured to be here in Edmonton to deliver the McDonald Lecture. Canada knows first hand the problems of both global commerce (the elephant is just to the south!) and tribal fragmentation (Canada is not only deeply multicultural in its Anglophone and Francophone populations, but is home to a widespread Native American population as well as a broad spectrum of immigrants from around the world). I trust my remarks thus will have a special resonance for you who, though having had a remarkable constitutional and cultural history, are challenged anew by the forces I discuss.

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One does not have to be Canadian to see the paradox, of course. Anyone who reads the daily papers carefully — the front page accounts of civil carnage in Bosnia or Rwanda or Chechnya as well as the business page stories on the Disney takeover of Capital-Cities/ABC or the Time-Warner deal with CNN — can see that our world and our lives are caught between the antagonistic forces of retribalization and global integration. We are retreating simultaneously into a fractious past and advancing into a global cultural future.

The race to the past holds out the grim prospect of a retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed: a threatened Balkanization of nation-states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe, what I have called (in my *Jihad versus McWorld*<sup>1</sup>) a kind of “Jihad”<sup>2</sup> against every kind of interdependence, cooperation, and mutuality; against technology, pop culture, and global markets. Meanwhile, the push into the future is animated by onrushing economic, technological, and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize peoples everywhere with the fast music, fast computers, and fast food — MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald’s — pressing nations into one homogeneous global culture, one McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce. Caught between Disneyland and Babel, the planet is falling precipitously apart and coming reluctantly together at the very same moment.

Ironically, the tendencies of both parochial local culture and McWorld’s global culture are at work, both visible sometimes in the same country at the very same instant. Iranian zealots keep one ear tuned to the mullahs urging holy war and the other cocked to Rupert Murdoch’s Star television beaming in Dynasty, Donahue, and The Simpsons from hovering satellites. Chinese entrepreneurs vie for the attention of party cadres in Beijing and simultaneously pursue KFC franchises in cities like Nanjing, Hangzhou, and Xian where twenty-eight outlets serve over 100,000 customers a day. The Russian Orthodox church, even as it struggles to renew the ancient faith, has entered into a joint venture with California businessmen to bottle and sell natural waters from the Saint Springs. For years, Serbian assassins wearing Adidas sneakers and listening to Madonna on Walkman headphones happily took aim through their gunsopes at Sarajevo civilians, many of them similarly outfitted with Adidas and Walkmans, as they scurried to fill family watercans. And today, Orthodox Hasids and brooding neo-Nazis in America’s far-right wing “militias” have both turned to rock music to get their traditional messages out to the new generation, while fundamentalists plot virtual conspiracies on the Internet.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* at 9.

Jihad and McWorld operate with equal strength in opposite directions, the one driven by parochial hatreds, the other by universalizing markets; the one recreating ancient subnational and ethnic borders from within, the other making national borders porous from without. What they have in common is anarchy: the absence of common will under the guidance of the law we call democracy. Each eschews civil society and belittles democratic citizenship; neither seeks alternative democratic institutions. Their common thread is indifference to civil liberty. If the traditional conservators of freedom were once regulatory governments, democratic constitutions and Bills of Rights, the “new temples to liberty,” George Steiner suggests, “will be McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken.”<sup>3</sup>

Even Klaus Schwab and Claude Smadja, respectively the founder and managing director of the World Economic Forum at Davos, have recognized that “Economic globalization has entered a critical phase” of which a Jihad-like reaction seems to be a part.<sup>4</sup>

A mounting backlash against its effects, especially in the industrial democracies, is threatening a very disruptive impact on economic activity and social stability in many countries ... a mood [that] can easily turn into a revolt.

In Europe, Asia, and the Americas markets already have eroded national sovereignty and given birth to a new global culture of the international banks, trade associations, transnational lobbies like OPEC, world news services like CNN and the BBC, and increasingly unrooted multinational corporations. While mills and factories sit somewhere on sovereign territory under the eye and potential regulation of nation-states, currency markets and the Internet exist everywhere, but nowhere in particular. And although they produce neither common interests nor common law, common markets do demand, along with a common currency, a common language (English!). Moreover, they produce common behaviours of the kind bred by cosmopolitan city life everywhere. Commercial pilots, computer programmers, film directors, international bankers, media specialists, oil riggers, entertainment celebrities, ecology experts, movie producers, demographers, accountants, professors, lawyers, athletes — these compose a new breed of men and women for whom religion, culture, and ethnic nationality are marginal elements in a working identity. They are both living, breathing abstractions and the new Americans. For America has become a global

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<sup>3</sup> G. Steiner, Granta cited in Anthony Lewis, “A Quake Hits the Summit” *International Herald Tribune* (2 June 1990) 303.

<sup>4</sup> K. Schwab & C. Smadja, “Globalization Backlash is Serious” *The [Toronto] Globe and Mail* (16 February 1996) B10.

abstraction made manifest in the concrete behaviours of consumption and shopping. And shopping has a common signature throughout the world. Cynics might even suggest that some of the recent revolutions in Eastern Europe had as their true goal not liberty and the right to vote but well-paying jobs and the right to shop. It is perhaps no surprise that as the Communists and the nationalists return to power in Russia and Hungary and elsewhere, it is not shopping but only democracy that is put at risk.

Shopping means consumption, and consumption depends on the fabrication of needs as well as goods. McWorld is a global product of popular culture driven by expansionist commerce. Its template is American, its form is style. Its goods are as much images as material, an aesthetic as well as a product line. It is about culture as a commodity, apparel as ideology. Its symbols are Harley-Davidson motorcycles and Cadillac automobiles hoisted from the roadways to the marquees of global market cafes, like Harley-Davidson's and the Hard Rock, where they become icons of lifestyle. You don't drive them, rather, you feel their vibes and rock to the image they conjure up from old movies and new celebrities, whose personal appearances are the key to the wildly popular international cafe chain "Planet Hollywood."

Music, video, theatre, books, and theme parks — the new churches of a commercial civilization in which malls are the public squares and suburbs the neighbourless neighbourhoods — these are all constructed as image exports creating a common world taste around common logos, advertising slogans, stars, songs, brand names, jingles, and trademarks. Hard power yields to soft, while ideology is transmuted into a kind of videology that works through sound bytes and film clips. Videology is fuzzier and less dogmatic than traditional political ideology: it may as a consequence be far more successful in instilling the novel values required for global markets to succeed.

McWorld's global culture is nearly irresistible. Japan has, for example, become more culturally insistent on its own traditions in recent years even as its people seek an ever greater purchase on McWorld. In 1992, the number one restaurant in Japan measured by volume of customers was McDonald's, followed in the number two spot by the Colonel's Kentucky Fried Chicken.<sup>5</sup> In France in the early 1990s, where cultural purists complained bitterly of a looming *Sixieme Republique* ("la Republique Americaine"), the government found itself attacking "franglais" even as it was funding EuroDisney park just outside of Paris. In the same spirit, the cinema industry made war on American film imports (treating films like vegetables, a protected part of the economy and, thus, protecting directors as if they were farmers). Yet is simultaneously

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<sup>5</sup> G. Hoover, *Hoover's Handbook of American Business* (Austin: Reference Press, 1994) at 746-47.

bestowed upon Sylvester Stallone one of France's highest honours, the *Chevalier des arts et lettres*. Further east, tourists seeking a piece of old Russia that does not take them too far from MTV can find traditional Matryoshka nesting dolls (that fit one inside the other) featuring the non-traditional visages of (from largest to smallest) Bruce Springsteen, Madonna, Boy George, Dave Stewart, and Annie Lennox.

In Russia, in India, in Bosnia, in Japan, and in France too, modern history then leans both ways: toward the tawdry global culture of McWorld's markets, but also into Jihad's divisive hatreds. McWorld's zealots bank on EuroDisney and Microsoft, while Jihad's warriors await nihilism and a world in pandemonium. Yet neither McWorld nor Jihad sustain civil society. McWorld's global culture is not the culture of democracy. And if, in the short run, the forces of Jihad, noisier and more arresting than those of McWorld, are likely to dominate the near future, in the long run, the forces of McWorld are the forces underlying the slow certain thrust of Western civilization and, as such, may be unstoppable.

Jihad's micro-wars will hold the headlines well into the next century, making predictions of the end of history look terminally dumb. But McWorld's homogenization is likely to establish a macro-peace that favours the triumph of commerce and its markets and to give to those who control information, communication, and entertainment ultimate (if inadvertent) control over global culture and human destiny.

Unless we can offer an alternative to the struggle between Jihad and McWorld, the epoch on whose threshold we stand — post-communist, post-industrial, post-national, yet sectarian, fearful, and bigoted — is likely also to be terminally post-democratic. For while Jihad pursues a bloody politics of identity, McWorld nurtures a bloodless economics of profit. Belonging by default to McWorld, everyone is a consumer; seeking a repository for identity, everyone belongs to some tribe. But no one is a citizen. Without citizens, how can there be democracy?

Neither Jihad nor McWorld can be said to serve democracy, but McWorld is likely to offer civil society and citizenship an even more daunting long-term challenge than Jihad because the internationalization of markets is rendering nation-states — democracy's historical protectors — increasingly marginal. After all, there is no activity more intrinsically globalizing than trade — not even war; and there is no ideology less interested in nations than capitalism — not even communism; and there is no challenge to frontiers more audacious than the market — not even the imperatives of environmental protection. In a number

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of ways, corporations are today more central players in global affairs than are either nations or tribes. For this reason, but also because here in America and the Western world it is McWorld that we can have some impact on, I will focus here on the role of McWorld and its ubiquitous markets and dominating corporations. For even Bob Dole in his unsuccessful Presidential campaign took a leaf from Pat Buchanan's book and complained about the uncertain loyalty of multinational corporations.

We call the new corporations of McWorld multinational, but they are more appropriately understood as post-national or even anti-national. They abjure the very idea of national boundaries or any other parochialism that limits them in time or space.

McDonald's serves over twenty million customers around the world every day — more customers than there are people in Greece, Ireland, and Switzerland together.<sup>6</sup> Even in an era of downsizing, General Motors employs more than three quarters of a million people world-wide. With more than two and a half billion dollars worth of pizzas sold every year since 1991,<sup>7</sup> Domino's earns enough to fund the collective government expenditures per annum of Senegal, Uganda, Bolivia, and Iceland.<sup>8</sup> "On Planet Reebok," boasted the familiar athletic shoe campaign, "there are no boundaries." Ralph Lauren's designer perfume collection, Safari, also rejects all "boundaries" while a 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympic sponsor was running ads showing its blimp cruising the world, calling for a "global party." Cute slogans, but tellingly accurate expressions of the spirit of McWorld.

National boundaries really do disappear in the wake of McWorld's global production and distribution ambitions. A popular protectionist bumper sticker in the United States reads: "Real Americans Buy American," and many Americans still think NAFTA has sold out their country's labour interests. The trouble is, it is hard to know which car really is more American. Is it the Chevrolet built in Mexico from primarily imported non-American parts and then re-imported into the United States for American consumers hoping to "buy American?" Could it be the Ford built in Germany by Turkish workers for export to the Nigerian market? Or is it the Toyota Camry conceived and designed at Toyota's Newport Beach Design Centre, built by American workers at the Georgetown, Kentucky Toyota plant from parts which, other than the engine and drive train, are almost exclusively American, and test driven at Toyota's 12,000 acre Arizona proving ground? Back in 1977, the Honda Accord

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<sup>6</sup> A.E. Serwer, "McDonald's Conquers the World" *Fortune* (17 October 1994) 101-16.

<sup>7</sup> Hoover, *supra* note 5 at 243.

<sup>8</sup> *The Economist Book of Vital Statistics* (New York: Times Books, 1990) at 136.

had no American parts. Today it is eighty percent American — a very “civic” product indeed.<sup>9</sup> So what does it mean to “buy American?”

No wonder so many corporations refuse to define themselves by reference to the origin of their labour force at all. In the global economy, neither capital nor work nor material are the determining factors, but rather what economist Harvey Elliot has called “the optimal relationship between these three.”<sup>10</sup> This pushes us into a world where information, communication, and administration intersect and where traditional nation-states can exert little control even where they have not yet acquiesced to deregulatory ideology and minimal state political philosophy. Many observers now accept as normal the phrase the “virtual corporation,” yet when American economist Robert Kuttner first used it a few years ago it seemed novel. It is defined, as Kuttner suggested, by a company that “is no longer a physical entity with a stable mission or location but a shifting set of temporary relationships connected by computer network, phone and fax.”<sup>11</sup> Tom Peters’ managerial hyperbole is only a little ridiculous when it asserts that the “definition of every product and service is changing. Going soft, softer, softest. Going fickle, ephemeral, fashion ... [A]n explosion of new competitors ... and the everpresent new technologies leading the way.”<sup>12</sup>

What do these changes do to traditional understandings of national sovereignty — the authority a democratic people supposedly exercise over the shaping of their communities and their lives? John Pocock asks whether the subordination of the sovereign community of citizens to the international operation of post-industrial market forces is a good or bad step in the architecture of post-modern politics.<sup>13</sup> Can the reply be anything other than: “Bad! A calamity not just for nations but for citizens!”? The constraints of markets on democracy may finally be even worse than the constraints of tribalism and religious fundamentalism, for the bonds of the market are invisible, even comfortable, accompanied by a pleasant rhetoric of private choice and personal consumer freedom. “We give you liberty!” proclaims an

<sup>9</sup> D.P. Levin, “Honda Star gets Another Sequel” *The New York Times* (27 August 1993) D3.

<sup>10</sup> H. Elliot, “Flying Foreign” *The Economist: The World in 1993* (25 December 1993/7 January 1994) 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> R. Kuttner, “Brave New Corporate Workplace of the Future” *The Berkshire Eagle* (1 August 1983) E1.

<sup>12</sup> T. J. Peters, *Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nano-second Nineties* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) at 6.

<sup>13</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, “The Ideal of Citizenship Since Classical Times” *Queen’s Quarterly* (Spring 1992) at 55.

advertisement for a mid-Western bake potato chain, “because we give you the choice of toppings!”

However “sovereign” consumers may feel, voting dollars or yen, as the case may be, is not the same as voting a common political will. Market relations are simply not a surrogate for social relations. The problem is not with capitalism *per se*, it is with the notion that capitalism *alone* can respond to every human need, can provide solutions to *all* our problems.

There is today a disastrous confusion between the moderate and mostly well-founded claim that flexibly regulated markets remain the most efficient instruments of economic productivity and wealth accumulation, and the zany, overblown claim that naked, wholly unregulated markets are the sole means by which we can produce and distribute everything we care about: from durable goods to spiritual values, from capital development to social justice; from profitability today to sustainable environments into the next century; from Disneyland kiddie-play to serious culture; from private wealth to the essential common weal. This second claim has moved some people to insist that goods as diverse and obviously public as education, culture, penology, full employment, social welfare, and ecological survival be handed over to the profit sector for arbitration and disposal. The U.S. army has even contemplated farming out perimeter security at its American bases, while prisons are being privatized.<sup>14</sup> Is capital punishment next? “Outsourcing” the electric chair? It probably would save money.

Partnership between government and citizens is one thing; a modest devolution of power to state and municipal government may improve the efficiency of the private sector. But wholesale privatization — and privatization has become the magic potion of those who would restore the antique notion of the market’s “invisible hand” — is a recipe for the destruction of our civic identity and constitutional faith, of our communities and our commonality, of our very sovereignty — the power to shape our common lives. Privatization is not about the limitation of government, it is about the termination of democracy. For the “governments” being dismantled in the name of British democracy or the German market or American liberties is actually the only common power the British or Germans or Americans possess to protect their common liberties and advance their common interests. Its destruction does less to emancipate us than to secure our servitude to global corporatism and consumer materialism. Conservatives like Bill Bennett and Pat Buchanan have now begun to recognize that this is not simply a fantasy of the old left but a stark reality of the new global economy.

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<sup>14</sup> A. Ramirez, “Privatizing America’s Prisons” *The New York Times* (14 August 1994) K1.

For markets are simply not designed to do the things democratic communities can do. Markets give us private rather than public modes of discourse. They allow us as consumers to tell producers what we want, but they cannot tell us who we are; and they prevent us from speaking as citizens to one another about the social consequences of our private consumer choices. As a consumer, I may want a car that goes 130 miles per hour, but as a citizen I may vote for a reasonable speed limit that will conserve gasoline and secure safer streets. There is no contradiction there, that is just the difference between the consumer and the citizen — between the consumer *in me* and the citizen *in me*. Hence, as a private consumer, I may say, “I want a pair of expensive running shoes,” but as a citizen I may say, “How about better athletic facilities in our public schools?” As a consumer I may pay to see violence-saturated Hollywood thrillers and listen to misogynist, woman-hating rap lyrics, but as a citizen I may demand warning labels that help us and our children make prudent moral judgments.

The point is that markets preclude “We” thinking and “We” action of any kind, trusting the power of aggregated individual choices (the famous “invisible hand”) to somehow secure the common good. Only it does not work that way. The quest by consumers for private satisfaction and by producers for private profit simply does not add up to the satisfaction for citizens of their public interests.

Markets also are contractual rather than communitarian, which means they stroke our solitary egos but leave unsatisfied our yearning for community. They offer durable goods and fleeting dreams but not a common identity or a collective membership — and so they can open the way to more savage and undemocratic forms of identity like tribalism. One of the tragic lessons of the twentieth century, rehearsed in Weimar Germany and post-communist Serbia and South Central L.A. alike, is simply this: If we cannot secure democratic communities to express our need for belonging, undemocratic communities will quickly offer themselves to us. From them we will get the warm fraternity and membership we look for in community, but at the expense of liberty and equality. Gangs offer identity but do not define open communal neighbourhoods; clubs are not civic associations; tribes are not democratic social movements. But without the latter, we are bound to get the former.

Is there then some American or Canadian or even some transnational, democratic “We” to be drawn from all the consumer “me’s” and corporate “I’s” that comprise the global economy? Markets give us the goods, but not the lives we want; prosperity for some, but despair for many and dignity for none. The world’s twenty-six thousand or more international non-governmental associations are no match for the Fortune 500 multinational corporations of

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McWorld. The institutions that are our nations' most formidable expression of sovereignty may no longer be able to rival McWorld's power: What is the Pentagon compared to Disneyland? Can the French government really overcome Hollywood by limiting imports? What is the United Nations in the face of the trillion dollar-a-day global currency market?<sup>15</sup>

Markets do not even know how to regulate themselves to survive, let alone nurture democratic civic communities. They are unable to produce the kinds of regulatory antibodies needed in order to protect themselves from the self-generating viruses of monopoly and infectious greed. Left to their own devices, market-place companies downsize until they have, in effect, fired not only their employees but their consumers as well — for as Henry Ford understood, employees turn out to be one and the same as consumers.

That is the paradox of McWorld. It cannot survive the conditions it inevitably tends to create unless it is checked and regulated by civic and democratic forces it inevitably tends to destroy. It needs democracy more than democracy needs it, yet while democracy cultivates free markets, markets often fail to cultivate democracy. It is no accident that the world's last great Communist political system, without surrendering an iota of its totalitarian control, has become the world's fastest growing market economy: yes, I mean China.

In the spring of 1996, Pepsi-Cola's director of East European operations allowed how "we think we can survive and prosper whatever regime is going to be here (in Russia)." Government may turn the clock back on democracy, but "whatever happens" they won't "turn back the clock on consumers and deny them modern, Western brands." No, indeed. In fact, pleasing consumers and inundating them with Western brands has become a favourite ploy of governments wanting to retain dictatorial control. Consumerism may turn out to be to the new dictatorships what bread and circuses were to the Roman Empire — seductive diversions that give the appearance of freedom (shopping) without its substance (self-government). That certainly is the lesson from China.

Advocates of privatization and markets have, of course, insisted that markets not only reinforce democracy, but are themselves inherently and deeply democratic. This is again to confuse, as advocates of Milton Friedman's and Frederick Hayek's *laissez-faire* economics often do, the private choices made by consumers with civic choices made by citizens. It is to believe that the liberty to choose from twenty-seven varieties of aspirin and the liberty to choose an affordable health system to which everyone will have full and equal access are the same.

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<sup>15</sup> T. L. Friedman, "When Money Talks" *The New York Times* (24 July 1994) E3.

There are at least three basic errors that make up what we might call the myth of markets. The first is that of equating private consumer choices with common civic choices, a distinction I already have elaborated in some detail. Economic choices are private — about my needs and desires — whereas political choices are public — about the nature of our public goods, the common weal. In the marketplace or in the mall the only relevant question is: “What do I want?” At the voting booth the question always is: “What’s good for us? What do we want?”

The second and third errors are still more fundamental for they assume that consumer choices are fully autonomous and authentic — a reflection of independently established wants and needs that markets do no more than dutifully serve. They assume that markets are genuinely free and elastic, paragons of competition offering an equal playing field to roughly commensurable rivals. Their insistence on the autonomy of consumers permits producers to talk like populists. If you dislike the homogeneity of McWorld, don’t blame its purveyors, indict its consumers they say. If popular taste is plastic, popular standards meretricious, and popular consumption homogenizing, impeach the populace whose choices are determinative, not the corporations whose profit depend solely on their faithfully serving that populace. If French consumers prefer American films and German shoppers like to eat under the golden arches of McDonald’s, it is not producers but democracy itself that apparently embraces the vulgarities of McWorld.

This logic assumes that the quarter-of-a-trillion dollar annual advertising expenditures of these same corporations is but window dressing; that consumer tastes are established in a vacuum rather than through what a recent *New Yorker* essay called “The Science of Shopping,”<sup>16</sup> that the desires and wants on the basis of which markets prosper are not themselves engendered and shaped by those very same markets; that these new masters of the shopping science with their strategically placed goods and orchestrated store atmospherics and consumer surveys are but beneficent efforts “to find out what people want.”

The truth is, as industrial manufacturing is internationalized, the industrial sector itself is being transformed by the interactive character of buying and selling in McWorld’s ever softer markets. Hard consumer goods are becoming linked with soft technologies rooted in information, entertainment, and lifestyle and products are emerging that blur the line between goods and services.

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<sup>16</sup> M. Gladwell, “A Reporter at Large: The Science of Shopping” *The New Yorker* (4 November 1996) 66.

With the saturation of traditional markets and the multiplication of competitors for the same consumer markets, capitalism can no longer afford just to serve real needs and wants at all. In the ancient capitalist economy, products were manufactured and sold for profit to meet the demand of consumers who made their needs known through the market. In the new postmodern capitalist economy, needs are manufactured to meet the supply of producers who market products through promotion, spin, packaging, advertising, and cultural persuasion. Whereas the old economy, mirroring hard power, dealt in hard goods aimed at the body, the new economy, mirroring soft power, depends on soft services aimed at the mind and spirit. “I don’t want customers to think they are walking into a clothing store,” says DKNY designer Donna Karan, “I want them to think that they are walking into an environment, that I am transforming them out of their lives and into an experience, that it’s not about clothes, it’s about who they are as people.”<sup>17</sup>

Where once the body more or less spoke up for its natural needs, today the mind and the spirit must be manipulated into wanting and needing all kinds of things of which neither the body nor the autonomous mind could possibly have dreamed. Possessing a perfectly good long-playing record collection, who needs compact discs? Why should millions of music lovers replace perfectly good vinyl collections for a marginal, indeed, quite a controversial, improvement in sound or size? Next year the industry will introduce still another format that will render compact discs obsolete. The compulsory obsolescence of what appear as perfectly adequate technologies may be sold to us as serving newly invented “needs” — the “need for digital sound,” for example — but rather than paying tribute to human progress, it is much more often just another expression of market greed.

The targeting of mind and spirit by corporations seeking to transform how humans think about “need” leads material markets into strange territory. As it assimilates and transforms so many other ideologies, post-modern capitalism has not shied away from assimilating and transforming religion. If Madonna can play erotic games with a crucifix, why shouldn’t Mazda and American Express work to acquire some commercial purchase on the Holy Spirit. “Trucks,” intones a gravelly-voiced pitchman in a 1993 Mazda television ad, “are a spiritual thing for me.” The new Mazda pickup is “like a friend — a friend, that is, with a new V-6 and a soul to match.”

To create a global demand for American products like cigarettes, soft drinks, and running shoes — for which there can be said to be no indigenous natural “need” (seventy per cent of the shoes sold world-wide are athletic shoes; seventy per cent of the world’s people are as far as I know not athletes!) — needs must

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* at 74.

be globally manufactured. For America's largest brand-name corporations like Coca-Cola, Marlboro, Nike, Hershey, Levis, Pepsi, Wrigley, or McDonald's, selling American products means selling America: its popular culture and putative prosperity, its ubiquitous imagery and software and, thus, its very soul. Merchandising is as much about symbols as about goods and sells not life's necessities but life's styles. The style marketed is uniquely American yet potentially global since, for the corporations in quite a literal sense, "we are the world." To the world that we are — or would be — America offers an incoherent and contradictory yet seductive style that is less "democratic" than physical-culture youthful, rich urban, austere cowboy, Hollywood glamorous, Garden of Eden unbounded, good-willed to a fault, socially aware, politically correct, mall pervaded and ironically often dominated by images of black ghetto life — black, however, as in Michael Jordan-hip and rapper-cool rather than as in welfare-poor miserable and prison-bound squalid.

Because sales depend less on autonomous choices by independent buyers than on the manipulated habits and shaped behaviours of media-immersed consumers, those who control markets cannot help but address behaviours and attitudes. Tea drinkers are improbable prospects for Coca Cola sales, so when it entered the Asian market, the Coca Cola company quite literally found it necessary to declare war on Indian tea culture (see the Coca Cola 1992 Corporate Report appropriately titled "Worlds of Opportunity").<sup>18</sup> Long-lunch eat-at-home traditions obstructed the development of fast-food franchises and successful fast-food franchises inevitably undermined Mediterranean long-lunch eat-at-home rituals, inadvertently corrupting "family values" as thoroughly as Hollywood action movies ever have done. For fast food is about accommodating a culture in which work is central and social relationship secondary, in which fast trumps slow and simple beats complex. Highly developed public transportation systems attenuate automobile sales and depress steel, cement, rubber, and petroleum profits. Agricultural lifestyles (rise at daylight, work all day, to bed at dusk) may be inhospitable to television watching. People uninterested in spectator sports buy fewer athletic shoes. The moral logic of austerity that might appeal to believing Christians or secular ascetics gets in the way of the economic logic of consumption. Preventative health campaigns hurt tobacco sales.

It is striking how so many of the new technological gadgets marketed as innovative ways of "liberating" us from the office and workplace actually

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<sup>18</sup> M. Pendergrast, "A Brief History of Coca-Colonization" *The New York Times* (5 August 1993) F13.

imprison us in an expanding zone of work. Do fax machines, cellular phones, and home computer modems free us up or tie us down with electronic tentacles that make work ubiquitous? Even the Walkman, that invitation to bring music into the leisure and work worlds, is in truth a technology that artificially enhances the need to buy cassettes for twenty-four-hour-a-day listening even as it turns listening from a social into a solitary occupation and links it to other consumption enhancing activities like jogging. Walkmans sell not just music but cassettes, and not only cassettes but athletic shoes as well; just as athletic shoes sell Walkmans and cassettes. You can take a walk in the woods (if you can find some woods) in a comfortable pair of old shoes and tune into nature's music for free. Jogging to a Whitney Houston film soundtrack earns big profits for McWorld, selling shoes, tapes, electronics, and a film all at once.

Can responsible corporate managers then be anything other than irresponsible citizens in McWorld's new era of sovereign consumer markets? There is no conspiracy here, only an inadvertent triumph of the logic of private profits over the logic of public goods. To sell all that McWorld has to sell, sometime citizens must be made over into full time consumers, Germans and Americans and Mexicans must be retooled as universal shoppers. That's why in place of our old town squares and multi-use urban downtowns we now have enclosed malls that offer nothing but commerce. Malls are the theme parks of McWorld — no community theatre, no childcare centre, no Hyde Park Speakers' Corner, no church or synagogue, no town hall, no grange, no schoolhouse — just one store after another and the demand that we shed every identity except that of consumer, that we shed our sociability and our citizenship for the solitary pleasures of shopping. Nowadays, malls don't even pretend to sell "necessities" (no dry cleaner's, no hardware store, no grocery shop). They concentrate on theme boutiques and gadget outlets like *The Disney Store*, *Brookstone's*, *The Sharper Image*, and *The Nature Store* which sell nothing you want or need ... until you get inside and realize you "need" everything they offer!

All of this speaks only to the illusory autonomy of consumers. The third and final error of those who mythologize markets is to pretend that the market in which consumers shop is any more free than the shoppers themselves. Ironically, approximately egalitarian capitalist competition began only to exist under the watchful eye of interventionist, Keynesian democratic governments that have used regulation and law to assure a competitive even-handedness which markets are incapable of achieving on their own. By the same token, in this era of deregulation and government downsizing, the competitive vitality of markets has never been in great jeopardy. Particularly in the newly sovereign market domain defined by information, entertainment, and telecommunications (the "infotainment telesector"), conglomeration and monopoly are becoming the rule.

The Walt Disney Company has now acquired Capital Cities/ABC for \$19 billion, while Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation has bid for CNN, Westinghouse has made an offer for CBS, and British Telecom is poised to merge with MCI to form one of the world's largest telecommunications corporations. "Every country has a telecommunications company," boasts the ad announcing the BT/MCI merger: "Now the planet will have one too."<sup>19</sup> In the old days, that was called monopoly. Now it goes by the name synergy.

Where just a few dozen years ago, the world's media were owned by thousands and thousands of local companies, today just twenty-three own a majority of the holdings with a half dozen having achieved global prominence.<sup>20</sup> These include the Bertelsmann company, which has its own Broadway location to rival Walt Disney's new presence in New York. What "synergy" means is that new sector conglomerates like Disney own not just film studios and theme parks, but trade mark tie-ins, publishing houses, television stations, sports teams, and newspapers. One insider gushed about how, in taking over ABC, Disney had become not just a world class but "a universe class operation."

Disney simply has followed the modern corporate imperative, which is not to pursue a fair market share and look out for the interests of equal competition, but to own deep and own wide. If you own movie studios, buy book companies and theme parks and get into the education business (the Disney Institute) and build "newtowns" where people can live your product (Disney's Florida newtown "Celebration").<sup>21</sup> If you own television stations, buy content like sports teams (Paramount acquired Simon and Schuster which owned Madison Square Garden and the New York Knicks and Rangers, but not for long because Viacom, the cable company, then bought Paramount and spun off the teams — big fish eaten by even bigger fish).<sup>22</sup>

The pattern is the same everywhere: if you own hardware, buy software (Japan's Sony swallowing Columbia films and thus taking a big, if apparently indigestible, bite of Hollywood). If you own software, buy television networks: Bill Gates of Microsoft creating MS/NBC and buying the rights to museum collection art works (the Barnes Collection, the Ansel Adams photographs) for monopoly use on CD ROM, and this after he had bought into the new creative team Dreamworks started by ex-Disney executive Jeffrey Katzenberg, record

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<sup>19</sup> This new merger is now in question.

<sup>20</sup> B. H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 4th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) at 21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Barber, *supra* note 1 at 135.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* at 144.

producer mogul David Geffen, and mega-hit director Steven Spielberg. So who is kidding whom when they claim that the real object of McWorld's markets is more variety, more choice for consumers?

Poised on the edge of the twenty-first century, Disney and McWorld's other telecommunication conglomerates seem to yearn for a nineteenth century world of monopoly, before anti-trust laws were invented. Michael Eisner is no Rockefeller, and Bill Gates is no Vanderbilt, and Steven Spielberg is no Carnegie: but that is only because Eisner, Gates, and Spielberg are far more powerful. Are they really the harbingers of new realms of liberty, these titans who exercise an inadvertent sovereignty not just over oil, steel, and railroads — the muscles of our post-industrial world's body — but over pictures, information, and ideas, the very sinews of the post-modern soul?

McWorld does little for consumer autonomy, less for competition, and nothing at all for the kinds of liberty and pluralism essential to political freedom. But perhaps still more dangerous to liberty, McWorld has encroached on and helped push aside public space. Its most alarming achievement — and here it has been mightily assisted by the anti-governmental privatizing ideology that has dominated politics in recent years — has been its contribution to the eradication of civic space.

Yet once upon a time, between the oppositional poles of government and market, there was a vital middling choice. Though in eclipse today, the powerful imagery of civil society held the key to America's early democratic energy and civic activism and, for British and Continental political theorists, represented a mediating space between the state and the individual. It was the great virtue of civil society that it shared with government a sense of publicity and a regard for the general good and the commonweal, yet (unlike government) made no claim to exercise a monopoly on legitimate coercion. Rather, it was a voluntary "private" realm devoted to public goods. Civil society is the domain that can potentially mediate between the state and the private sector, between the identity of an exclusive tribe and the identity of the solitary consumer, between Jihad and McWorld. For it offers women and men a space for activity that is simultaneously voluntary and public; a space that unites the virtue of the private sector — liberty — with the virtue of the public sector: concern for the general good.

Civil society thus is a dwelling place that is neither a tribal fireside nor a shopping mall; it asks us to vote neither our political opinions nor our consumer desires but only to interact with one another around common concerns. It shares with the private sector the blessings of liberty; it is voluntary and it is constituted by freely associated individuals and groups. But unlike the private sector, it aims at common ground and cooperative action. Civil society is thus public without being coercive, voluntary without being private.

The best way to think about civil society is to envision the domain North Americans occupy when they are engaged neither in government (voting, paying taxes) nor in commerce (working, producing, shopping, consuming). Such daily business includes attending church or synagogue, doing community service, participating in a voluntary or civic association, joining a fraternal organization, contributing to a charity, assuming responsibility in a PTA or a neighbourhood crime watch, or organizing a church bazaar or a block party. It is in this civil domain that such traditional institutions as foundations, schools, churches, public interest groups, voluntary associations, and social movements belong. The media too, when they place their public responsibilities as information providers ahead of their commercial interests as profit-making corporations, are best understood as members of civil society.

McWorld leaves us stranded in an era in which citizens have neither a home for their civic institutions nor a voice with which they speak. Either be passively serviced (or passively exploited) by the massive monopolies that ply markets in the false name of consumer liberty, or turn to the intimate ministrations of inegalitarian tribal fragments that offer identity without liberty and comfort without justice. But neither Jihad nor McWorld offer liberty or a space for citizens to pursue it.

In the international arena where corporations alone have a measure of sovereignty and where the boundaries of democratic states prevent them from exercising regulatory authority, there seems even less opportunity for civil society to grow. Yet it is precisely here, where markets thrive even as subnational tribes make war on them, that civil society and a space for citizens is most needed. So we return to our animating conundrum: Jihad pursues a bloody politics of identity; McWorld nurtures a bloodless economics of profit. Belonging by default to McWorld, everyone is a consumer; seeking a repository for identity, everyone belongs to some tribe. But no one is a citizen. And without citizens, I ask again, how can there be democracy?

The task today in theory, no less than in practice, is to reilluminate public space for a civil society in eclipse. Unless a third way can be found between private markets and coercive government, between McWorld's anarchistic individualism and Jihad's dogmatic communitarianism, we seem fated to enter an era wherein the space where a public voice should be heard will be a raucous babble — faithfully reproduced by a faithless media — that leaves the world's civic soul forever mute.

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