CONSUMED:

THE FATE OF CITIZENS UNDER CAPITALISM TRIUMPHANT

THREE LECTURES FOR THE SHIHING TEH LECTURESHIP:
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Lecture 1:
The Fate of Citizens Under Capitalism Triumphant:
Consumerism and the Infantilist Ethos

Lecture 2:
Neo-Liberal Privatization and Civic Schizophrenia:
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LECTURE ONE:

THE FATE OF CITIZENS UNDER CAPITALISM TRIUMPHANT:
Consumerism and the Infantilist Eths

“Last of all, that ends [man’s] eventful history,
Is second childishness…”
(Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II, vii)

“When I was a child I spake as a child,
I understood as a child, I fought as a child,
but when I became a man I put away childish things.”
(St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, *The New Testament*)

In these paltry times of capitalism’s triumph and its decline into consumer narcissism, Shakespeare’s seven ages of man are in danger of being washed away by life-long puerility. Pop cultural journalists have used many terms to depict a new species of perennial adolescent: kidults, rejuveniles, twixters and adultescents;¹ around the world Germans speak of “Nesthocker,” Italians of “Mammone,” Japanese of “Freeter,” Indians of “Zippies” and the French of a “Tanguy” syndrome and “puericulture.” What they are discerning with their pop neologisms is the consequence of a powerful new cultural ethos, felt more than recognized. It is an ethos of induced childishness: an infantilization that is closely tied to the demands of consumer capitalism in a global market economy.

This infantilist ethos is as potent in shaping the ideology and behaviors of our radical consumerist society today as what Max Weber called the “Protestant ethos” was

¹ Webster’s New American Dictionary offered “adultescent” as its ‘word of the year’ in 2004.
in shaping the entrepreneurial culture of what was then a productivist early capitalist society. Affiliated with an ideology of privatization, the marketing of brands and a homogenization of taste, this ethos of infantilization has worked to sustain consumer capitalism, but at the expense of both civility and civilization and at a growing risk to capitalism itself. Although we use the term democratic capitalism in a manner that suggests a certain redundancy, the reality is that the two words describe different systems often in tension with one another. Consumerism has set the two entirely asunder.

How much should we care? In an epoch when terrorism stalks the planet, when fear of Jihad is as prevalent as the infringement of liberties to which fear gives rise, when AIDs and Tsunamis and war and genocide put democracy at risk in both the developing and the developed world, it may seem self-indulgent to fret about the dangers of hyper-consumerism. When poor children in the developing world are being exploited, starved, prostituted, and impressed into military service, anxiety about the prosperous young in the developed world who may be growing up into consumers too fast, or about adult consumers being dumbed down too easily, can seem parochial, even solipsistic.

Yet as James Madison said long ago, the pathologies of liberty can be as perilous as the pathologies of tyranny; and far more difficult to discern or remedy. Although forces of Jihad continue to struggle violently against the successes of McWorld, and the abuse of children living under poverty remains a far greater problem than the infantilization of adults living under prosperity, modernization appears to be irreversible over the long term, if at a punishing cost to the game’s losers. But the fate of citizens under capitalism is another matter. The victory of consumers is not synonymous with the victory of citizens. McWorld can prevail and liberty can still lose. The diseases of
prosperity which are the afflictions of capitalism triumphant do not kill outright. They violate no explicit laws of justice. Yet capitalism’s success breeds new and dangerous challenges. This is of special importance in the emerging world of such powers as China, India, Nigeria and Brazil where consumer capitalism is being seen as a road to liberty.

Once upon a time, capitalism was allied with virtues that also contributed at least marginally to democracy, responsibility and citizenship. Today it is allied with vices which – although they serve consumerism – undermine democracy, responsibility and citizenship. The question then is whether not just democracy but capitalism itself can survive the infantilist ethos upon which it has come to depend. What is clear is that either capitalism will replace the infantilist with a democratic ethos, and regain its capacity to promote equality as well as profit, diversity as well as consumption, or infantilization will undo not only democracy but capitalism itself.

Infantilization points to the dumbing down of goods and shoppers in a post-modern global economy that seems to produce more goods than people need; and points to the targeting of children as consumers in a market where there are never enough shoppers. There is anecdotal evidence for infantilization everywhere: airport police handing out lollipops to placate irate passengers at inspection points; television news divisions turned over to entertainment executives; the professionalization of high-school sports that turns teen basketball courts into NBA recruiting turf and basketball player bodies into advertising billboards; adult fiction readers flocking to Harry Potter and The

2 “Police at Harrisburg International Airport in Pennsylvania have been sweetening the inspections by passing out lollipops to targeted drivers. ‘It's so we don't intimidate,’ said Alfred Testa Jr., the airport's aviation director. ‘The policemen are very polite. They will have a smile on their face.’” “The Infantilization of America,” posted on February 19, 2004 on the website AFFBRAINWASH.com, citing Eugene Volokh.
Lord of the Rings; fast food franchises girdling the world to exploit children’s restless aversion to grown-up sit-down dining; teen guy games such as Grand Theft Auto and Narc and comic book films such as Terminator, Spider-Man, Catwoman, and Shrek dominating the entertainment market; cosmetic surgery and botox injections promising a fountain of youth to female baby boomers who envy their daughters; sexual performance drugs like Levitra, Cialis and Viagra (2002 sales of over a billion dollars) doing the same for men.

Beyond pop culture, the infantilist ethos also dominates: dogmatic judgments of black and white in politics and religion come to displace the nuanced complexities of adult morality, while the marks of perpetual childishness are grafted on to adults who indulge in puerility without pleasure and indolence without innocence. Hence, the new consumer penchant for age without dignity, dress without formality, sex without reproduction, work without discipline, play without spontaneity, acquisition without purpose, certainty without doubt, life without responsibility and narcissism into old age and unto death without a hint of wisdom or humility. In the epoch in which we now live, civilization is not an ideal or an aspiration, it is a video game.5

Infantilization is intimately associated with global consumerism. Those responsible for manufacturing and merchandizing goods for the global marketplace, those who are actually researching, teaching and practicing marketing and advertising today, are aiming both to sell to a younger demographic and to imbue older consumers with the tastes of the young. Marketers and merchandisers are self-consciously chasing a youthful

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4 In 2002 Americans spent 7.7 billion dollars on 6.9 million cosmetic procedures according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. This included 1.7 million Botox injections, 495,000 chemical peels, 125,000 face lifts and 83,000 tummy tucks – 88% of these to women. (Samuelson)

5 Among the most popular video games in the world, Civilization (now in four editions from Firaxis) offers players a chance to “rule the world” via sixteen classic cultures, from 4000BC to 2050 AD.
commercial constituency sufficiently padded in its pocket book to be a very attractive market, yet sufficiently unformed in its tastes as to be vulnerable to conscious corporate manipulation via advertising, marketing and branding. Consumer capitalism seeks to encourage adult regression, hoping to rekindle in grown ups the tastes and habits of children so that they can sell globally the relatively useless cornucopia of games, gadgets and myriad consumer goods for which there is no discernible ‘need market’ other than the one created by capitalism’s own frantic imperative to sell. As Susan Linn puts it in her critical study of what she calls “the hostile takeover of childhood,” corporations are vying “more and more aggressively for young consumers” while popular culture “is being smothered by commercial culture relentlessly sold to children who [are valued] for their consumption.”

The young are big spenders way before they are even modest earners: in 2000, there were 31 million American kids between twelve and nineteen already controlling 155 billion consumer dollars. Just four years later, there were 33.5 million kids controlling 169 billion dollars, or roughly $91 per week per kid. The potential youth market is even more impressive elsewhere in the world, where a far greater proportion of the population is under 25, and where new prosperity in nations such as India and China promise a youth market of hundreds of millions in the coming years.

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7 Ibid.
Once upon a time, in capitalism’s more creative and successful period, a productivist capitalism prospered by meeting the real needs of real people. Creating a synergy between making money and helping others (the Puritan Protestant formula for entrepreneurial virtue), producers profited by making commodities for the workers they employed – a circle of virtue that, while it involved elements of risk-taking for producers and of exploitation for workers, benefited both classes and society at large. Today, however, consumerist capitalism profits only when it can address those whose essential needs have already been satisfied but have the means to assuage “new” and invented needs – Marx’s “imaginary needs.” The global majority has extensive and real natural needs mirroring what psychologist T. Berry Brazelton has called “the irreducible needs of children.” But it is without the means to address them, being cut off by the global market’s inequality (the “north/south divide”) from the investment in capital and jobs that would allow them to become consumers. This is true not just for the global Third World but for the growing Third World within the First World, the poor who live among the wealthy, exposed to the seductions of the consumer marketplace but without the means to participate in it.

In the developing world, although the demographic grows younger (recall the familiar fact that more than half of the population of the Middle East is under sixteen), children remain marginalized and in poverty, irrelevant as consumers despite their overwhelming needs and forced by oppression and need to grow up prematurely, becoming little soldiers, little prostitutes and little garment factory workers giving some to the global market economy but gaining little from it. They are wholly disempowered.

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even where they are used and abused as child soldiers or sex objects. And they are always the first to pay the cost of global economic inequalities. Their needs are ignored by global capitalism since they have no disposable income to pay for them. Even the institutions of the First World such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the institutions charged with responding to their needs impose “conditionality” on the aid and loans with which they purport to alleviate their problems. “Corrupt” and “inefficient” Third World governments are punished; the kids starve, fall ill and die. In war and poverty, in natural disaster and man-made genocide, they are most often the first victims and the last to benefit from capitalism’s otherwise voracious appetite for consumers.

In this new epoch in which the needy are without income and the well-heeled are without needs, radical inequality is simply assumed. The United States and Canada, for example, with just over 5% of the world’s population, control almost one third (31.5%) of the world’s private consumption expenditures. Western Europe, with 6.4% of the population, controls almost 29% of expenditures – that means 11½% of the world’s population controls 60% of the world’s consumer spending. On the other hand Sub-Saharan Africa with nearly 11% of the population controls only 1.2% of consumer expenditures. Inequality leaves capitalism with a dilemma: the overproducing capitalist market must either grow or expire. If the poor cannot be enriched enough to become consumers, then grown-ups in the first world who are currently responsible for 60% of the world’s consumption, and with vast disposable income but few needs, will have to be enticed into shopping. Inducing them to remain childish and impetuous in their taste

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helps assure that they will buy the global market goods designed for indolent and prosperous youth. When translated into figures for comparative spending on advertising versus spending on foreign aid, these grim inequalities yield a remarkable contrast: while the United States spent about $16 billion in foreign aid in 2003, the projected American expenditure for advertising for 2005 is $280 billion (about one half of the world’s projected advertising expenditure for 2005).\textsuperscript{11} If manufacturing needs rather than goods is a primary task of consumer capitalism, however, the massive advertising and marketing budgets are understandable.

Marx himself had remarked in the \textit{Communist Manifesto} of 1848 on the dislodging of old-fashioned industries by new industries in which “in place of old wants, we find new wants.” Calvin Coolidge had presciently depicted advertising as “the method by which the desire is created for better things,” anticipating by nearly 40 years Guy Debord’s more radical claim in the 1960’s that “…the satisfaction of primary human needs, [is] now met in the most summary manner, by a ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs.”\textsuperscript{12} Many of the needs of children that can regarded as “irreducible,” on the other hand, cannot be met by the market at all, but depend on kinship relations, parenting, self-image, learning and limit-setting.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} Advertising expenditures projection from Robert Coen, Universal McCann’s Insider’s Report on Advertising Expenditures, December 2000. While the gross aid figure puts the United States on top, one, when calculated as a percentage of GNP its foreign aid ranks dead last out of 22 Western Countries and (at about 1.4% of GNP) leaves it well below the European average of over .2%, and far below the United Nations Millennium goal of .7% of GNP for developed nations.
\textsuperscript{13} Brazelton and Greenspan’s list of seven irreducible needs depend to some degree indirectly on economic factors (starving parents are unlikely to be capable of protecting or even loving their children), but except for physical protection and safety, are relational rather than commodity-based. See T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley I. Greenspan, \textit{The Irreducible Needs of Children}, Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Press, 2000.
The argument here then rests on and gives systematic expression to the message of such merchandizing advocates as Gene del Vecchio. DelVecchio tells clients that capitalism is under siege and that to sell in the global marketplace where “the demand for adult goods and services has proven not to be endless,”14 and where there is little profit in selling to those who are in need, manufacturers must not only create homogenous global products aimed at the wealthy young, but must embark on what another marketer calls a veritable “consumerization of the child.”15

World advertising expected to increase by 5% a year over the next few years, with growing amounts to be spent on children. Europe is already approaching $100 billion per annum, Latin American advertising is growing five percent per annum and is already over $16 billion a year. China is beginning to see the profits that can be earned from the 8-21 year old youth market, whose members have aggregate annual income totaling perhaps $40 billion. While it is only $9 billion today, China is projected to grow to $12 billion by 2006 and to $18 billion by 2011, when it will become the third largest advertising market in the world.16

What observers say about China now reads little different than what they say about France or Mexico: “Chinese kids, teens and young adults play an important role in the Chinese consumer retail markets… (as) direct spenders” but also, as in the West, in their capacity to “influence their parent’s purchasing decisions” and in their growing online spending.17 In a nation where the one-child policy has created hundreds of millions

15 Pecora, p. 154
16 World advertising figures from Tobi Elkin, “Just an Online Minute…Look East,” MediaPost, December 6, 2004
of families with six adults (two parents, four grandparents) focused on the needs and wants of one child, the climate for infantilizing the market (never mind spoiling the kids) seems extraordinarily promising – if that is the word – while its impact on China’s coming global role seems more than disconcerting.

In the emerging world of total commerce, there is advertising on parking meters, advertising on public buildings, advertising on so-called public non-commercial television, ubiquitous blimp and airplane borne (smoke generated) signage, naming opportunities on public buildings such as sports stadiums once associated with public figures, and advertising possibilities in outer space -- once it is militarized, why not commercialize it as well? The last frontier, now crossed, is not however outer space but the human body. The selling of the body now includes the selling of the constituent elements of the human genome. Roughly twenty percent of the genome has now been patented for private commercial use, and the trend is accelerating. As with so many other elements in the global race to the bottom, it is globalization that drives privatization: the quest for genetic patents is a function of the globalization of research. If “we” don’t do it, the Koreans or the French or the Chinese will.

Globalization stimulates selling to the young in another important way, as well. The global market turns out to be defined by the relatively common tastes of the young. Adult cultures are plural and distinctive, but youth culture is remarkably universal. In the apt description of Naomi Klein, “despite different cultures, middle-class youth all over the world seem to live their lives as if in a parallel universe. They get up in the morning, put on their Levi’s and Nikes, grab their caps, backpacks, and Sony personal CD players,
and head for school.\textsuperscript{18} There are French \textit{citoyens} and Ibo tribesmen and Iraqi Sunnis and Brazilian patriots but kids are kids are kids. If their countries and tribes and religions can be made to appear as secondary to their global market tastes and youth branded appetites as children, capitalism need not be impeded by pluralism. A \textit{global} consumer economy in a world of differentiated cultures depends on the ability to sell uniform goods.

According to Naomi Klein, the question is quite precisely: what “is the best way to sell identical products across multiple borders? What can advertisers use to address the whole world at once? How can one company accommodate cultural difference while still remaining internally coherent?”\textsuperscript{19} The business guru James U. McNeal, who has written what admirers call the “bible for all children’s marketers,”\textsuperscript{20} has a compelling answer:

\begin{quote}
In general, it appears that before there is a geographic culture, there is a children’s culture, that children are very much alike around the industrialized world. They love to play… they love to snack… And they love being children with other children (in contrast to assuming most adult roles). The result is that they very much want the same things, that they generally translate their needs into similar wants that tend to transcend culture. Therefore, it appears that fairly standardized multinational marketing strategies to children around the globe are viable.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

The starting point for McNeal’s logic, as well as Klein’s, a logic which turns out to be the spirit of modern consumer capitalism, is William Greider’s global market world of surplus production:\textsuperscript{22} too many goods chasing too few consumers in an era of growing inequality and diminishing consumer wants, at least among those with disposable income, and in a global economy where customers with the means to buy are too diverse to desire

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Naomi Klein, \textit{No Logo}, New York: Picador, 2000, p. 115
\item \textsuperscript{19} Naomi Klein, p. 115.
\item \textsuperscript{20} A blurb from Helen Boehm, the Vice President of Fox’s Children’s Network, on the back cover of \textit{Kids as Consumers} (note 6).
\item \textsuperscript{22} “To put it crudely, capital is being invested in new factories to make more things when the market is already struggling with a mounting shortage of buyers.” William Greider, \textit{One World, Ready or Not}, New York: Simon & Shuster, 1997, p. 49.
\end{itemize}
the same goods (if they desire any at all). Quite simply, in a world of too many commodities and too few consumers, “children become valuable as consumers.”23

Market to kids and secure a single planetary market. That is the blunt strategy embraced by marketing advocate Arundhati Parmar, who writes enticingly about “global youth united” as a “homogenous group” that can be a “prime target for US marketers.”24

We are trapped in an individualistic consumer culture in which the public goods that belong to us as citizens are not part of the accounting. The fate of capitalism and the fate of citizens no longer converge. The trouble faced by democratic society is not simply that it is deprived of the responsible grown-up citizens who are its only legitimate custodians but that the ethic of infantilization perverts childhood as well, prompting us to treat children instrumentally – not as little beings to be serviced by big capitalism but as themselves the little servants of big capitalism. J.M. Barrie’s fantasy of Peter Pan is neatly inverted. For Barrie, the dream was for kids never to grow up so that they might be spared the burdens of responsible adulthood: jobs, families, mortgages and political and moral responsibilities. “I don’t want to grow up,” exclaimed Peter, fleeing to Neverland. “I don’t want to be a man, I want always to be a little boy and to have fun.”

Modern merchandisers don’t want Peter to grow up either: they want to make him their loyal customer, to exploit his separation from mother and family to make him theirs, to prompt him to buy the fun for which his youth once offered him costless access. Fly to Neverland, Peter, where we await you with everything the little boy in you ever wanted – except you have to buy it with grown-up dollars. Or buy it, in that perversion of

Neverland fabricated by the Michael Jackson brand, by selling out both the family and innocence. Leave your parents behind, but be sure to bring your wallets and corrupted eroticism with you.

The battle is not limited to marketing and markets. Del Vecchio’s words manifest not merely an ethos of marketing, but the language of politics made contentious, argumentative and simplistic; the language of ideology focused on privatization, narcissism and interest; and the language of tele-religion and commercialized revivalism, construed more and more as a tele-commodity offering shallow solutions to deep problems; all deployed on behalf of the interests of a declining global consumer economy unable to sell the poor what they need (it doesn’t pay) but trying desperately to sell the prosperous what they don’t need. Thus does infantilization in this instrumentalist form abandon childhood as a precious legacy. Thus, our democracy is little by little corrupted, our republican realm of public goods and public citizens is gradually privatized and the capitalist economy, once intended to serve democracy and the republican commonweal alike, is bent and soon likely to be broken.

To the disorderly rulers of ancient Athens, the philosopher Socrates once said for justice to prevail you must make kings philosophers or philosophers kings. Today’s Sophists of marketing offer an analogous if less noble formula: for consumer capitalism to prevail you must make kids consumers or make consumers kids. That is to say, smarten up the kids – ‘empower’ them as spenders; and dumb down the grown-ups, disempower them as citizens. As McNeal puts it, this requires that we understand that
“children are a future market that can be cultivated now so that when children reach market age they can more easily be converted into customers.”

This is clear seen in the distribution of movies in the global marketplace. In 2003, the top grossing film in Argentina, Germany, Mexico, Switzerland and the United Kingdom was the animated cartoon Finding Nemo. Looking at the top ten grossing films in twenty countries during 2003 reveals that children’s blockbusters such as Finding Nemo, The Matrix ReLoaded, Pirates of the Carribean, and Bruce Almighty prevailed throughout the global marketplace.

TWENTY-TWO COUNTRIES’ TOP TEN GROSSING FILMS, 2003

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25 Ibid., 249.
Thus do global marketers around the world, when not explicitly infantilizing adults, engage in the delicate task of empowering children as adult consumers without permitting them to forgo their childish tastes. To do this requires not simply the shaping of fresh advertising and merchandizing strategies, but the reshaping of cultural, educational and civic institutions to help sustain an ethos favorable to infantilization – the condition for the selling of uniform commodities the world over.

The logic carries all the way down to toddlers and perhaps even fetuses who, once they are deemed alive and human, can be deemed shoppers in potentia as well. There is room enough for Barney babies and teletubby toddlers in the children’s market. According to the Center for a New American Dream, “babies as young as six months of age can form mental images of corporate logos and mascots,” which means “brand loyalties can be established as early as age two.” It follows that “by the time children head off to school most can recognize hundreds of brand logos.”

Kids’ marketer James McNeal splits the difference, identifying the ideal “kid customer” as “a confident little 9 year old with a cute little nose and arms full of shopping bags, emerging from a department store… confident, a big spender, able to cope in the market place.”

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26 Cited from the Media Awareness Network, “How Marketers Target Kids,” 1/24/2005
wonder that spending on advertising to children has increased from less than $100 million in 1990 to more than $2 billion in 2000. After all, “kids are the most unsophisticated of all consumers. They have the least and therefore want the most. Consequently, they are in a perfect position to be taken.”  

It takes more than mere marketing to score a hit on targeted children, however. It requires that the target be separated from its protective environment: that it be uprooted from the homes and habits that initially protect it from predatory marketers and prevent them from becoming mere instruments of commercial exploitation. Wendy and her brothers, seduced by Peter Pan, flew from home (literally) to escape the overbearing grown-ups who were fixed on seeing them all grow up. Merchandisers entice them from their homes to bring them into an adult consumerist world where their innocence makes them especially vulnerable to commercial blandishments. Liberation here means establishing children’s boutiques and Disney and Warner Brothers stores as adult free zones, and it means arranging mall space so that teen and youth shops are on different shopping floors (or wings) so that the young will shop separately from their parents. 

Children in earlier totalitarian societies were stripped of familial loyalties and made to serve the party in the name of liberty from “untrustworthy” and “unpatriotic” parents – ‘turn your parents in if they are disloyal to the Party!’ Today, for merely economic reasons, children’s “gatekeepers” are also confronted and where possible

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28 McNeal, p. 20 It is hardly a surprise then that a world survey of marketing to children in 2001 would boast that, “advertising has become pervasive in daily life and continues to expand into new realms. Increasingly, advertisers are marketing to children to shape consumption preference early and to take advantage of the growing amount of money that people are spending on children, which hit $405 billion in 2000. “Marketing to Children: A World Survey, 2001,” Euromonitor International (cited in Vital Signs, 2003).
pushed out of the way in the name of “empowerment” – the need to make children “autonomous” consumers.

A favorite phrase of the kid marketers is “kid empowerment.” Although actually ‘empowering’ only irresponsibility and impulse, marketers offer kiddies a flag of a faux ‘autonomy’ that uses the language of liberation and empowerment to justify making the young more vulnerable to the seductions of commercial predators.

The misuse of normative terms like autonomy and empowerment to rationalize selling to children far too young to possess either liberty or judgment (the two key components of real choice or self-determining power) is typical of an infantilist ethos that reinforces consumer market ideology by providing corporate predators with an altruistic ethic to rationalize selfish and patently immoral ends

The cultural pathology of late consumer capitalism effectively prioritizes consumerism at the expense of capitalism’s traditional balance between production and consumption, work and leisure, and investment and spending. In the pathological culture of consumer economics, consumer behavior turns out to be remarkably unaccommodating to civilizing tendencies. The consumer at once both imbibes the world of products, goods and things being impressed upon her and so conquers it, and yet is defined via brands, trademarks and consumer identity by that world. She essays to make the market her own even as it makes her its prisoner. She trumpets her freedom even as she is locked up in the cage of private desire and unrestrained libido. She announces a faux consumer power even as she renounces her real citizen power. The dollars or Euros

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or Yen with which she imagines she is mastering the world of material things turn her into a thing defined by the material – from self-defined person into market-defined brand; from autonomous public citizen to heteronymous private shopper. The boundary separating her from what she buys vanishes: she ceases to buy goods as instruments of other ends and instead becomes the goods she buys – a Calvin Klein torrid teen or an Anita Ruddick body-shop urbanite or a politically conscious Benneton rebel or a Crate ‘n’ Barrel urban homesteader or a Nike plasma television spectator “athlete.”

The dynamics of consumption actually render the individual more rather than less vulnerable to control much in the way that the infant, for all its sense of power, is actually powerless in a world from which it cannot distinguish itself. In short, in almost every way, the full-time consumer as imagined by the aggressive marketing executive ideally acts more like an impulse child than an adult.

The citizen, on the other hand is an adult, a public chooser empowered by social freedom to effect the environment of choice and the agendas by which choices are determined and portrayed; the infantilized consumer is a the private chooser, whose power to participate in communities or effect changes is diminished and whose public judgment is attenuated. The infantilist ethos, then, does the necessary work of consumer capitalism, but at the expense of the civilization that productivist capitalism helped create.

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30 Marketers themselves divide the population into such consumer targeted categories and develop merchandizing strategies accordingly. A Virginia marketing firm called Claritas thus managed to segment America into dozens of neighborhood consumer sectors defined by actual consumables such as “Pools and Patios,” “Shotguns and Pickups,” “Bohemia mix” and “Urban Gold.”
Capitalism itself has come full circle. Originating in an extraordinary synergy between selfishness and altruism, between profit and productivity, it once upon a time allowed energetic and entrepreneurial risk-takers to prosper by serving the growth and welfare of prospering nations. It did so it with the succor of a Protestant ethos that lent moral weight to hard work, far-sighted investment, and ascetic self-denial – the very qualities productivist capitalism needed to thrive. Today, its productive capacity has outrun the needs it once served even as its distributive capacity has been stymied by the growing global inequalities it has catalyzed. Depending for its success on consumerism rather than productivity, it has generated an ethos of infantilization that prizes the very attributes the Protestant ethos condemned. It seems quite literally to be consuming itself, leaving democracy in peril and the fate of citizens uncertain. Although it affects to prize and enhance liberty, it leaves liberty’s meaning ambiguous in an epoch where shopping seems to have become a more persuasive marker of freedom than voting, and where what we do alone in the mall counts more importantly in shaping our destiny than what we do together in the public meeting hall.

DEFINING INFANTILIZATION:

“Childhood makes capitalism hum over the long haul,” writes critic Dan Cook. And the infantilist ethos generates a set of habits, preferences and attitudes that encourage and legitimate childishness. As with Protestant asceticism in its time, infantilism reflects broad attitudes and general behavior that mirror the age, beyond the specific concerns of capitalism. But it also serves capitalist consumerism directly by nurturing a culture of impetuous consumption necessary to selling puerile goods in a developed world that has few genuine needs.

Infantilization aims at inducing puerility in adults and preserving what is childish in children trying to grow up, even as children are “empowered” to consume. This perspective suggests that childishness, in contrast to adulthood, privileges:

- IMPULSE over DELIBERATION;
- FEELING over REASON;
- CERTAINTY over UNCERTAINTY
- DOGMATISM over DOUBT
- IGNORANCE over KNOWLEDGE
- PLAY over WORK;
- PICTURES over WORDS;
- IMAGES over IDEAS;
- WATCHING over REFLECTING;
- PLEASURE over HAPPINESS
- INSTANT GRATIFICATION over LONG-TERM SATISFACTION;
- EGOISM over ALTRUISM;
- PRIVATE over PUBLIC
- NARCISSISM over SOCIALIBILITY
- ENTITLEMENT (RIGHT) over OBLIGATION (RESPONSIBILITY)
- THE TIMELESS PRESENT over TEMPORALITY (NOW over PAST and FUTURE)
- THE NEAR over the REMOTE (INSTANTANEOUS over ENDURING)
- PHYSICAL SEXUALITY over EROTIC LOVE;
- INDIVIDUALISM over COMMUNITY
- IGNORANCE over KNOWLEDGE

We can reduce this welter of binaries to three archetypical dualisms that capture infantilization: EASY over HARD, SIMPLE over COMPLEX, and FAST over SLOW.

EASY OVER HARD

To say the infantilist ethos prefers easy over hard is actually also to say the young are naturally drawn to what is simple rather than what is complex and what is fast rather than what is slow. Phrases such as ‘easy listening,’ ‘shopping made easy,’ ‘easy (appropriate for ages 2-8) games’ and a person of ‘easy morals,’ push and promote commercial products tailored to the attention span and tastes of the young. Easy in the
realm of happiness supposes simple pleasures trump complex ones, whereas spiritual and moral leaders have generally made the opposite case.

The preference for easy plays off of modern utilitarian ideas. Traditional ethics (in Aristotle, Augustine or Kant, for example) distinguished higher and lower forms of pleasure and presumed that what gave pleasure might not always be identical with what was good. But modern ethical utilitarianism of the kind found in philosophers like David Hume and Jeremy Bentham tried to subordinate ‘the good’ to what was merely pleasurable and then to simplify and reduce pleasure to elementary physical stimulation. It made no distinctions between kinds of pleasure (or pain), assuming that happiness depended merely on maximizing elementary pleasure and minimizing elementary pain for the greatest number of people. This permitted Bentham at the beginning of the nineteenth century to offer a useful if simplistic “felicific calculus” that associated all human behavior and all human ethics with simple, easy to measure indicators of elementary pleasure and pain. The good was what felt good. What felt good was pleasure’s presence and the absence of pain as measured by the lowest common denominator of sense experience. Happiness was quantifiable. How intense was it? How long did it last? How soon would it come? How certain was its realization? more difficult pleasure” since “difficult pleasures are more rewarding.”

The tensions between easy and hard have challenged every society, but ours is perhaps the first in which the adult institutions of a civilization seem to be on the side of easy. Ours rewards the easy and penalizes the hard. It promises profits for life to those who cut corners and simplify the complex at every turn. Weight loss without exercise, marriage without commitment, painting or piano by the numbers without practice or
discipline, internet “college degrees” without course work or learning, athletic success through steroids and show-boating. In the realm of foreign policy, President Bush’s high-minded global strategy of liberty shares in the ethos of easy, comprised by words without consequences: war without conscription, idealism without taxation, morality without sacrifice and virtue without effort. The very opposite of a Protestant ethos: not “no pain, no gain,” but “all gain, no pain.” An infantile dream-view of the world in which saying “I want it to be so” is enough to make it so; in which, critic Slavoj Zizek has pointedly remarked, the consumer market offers products that make choice easy – “products deprived of their malignant property: coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol…. virtual sex as sex without sex, the Colin Powell doctrine of war with no casualties (on our side, of course) as war without war, the redefinition of politics as expert administration as politics without politics.”³²

It is easier in a generic sense to watch than to do, easier to watch television where the imagination is more passive, than to read books, where the imagination must be activated, easier to masturbate than establish relationships within which reciprocal sexuality and interpersonal sensuality are a healthy part. In sum it’s easier to be a kid that a grown-up, easier to play than to work, easier it push aside than to assume responsibility. This is not merely a conservative point (although conservatives have perhaps understood it better than others). Call it Aristotelian or even utilitarian in John Stuart Mill’s version. For what is being argued is that on every count, what is easy may also turn out to be less gratifying, hampering rather than furthering human happiness. But this is a lesson that only adults learn – after they have been helped by parents, schools, church and society to

grow up. Under the cultural sway of infantilization this lesson is made to seem rigid and Puritanical, the preserve of people who are hostile to happiness.

SIMPLE OVER COMPLEX

As an entailment of its preference for easy over hard, then, the infantilist ethos also prefers the simple over the complex. Simplicity has a sweetness all its own, but adult civilizations are generally defined by their capacity to embrace nuance and complexity in their thinking and behavior, even where decision-making may ultimately require reaching a conclusion that puts aside nuance. Complexity avoids simplistic dualisms, and looks for shades of gray. Scales of moral complexity such as the one postulated by Lawrence Kohlberg rank complexity of thinking and the ability to shade as features of a more developed moral sense. Carol Gilligan has shown that the moral voice of women may be defined by a still greater complexity and sensitivity to context, one that moves beyond Kohlberg’s own perhaps too gendered dualisms.

Philosophers and scientists often explain and elaborate the meaning of life itself, along with the consciousness in which life issues, in terms of a widening and deepening spiral of complexity: subatomic particles and force fields constitute atomic particles like electrons and protons which in turn constitute atoms and molecules which constitute the complex atomic elements that constitute molecular matter; matter is made more complex

33 Intellectuals who can avoid black and white [Adlai Stevenson? John Kerry?] are sometimes criticized as indecisive, while bold decision-makers who defy nuance [George W. Bush?] are often criticized as simplistic in their judgments.
34 Steal and save the starving kids, or stay honest but watch them die, says Kohlberg in a typical dualism. Explain to the grocer what the problem is (my kids are starving but I can’t afford food right now) and find a solution that works for both sides says Gilligan (lend me food, I’ll pay you later when I can). See Lawrence Kohlberg, The Stages of Moral Development, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971; and Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. See also my cover review essay “Gilligan’s Island, in The New Republic, December 7, 1992.
yet as it becomes organic matter; organic matter assumes still greater complexity on its way to becoming life; and life at its most complex yields consciousness, reflection and then self-consciousness and self-reflection. We are beings defined by the very complexity by which we understand ourselves as being complex.

Complexity defies the reductive principles by which we might insist our essence is defined by water or mere atoms since our bodies are ninety-eight percent water or one hundred percent molecular; for it is precisely in how they arrange themselves that some molecules end up constituting living consciousness and others the petrified stones or swirling plasma or the hydrogen, oxygen and carbon molecules from which all conscious, living matter comes and to which it can all be reduced. The association of complexity with mature adulthood and civilization, and of simplicity with childhood, is everywhere evidenced today in the commercial marketplace. Consumerism reduces identity to its own commercial behaviors and leads to an identitarian psychology in which quite literally we ‘are what we buy’ -- we are the brands we consume (chapter [now five] six below). Shopping and consuming are not an aspect of behavior but define the meaning of life.

The preference for the simple over the complex is evident in domains dominated by simpler tastes – fast food and moronic movies, revved up spectator sports and dumbed down video games, for example, all of which are linked in a nexus of consumer merchandizing that the infantilist ethos nurtures and promotes. Many of those lionized and rewarded by commercial culture today, heroes to the child consumers who are prime targets of marketing, are themselves behaving like the kids for whom they are supposedly role models. In an acute and quite astonishing New Yorker profile of the celebrated basketball player Shaquille O’Neal, (at the time still the strong man of the then
indomitable Los Angeles Lakers), Rebecca Mead describes how “American culture is increasingly geared to the simple tastes of teen-age boys” by showing how Shaq lives the life of an unformed teen, utterly secure in the “simplicity of his tastes.” She shows how in “many ways his life style is a thirteen-year-old’s fantasy existence.”

We celebrate a sports culture that prefers its athletes to be foolish playboys. When Shaq celebrated his thirtieth birthday party with red balloons at the foot of his driveway, a red carpet with Superman logos projected in spinning light in his living room, long tubular balloons in red and yellow and blue as decoration, and a cake with O’Neal depicted as superman as the party’s climax, he was acting out a role the corporation that employed him helped design and perfect.

Sports today, with its preference for fast and simple over slow and complex discloses the ambiguity of an infantilist ethos that dumbs down adults even as it accelerates the maturation of children into ‘empowered’ consumers. Adult athletes are treated like children and behave accordingly; children are pushed to grow up into profit-generating ‘adult’ athletes as fast as possible, regardless of the consequences to their bodies or their spirits.

Sports, like entertainment generally, is an obvious but hardly the only domain where simple trumps complex. The transformation of hard news into soft news, and soft news into infotainment is an old story made worse by talk radio and cable television, neither of which owe anything to broadcasting’s once weighty civic standards. Cable news has accelerated the dumbing down, creating what a critic has called the “Fox effect”

36 The Lakers use Superman as Shaq’s alter ego, playing the Superman theme when he makes his entrance; Shaq himself has framed comic books and pinball machines and Superman on his car headlights.
Murdoch’s publishing and broadcasting empire almost published and screened a bottom-feeding confession by O.J. Simpson called “IF I DID IT,” backing off at the last minute only when the public at large finally rejected this exercise in consumer extremism (“you will never go broke underestimating the taste of the American Public,” Wrote the critic Mencken nearly a century ago!)

Most newspapers are losing money, and finding it more and more difficult to compete with television and the internet, which are in turn finding it increasingly tricky to accommodate hard news. PBS begins to look CNN, while CNN looks more like Fox, even as Fox turns into ET! (Entertainment Tonight), each of them drifting away from the adult standards by which they once defined themselves.

FAST OVER SLOW

The preference for easy over hard and simple over complex issues naturally in a preference for FAST over SLOW. The world of kids is a hare’s civilization in which tortoises have no place. It has been seventy-five years since philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote In Praise of Idleness, and since that time the “pleasure of slowness,” Milan Kundera observed not long ago, “has disappeared.” Kundera proposes that “speed is the form of ecstasy the technological revolution has bestowed upon man,” and ecstasy, like speed (the eponymous drug for people who think they are cool), is a specialty of the

38 Milan Kundera, in his novel Slowness, New York: Harper Collins, 1995, pp. 2-3. Kundera captures the acceleration of culture under conditions of modern speed by suggesting that “the way contemporary history is told is like a huge concert where they present all of Beethoven’s one hundred thirty-eight opuses one after the other, but actually play just the first eight bars of each.” Ten years later, the concert would include “only the first note of each piece” to constitute “one hundred and thirty eight notes for the whole concert, present as one continuous melody.” Another ten years, and the entirety of Beethoven’s music would be “summed up in a single very long buzzing sound.” Pp. 92-93.
young. Kundera makes technology the culprit, but technology is always a tool and while it has features that catalyze speed, speed is something the infantilist ethos demands from both technology and capitalism. Fast food, fast music, fast film editing, fast computers, athleticism in which speed alone counts, digitalization where speed is the primary objective, the fast track life (even where it is actually a no-growth road to nowhere) – these are the ever more embedded trends that dominate popular youth culture and commerce world-wide. In India, the new generation of fast consumers call themselves “Zippies.”

James Glieck, who writes about speed, observes that the modern Olympics, reflect “an obsession with time that is more finely grained and intense than ever in human history. It has a weird effect on the Olympics. The Games themselves have been twisted by our obsession with time and our control of it.”39 Glieck’s study of speed rests on the premise that “the modern economy lives and dies by precision in time’s measurement and efficiency in its employment.” Business is always making “a grab for a few extra seconds of your time…. With fast ovens, quick playback, quick freezing, and fast credit.”40 Fast translates into instantaneity, which, Glieck observes, “rules in the network and in our emotional lives: instant coffee, instant intimacy, instant replay, and” bringing us back to what is perhaps infantilization’s greatest departure from the Protestant ethos, “instant gratification.”41 And “instant books” as well. So-called “insta-books” are in fact ever more common in the publishing industry, where a record of sorts must have been set in

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2006, when an insta-book about Jennifer Lopez and Brad Pitt of more than 200 pages was written in just one week and published shortly thereafter.  

Fast edits and jump cuts in films and videos as well as the instant ‘pop-up’ ads that blitz the internet all the same frenzied obsession with speed. Compare Hollywood films of the Thirties where scenes could last for tens of seconds or even a full minute without a single edit or change in camera angle with today’s music videos and comic-book and digital action films where no scene lasts more than a second or two without a snip here and an edit there, and where multiple jump cuts per second are the norm for hyperactive directorial control freaks among whom faster has become a form of cinematic tyranny, imagining as they do that youthful audiences saddled with their media induced attention deficits crave such speed -- even as they themselves reinforce the addictive tendencies. Speed is a drug that any other that must be taken in ever higher doses just to maintain its hold over the psyche.

Digitalization encourages and facilitates both speed and non-linearity, the latter a kind of artificial rupture in temporality in which our “normal” linear experience of time is deconstructed into non-sequential fragments. Ruptures in temporality may well catalyze art and creative innovation to be sure, (the “Best Picture” Oscar-winning film *Crash* is an example), but are corrupting to normal consciousness and to responsible and predictable behavior of the kind traditionally associated with mature adulthood.

Seen from the perspective of adulthood, speed has become the paramount modern form of youthful vanity: time whipped, time mastered, time accelerated, time overcome.

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With the perceived victory over time comes the illusion of victory over death – not just the would-be magic of cosmetic surgery and the promised immortality of Cryonics but the total liberation from time that comes with instantaneity: ceaseless instant change, change so fast that it bypasses every terminus and overshoots the stop-signs that might otherwise signal death’s approach. Shopping itself partakes of the illusion that time can stand still or vanish completely: clocks are never seen at the mall, (nor in Casinos), where vendors hope shoppers will feel as though time is standing still while they shop or gamble. Fast food means eating (fueling up) is almost instantaneous. “Conspicuous consumption stems from a fear of death” concludes a dour trio of sociologists – with ‘shop till you drop’ both an exultant boast and a reminder of what can happen if shopping is ever allowed to end.43

Video games too depend on rapid neurological response and instant reaction to stimuli. Such games are intrinsically tied to the perpetuation of childhood and represent one of the most successful sectors of merchandizing to children and turning adults into consumers of children’s commodities (more on this below). But even as measured by speed alone, intelligence in the world of digital games is associated with the rapid firing of synapses rather than the forging of paths between synapses that constitutes traditional associative intelligence (putting together and making sense out of the raw information generated by fast neurons). Where once intelligence was equated with wisdom and deliberation, with the deliberate privileging of slowness and the intentional expenditure of time’s wealth, today smart is too often about quick. To be counted as bright, you have to be a quick study, reach conclusions in the blink of an eye, short-circuit the deliberative

process (bor-ing!) and cut to the quick. College and Law Board exams, like all modern
tests, are timed – a recent suggestion to make them open-ended was quickly shot down.

Nowhere is the acceleration of time more apparent than in the domain of “news.”
If news is what is new, in an era of high speed happenings, only the ‘latest’ and ‘newest’
count truly new. News cycles that lasted weeks and ‘fortnights’ in the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries, when monthlies reported happenings that were sent by stage coach
and steamboat at a leisurely lunar pace, have progressed in the same ponderous but sure
way that compound interest accumulates. In the first half of the twentieth century, when
daily news cycles were been driven by the telegraph and news ticker and wire services,
and newspaper ‘dailies’ took over from weeklies, the pace took off. In the last half
century, hours, minutes and seconds have come to dominate the now cliched “24/7” news
cycle in which instant communication and media digitalization that move literally at the
speed of light give cable news networks and the internet (to which traditional print media
are fast migrating) their powerful but deeply counterproductive edge.

Fast here is by no means better or even particularly appropriate. The news cycle
now moves faster than the news, with twenty-four hour a day cable services and blogs
demanding more content than the lumbering real world can provide. With the news cycle
outracing the news, the news must recycle the few legitimate ‘big stories’ it has, re-
running the stomach-churning images of the
fire/demonstration/trial/accident/election/shooting/indictment/murder/resignation/plague/
funeral/coup all day or for days (weeks) at a time. Natural disasters (Katrina or the
Indian Ocean Tsunami), human disasters (Princess Di dead, the Pope dead, Terry Schaivo
dead, the Kyoto Global Warming Treaty dead), celebrity trials (O.J. Simpson was BACK
last month!) can quite literally fill weeks of programming – all aimed at the grown-up kidults.

Indeed, according to a *New York Times Magazine* writer (he ought to know!), the 24/7 news cycle, generating “much more news and much faster news,” has helped create “a kind of widespread attention deficit disorder” in which new is trumped by newer and newer superceded by newest, which -- instantly superceded -- becomes not the news but (as Russell Baker called it) “the olds.”

Speed has killed news and corrupted telecommunications more generally as it defines the supposed virtues of wireless phones, blackberry communicators and the internet. These forms of communication put us in touch instantaneously with people removed from our socio-physical environment, but remove us from the social spaces in which we physically exist. In this they contribute to the annihilation of public space already underway.

The emblem of the consumerist preference for fast, which has become the emblem of American style consumerism for the rest of the world, is of course fast food. Fast food has been much misunderstood, even by its critics. In Eric Schloesser’s book *Fast Food Nation*, (now a film) much of the focus is on what we eat, its overall quality and how it effects our health as well as the international economy and the environment, crucial topics all. But fast food’s essence is not what it is but how it is: its speed, to which everything else including its quality and variety or lack of quality or lack of variety is

44 Jack Rosenthal, “What to Do When News Grows Old Before Its Time,” *The New York Times*, Sunday August 8, 2004, The Week in Review. Rosenthal observes that obsession with the latest news puts a premium on going after tomorrow’s big story rather than carefully following-up yesterday’s big story. Almost as soon as they appear, new stories disappear. Where is the Abu Grahib prison scandal now, he asks? What’s become of that anthrax scare from a couple of years ago? How about the celebrity murder cases, once the trials are over? Slow-moving stories (environmental degradation, the slow spread of nuclear weapons) do not lend themselves to news coverage unless there is a topical hook. How can a people be informed when the news forever trumps the olds?
linked. If there are as yet no fast caviar cafes or fast truffle shops, it is not because caviar and truffles are expensive, but only because complex foods demand well developed palettes and by their very nature demand to be consumed slowly. Oyster bars are a compromise between speed and mature taste, and coffee chains like Starbucks invite a certain leisure – along with wireless multi-tasking. But for the most part, most consumer outlets are about fast while much of what we experience as complex pleasure requires that it happen slowly. To consume is not to experience but to appropriate and swallow for purposes other than intrinsic pleasure, the way dogs eat.

Fast tandoori and fast tacos are in fact available in London and Los Angeles and elsewhere, and fast does not have to mean tasteless or monocultural. The point is not to privilege the highbrow or insist on a hierarchy of foods. For gourmet fast foods differ little from fast burgers and fast fries in their ultimate impact on culture. Being ‘fast’ means we scarcely taste them anyway. It really is not a question of class, since McDonald’s itself, although predominantly down market in the United States, is up-market in Moscow and Peking and perfectly middle brow in many European cities. The point is the speed with which food is bought and consumed, the radical informality and antisociability of the consuming process, the contrast between what we do when we eat and what we do when we (say) break bread together or dine or share a repast. Dining cannot be hurried without impeaching its integrity as dining; Thanksgiving at McDonald’s isn’t possible, even if Ronald McDonald hires a four star chef and puts turkey, sweet potatoes and cranberry sauce on real crockery.

These kid characteristics have adult marketplace parallels of course. Mall food courts are designed as quick pit stops where shoppers can refuel on the run without
borrowing too much valuable time from the spending sprees they are supposed to be embarked on. It is not an accident that suburban malls host no serious restaurants where shoppers might be detained for hours at a time from their consumer rounds. In the same manner, urban and suburban fast food emporiums facilitate fast eating for business workaholics for whom a French three hour lunch or a Spanish leisurely noontime repast at home with the family impairs the efficiency of the full work day. The Fundacion Independiente in Madrid has launched a campaign to get rid of such long lunches. The Foundation’s president said pointedly “In a globalized world, we have to have schedules that are more similar to those in the rest of the world so we can be better connected. These Spanish lunches of two to three hours are very pleasant, but they are not very productive.” Even seemingly leisure-minded hang-out establishments like Starbucks or Sports Bars sport television and wireless internet connectivity so that customers affecting to chill can in fact engage in on-going lap-top and Bluetooth or Blackberry multi-tasking, video shopping included, over a laid-back latte grande. Customers can be busily engaged in several places at once even as they seem to be kicking back in one single place.

Easy, simple and fast: modern consumerism corrupts children infantilizes adults and undermines what means to be a citizen. With this understanding of what infantilization means, we can examine its impact on citizenship and what appears to be a perilous “civic schizophrenia” in the life of our democracies. This is the subject of the second lecture.

Lecture 2: Neo-Liberal Privatization and Civic Schizophrenia: How Markets Swallow Citizens and Totalize Their Life Worlds

“Libertarianism is a political philosophy for Peter Pans, an outlook on work premised on never growing up.” Alan Wolfe

“The distinction between private and public coincides with the opposition of necessity and freedom, of futility and permanence, and finally of shame and honor.” Hannah Arendt

As the Protestant ethos once shaped a culture conducive to work, and investment, the infantilist ethos today shapes a culture conducive to laxity, shopping and spending. Where once Americans worked harder than almost any other people, today Tom Friedman worries about the “quiet crisis” in which the tendency to “extol consumption over hard work, investment and long-term thinking” creates an America whose vaunted productivity is in decline and where kids “get fat, dumb, and lazy,” squandering the very moral capital the Protestant culture once promoted and sustained. After 9/11, President Bush did not invite Americans to sacrifice or work hard in order to defeat terrorism, he invited them to go shopping. What is today’s reality in the United States may well be tomorrow’s reality in India, South Korean, Taiwan and other market economies emulating the United States.

Privatization strategies have shaped the dominant political paradigm throughout the West and in Asia as well at least since the 1980’s when President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher adopted them as the official political philosophy of conservatism. These strategies assail the idea of collective social entities even as they

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47 Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 73. Ever sensitive to nuance, Arendt adds that this does not mean that “only the necessary, the futile and the shameful have their proper place in the private realm.”
48 Thomas L. Friedman, The World is Flat, New York: Farrar, Giroux and Strauss, 2005, p. 252. Friedman notes that outsourcing is not only about lower wages: when CEOs “send jobs abroad, they not only save 75% on wages, they get a 100 percent increase in productivity.” p. 260.
celebrate the private and the personal and have recently made inroads in Western Europe and Asia where communitarian and welfare state models have long been popular. Long before Reagan and Thatcher, early social science critics of the public interest such as David B. Truman were insisting that there was no need to take account of the common good in discussing interest theory “because there is no such thing as the public interest.” Politicians like Margaret Thatcher simply asserted that “there is no such thing as society.” Skepticism about government and society accompany a renewed and quite astonishing faith in the endless capacity of markets to “coordinate human behavior or activity with a range and a precision beyond that of any other system, institution, or social process.” These market strategies reinvented classical laissez faire economics and political libertarianism (sometimes called neo-liberalism in Europe), attacking large, bureaucratic government as an inflexible and inefficient adversary of the liberty in whose name it affects to operate.

Liberty here has a negative connotation: to be free from, not to be determined or controlled by some one else’s power or will. As the feared seat of visible power in earlier centuries and as the recognized locus of collective will more recently, government has been the entity associated with alien power and will -- a particularly noxious enemy of liberty and personal choice as seen from this libertarian fashion. Milton Friedman, the compelling libertarian economist, offers definitive language. Nearly a half century ago,

50 This concise formulation belongs to Charles E. Lindbloom who, however, in his balanced presentation of the market system, also notes that “it is a harsh and often cruel coordinator… both an ally and enemy of personal freedom.” While it “destroys many mammoth historical inequalities” it “then introduces inequalities of its own,” and while “historically, it has supported democracy… it has sabotaged important democratized features of ostensibly democratic states.” The Market System: What It Is, How It works, and What to Make of It, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) PATRICK CHECK DATE AND PAGE PLEASE
he contested the prevailing social welfare (statist) ideology of the time by insisting that “every act of government intervention limits the area of individual freedom directly and threatens the preservation of freedom indirectly.”\(^{51}\) Put into practice, this means, as Ronald Reagan was to argue, when it comes to liberty government is always part of the problem rather than part of the solution. This libertarian ideology rationalizes the privatization strategy that has become a crucial ally of infantilization in commercial society today.

Yet the truth is as Jefferson argued in practice liberty is public rather than private and is benefited by democratic public regulation, which is itself an expression of political freedom. In the name of abstract personal liberty, libertarians and privatizers actually pervert and undermine real autonomy, because as Hannah Arendt had argued, “political freedom, generally speaking, means the right ‘to be a participant in government,’ or it means nothing.”\(^{52}\)

The early English liberal idea of freedom was negative in the sense that it was oppositional: it faced a public sphere of church and government that was hierarchical, authoritarian and in need of radical dissent. In associating liberty with “the absence of external impediments on motion,” Thomas Hobbes was offering a fitting rebuke to the tyrannical monarchies that obstructed potentially free citizens and constrained the free movement of people and goods. Liberty here becomes synonymous with revolution: overthrowing things and liberating people from the grip of tyrants.

Yet a historically appropriate theory of liberal rights useful in freeing men from tyranny is not so easily converted into a theory of civic participation useful in justifying

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democracy and grounding justice in societies that have long been free, at least in the formal legal sense. This has been the primary paradox of politics in the last century. Neo-liberals, libertarians and privatizers seem to be reverting to a notion of freedom useful in opposing tyranny -- and perhaps useful in nurturing the emergence of democracy, say through doctrines of international human rights today – in order to challenge the legitimacy of democratic governance itself, that form of government the old negative liberty helped establish and legitimate. But nowadays, the idea that only private persons are free, and that only personal choices of the kind consumers make count as autonomous, turns out to be an assault not on tyranny but on democracy. It challenges not the illegitimate power by which tyrants once ruled us but the legitimate power by which we try to rule ourselves in common. Where once this notion of liberty challenged corrupt power today it undermines legitimate power.

Neo-liberals know they make war not on illegitimate power (the old visible tyrannies) but on legitimate power (visible democratic citizenship) in order to privilege a market power that is both illegitimate and invisible, but crucial to the selling of goods. Their rhetoric focuses on the tyranny of the state, but they contest not public tyranny but the public good because the public good and the private goods of late consumer capitalism have contradictory purposes and stand in fundamental tension.

Times change, and with it the threats that democracy face. Tyranny is not what is once was in the parts of the world we now call free: it is not a matter of vicious tyrants and totalitarian parties and illegitimate states. At least since Alexis de Tocqueville toured the tumultuous America of Andrew Jackson in the 1830’s, tyranny has exhibited to us
moderns a deceptively fresh face. “Fetters and headsmen,” Tocqueville already saw, “were the coarse instruments that tyranny formerly employed; but the civilization of our age has perfected despotism itself… monarchs had, so to speak, materialized oppression; the democratic republic of the present day have rendered it as entirely an affair of the mind.” Nowadays, it is not just the power of public opinion about which Tocqueville worried but of the marketplace itself that has created conditions under which, in Tocqueville’s phrase, “the body is left free, and the soul is enslaved.”53

Tocqueville was worried about a tyranny of the majority that could be associated with democracy, but the psychological reality he captured begins with the fact that constraint itself is aimed not at the free body but the liberated consciousness.54 The modern tyrant hopes to impede our aims, divert our purposes and reformulate our goals. He is not the democratic majority or the public good, he is the enforcer of consumer capitalism’s need to sell. His instrument is not the state but the very market about whose vaunted liberty he boasts. Can it be then that in the new battle for consciousness, the ideology of liberalism has as its true purpose the liberation of the body from public goods in the name of subordinating the soul to the selling of endless private commodities? Does the grinning post-modern Peter Pan who is the new boy hero of buzz marketing work to free the young from convention and deadweight adulthood? or only to free them from the moral authority of ‘gate-keeping’ parents and a watchful democratic state in order to indenture us to private consumerism?

53 Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Chapter 15, p. 274 (PATRICK, Check citation)
54 Louis Hartz dismissed the Tocquevillian obsession with the ‘tyranny of the majority’ by noting that the much maligned American majority was “a puppy dog tethered to a lion’s leash.” See The Liberal Tradition in America, Boston: Beacon Press, 1954.
To oppose this perverse use of liberty as a cudgel against our collective and moral will, against democracy itself, we need to recall and reaffirm the language of positive or moral liberty. That is to say, in the traditional language of Rousseau, Kant and Dewey, we need to understand that there can be no viable idea of public liberty outside of the quest for a moral and a common life defined by purposes that are to some degree public in character; no securing of liberty that is not also grounded in moral limits and hence in education and civic participation. In the current political climate of globalizing markets, free trade and mandatory privatization, and under the sway of the infantilist ethos, this strong view of liberty is unpopular, maligned and permanently under siege.

Yet to be politically relevant, liberty in our era must be experienced as positive rather than negative, must be public rather than private. Citizens cannot be understood as mere consumers because individual desire is not the same thing as common ground and public goods are always something more than an aggregation of private wants.

Champions of consumer democracy have tried to have their civic cake and consume it too by talking about a “consumers’ republic.” Yet a republic is defined by its public-ness (res publica meaning the things of the public), and what is public cannot be determined by consulting or aggregating private desires.

The consumer republic is quite simply an oxymoron. Public liberty demands public institutions that permit citizens to treat with the public consequences of private market choices. Being permitted to choose among a plethora of automobile brands does not permit a choice in favor of public over private transportation or in favor of fuel-thrifty rather than fuel-wasting engines. Asking what “I want” and asking what “we as a

community to which I belong need” are two different questions, though nether is altruistic and both involve ‘my’ interests: the first is ideally answered by the market, the second by the democratic community. When the market is encouraged to do the work of democracy, culture is perverted and the character of our commonwealth undermined. Moreover, my sense of myself as a moral being embedded in a free community is lost.

The logic of democracy may begin with the positing of rights and of a theoretical “natural condition” in which women and men are “born free,” but it depends for its implementation on civic learning, public participation and common consciousness that puts flesh on the bones of our potential liberty. The new forms of soft tyranny we face today derive less from traditional modes of hard autocracy that enslave the body in the name of owning things than from new soft modes of merchandizing and entertaining aimed at manipulating the spirit in the name of selling things. Compulsive shopping speaks to new forms of market coercion that are difficult to discern, let alone contend with, because they allow us to “feel free” even as we yield gently to their subtle bottom-up compulsion.

Max Weber talked about the iron cage of modernity. That was a century ago. For late consumer capitalism in crisis in a postmodern age, a different cage comes to mind. There is a fiendishly simple method of trapping monkeys in Africa that suggests the paradoxes that confront liberty in our era of global consumerism. A small box containing a large nut is affixed to a well-anchored post. The nut can be accessed only through a single, small hole in the box designed to accommodate an outstretched monkey’s grasping paw. Easy enough for the monkey to reach into, but when it clasps the nut, impossible for the monkey to get out. Because once the monkey’s paw forms a fist, it
cannot be withdrawn; the monkey is trapped. Of course it is immediately evident to everyone (except the monkey) that all the creature need do to free itself is let go of its prize. Clever hunters have discovered, however, that they can secure their prey hours or even days later, because the monkey – driven by desire – will not relinquish the nut. It will die first (and often does). Why work to catch the monkey when the monkey will catch itself for you? Is this coercion? Is the monkey free or not? The infantilist ethos does not manacle our hands, it encourage us to tightly grip the chains by which we are held fast. All we need do is let go. How much more fiendish is this box than Weber’s iron cage?

In the modern global consumer society, consumers are the market’s compulsive monkeys. No producer or vendor puts a gun to their heads and forces them to buy. They are pushed into no cages. Whether talking about pornography or fast cars, drugs or fast food, video games or fast computers, producers will say “we just give the customers what they want.” Marketers will talk about consumer democracy and how the market “empowers” shoppers, empowers even the smallest of children. So are the customers powerful? Are the monkeys free? In a sense, they are. But neither monkeys nor consumers are autonomous moral persons or free citizens, and only such persons -- citizens -- can enjoy liberty and exercise the rights that define their autonomy. What more cynical and effective way to subvert freedom than to urge women and men to yield their public souls and become private solitaries, lonely shoppers, personal choosers? This is the foundation for the new soft totalism (I will come to it at the end of this lecture) that makes of free market societies invisible prisons whose structures of decision promise personal liberty and happiness while producing market servitude and civic frustration,
Privatization is more than just an economic ideology. In league with the ethos of infantilization, it embraces and reinforces narcissism, personal preference and puerility. It thus constitutes a noxious political doctrine deeply corrupting to democracy and to the adult civilization democracy constitutes and supports. It is also imperils human happiness, presumably the end state for which democracy is merely a condition.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PRIVATIZATION:

Why is freedom when treated as wholly private so unrewarding, even destructive? It is implicated in a disturbing paradox: it foments a kind of *civic schizophrenia* that divides the choosing self into opposing fragments and ultimately denies legitimacy to the fragment we understand to be ‘civic’ or ‘public’ – the self associated with our capacity to exercise public freedom. Privatization ideology treats choice as fundamentally private, a matter not of determining some “we should” produced by citizens interacting democratically but only of enumerating and aggregating all the “I want’s” we hold as private consumers. Yet private choices do inevitably have social consequence and public outcomes. When these derive from purely personal preferences, the results are often socially “irrational” and unintended: at wide variance with the kind of society we might choose through collective deliberation and democratic decision-making. Although they accurately reflect private wants and wishes, they are quite literally dysfunctional with respect to our common values and norms.

This explains how a society without villains or conspirators, composed of good-willed but self-seeking individuals, can produce a radically commercial culture which many of those same individuals despise and for which no one is directly responsible even
though more than a few may be said to contribute to its making. Consumer capitalism does not operate by producing self-conscious advocates of duplicity who render consciousness false by getting individuals to establish an unjust society they do not really want. Rather, it generates an ethos of schizophrenia that helps condition the attitudes and behavior it requires for its own survival. It fosters ‘me’ thinking on the model of the narcissistic child and discourages ‘we’ thinking of the kind deliberative grown-up citizens recognize as wisdom. Its builds psychic monkey traps into its free-range marketplace. If the attitudes and behaviors that result turn out to undermine other important cultural values, which however are extraneous to capitalism’s concerns -- however deeply relevant they may be to moral and spiritual frameworks and to the shaping of an ideal public culture – too bad.

Today, however, culture and capitalism are set asunder by an infantilist ethos made the more effective by its alliance with a privatization ideology corrosive to civilization in its own right. We are encouraged to withdraw from our public selves into the sanctuary of “I want,” to secede from the public sector and fence ourselves in behind “walled communities” in which we deploy private resources to acquire what were once “public” goods such as garbage collection, police protection and schooling by treating them as private commodities.

The paradox of public and private that sets capitalism against civilization works to defeat common aspirations by “empowering” private wants. We lose the capacity to shape our lives together because we are persuaded by the prevailing ethos that freedom means expressing our desires in isolation.
The ethos of infantilism and the ideology of privatization privileges the consumer in us over the citizen is us, encouraging private desires which marginalize public goods. What the convergence of privatization and infantilization does so effectively is to tilt the contest between public and private, guaranteeing that the “me” will trump rival public goods, and that the consumer “me” that dwells ever more schizophrenically within each of us will triumph over the would-be citizen “we” dwelling nearby. For consumers believe they are better defenders of liberty than citizens, indeed that they are better citizens, that they do the work of citizens better than citizens do that work. This has been the well-intentioned but disastrous tactic of private sector do-gooders from the time of the National Consumers League earlier in the century to today’s advocates of the citizen consumer and the champions of corporate responsibility – all of whom try without success to heal the civic schizophrenia induced by privatization.

Examples abound of how this civic schizophrenia, when combined with an infantilist ethos and the ideology of privatization, can defeat the commonweal. I want a Hummer SUV that is bigger, faster, and meaner than everything on the road; but we need a country (and I want to live in a country) and we must have a world (and I want my children to live in a world) where some one else’s car does not protect its occupants by killing me and mine, where the nation is not oil dependent on foreign countries with whom we end up going to war to protect our energy imports, where the global environment is not degraded by fossil fuel by-products. You want the best health services that you can buy for you and yours alone, but you want to live in a country where everyone is protected from plagues and viruses because health is a public not a private
good which means that where some are at risk all are at risk. I want a career in youth
marketing where I can find a niche in targeting five-year-olds, but I don’t want to live in
a society where kindergartners are targets of manipulation and exploitation, and I
certainly don’t want my five-year-old targeted. As a career marketing executive, I work
to open kids up to the ‘influencers’ and avoid the gatekeepers (moms and teachers, for
example) who protect them from people like me! But as a citizen I want to live in a
country that protects kids from exploitation and marketing. As a producer of films for the
global market, you want adults everywhere to retain childish tastes and impetuous movie-
going habits (repeat viewers of blockbuster films are what make the big bucks!) that
guarantee profitability to your films, but as a parent you don’t want your own children to
be addicted to violence, porn, comics, video-games and fast food tie-ins – and you
certainly don’t want to be addicted to such tastes yourself when you have turned thirty or
forty and are yourself a parent of kids.

Now it seems clear that what we wish for one by one -- to spend rather than save,
for example, is not intended when aggregated to be a referendum on America’s global
fiscal viability; yet this is in fact exactly what it has become. Undeliberated private
choices engendered in part by the convergence of the consumer mandate to spend and the
focus on youth consumption result in undeliberated and often dire public consequences.
Even the savings banks from whom we might expect to receive encouraging messages
about the public benefits of saving have grown schizophrenic, peddling credit and debit
cards rather than savings accounts, joining in the chorus of infantilizing voices instructing
people to spend – spend beyond what they have, beyond emptied savings accounts, spend
themselves into deep debt, because the capitalist economy counts on that spending for its survival even though the national economy is damaged by it.

To keep global capitalism growing at the pace its survival requires, the keepers of the capitalist ethos must export America’s own puerile spending mania. Nations that sell their goods to the United States but have less robust domestic consumer economies that import too few overproduced American goods (contributing to the egregious American trade deficit) are of particular concern. In ongoing trade discussions with China, American secretary of the treasury John W. Snow has been insisting not only that the Chinese “speed up the privatization of state-owned companies, including banks,” but that “China needs to get people to spend more and save less.” President Bush recently reinforced this message, telling Chinese President Hu Jintao that he must create “a nation of consumers and non-savers, which will inure to the benefit of our manufacturers and our farmers as well.” (New York Times, November 20, 2006). This is of course the very mantra of consumer capitalism in decline: spend don’t save! Never has the passing of the Protestant ethos been more apparent.

Yet although we are taught that the right to make personal choices from a menu is the essence of liberty, the real power, and hence the real freedom, is in the determination of what is on the menu. The powerful are those who set the agenda, not those who choose from the alternatives it offers. We select menu items privately, but we can create a meaningful menu of choices only through public decision-making.

Moreover, it turns out that increasing the number of choices on a given menu has diminishing returns, even for private liberty. Addicted to the panacea of more, we like

56 Cited by Edmond L. Andrews, “U.S. Offers Details of Plan for Open Markets in China,” October 16, 2005. Though consumer spending has grown by about 10% a year recently, and home consumer credit is growing, the pace is far too slow for a White House that ‘wants Beijing to get people to spend more.’
the idea of maximizing the number of choices we can have. But the psychologists teach that there are limits to how many choices we can actually entertain as well as limits to our capacity to calculate the benefits of alternative possibilities. Nicholas Negroponte at MIT media lab says about the real nature of choice: “I don’t want 500 television channels, I just want the one channel that gives me what I want to see.”\footnote{Kevin Roberts, \textit{Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands}, New York: Powerhouse Books, p. 33.} 55 channels is choice overkill – what Barry Schwartz argues is “choice overload” in a world where more can actually feel like less.\footnote{Barry Schwartz, \textit{The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less}, New York: Harper Collins, 2004, p.6.} Private choice can be overwhelming. And even when we are underwhelmed, empirical studies show that regardless of intelligence, people do not always choose well.

Whether overwhelmed by too many private market choices, or disempowered by the lack of real public choices about what sorts of decisions need to be on our agenda, we end up riven by a deeply schizophrenic sense of liberty. We are internally divided and dissatisfied with both our private and our public options. Like the alcoholic who tries to hide the bottle from himself, we find ourselves loathe to embrace in public the kind of society our private desires continuously create. Yet we are unable and unwilling to disempower those private desires, and continue to accept the claim that producers are not only giving us what we want but (as they like to say) “empowering” us in the process. For satisfying private desires does feel good; and serving the survival of consumer capitalism may also seem to be a good thing for everyone. Our selfishness is rationalized and excused, while we permit the public goods after which we still yearn to be construed as liberty-destroying and disempowering. The public goods and the democratic institutions by which they are secured are delegitimized. Such profoundly public terms as
liberation and empowerment, once reserved for a civic discourse associated with
democracy and citizenship, are made over into tools of marketing and merchandising –
the new banners of a ‘consumer revolution’ whose aim is the final destruction of our
public selves as citizens.

It is the peculiar toxicity of privatization ideology that it rationalizes corrosive
private choosing as a surrogate for the public good. It enthuses about consumers as the
new citizens who can do more with their dollars and Euros and yen than with they ever
did with their votes. It associates the privileged market sector with liberty as private
choice while its condemns democratic government as coercive. It promotes a new and
malevolent variation on the eighteenth century doctrine of the “invisible hand” by which
Enlightenment economists once postulated that the pursuit of private desire by selfish
individuals would result in the greater good of all. Privatization ideology today
encourages us to believe that the market is not only efficient and flexible but can
somehow turn its regressive impulses to the service of what is left of the idea of the
public good. At the same time it pretends that the traditional instruments of our civic
empowerment, our democratic institutions, are actually means to our enslavement. The
logic is internalized, however, where it can operate in a stealth fashion by deploying civic
terms like liberty and empowerment in a private context that actually robs them of their
public functions.

Privatization is a kind of reverse social contract: it dissolves the bonds that tie us
together into free communities and free democratic republics. It puts us back in the state
of nature where we possess the natural power to get whatever we can by ourselves but
lose all those things to which we may have a natural right but will be capable of securing
only when acting in common. Private choices rest on individual power, skills and personal luck. Public choices rest on civic rights and common responsibilities. Public liberty is what the power of common endeavor establishes, and hence presupposes that we have constituted ourselves as public citizens by opting into the social contract. With privatization, we are seduced back into the state of nature by the lure of private liberty and particular interest; but what we experience in the end is an environment in which the strong dominate the weak and anarchy ultimately dominates the strong and the weak, undermining security for both.

TOTALIZING MARKETS:

It is ironic that privatization, which speaks in the name of liberty and pluralism, actually facilitates a nearly totalizing dominion of the market over every sphere of human life. While one would not want to call the market “totalitarian,” (the term conjures us Nazis and Bolsheviks robbing people of every right), it has today become a kind of bottom up totalizing force that defeats the liberal pluralism in whose name privatization advances its ideology. Modern markets tend to prove Plato’s claim (in *The Republic*) that “too much freedom seems to change into nothing but too much slavery.” For the infantilist ethos totalizes our lives by affording commerce a universal access to every part of life and every sector of our ‘life-world’ in ways we can only experience as homogenizing and flattening. After all when religion colonizes every sector of what should be our multi-dimensional lives we call the result theocracy; and when politics colonizes every sector of what should be our multi-dimensional lives we call the result tyranny. So why, it might be asked, when the marketplace -- with its insistent ideology of
consumption and its dogged orthodoxy of spending -- colonizes every sector of what should be our multi-dimensional lives, do we call the result liberty?

The market consciously aims at exerting a firm grip on time and on space at their most encompassing, controlling each and every of our waking moments and infiltrating our most remote and private geography. This is the necessary condition for capitalism’s success: an all-consuming people who shop or think about shopping, who form or exercise consumer wants, all the time. Compare a modern suburban mall that is the only common space in those suburban death-scapes where more than half of America lives today with the traditional town square or the village commons around which, in most societies, mixed in among the shops and stores and commercial establishments, could once be found a schoolroom and courthouse, a post office and library, a village theater and churchyard, each mirroring the rich human variety that constituted a democratic community’s essential character. The famous mega-market in Minneapolis called “The Mall of America” has become the mall that is America; and that mall that is America threatens to colonize every other people’s worlds, from Mumbai and Taipei to Johannesburg and Moscow.

In reducing civic liberty to a whining and whimsical ‘I want’ that trumps every other human sentiment, the infantilist ethos has declared war on variety: it has hurried to out-rush, outflank and dominate every attitude and behavior that does not conduce to shopping. Unlike the state, which uses its monopoly over legitimate force to guarantee diversity, the market uses its persuasion to enforce commercial monopoly. This entails not so much false consciousness as divided consciousness – that civic schizophrenia to which we have alluded earlier.
In a book with the telling title “Preference Pollution: How Markets Create the Desires We Dislike,” the economist David George has spelled out the ways in which the marketplace has used its capacity to satisfy “first order desires” (as Harry Frankfurt calls them) even as it ignores the “second order desires” that constitute what we might understand as our genuine will. It gives us what “we want” (big gas-guzzling, pollution spewing S.U.V.s, for example) but pays no attention at all to what we want to want (energy independence and clean air). By serving desire, it feels free to engage in “unrestricted persuasion” with respect to first order desires, thinking in doing so it legitimizes free will.\(^{59}\) In the subtitle of her book, *The Overspent American*, Juliet Schor proposes to tell us “why we want what we don’t need.”\(^{60}\) What needs explaining however is why we don’t want what we want. Why what we want is not really what we want to want (what our social selves want). If, as Harry Frankfurt insists, “to have a free will is to be moved by desires that one wishes to be moved by,” then market persuasion directed at first order desires isn’t really freedom at all.\(^{61}\) Part of how market totalism works is to make the realm of first desires the only legitimate realm of choosing. In old fashioned moral language, the empire of impulse is allowed to trump the empire of will, and then rewarded with a crown called liberty. What is missing, however, both in the old moral language and in David George’s economist talk is that first order desires tend usually to be private, and second order desires tend to be public. We speak first as “me” and only then consider the “we.”

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\(^{61}\) Harry G. Frankfurt, *op. cit.* chapter five.
Unlike political coercion from the top down, bottom up consumer homogenization unfolds out of sight, and consumerism colonizes time and space under the banner of choice (since private choices are seen as competitive and pluralistic.)

**Forms of Market Totalism:**

There are five forms of market domination that constitute the substance of my argument that the consumer market penetrates and totalizes our lives. The consumer market is **ubiquitous** (it is everywhere); it is **omnipresent** (it is ‘all the time’ and aspires to fill up all time); it is **addictive** (it creates its own forms of reinforcement); it is **self-replicating** (it spreads virally); and it is **omni-legitimate** (it engages in active self-rationalization and self-justification, eroding the moral bases for resisting it). Together, these five characteristics give markets a power over our lives and thoughts, bodies and souls, that rival more traditional forms of totalitarianism. Yet although they are less toxic because they operate under the putative legitimacy of market freedom and depend on civic schizophrenia for their success, they are the more difficult to resist and overcome.

**UBIQUITY:** In the traditional liberal view of society, life offers many discrete spheres of activity for human beings whose values, cultures and life purposes are historically plural and empirically diverse (pluralism is a fact rather than an aspiration). In surveying the spheres in which justice might play a role, for example, Michael Walzer gave us a representative typology which considered not only the marketplace defined by money and commodities, but other spheres, each with its own values and goods, defined by merit (office in the ancient sense), by work (workplace), by leisure (recreation), by education (school-place), by kinship and love (family or home), by divine grace.
(religion), by respect and recognition (friendship, and by politics (public or civic space)). Walzer gave the fact of human pluralism a prescriptive thrust, arguing that “there is no single set of primary or basic goods conceivable across all moral and material worlds.”

Now as a theory, private market philosophy shares this commitment to pluralism and variety. Yet the liberal democratic state employs its monopoly over legitimate force to assure a pluralism of spheres and the sanctity of individual rights and of the domain of privacy rights define, while the consumer market-place tends to colonize every sphere and sector, even though it maintains the fiction of pluralism. Commercializing capitalism mandates the infiltration and permeation of non-commercial spheres in order to maximize profitability. It is quite literally everywhere, colonizing every life sphere in which we live out our daily routines. On sidewalks and walls and buses and trains, in schoolrooms and bedrooms and restrooms and trams, on big screens and pod-screens and TV’s and phones, carved into haircuts and written on skin, codified as trademarks and brandmarks and lovemarks – ciphers for human identity consumed by desire, a spirit perfectly captured by the New York Times in the title of a book review of a philosophical study of desire reading “I Am, Therefore I Want.”

Ubiquity is a powerful term, but as with so many ideas examined here, it is not my coinage but that of the marketers. A journalist surveying telecommunication conglomerates introduces a story on MTV networks under the title “I Want My Ubiquitous Conglomerate.” “His” ubiquitous conglomerate – which is itself a

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63 Ibid., p. 9.
subsidiary of the still more elephantine Viacom -- includes MTV, MTV2, Nickelodeon, Comedy Central, TV Land and Spike in the United States, and 111 channels around the world, including 19 brand new channels in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa. The question posed by this newsman’s story is “once you are everywhere, where do you go next?” Meanwhile, *Newsweek* takes note of the new competition for small screen television (on cell phones and i-pods) by shouting “only one thing is clear: the race is on toward ubiqui-TV.”

A recent advertising campaign slogan for Samsung’s new cell phone television portrays ubiqui-TV as a privatization of public space: we watch a variety of people nominally “in public” turn their spaces into privatized viewing rooms for their handheld Samsung mini-screens, while a tagline urges us to “imagine the world as your living room.” The annihilation of public space, a feature of many of the new technologies, from cell-phones and Blackberry’s to video-games and global positioning auto maps (no more turning to “the public” to ask directions), has become a virtue among privatized consumers for whom the presence of public others is a distraction from consuming private behavior.

Hence, alone among its allies, the United States opposed the 2005 UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity because it insisted and insists that the free market is a better vehicle for global cultural diversity than transnational regulation. Yet the global marketplace has facilitated an asymmetry in cultural power in which the United States (and Hollywood) dominates. French cultural minister Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres defended the Convention by noting that “Hollywood movies account for 85% of movie tickets sold around the world. In the United States only 1 percent of shown movies come

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66 Johnnie L. Roberts, “Small TV, Big War,” *Newsweek*, October 24, 2005, commenting on the Apple-Disney deal that allows i-Pods to carry Disney/ABC content such as “desperate Housewives” and “Lost.”
from outside the United States." Does the United States defend the market mechanism then because it assures diversity or because it assure American cultural dominion and the ubiquity of its commercial products?

Ubiquity means everywhere; which means anywhere can become a target for commercial take-over by specialists for whom an unbranded space is an unfulfilled potential. There is no such thing as a blank slate – a *tabla rasa* – in today’s ubiquitous marketplace. Every blank space invites a brand logo or an advertising slogan; every skin patch invites a commercial tattoo; every silence invites a noisy come-on. Marketers figure out how to hook products and brands to movies and songs; to make whole TV stations advertising boards (MTV, like VHF, is a shopping network for the music industry in which, we have seen, rock around the clock becomes shop around the clock on 111 channels [and counting] world wide). They try to enlist the five senses in every campaign, recently seizing on the idea of “embedding aromas” in packaging, “hoping the way to the purse is through the nose…. Targeting as many of the five senses as possible”

As companies trade, merge, co-brand and exchange, they try to create content monopolies over the multiple screens we nowadays watch from dawn to midnight. Those Samsung cell phone screens, so seemingly plural, are conduits to common content, and the firms that control or sponsor content seek a monopoly on that commonality. The

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68 One clever youngster has attracted marketing attention by coining the term “bum-vertising” to sell an ass-forward version of the branded forehead; he has specialized in enlisting the homeless (“bums”) to give up begging in order to shill other people’s wares: pandering in place of panhandling as a new form of buzz (down) marketing. See Claudia Rowe, “‘Bumvertising’ Stirs Debate,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, September 13, 2005.
Disney Company (and its ABC broadcast subsidiary) is partnering with Steve Jobs’ Apple Computer company to put Disney content on Apple’s latest iPod video receivers. Their rivals such as Google video and RealNetworks compete for the same eyeballs, every digital pipeline looking for its own monopoly over content – right around the world. And so Newsweek’s “race is on toward ubiqi-TV,” where virtual ad-driven watching never stops courtesy of multiplying media technologies -- wrist watch, phone, ipod, computer screen, wifi connectivity, television sets large and small, and old fashion movie screens.  

There are more and more circuits, more wires, more “pipes” to deliver virtual content, but less and less pluralism of content. The internet has already entangled us in a world-wide-web that has become a surrogate reality. Futurologists in the mould of George Gilder have gone a step farther in quest of ubiquity, imagining an electronic network built into and coterminous with the atmosphere, an “ethersphere” into which anyone can plug: presto! universal wi-fi absolutely anywhere. Using the nearly infinite bandwidth beyond what is commercially exploited today, no one will ever have to be off-line again; we can all be hooked together into a virtual “telecosmic” network through which, however, our actual connections to actual publics are obliterated. 

Webgames target youth, but players abound in every generation – millions of kidult gamesters participating in “persistent” (permanently on and available to players who log on) online games. A 54 year old online player of “Star Wars Galaxies” complained when the manufacturer changed the format and rules that it had ruined the “wonderful second life together” she and fellow gamesters had developed – destroying “a camaraderie and

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friendship with other players that were far more important than the play itself – relationships that can be hard to replicate in ‘real life’.

Gilder’s vision of a ubiquitous telecosm is no futurologist’s fantasy. In October, 2005, Philadelphia chose EarthLink “to build and manage a wireless network spanning the entire city.” Chicago, Miami Beach, Milwaukee and Portland are also exploring municipal wireless networks and Google recently offered to “make all of San Francisco wireless for free” (well, not exactly free, but to be paid for by advertisements targeting users.72 Around the world, where many countries including South Korea, Canada, Israel and Japan already have a greater percentage of their population with access to broadband than the United States (which now ranks sixteenth in broadband access), public wireless networks is likely to prove even more seductive.

Born of competition and rooted in entrepreneurship, consumer markets today have become monsters of monomania. With “everything for sale” (the title of a book by Robert Kuttner on markets), rival spheres come under attack, and “government stands impeached and impoverished, along with democratic politics itself.”73 There is only one paradigm – “unfettered markets are deemed both the essence of human liberty, and the most expedient route to prosperity” – and hence but one value (profit), one activity (shopping), one identity (the consumer), one paradigm of behavior (market exchange), one life world (commerce) that qualify as legitimate.74

**OMNI-PRESENCE:** the consumer market aspires to be everywhere but it also wishes to be ever-present, occupying time with the same fierceness that it conquers space. In modern consumer societies, the store is never closed, the pitchman is never silent and

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74 Ibid., p 3.
the opportunity to engage in market exchange is never suspended. This is a kind of reverse-Sharia in which the rules of every competing social sector whether religious or political, being overwritten by the rules governing shopping. Islamic Sharia, like Puritanism with its Sunday ‘blue laws’, might decree “no shopping on the Sabbath,” or “no alcohol or dancing permitted, ever!” Market ‘sharia’ decrees: ‘no no-shopping days permitted, stores permanently open!’ and ‘alcohol and dancing [and everything else that can be bought] permitted, encouraged, ordained, everywhere and always!’ Shops and malls that once were open five or six days a week now are open seven days a week, with added hours on selected evenings and holidays, and early openings (five or six in the morning, even 12.01 past midnight) on those special shopping days like ‘Black Friday’ (as in ‘profitable’ or in ‘in the black’) right after Thanksgiving on a day when nearly ten percent of all holiday purchases are now made in the United States, many at pre-dawn morning sales. ‘Religious’ holidays from Christmas and Easter to Passover and Ramadan have joined other holidays like Halloween and Kwanza and Valentine’s Day as occasions for commerce that spread across ethnic and national boundaries, their “holiness” an excuse only to stop working (producing) in order to ramp up consuming.

To measure commercialism’s contemporary omnipresence is to chart the actual minutes and hours spent each day by Americans or Germans or Japanese during which they are exposed to commercial media messaging and invited to identify themselves in terms of what they buy and eat and drink and wear. The numbers, as they impact on the young, are particularly daunting. Measured by the time allotted to them, commercialism’s pedagogical competitors – education, parenting, socialization by church or civic group -- come out on the short side. Teachers struggle for the attention of their students for at
most 20 or 30 hours a week, perhaps 30 weeks a year, in settings they do not fully control and in institutions that are often ridiculed in the popular media. Pastors, rabbis, immans and priests get an hour or two a week with that ever smaller minority of their congregations that actually attend services, and parents no longer have much time with their kids after they go to school. The true tutors of late consumer capitalist society as measured by time are those who control the media monopolies, the aggressive content purveyors, shameless lords of the omnipresent pixels, who capture sixty or seventy hours a week, fifty two weeks a year, of children’s time and attention.

The Kaiser Family Foundation’s 2005 survey of eight to eighteen year old American youngsters found that “the total amount of media content young people are exposed to each day has risen to eight and a half hours.” The culture of puerility legitimates it all in part simply by owning the clock. But to own the clock is not always to display it. Malls are stubborn in their disdain for clocks, and manage to own time by operating outside of its discipline. If shoppers do not know what time it is, they can never spend too much of it on shopping. The now notorious “24/7” news cycle that puts “all-news all the time” on dozens of cable channels, internet stations and satellite radio and television transmissions announces that news time is all the time. All news all the time is no longer news at all, but commercial infotainment geared to commerce rather than to information. The executive vice-president of scheduling at CBS acknowledges the obvious, that “in a hyperactive society with so many choices, viewers are used to being entertained every minute.”

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76 Kelly Kahl cited in “Changing Their Tune,” October 17, 2005 [??]
In responding to multiple technologies, young people are developing multi-track minds that accommodate multitrack media, adding hours to the clock. A successful marketing strategy must think bigger than 24 hours a day. A study commissioned by Yahoo! and OMD Worldwide found that by exploiting the multi-tasking typical of fast-moving young people, it is possible to get “members of the My Media generation [to] fit up to 44 hours of activities in just one day.”\(^\text{77}\) In an infantilist culture, time itself is elastic, for electronic gadgetry like TIVO and iPods allow consumers to “time shift” their consumption of content. Hence, young people can respond to advertisements about gear on their television screens (the Home Shopping Network), even as they research comparative pricing on another channel (Googling stuff), and ‘buzz market’ stuff to friends on still another (I-messaging them) – a three for one multitasking that lets them do an hour’s consumer labor in twenty minutes.

The younger the target consumer, the more effective the assault on time. While adults can mute, filter, or otherwise elude or ignore advertising, “the first survey of American children by Mediamark Research Inc. has found that children differ from adults in one way that should interest advertisers: most of them aren’t skipping TV ads.” They do not mute their sets during ads, and they do not time shift out of commercial space as adults do. More than 60% of 5,400 six to eleven year olds said they watched ads the same way they watched programs.\(^\text{78}\) Commercials themselves have a timeless quality,

\(^{77}\) Gavin O’Malley, “Yahoo! OMD: Global Youth Get Music Fix on Web, Tuesday September 27, 2005. The study surveyed 13-24 year olds in eleven countries and was released in September, 2005. Another study by Mediamark Research found that “nearly 60% of children between the ages of 6 and 11 go online at least once a month, and one in 12 go online daily.” 42.6% play online games at least once a month. 84% of respondents play video games each month, with one fifth reporting they play every day (30% of boys and 11% of girls). Shankar Gupta, “One in 12 Kids Visits Web Daily,” November 22, 2005.

merging with television, web-based and video-game content, to digest more and more of a typical child’s daily schedule.

The commercial time-space continuum is expandable. Its eyes are those glowing diodes that stare at us day and night, green or red peering optics that are always on even when the gadgets they sign for are off, reminders that the commercial time-space continuum is never “off,” only hibernating or paused or, if you try to turn it off, like your computer, recycling into the “restart” mode, waiting, every ready for you to log on again and get on with the consumers’ virtual life. Like all the other systems of the market economy, the selling system default mode is set permanently to “opt in.” There is no opt in switch, you are in until you opt out. Except there is no “opt out” switch either, so you are forever in. This is a kind of “passive consuming,” a system mode which, like car restraints and safety cushions, work without the will or input of the user. The market economy is in user mode all the time, and deploys wares and marketing without the consumer having to do anything at all. A perfect selling machine.

There is no longer anywhere to hide: iPod and cell-phone, wireless network and telecosm, are everywhere with you; there is no longer any moment in which to take sanctuary, time belongs to the market.

ADDICTIVENESS:

Another indicator of the totalizing and homogenizing character of consumer culture is its apparent addictiveness. Addictive behavior places the addictive object in the forefront of both consciousness and sub-consciousness in a manner that can obliterate rival interests. In the first instance, it is a medical and psychological issue. But in a hyper-
consumer society, it has a cultural and economic dimension, as is apparent in this
technology expert’s comment on a 4-year old playing a video game, “who was so excited
about finding words in the maze that she got addicted, in an arcade-ish way” to the
game. 79 My use of the term addiction is not metaphoric: addiction is ubiquity’s core
psychology and hence an ideal means to securing market omnipresence. For addiction
leads to repetitive behavior in which the addicted subject returns to the same obsession
over and over again, so that it encompasses time as well. The consumer society prospers
on addictive behavior, selling tobacco, alcohol, medications (legal drugs) and of course
state-sponsored and casino as well as on-line gambling (estimated to be a 10 billion a
year business); it also sells sugar-saturated sodas and candies and grease-laden fast foods
to the young who often acquire an addiction to them -- in theory because consumers
“want” these ‘goods,’ but in fact because it is profitable to do so, especially when
addictions are created.

Business spends over $11 billion a year in its “advertising assault” on “children,
teens, and young adults.” Some of this is to sell about $20 billion a year in toys, and
alarmingly, marketers are now introducing digital music players and digital cameras for
three year olds – “Mommy, Help Me Download ‘Farmer in the Dell’ to My MP3 Player”
proclaims a New York Times “news” headline! 80 The greater proportion of the sum
continues to be spent by the food, beverage, candy and restaurant industry whose aim, if
not quite addiction, is not only brand loyalty, but sugar, salt and grease dependency. Fast
food chains vie for the superburger record, with Hardee’s 1400 calorie “Monster Thick-

79 Warren Buckleitner, editor of Children’s Technology Review, commenting on the new infant game
80 Michael Barbaro, “:Mommy, Help Me Down load ‘Farmer in the Dell’ to My MP3 Player.” The New
burger” and Wendy’s 1000 calorie “triple cheeseburger” trumped by Ruby Tuesday’s 1780 calorie “Ultimate Colossal Burger.” Meanwhile, Pizza Hut boasts a Full House XL pizza with 2240 calories.81

Alcohol, naturally addictive, is also heavily marketed to the young. Binge drinking has become a peril on university campuses across the world, and in the United States it finds commercial sponsorship in extensive television beer advertising geared to teen taste (girls, gags and geeks mixed in with talking turtles) as well as in the new fashion of collegiate drinking games like Beer Pong, in which contestants try to throw ping pong balls into beer cups with the “losers” being “compelled” to guzzle beer. Anheuser-Busch introduced a “Bud-Pong” game in 2005, “promoting Bud Pong tournaments, and providing Bud Pong tables, balls and glasses to distributors in 47 markets, including college towns like Oswego, N.Y., and Clemson, S.C.”82 Outrageous websites (not beer company sponsored, however) with names such as www.collegedrunkfest.com “feature rules, merchandise and pictures of wild parties, with some students naked and others hugging the toilet.”83 The site is a kind of unending virtual spring break venue made up of equal parts of porn and foolishness, all explicitly linked to heavy drinking.

Addiction is a clinical term, and many observers use it in speaking of consumer behavior. The consumer market aims to attach every natural human need to an artificial commercial product, so that for the need to be fulfilled the product must be purchased.

81 These quotes and figures are from Derrick Z. Jackson, “Why Obesity is Winning,” The Berkshire Eagle, August 24, 2005.
83 Ibid. www.collegedrunkfest.com The site’s homepage announces that “this website contains nudity, violence, explicit language and everything else that your mother would never let you see.”
The aim is commodity-based addiction, day and night (omnipresence is a synonym for addiction): no sleep without Ambien and no wakefulness without No-Doz, no passive evening spectatorship without TV and no midday athletic prowess without all the right gear; no nighttime colds without NyQuil and no daytime sniffles without DayQuil. Every mental and emotional state demands a commercial facilitator, ideally one on which a dependency can be bred. Think of a typical young man’s evening out at the local mall sport’s bar: no cool without Ralph Lauren, no hook-up without Nokia, no fun without Bud, no buzz without nicotine, no pickup without Heineken, no chat without the overhead bar TV screen, no getaway without the Miata, no background Muzak without Bose, no come-on sheets without Martha Stewart, no intercourse without Viagra and no see-ya without the trumped up buddy call on Verizon. Even big-ticket items in the Third World call for big ticket commercial facilitators: no war without Blackwater, no democratization without Halliburton, no reconstruction without Bechtel. Eventually, the generics become indistinguishable from the brands so that it becomes redundant to mention both: youth means Pepsi, memories mean Kodak macho means Hummer, games mean Sony, music means iPod, computers mean Microsoft, knowledge means Google, sports means Nike. Addiction itself is commodity based: no addiction therapy without web-based health sites and self-help books and novel medications aimed at depression or bipolarity or anorexia or the latest illness of the week that can be associated with addiction.

Addiction to consumer products, to gear and peripherals and to games and goods, is good, but addiction to consumerism itself – to shopping – is better. The syndrome is know as compulsive shopping, which is more today than a rhetorical phrase or a tired
shopper’s joke. A Stanford University Study reports that “up to 8% of Americans, 23.6 million people, suffer from compulsive shopping disorder,” an affliction associated with “out of control spending” that “rips apart relationships and plunges consumers into overwhelming debt and bankruptcy.” Googling terms such as “shopping addiction” and “shopoholism” turns up hundreds of help sites, dozens of books (mostly of the self-help variety), and a growing medical literature that extends all the way to Russia and China. The figure of twenty-four million compulsive shoppers in America suggests something approaching a pandemic. The addict is not an aberration but a product of the marketing industry. Addiction is not a pathology in need of therapy, but an industry ambition calling for reinforcement. The infantilist ethos is itself at least in some part an ethos of addiction, attested to by an estimated twenty-four million American compulsive shoppers.

The Illinois based Proctor Hospital runs an “addiction recovery program” that, among more traditional varieties of addiction such as drug dependency and alcohol addiction, for example, also treats compulsive shopping. “Compulsive shopping or spending,” Proctor counsels on its website, “may result in interpersonal, occupational, family and financial problems in one's life. In many ways the consequences of this behavior are similar to that of any other addiction. Impairment in relationships may occur as a result of excessive spending and efforts to cover up debt or purchases. Persons who engage in compulsive shopping or spending may become pre-occupied with that behavior.

and spend less and less time with important people in their lives. They may experience anxiety or depression as a result of the spending or shopping which may interfere with work or school performance.86 This is a lucid a definition of how a totalizing consumer economy might come to dominate consciousness.

Addiction is not just an American phenomenon, a by-product of American hyperbole and the American penchant for medicalizing cultural problems and dealing with them through self-help programs. In the United Kingdom, the website www.addictions.co.uk cites a 1998 Mintel marketing study that has as many as one of four Britons “admitting being addicted to shopping,” with “twice as many women as men saying that they frequently set off on a shopping expedition even though they have nothing specific in mind to buy.”87 Such behavior results in an “overwhelming sense of shame, remorse and guilt accompanied by feelings of hopelessness and helplessness,” and leads not only “to despair” but often to still “more addictive behaviour resulting in more self destructive feelings.” These in turn generate “high levels of debt, fear of discovery and retribution leading to more denial and desperate acts to cover up the behaviour. For those closely connected to the sufferer life becomes frightening and unpredictable with a growing sense of uselessness and the belief that the sufferer is deliberately causing chaos and a feeling of desperation sets in.”88

In Russia, which has shivered through a fifteen year consumer capitalism cold shower (all consumerism all the time), and has established little in the way of

86 See www.proctor.org.
87 According to the site www.addictions.co.uk, “the shopping habits survey by the market analyst Mintel asked more than 1,000 people which category they fell into: addicted, happy, purposeful, reluctant or obstinate. It found the number of shopoholics has soared. (www.mintel.co.uk)

88 From the website www.addictions.co.uk
democracy, shopoholism has also become a well publicized problem. An essay in the Russian on-line magazine Pravda reports that shopping addiction is a “mental and spiritual disorder” that is now common “mostly with women;” one that has recently “been shaping up as an epidemic.” The piece cites “researchers” who include the Psychologist Nadezhda Yugrina who have “found out that about twenty percent of German women acknowledge their insuperable desire to buy something all the time.”

Unsurprisingly then, shopping addiction appears to be as global as shopping itself. And while it is widely recognized as a pathology of advanced market society, it may be that it is in fact market society itself writ large, the perfect image of its defining ethos. The infantilizing aspects of shopoholism seem clear enough. Therapists report that they are “seeing a growing number of teenagers and young adults as patients, who grew up spending hours on the computer, playing games and sending instant messages. These patients appear to have significant developmental problems, including attention deficit disorder and a lack of social skills.”

Such disorders today comprise “a growing niche in mental health care and addiction recovery” under the diagnostic rubric: “Internet addiction disorder.” Therapists speak of 15 or more discrete symptoms for the compulsive shopping disorder, while firms advertising therapies offer 12 step programs designed specifically to treat it. At places such as the Sierra/Tucson Psychiatric Hospital in Arizona, the EG Center for Online Addiction in Bradford, Pennsylvania, and the Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery at Proctor Hospital in Peoria, Illinois, computer addicts mix in with more traditional populations of cocaine and alcohol abusers.

90 Sarah Kershaw, “Hooked on the Web,” Ibid.
At the treatment end of addiction, therapies are offered not only for addiction but for those whose addictions have led to crippling debt, for which groups such as Debtors Anonymous offer traditional “healing and health” twelve step remedial programs. Therapy can work as long as "compulsive shopping and spending are defined as inappropriate, excessive, and out of control," says Donald Black, MD, professor of psychiatry at the University of Iowa College of Medicine. But what if we face a pathology not just of the individual consumer but of the culture itself? What if the consumer culture that generates a response to pathological compulsive disorders and the consequences they bring (indebtedness and bankruptcy) is itself organized around and even defined by the very pathologies its therapies affect to address? Is not addiction under such circumstances consumption-*sustaining* rather than shopper-*pathological*? To the extent that, in Dr. Black’s own phrase, “shopping is embedded in our culture,” the culture is unlikely to be able effectively to treat it. For the culture is directly complicit in breeding the pathologies that putatively threaten it. It *is* its pathologies, which cannot then be truly regarded as aberrational with respect to its ends. It is the culture itself that becomes aberrational. The dirty little not-so-hidden secret of infantilization is that the cultural ethos of consumerism mandates compulsive shopping disorder in order to satisfy its need for compulsive selling.

**SELF-REPLICATION:**

Addiction is an effective instrument of totalizing commercialism; so is self-replication, that capacity of market entities to reproduce themselves, both virally and in other ways, in the absence of public oversight and regulation. Global corporations that

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depend on franchising (fast food or coffee chains) aim first to establish a beachhead, then
to dominate, in time to suffuse and finally to monopolize the market in which they
compete. A Starbucks wherever coffee is consumed, no rivals; an Einstein café (once a
unique Berlin coffee shop) reproduced as often as possible, across Berlin and then
Germany; McDonald’s wherever burgers (beef, lamb, tofu, no matter) are to be eaten in a
hurry. When there was a single McDonald’s in Beijing, variety was served: an alternative
to Chinese cuisine had established an entrepreneurial, diversifying foothold. With ten
McDonald’s in the city, different neighborhoods could partake in the new variety. But
with one hundred outlets, now nearly 350 across China and still proliferating, diversity is
diminished and franchise monopoly at the expense of pluralism becomes a growing
danger. There may be natural market limits on franchising (some fast food chains have, at
least for the time being, hit a wall), but there are no natural limits on the ambition to
franchise until every sandwich consumed anywhere in Peking or China or Asia or the
world is a quick-eat Big Mac.

Franchising not only aspires to a market monopoly (Coke leaves no room for
Pepsi or, for that matter, for tea), but produces homogenization and conformity. Fast
food not only replicates itself through franchising, it encourages competitors in the food
service business to pursue fast food, leaving less and less room for rival “slow food”
services. Consumer malls world wide still offer all manner of fare from ethnically
inflected fast food chains such as Pizza Hut, Wendy’s, Burger King, McDonald’s.
Domino’s, KFC, Taco Bell, Sbarro’s as well as the local Chinese and Thai chains, but
finding an alternative to fast food (finger food served in a hurry to customers who stand

92 In *Jihad vs. McWorld*, I described the Coca Cola Company’s efforts, described in its 1992 Annual
Corporate report, to dominate the India beverage market by making “war” on Indian tea culture.
in line to buy, and stand or perch on chairs to eat fast) in general is difficult. Traditional restaurants, barring the occasional sports bar, are rarely found in the big box malls, since eating in such venues is meant to supplement shopping (a fuel stop) rather than borrow serious time from it. The point of fast food after all is its speed, not its recipes. The same is true for the sports shoes sector, where there is competition among brands, but little competition by alternative modes of footwear. Nearly two thirds of the shoes sold in the world today are sports shoes, so that there is less variety around the world than ever before. T-shirts and baseball caps as well as blue jeans and athletic shoes are sold under a number of competing (if monopoly-aspiring) global companies, but the overall result is an emerging global ‘youth uniform’ that pinches dress tastes as effectively as MTV and VHF constrict musical taste.

Commodification is the mode by a consumer society reproduces itself, working over time to create uniform monopolies of taste and behavior. To commodify an object is to transform multiple meanings into a singular market meaning, namely the potential of a good or service to be bought and sold. To commodify is thus to colonize, to impose singular meanings on multi-dimensional goods: “Things never before considered commodities – things that were free, unlimited, or beyond the pale of human commerce – have become commodities today,” writes James Ridgeway; “…. The oceans are being commodified (oil drilling)… offshore fishing rights are being auctioned….. the sky – the earth inner and outer atmosphere – is fast becoming a commodity and sold in bits and pieces.”93 He concludes: “Now, parts of human bodies are commodities as well, from blood to eyes, kidneys, and hair….. efforts are being made to commodity not only living

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things, but… life itself, with biotech companies making ownerships claims to genetically engineered life forms.”94

The internet is a particularly powerful reproducer of consumerism because of its technical capacity to reproduce digital information, and both spread and preserve such information permanently. Try to “erase” an email and its many ghostly shadows or eradicate all traces of a website visit on your computer, and it becomes clear that decommodification and decolonization are far more daunting than the colonizing processes to which they respond.

The computer virus is a useful metaphor for at least one powerful characteristic of commodification: the way in which it not only puts its character at the center, but removes characteristics and identities that were in place prior to infection. Like those multiplying pop ads that efface other underlying images on your computer screen, commodified goods dominate our landscape. Like a virus that may reproduce what is a quite innocent message over and over again until it erases all other message content, and become something other than innocent, commodification works to transform many kinds of goods and services into saleable commodities whose core meaning if their consumability – they can be bought for a price. Like a cancer, commodification does not so much kill as crowd out other meanings and values, so that “exchange value, not truth value [or any other kind] counts.” What is the tumor but the single mutating cell run amok, reproducing itself over and over again, oblivious to what it may be destroying on the way to a successful reproduction? Television takes over our entertainment sector, crowding out theater and movies. The internet and broadband crowd out television.

“Normal” use becomes abnormal, and then obsessive and finally addictive. All the while,

94 Ridgeway, ibid.
consumer capitalism triumphs, seemingly a benign engine of the market sector. Yet its endless capacity for self-replication ultimately destroys alternative sectors and thus erodes variety.\textsuperscript{95}

OMNI-LEGITIMACY (or “DIVERSITY, WHATEVER”)\textsuperscript{96}

The real purpose of the infantilist ethos now becomes apparent: to legitimate the structural features and behaviors capitalism depends upon that might otherwise be thwarted or rejected, if other value systems were pursued (religious, political, civic, artistic). To be compelling, a market society that boasts a theory of pluralism must in practice either obscure its bottom-up forms of coercion or give try to legitimate the actual absence of diversity. Legitimation, to lean again on Horkheimer and Adorno, often takes the form of a “circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger.”\textsuperscript{97}

The ubiquity of commerce must be made to seem a good thing, a widening of our realm of discretion. Addiction must be renamed, authorized, made to seem benign – associated with “need satisfaction,” for example. Homogeneity must be reformulated – as healthy value consensus, for example. A cultural ethos that successfully places consuming at its core and shuts out rival spheres, must seem to be justified in doing so – and not just in purely economic or instrumental terms. It must be “OK,” as the fatuous

\textsuperscript{95} Buzz marketing is typically representative of consumerism’s penchant for replication. As we have already seen, it uses what is often covert peer-to-peer marketing to sell young people fresh, new and uncommon fashions which, when marketed in this way, become common fashions. The result is less variety rather than more.

\textsuperscript{96} A Canadian Department Store advertising slogan, cited by Naomi Klein, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}, p. 31.
title of an earlier rationalization of a certain kind of commercial ethos put it: “I’m OK, You’re OK.”

This is of course precisely the goal of marketing: to impose an omni-legitimacy of good feeling and appropriate sentiment not only on the products and brands it services, but on the marketing process by which it achieves its goal. Marketing itself needs branded legitimacy, the legitimacy of branding, to succeed. Holding market culture together through branded wants and manufactured desires allows consumer marketing to separate us from one another through privatization even as its forges a faux commonality and consensus through common branding. The passive, quasi-addicted children who emerge as archetypical consumers are less one-dimensional (Herbert Marcuse’s term) than no-dimensional, because such identity as they possess is entirely heteronymous, a product of what is bought, eaten, worn and imbibed into a passive imagination. This is not really identity at all, but merely a coat worn to cover nakedness. I am my Mercedes. I am my Apple. I am my Big Mac. I am my Nikes. I am my MTV. We are our cars, we are our computers, we are what we eat and wear and watch. The end effect of the ethos is the eradication of significant differences among consumers, people who in as much as they are consumers are clones.

As the hold of consumerism grows, what Adorno and Horkheimer used to call “mass culture” becomes even less diverse. “Under monopoly all mass culture is identical,” they wrote long ago, “and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through. The people at the top are no longer so interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows. Movies and radio need no longer

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98 The title of a pop psychology best-seller by Dr. Thomas A. Harris in 1973.
pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries…”

Fortunately, we are not yet fully propelled into this nightmare. Other powerful forms of identity continue to rival consumer identity. Unfortunately, many of those identities arise out of anti-modern ascriptive identities drawn from religious fundamentalism and ethnic extremism, Jihadic identities of the kind that were the subject of my *Jihad vs. McWorld*. Totalization generates its own contraries, just as conformity spawns rebellion. Nonetheless, consumer capitalism in the grip of marketing continues to risk totalization and homogeneity. The question is whether it is possible to prevent the infantilist ethos from succeeding, to impede the course towards further totalism and privatization, to loosen the hold of marketing and branding on identity, to overcome the civic schizophrenia that has made it so difficult for constructive citizens to work together to overcome destructive impulses of consumers when acting alone.

Is then resistance to the infantilist ethos possible? Are there significant forms of rebellion and opposition already in place despite the infantilist ethos? Can they be made effective? Is there a civic therapy that can treat the civic schizophrenia that afflicts liberty in market societies? The power of dialectic, opposites arising out of the very contradictions against which they rebel, suggests that there might be.

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99 Dialectic of Enlightenment, chapter 9.
Lecture 3:
RESISTING CONSUMERISM: CAN CAPITALISM CURE ITSELF?

“Under certain circumstances (the marketplace) held out a vision of transcendence, however, fleeting.”
- Jackson Lears

Can a balance be restored between marketing and life? Is there a way for capitalism to survive and yet still reconcile itself to a culture of adults who do more than shop, and meet the needs of real people who lack the resources to participate in market exchange? Overthrowing capitalism has never been either a viable or a desirable option -- not at any stage in its long dialectical history (as socialists, communists and Marxists learned from long, bitter experience). So today the challenge is not capitalism per se but restoring the balance between capitalism and the many other independent life worlds it once helped establish but now, dependent on hyper-consumption, it threatens to destroy.

In a cultural ethos as totalizing and insistent as that of “push” consumer capitalism today, true physical withdrawal is hardly an option. Withdrawal to where? The family hearth is no longer a refuge in a world of virtual commerce where the tentacles of the digital octopus stretch out around the family gatekeepers and into the child’s bedroom on computer and television screens. Nor are there any longer those “loci vacuii” or empty places to which the Seventeenth Century political theorist John Locke had suggested those who wished to opt out of a given society or social contract might repair. The once (to the West) “exotic” societies explored by Marco Polo now trod the Western path, if a decade or so off the pace. China and India have recently signed contracts with AOL, Google and Microsoft, and as pundits such as Thomas Friedman never tire of reminding us are the new capitalist behemoths-to-be. Even the least developed parts of the world

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100 Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance, p. 9.
cannot save themselves from the global consumerism that perches on their doorsteps, awaiting only the abolition of that wrenching poverty which alone insulates them from its sure Midas-market touch. Nor is asceticism ever going to be a successful option for more than a small minority in a society whose ethos is everywhere at war with austerity and self-control.

It might then seem that the ethos portrayed here embodies forces so powerful, so inescapable, so necessary to the survival of capitalism in its late consumerist phase, that they can no longer be resisted or transformed at all. That neither resistance nor withdrawal, neither rebellion nor subversion, neither asceticism nor pluralism, are possible; that we can do little other than acknowledge the ineluctability of infantilization and be content, as Rousseau put it, with throwing garlands of flowers over our smooth and comforting chains. In short, it may seem there is no alternative to rationalizing our new condition of consumer servitude as a gentler species of “private” freedom while democracy, commonwealth and the liberty that is pluralism vanish over the receding historical horizon. This would mean that there are no viable strategies to contend with modern capitalism’s only truly ‘successful’ adversaries, those Jihadist reactionaries who would annihilate the market, and along with it democracy itself.

One of the greatest perils of failing to resist hyper-consumerism in a moderate, democratic way may in fact be how such a failure might privilege more violent, Jihadic, anti-modern kinds of resistance that are deeply undemocratic. I have related elsewhere the price of the struggle between those two equally undemocratic forms of modernity –

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101 In *Jihad vs. McWorld*, I noted the demoralizing irony of the fact the poverty was the only sure way for a society to save itself from McWorld and its totalizing consumerism.
McWorld and the violent struggle of Jihad to liquidate it—and will not revisit it here.102 But it is crucial to recall that study’s chief lesson: that unless capitalist consumerism and the homogenizing McWorld it produces can be democratically contained and modified, its challengers are likely to be zealots or nihilists with less sympathy for liberty and democracy by far than the aggressive materialists of consumer society who are infantilizing our global marketplace.

The dialectics of history, however, suggest there may be ways to respond to infantilization, privatization and civic schizophrenia that lie within the very contours that define their logic. Like the forces that once created the Protestant ethos, those that today create the infantilist ethos have some potential to produce their own remedial strategies. After all, even Jihad is to a significant degree the product of the modernizing commercial forces it challenges. If dialectic means anything, it means that consumers themselves harbor the secrets that can release them from consumerism.

If those who are consumed are to be instrumental in resisting consumption, however, they will still in the long term require larger social changes to succeed. These changes will come from the inside out but also from the outside in, much as a successful therapy does. It will require action by reengaged citizens as well as by resisting consumers. The restoration of a healthy pluralism in which human values are multiple and material consumption but one in a cornucopia of human behaviors will in fact quite precisely require a social therapy that treats our defining civic schizophrenia -- a civic therapy that restores the balance between private and public, giving our public civic selves renewed sovereignty over our private consumer selves and putting the fate of citizens ahead of the fate of markets. This involves both a restoration of capitalism to its

primary role as an efficient and productive way of meeting real economic needs, from push back to pull, and a restoration of the democratic public as the sovereign regulator of our plural life world – of which the marketplace is just one among equals. Before coming to this broader social strategy, however, there are important forms of resistance, subversion and rebellion as well as of market skepticism and consumer consciousness worth exploring. For corporate marketing and hyper-consumerism have already generated significant real-world reactions that can be identified and elucidated. Their collective impact creates a foundation for the serious political and civic work that will also be required.

**Restoring Capitalism**

The hold of consumerist capitalism over us can to be sure be moderated on the demand side by ‘civic consumer’ resistance and bent a little on the supply side by corporate good will. But it is ultimately made inflexible by capitalism’s intractable survival needs. Unless ways can be found to help capitalism serve and prosper from serving real rather than faux needs, to provide services to those who are not yet consumers rather than those for whom consumption has become a matter of addiction rather than of need, no resistance from inside the market, however creatively destructive, is likely to succeed. From the outset, consumer capitalism’s paradox has been that those with real needs are without the means to enter the marketplace, leaving producers with no alternative to fabricating needs among those whose wants it has already oversupplied. The radical inequalities that divide developed societies from within, and continue to carve the planet into hemispheres that exist as on different planets, feed off of capitalism’s modern “triumph” as consumerism. But where there is real need, there
capitalism, forever in search of profits, is not. This puts global capitalism itself at risk, risking in Jeff Faux’s dramatic terms a “global class war.”

There are obviously commodities enough in the developed world that might respond to and efficiently meet the special and real needs of the developing world. For all the wants of that vast world of potential consumers, there are products galore that could secure the health and safety of children, promote the economic potential of women, and support the long-term market viability of whole societies. Just recently, an anti-diarrheal oral vaccine called RoraTea was approved that could save up to a half million children a year in third world countries. Problem? It costs $187.50 for a series of three oral doses, pushing it entirely out of the marketplace for those whom most need it in places like Africa. The same can be said of a whole class of commodities pushed by advocates of Third World aid like Jeffrey Sachs, including nitrogen-fixing plants (to improve poor soil), water recycling devices (for water systems with too much salt), vaccines targeting childhood diseases, and nutritional supplements designed for the millions of children for whom starvation is a permanent and mortal threat. All such commodities might help Third World citizens to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. But for the strategy to work, they have to be wearing boots. In the consumer marketplace, this means being able to pay the price of the consumables they so desperately need.

Recently, a promising commodity specifically designed to address child malnutrition was introduced in the African marketplace. Since malnourishment is a principal contributor to the diseases that afflict and kill the young, addressing hunger is also a way to treat disease. Niger has over 150,000 severely malnourished children and 650,000 who are moderately malnourished. A quarter of children never reach the age of

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five. Aid workers at *Doctors Without Borders* recently developed a 500 calorie “plumpy’nut” peanut paste bar that can be packaged in foil, is resistant to spoilage and that can be injected with a slurry of vitamins and minerals that saves lives. A couple of foil packets a day is a miracle cure for the starving (proximate normalcy can be attained within a week or two), and an inexpensive foundation for long term child (and adult) nutrition.104 Here is a consumer product designed to rescue children from death.

Simpler yet is the mosquito net, a old remedy newly advocated by Jeffrey Sachs, once an ardent partisan of privatization and market strategies, whose recent work has moved in a very different direction.105 Sachs has focused attention on simple products as exemplars of the kinds of commodities capitalism can produce to meet genuine needs around the world. His favorite example is the old staple mosquito net. Malaria and many other communicable diseases that continue to ravage Africa and other poor regions of the world are spread primarily by mosquitoes. Protecting exposed populations with bed mosquito nets is an efficient and inexpensive prophylactic against these diseases as well as against those even more dangerous infections (such as HIV/AIDS) that attack those whose immune systems are already weakened by mosquito-born plagues like malaria. Yet even an item as cheap as a mosquito net is beyond the means of those who most need it. Sachs thus must depend for his mosquito net campaign on international aid organizations and philanthropy of the sort made available by the Gates and the Clinton foundations, while capitalism’s magnificent market mechanisms are more or less shut out.

The crucial question then for all such products, from vaccines to mosquito nets, is how to make them a source of profit so that the great engine of capitalism can be turned

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towards providing them for the markets where they are needed. The reality is that moral claims are not sufficient to animate the private marketplace, which moves according to a potential client’s capacity to pay rather than on the righteousness of her needs. Capitalism “needs” to be able to address the vast and untapped marketplace of the billions around the world who still have real needs, and it “needs” to move away from having to manufacture faux needs for those whose wants have been largely satisfied. Moreover, this need of capitalism corresponds perfectly to the need of the world’s poor to have their needs satisfied. Yet the market mechanism itself prevents the two sets of needs from converging. Only if they do, will a way can be found for capitalism to target irreducible needs and redress global North/South injustices.

Is it possible for capitalism to revamp its mission within the limits of the modern consumer market? Those engaged in the experiment seem dubious. Jeffrey Sachs no longer seems to put much faith in the market efficiency he once championed, and looks more to significant governmental and NGO participation in prompting the market to make a contribution. He calls on private philanthropies but also on the World Bank, the IMF, the WHO and other international institutions to become active in his campaign to address African disease, poverty and malnutrition. He relies heavily on achieving compliance with the unmet United Nations Millennium goals, which ask developed nations to raise their foreign aid contributions to .7% of their GNPs – a modest goal that would nonetheless require “generous” European nations to double their expenditures (from a current rate of about .4%, and require the United States to increase its aid nearly
fourfold (from what is currently less than .2%). In the absence of such formidable increases in government aid, he worries that real change will not be possible.

THREE CAPTIALIST EXPERIMENTS:

**PRAHALAD**: Nevertheless, there are three experiments under way that depend on the market itself and that aim at redirecting capitalism by utilizing its flexible potential for change. These include the experiments proposed by three imaginative economic pioneers: C.K. Prahalad’s strategy of mining “the fortune at the bottom of the consumer pyramid” by turning the world’s poor into paying consumers; Mohammad Yunus’s idea for lifting women and their families out of poverty through microcredit, a small-loan program for the impoverished to jump-start market development in communities barred by poverty from market participation; and Hernando DeSoto’s inventive idea of addressing poverty by legalizing informal and black market elements of the private economy that represent real but largely unrealized wealth among populations that are poor in name rather than substance – if their invisible wealth can be unlocked. Each of these proposals, which I will only touch on here, has the virtue of relying on the market itself to cure what seem to be the market’s inability to address global inequalities and use its capitalist potential to treat world poverty and overcome global inequality. Although each, as I will show, finally depend, like almost every reform we have examined here, on some form of government intervention, they remind us of the dynamism of capitalism when it is liberated from a dominant cultural ethos to which it has become tethered, and allowed to serve a system that must accommodate justice as well as prosperity.

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106 According to the OECD, in 2004 the United States contribution to foreign aid is about .17 percent of GNP, second lowest after Italy which is .15 percent of GNP. Only a handful of countries meet the .7 percent benchmark set by the Millennium Goals. From the OECD list of 22 countries, only Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden exceed .7% while fourteen of them fall below .4%. See the OECD website [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/40/3/353879786.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/40/3/353879786.pdf).
In his popular text with the self-explanatory title *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*, C. K. Prahalad, an economist at the University of Michigan, seeks to reattach the heavy load of poverty reduction to the engine of what he calls an “inclusive capitalism” by treating the poor as a capitalist “growth opportunity” in which their own collaborative contribution is critical. Although he recognizes that to date “the large-scale private sector was only marginally involved in dealing with the problems of 80 percent of humanity,” Prahalad rejects the paternalistic notion of the poor as “wards of the state.” Rather, he asks how one might mobilize the “resources, scale, and scope of large firms to co-create solutions to the problems at the bottom of the pyramid (BOP), those four billion people who live on less than $2 a day?”

The virtue of Prahalad’s approach is that he begins not with a new but with the classical definition of capitalism – which approaches the eradication of poverty precisely as it approaches every market need: by figuring out how to respond effectively to need expressed as market demand in a manner that earns profits for investors and producers. His turns the challenge of making capitalism work in impoverished settings at the bottom of the pyramid -- few are trying to meet the desperate needs to be found there -- into a virtue. After all, is there not an inviting market opportunity to be found at the bottom of the pyramid where it is still possible to capture the largest number of unsatisfied consumers left on the planet today, over half the world’s population? Although they are without the wherewithal to pay for what they need, Prahalad hopes to enlist the poor as participants in creating the new market that will address their needs. He understands that

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there is no existing market, and hence few companies willing to invest; the challenge is to create a new market through what is “essentially a developmental activity,” converting the poor into potential consumers. This means converting “poverty into an opportunity for all concerned” and calls for a cooperative strategy in which governments, NGOs, corporations and the poor themselves are engaged in collaborative activity. Prahalad focuses on how the poor see themselves, and believes changes in discourse and self-image can contribute to changes in behavior. A discourse centered on “the poor” and “alleviating poverty” cannot draw investors and producers into low-profit new markets. The “needy” draw pity not investment; on the other hand, “collaborators” are potential customers.

Prahalad’s strategy can be criticized for assuming up front the very changes it must produce in order for it to succeed: if the poor knew how to bootstrap themselves out of their victim status into entrepreneurship rather than victims, they would not be poor. Yet it is also true that if cultural ethos is about how we see and identify ourselves, then encouraging a language of consumer demand as a substitute for the language of desperate neediness can make a difference. Prahalad has also been criticized for confining his research largely to India and Latin America (Peru, Mexico, Brazil, and Nicaragua) where attitudes towards poverty are already changing and development is already well under way and thus, the challenges of poverty less formidable than in say Africa or the Middle East. Prahalad also cites the work of Unilever’s Indian subsidiary Hindustan Lever Limited, but despite persistent inequality, India is well along in the process of energizing its consumer sector and leapfrogging over rivals in the world trade market. Indeed, nowadays, India is often cited as an example of the new competition that lazy old
industrial nations like the United States are going to have to contend with (this was a
topic of President Bush’s 2006 State of the Union speech and is a perennial theme of
pundit Thomas Friedman), rather than as an exemplar of the kind of traditional poverty to
which markets have not yet begun to respond. Africa is the real test for any theory of
market revisionism.

**YUNUS**: Muhammad Yunus’s Grameen Bank, begun in the early nineties in
Bangladesh (at the time a major site of extreme underdevelopment), is a second example
of capitalism’s capacity for self-revision.108 Yunus, who just won the 2006 Nobel Peace
Prize (and probably deserved a Noble Prize in Economics!) quickly grasped that to mine
what Prahalad called the bottom of the pyramid meant jumpstarting the engagement of
the poor in their own bootstrapping operation. Which was to say, doing what Prahalad
failed to do, giving them the boots by which to bootstrap. Attitude change would not be
not enough. Very small loans, often $50 or less, could give people with nothing just
enough capital to do something. Such marginal changes could be critical. It was well
know in the developed world that the difference between a working head of family and a
homeless vagrant might be a month’s shortfall on a rental payment. Yunus saw that in the
developing world the difference between an impoverished mother unable to meet the
needs of her own children and a village dynamo helping the whole community rise up out
of poverty might be a micro-loan of a few dollars, enabling her to start up (for example) a
modest cottage industry basket business. Microcredit can turn the poor into self-
employed producers, and transform the needy into viable consumers in the global
marketplace.

108 For background, see David Bornstein, *The Price of a Dream: The Story of the Grameen Bank and the idea that is helping the poor change their lives*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996
Like Prahalad, Yunus also understood that discourse and ethos were at stake. His most radical innovation was thus to treat credit as a right, urging banks to rely on trust and the engagement of the bank itself in guiding the client’s investment as collateral to secure the loan. Since the loans were labor intensive (the banks stuck around to help make their investments productive), they carried high interest rates, often more than 50 or 60% of the original loan. But a fifty dollar loan repaid at $80 after a year that established a real business which lifted a family out of poverty was a pretty good deal for lender and borrower alike.\textsuperscript{109} And although Yunus insisted on credit as a right, he also understood that lender institutions had to be sustainable, which is to say at least marginally profitable.\textsuperscript{110} This was not philanthropy, but prudent market investment that helped create the market in which it invested.

A decade after Yunus’s pioneering work, microcredit has become an important tool of the international aid and development community and has made the Grameen bank a model of how finance capitalism can contribute to development without altogether slighting profit. 2005 was the International Year of Microcredit, widely supported by the IMF, the World Bank and the United Nations. The microcredit strategy has been used throughout the third world, and been the subject of some experimental work in third world enclaves inside the first world, in Los Angeles for example. It depends on a market

\textsuperscript{109} Indeed, one of the problems of microcredit has been that those institutions like the Grameen bank that offer the first round loans are edged out later on by big banks unwilling to take the initial risk, but who want to cash in later on second and third round loans where the lendee has already proven her credit-worthiness.

\textsuperscript{110} Hence, Yunus argued, “In fixing the interest rate market interest rate is taken as the reference rate, rather than the moneylenders’ rate. Reaching the poor is its non-negotiable mission. Reaching sustainability is a directional goal. It must reach sustainability as soon as possible, so that it can expand its outreach without fund constraints.” Yunus also gives a high priority to building social capital, which helps sustain individuals in their new endeavors. Yunus, “What is Microcredit?” January, 2003. On-line at www.grameen-info.org/mcredit/.
logic but conceives of the market as part of a larger world of values and norms for which the wealthy are no less responsible than the poor.

**DESOLO**: In a third example of what can be called self-reforming market capitalism, the Peruvian economist and head of the *Institute for Liberty and Democracy* Hernando de Soto has attracted wide attention for his proposal to confront apparent poverty by finding ways to capture wealth hidden in the world of the poor. Market zealots like Margaret Thatcher and Milton Friedman as well as justice-seeking egalitarians like former Secretary of State Madeline Albright and former United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar have alike welcomed de Soto’s effort to bring “dead capital” into the real economy by titling untitled assets and thereby empowering the poor to whom the assets belong as players in that economy. De Soto saw that if the extra-legality of much of the global property system could be overcome so that those who possessed it could use it, invest it, and borrow on it – “own” it in the legal sense – much of what passed as poverty would cease to exist in many places around the world. As a sympathetic critic put it, “the problem with poor countries is not that they lack savings, but that they lack the system of property that identifies legal ownership and therefore they cannot borrow.”\(^{111}\) What de Soto has managed to do is not just (in de Soto’s title) to solve “the mystery of capital” but much more importantly, to help “solve the mystery of poverty.” The potential energy and the economic value that is “locked up in a house” belonging to a family that lacks legal title to it, if unlocked, “can be revealed and transformed into active capital.” For “capital is born by representing in writing – in a title, a security, a contract, and in other such records – the most economically and socially

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useful qualities about the asset."112 Turning a house into capital means it can be used as collateral for a loan or the foundation for a business; it means that credit need not be furnished externally by a bank, but can be self-generated by converting the value of hidden capital already in the hands of a economic player.

Although de Soto suggests in his subtitle that capitalism has succeeded in the West and failed everywhere else, his analysis tends to prove the contrary thesis, a thesis that has been argued throughout this book: that capitalism is poised to fail in the West – where it produces goods for people with few real needs – but positioned at least potentially to succeed elsewhere and thereby help first world capitalism sustain itself. The challenge is whether it can title untitled third world assets and give the poor the wherewithal to reward first world capitalism when it responds to their genuine needs. Nonetheless, as with every other instance of responsible capitalism and civic consumerism described here, unlocking hidden capital is a political and legal rather than strictly an economic task. It is a function of politics and democratic legislation. In fact, in the absence of a political strategy that secures newly manifested capital against exploitation and abuse, the danger of de Soto’s ingenious idea is that once the regular economy discloses, legitimizes and hence captures what de Soto estimates may be up to eight trillion dollars in formerly extra-legal assets, these newly legalized assets are in danger of being taken from their new and rightful long-terms owners-by-use and effectively confiscated by dominant players already in the market – for example, monopoly corporations and corrupt governmental officials sitting astride the ‘legal’ market economy.

Because he is a believer in markets, de Soto makes the mistake of assuming a “legal” economy that is neutral. Hence, he fails to notice that “legalization” also exposes newly recognized capital assets to the power arrangements that can define both the marketplace and the legal system. As tenant farmers discovered in the United States in the Nineteenth Century, formalizing their ownership over the land they worked certainly allowed them to collateralize their property, but it also allowed banks and big corporations to expropriate that same property when farmers failed to keep up with high interest payments or fell prey to a hard luck growing season. What does not belong to you (even if you have ‘used it’ extra-legally for generations) cannot be taken from you (so you can continue to use if for generations to come!) To take title to and own an asset is to become vulnerable to every claim on ownership that corrupt and power-deformed political and market players can tender. Foreclosure, bankruptcy, repossession and other strategies by which a system eats up the poor work more efficiently when hidden capital is revealed and given a legal title. This is probably one reason why the poor themselves sometimes prefer to hide assets behind extra-legality, even if this means they cannot take advantage of legitimacy’s benefits. Undocumented workers, for example, remain undocumented in part because they benefit from not having to acknowledge and pay tax on income or risk forced repatriation to their home countries if something goes amiss in the ‘legal’ relationship.

This is not an argument for extra-legality or for leaving assets untitled. It is an argument for insisting that legitimation of undeclared and untitled assets makes sense only when the legal system in question is not tilted to the rich, only when the political system is not dominated by the wealthy, only when the marketplace is defined by genuine
equality and undominated power relations. The poor can afford to publicly own their hidden assets only when they publicly own their governments. De Soto’s research suggests that in Haiti, the poorest nation in Latin America, the total hidden assets of the poor are worth more than 150 times the total foreign investment made in Haiti since 1804, when it won independence from France. Untitled assets in Egypt amount to more that 55 times the total of direct foreign investment there over its recorded history. Yet, in the absence of major political reforms and an end to corruption, it seems likely that a full accounting of such massive assets would benefit those who already control them extra-legally less than it would benefit the exploiters-in-perpetuity who would seek to appropriate them. The people must trust – better yet, control -- the legal system in order to benefit from the legalization of their potential assets in the invisible economy.

De Soto is a splendid and innovative economist, but in making capital visible he also has rendered power invisible. For his scheme to work, capital and power must be legitimated and captured at the same moment. Which will work only in a genuinely democratic, egalitarian society. As with almost every other experiment in market innovation scrutinized in the last two chapters, de Soto’s depends on the quality of democracy, something the market can itself never guarantee.

**Overcoming Civic Schizophrenia by Democratizing Globalization**

Power is the missing constant in almost all of the proposals for capitalism’s self-reform reviewed here. Once upon a time, democratization – which invests power in a nation’s citizens – rendered private power both public and accountable. Now, globalization often places both real power and its many abuses largely beyond the
purview of national governments. The problems are global, democracy remains local. Voluntary codes need enforcement, and adducing standards to which to attach such codes is a function of democratic deliberation, but there can be no effective solutions within the framework of national sovereignty alone because interdependence – what Thomas Friedman calls a flat world – has fatally compromised sovereignty. Protecting children from commercial exploitation demands government regulation and oversight, but that cannot be achieved within solitary nations without encouraging a race to the bottom in which the market ruthlessly seeks out national markets willing to leave children unprotected. Consumer monopolies of the kind towards which Microsoft and Google naturally tend can be prevented only through vigorous anti-trust legislation and government intervention in the name both of genuine private competition and the public trust, but there is no global public to entrust, no global legislature to enact regulations.

In other words, civic schizophrenia has to be treated globally as well as locally, but there are only local citizens bounded by their national loyalties, and they cannot rein in the rampant desires of unleashed global consumers. How can toxic substances and drugs including tobacco and alcohol be effectively regulated when they can so easily slip the bonds of national oversight? Critics of the American ‘addiction to oil’ including President Bush himself, as well as critics of President Bush who protest his outsourcing of American port security to firms under the sway of ‘foreign’ governments such as the United Arab Emirates, share a common illusion – that control over the production and distribution of oil or meaningful control over national port security anywhere can realistically be exercised by singular sovereign nations, even when they are hegemonic and democratic and even when they expressly choose to exercise it.
This lesson is perhaps most obvious when it comes to questions of global inequality, global rights and global justice. Whether using the innovations of Prahalad, Yunus and DeSoto portrayed above, or trading pollution emissions on the global market, or forgiving third world debt as envisioned by the Millennium 2000 goals (Jubilee 2000), or rescuing peoples from genocide in places like Uganda, Sarajevo or the Sudan today, market reforms demand transnational civic and political cooperation as well as international enforcement of a kind that violates the sovereignty both of the transgressing and the enforcing nations. In a world of interdependence, the sovereignty we seek to recapture is no longer an effective instrument of national democratic will. Citizens remain creatures of nations, while consumers are planetary itinerants. Democracy is parochial, markets cosmopolitan. The remedy is no longer commensurate to the challenge. With markets globalized, consumers are the new branded cosmopolitans who respond neither to the siren call of nationality nor the therapeutic appeal of democracy. We ‘kidults’ have lots of company around the world. China has almost 300 million children under fourteen, while India has nearly 350 million children – a subcontinent of potential ”Zippies” waiting to be rushed into permanent consumerism. In many parts of the world, including much of the Middle East and Africa, more than half the population is under sixteen. These children face three possible destinies only one of which can promise them liberty or happiness: a harsh life of exploitation as child soldiers, child sex objects and child victims where poverty enslaves, starves or otherwise destroys them;¹¹³ a far more welcome but ultimately one-dimensional, unfulfilling and unfree life as shoppers in

¹¹³ See Peter W. Singer, Children at War, New York: Pantheon, 2005. Child soldiers used to be a rarity, by now as Singer shows they are commonplace in Africa and parts of Southeast Asia. Even the U.S. military campaigns to draw youngsters fresh out of high school into the military, in effect promising them that if they do military service they will in time have careers and incomes that will allow them to be consumers.
the growing world of infantilized shoppers;\textsuperscript{114} or a life of autonomy and dignity as empowered citizens of global civil society and democracy. Global victims, global shoppers or global citizens – with the third option remote because democracy remains locked inside of increasingly disempowered sovereign states.

The anarchy and illegitimate power of global markets can then only be brought under control by the legitimacy and power of global democracy. In the age of nation states, Thomas Jefferson (and John Dewey after him) once cried ‘the remedy for the ills of democracy is more democracy.’ Today the remedy for the ills of democracy \textit{within} nations is more democracy \textit{among} nations. The paradox is that democratic nations, intent on preserving the vestiges of a sovereignty that has already been taken from them by the brute facts of interdependence, have themselves become the most vociferous opponents of democracy \textit{among} nations – just as once upon a time, supporters of the sovereignty of the states at the time of the American founding were enemies of the federalist quest to establish a more effective national union. This paradox leads democracies accustomed to exercising their will through sovereignty to stand squarely in the way of the trans-sovereign pooling of power that alone can offer their citizens a chance, working across borders, to control their common destiny. Only if they release their citizens, can the powers of citizenship be made to count across borders. As Trotsky once warned social democrats there could be no socialism in one country alone, today’s realists must warn democracy’s national partisans there can be no democracy in one country alone. Nor even – imagine the neo-conservatives’ utopian dream come true -- in a world in which

\footnotesize{$^{114}$ At the beginning of the new millennium, India had only one kids’ television channel (the Cartoon Channel), today it has nine or ten, with global corporations like Nickelodeon, Disney, Sony and Turner pushing for larger market share. World brands such as McDonald’s spread worldwide not only via their franchises but through links with bands such as Destiny’s Child whose recent world tour sponsored by McDonald’s visited not just the UK, France, Germany and Spain, but Japan Australia and Brazil in 2005.}
every nation miraculously becomes a working democracy, but relations among them remain unregulated.

In the absence of democracy among and between nations, sovereign democracies will feud and fight, and discover and rediscover in the global market only an arena for cultivating national advantages (as they do today). Neither port security nor energy policy nor hidden capital nor child pornography nor undocumented workers nor public health in any given nation can or will ever again be controlled and regulated at the sole discretion of that nation’s sovereign citizenry. The world is interdependent not because sovereign nations have wished it so but because, in spite of their wishes, encroaching forces of ecology and technology, capital and labor mobility, crime and disease, and terrorism and war, are quite simply beyond their control. Interdependence is the reality.

Individual nations remain crucial players however, as much in what they can obstruct as in what they can still accomplish. They can still frustrate internationalists and impede the development of transnational democratic institutions, as the United States government has done with its refusal to sign on to the Kyoto Protocol on Global Warming, a reality that has doomed the promising ‘carbon trade’ market idea pioneered in the nineties (allowing nations to buy and sell ‘pollution rights’ within an internationally determined quota on the global marketplace), even though that trade has been partially realized on a regional basis in Europe today. Or as India had done in refusing to abide by the nuclear proliferation treaty, most recently with the active complicity of the United States. But even an environmental protocol signed by every nation cannot function effectively without teeth, since it remains susceptible to any nation’s decision either to drop out or refuse enforcement on its territory (the dilemma

115 Note on carbon trading: T.K.
not only of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty but also of the new International Criminal Tribunal and the Land-Mine Treaty). As Thomas Hobbes wrote long ago, covenants without the sword are of no use at all to secure a people’s safety. Non-compliers, free riders and other outlaws will always be happy to sign agreements they wish others to obey as long as they themselves – in the absence of vigorous enforcement -- can do as they please.

The market operates on interest alone and market contracts are obeyed only when they must be obeyed. Enforcement depends on making it in the interest of contractees to comply by raising the costs of non-compliance. This is viable only when there is effective enforcement. In a globally interdependent world where markets and the illegitimate power exercised by market monopolies are transnational, but where democracy remains national, there can be no remedy either for civic schizophrenia or social injustice. Poverty, for example, is ultimately political, and its alleviation cannot take place without the deploying of democratic power. Yet famines and health plagues today, like earthquakes and tsunamis, cross borders, and to be efficacious democratic remedies must follow them across and beyond the boundaries of one or another individual nation’s sovereignty. There are, Amartya Sen proposes, “extensive interconnections between political freedoms and the understanding and fulfillment of economic needs.”116 The evidence shows not only that “poor people… care about civil and political rights,” but that the achievement of such rights is a crucial factor in successful development.117 As proof, Sen reminds skeptics that “no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent

117 Ibid., p. 151.
country with a democratic form of government and a relatively free press.”¹¹⁸ But how to apply this formula to a global environment in the absence of global governance? Democracy must come first – justice and the realizations of rights follow; but ultimately only global democracy will suffice. Likewise, infantilization will yield only to democracy, but can be overcome as a global cultural ethos only by a global democracy that can trump frontiers as well as consumers. The infantilist ethos, on the contrary, fragments us – consumers vs. citizens, this nation against that nation – while the real context in which identity must be worked out is a global marketplace without guiding democratic or integrative norms.

With wealth and the commonwealth in planetary tension, economic prosperity and market entrepreneurship have been unable to serve social diversity or human ends. Rousseau proposed that we see ourselves entirely as natural individuals or citizens, one or the other; but in truth, only recluses, the likes of Robison Crusoe or Rousseau himself, could live alone in the already complex, interdependent social world that was Eighteenth Century reality, let alone our interdependent modern world today; while citizenship requires a planetary community that does not yet exist.

To be sure, brand identities rooted in consumerism girdle the globe, making consumers – above all, kid consumers -- the first and only global itinerants: solitary anarchists free to shop everywhere. Yet they are able to root themselves civically nowhere at all. Nikes walk the world and dominate the Olympics; Germans and Finns and Russians and Japanese “win” medals that prove only their atavistic insulation from the global realities that inhere in the Nike Swoosh that nowadays adorns almost all

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 152.
athletes. Religious identity also looms large, transgressing boundaries between nations even as it breaks up nations into warring theological tribes. Religion is too big and too small to hold together Iraq, trumping civil religion and civic identity at every turn.

Yet where market identity is cosmopolitan, and religious identities aspire to global expansiveness, civic identity remains small and parochial. There is a deep incommensurability between citizenship – even when it is allowed to resume its sovereign power over private markets – and these realities of globalization. So the challenge to democrats today is to find a way to globalize democracy not within but among nations; which means to democratize globalization, the ultimate challenge.

The prospects are less than promising. The institutions currently available, whether N.G.O.’s or international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations system, while of potential use, are in the first instance creatures of the sovereign nation state system rather than genuine transnational bodies, or of elites pursuing interests that are less than civic and democratic. Global civil society is widely and enthusiastically discussed, but generally defined in terms of relatively weak “non-violent, legally sanctioned power-sharing arrangements among many different and interconnected forms of socio-economic life that

119 Nike is only one of many intrusive Olympic sponsors: “There were just 2,500 athletes here [in the 2006 Turin Winter Olympics],” writes Sally Jenkins, “compared to 10,000 guests of the 11 top Olympic sponsors – including Visa, Coca-Cola and McDonald’s – which pay about $50 million each for sponsorship rights.” Jenknsm, “A Fiat Caveat: Don’t Urbanize the Olympics,” The Washington Post, February 27, 2006.

120 David Chandler approaches what he calls the “imagined concept” of global civil society critically, arguing that it is more attuned to state power and elite economic interests than to the normative interests of international governance about which Mary Kaldor, David Held and other ardent advocates of global civil society write. See David Chandler, Constructing Global Civil Society: Morality and Power in International Relations, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004. For those wishing to follow the academic debate on these matters, the new journal Globalizations headquartered at Newcastle-on-Tyne in England is extremely useful.
are *distinct from governmental institutions*.\textsuperscript{121} But this separation from power guarantees that global civil society will be incapable either of employing legitimate violence to contain illegitimate violence (say in genocidal wars like the current one in the Sudan) or bring the weight of some form of pooled, global sovereignty to bear on anarchic markets. Global governance involving pooled sovereignty and genuine transnational legal and political power, on the other hand, continues to be seen as, at best, as utopian ideal.

The office of the Secretary General at the United Nations may aspire to autonomous global influence, but the Secretary General reports to a United Nations that was founded as and continues to be a body constituted by sovereign states. Its ruling body, the General Assembly, is a congress of nations not a world legislature. Likewise, institutions that are part of the “international financial infrastructure” such as the IMF and the WTO also represent nations rather than a global common good. Indeed, they disproportionately represent powerful nations with market economies, and thus sometimes seem to amplify rather than mute the influence of private market firms over governments. Corporations and banks effectively double dip: they use their influence *inside* states where privatization has secured their hold over politics, in order to defang democratic oversight; *and* they use their role *globally*, as the only international players on the world scene able to exploit global financial capital investment exclusively to their own interest. Globally, they can work through international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization (which they control through the G-8 governments they influence) to divert other poorer nations desperate for investment from focusing on their own welfare. Investment capital offered in the name of

\textsuperscript{121} Emphasis added. This is the definition of political scientist Anne-Marie Slaughter in her *A New World Order*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 18. See also the enthusiastic account of John Keane, in his *Global Civil Society?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
development, is made “conditional” on recipient governments cutting back on spending and social investment. The market economy reinforces the governance of private capital geared towards endless consumersism at home and abroad.

What is missing is a transnational citizenry that might counteract the tendencies of the global market. What is missing is genuinely transnational civic entities on which to found such a citizenry. This deficiency is made more daunting by the paradox of solidarity that faces anyone wishing to construct democratic civic institutions. Religious and cultural identities are already “thicker” than local civic identity, providing more affect, kinship and solidarity, even if sometimes at the expense of greater exclusiveness. When citizenship is made global, it is obviously thinned down, and its contribution to identity becomes still leaner. Compare a would-be “global citizen” with a zealous Wahabean Jihadic warrior: whose attachments are likely to be more compelling? Can a Common Cause supporter match the ardor of a North Ireland Protestant? When civic identity is local, and embedded in a long civic tradition and the patriotic trappings of a civil religion (e.g., the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address, the Emancipation Proclamation, Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech), it can at least begin to provide at least an approximation of a kind of social glue that holds a citizenry together. Can it do the same in a watered down global form? Some social philosophers and global civic practitioners try to promote the idea of a civic calling with global reach: a perspective that yields something more than mere enlightened interest, but what philosopher Virginia Held calls a global ethics of care.122 Global media

122 “The ethics of care builds concern and mutual responsiveness to need on both the personal and the wider social level,” and can be linked to feminist concerns that soften the patriarchal Hobessian view of the social world that dominates thinking about the global marketplace. Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 28.
coverage open us to global sympathy, and it is easier today than ever before to extend civic compassion across national frontiers to victims of genocide in Dafur or to abused child-soldiers in Liberia or casualties of a Tsunami in Indonesia.

While the kind of social capital that arises out of cultural identity and traditional patriotism is usually (using Robert Putnam’s distinction) bonding capital that holds people together by excluding others, the kind of social capital that is generated by common civic work and voluntary civic activity across national borders and that is associated with the civic calling is bridging capital – capital that links people together.\textsuperscript{123} Bridging capital is easier to create with global telecommunications and an emerging global ethics of care. But to be effective, global citizenship needs to mimic what Anthony Appiah has appealingly called “partial cosmopolitanism,” an attachment to the human community rooted in “the partialities of kinfolk and community.”\textsuperscript{124} In civic shorthand, many have used the neologism “glocal citizenship,” an identity that begins in the neighborhood but spirals out to encompass ever expanding circles of civic diversity and cultural difference that eventually bridges nation-states as well. Glocal citizenship insists on the priority of civic over other identities precisely because civic identity encourages and safeguards other identities, while other thicker identities discourage diversity and repress competing identities.

As I have argued above, it turns out that democratic public authority – the public’s right to a monopoly over coercion – is actually what permits a multivalent and pluralistic market order to be established and enforced. Public monopoly is thus the condition needed for private pluralism to flourish. Private authority of the kind

supposedly found in free and competitive markets, though definitive of diversity in theory, tends to constrict actual diversity in practice. The American “civic religion” offers a singular civic identity rooted in a singular civic calling and allows America to be a home to many different peoples, cultures, nations and religions. A mono-cultural (mono-religious or mono-ethnic) world countenances on the other hand brooks no significant cultural, religious or ethnic differences. This is perhaps one reason why American mutli-culturalism, under the umbrella of an American civic religion, has been so successful, while French or Dutch or German forms of multi-culturalism, despite good faith but in the absence of a compelling civil religion that draws immigrants and native born into a single civic calling, have been so problematic.

The irony is that the “free market” (free from democratic control) strangles civic freedom and downplays citizenship and the civic calling in ways that undermine democracy and freedom overall, permitting natural monopolies (whether business or ethnic) and unregulated trusts to dominate; whereas, the public monopoly of the sovereign democratic state over power is freedom’s and diversity’s real guarantor. As John Stuart Mill understood, 125 liberalism concerns a kind of freedom that is not about endless trivial choices but about the pluralism of the human condition and the openness of human development. This is the freedom for which democracy is the condition -- and the infantilist ethos the obstacle.

At this moment, however, when markets are global but democracy still national, democratic forces within national societies have a hard time cooperating across national frontiers and liberal diversity remains invisible in the global setting because neither

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125 The frontispiece of Mill’s *On Liberty* focusing on moral development rather than freedom is take from Karl Wilhelm von Humboldt’s Sphere and Duties of Government, translated into English in 1864.
public liberty nor civic pluralism exist at all. Citizens may wish in theory to collaborate but find themselves constrained by the parochialism of their institutional constituencies. Global producers and global consumers are friends and allies, children of Davos deeply invested in free trade, unrestricted access, the free flow of capital, and the right to impose their standards on nations where they invest through so-called ‘conditionality.’ Investors, producers, marketers and shoppers share a commitment to privatization and branding as well as to the ethos of infantilization that allow them to cooperate across national frontiers.

Citizens, on the other hand, face each other across those same frontiers as rivals and enemies, representing competing national economies that share neither a private marketplace nor a global commonweal. They still imagine walls might protect them from the malevolent forces of interdependence and the predatory effects of unregulated markets. Just 15 years after the Berlin wall came down bringing the Iron Curtain down with it, many of the democratic forces that were responsible are busy constructing new barriers, barriers meant to impede the progress of global anarchy and market injustice, but that will be equally futile in the long term. Not just actual walls to fence out illegal immigrants or insurgent terrorists, but government subsidized trade barriers. Across these protectionist barriers, French farmer faces Nigerian farmer as an adversary, French agricultural subsidies undermining the capacity of Nigerian agriculture to compete, even inside its own borders, with foreign products. Across these walls, Americans seized by fear of terrorism stare down the immigrant labor to which American industry silently beckons. Across these hardened frontiers, German steelworkers face Indian steel workers as enemies – any market victory for the one, a market defeat for the other. Across these
Yet the alternatives are uncertain in a world of persistent sovereignties. Peoples distrust one another’s global instincts. Goods advanced as “common” by developed nations, such as global safety standards or child labor restrictions or environmental protection, turn out in application to favor the interests of the developed (where standards are already in place) and prejudice the interests of the developing, who cannot “afford” new standards without losing their competitive edge over the developed countries, and are in any case being asked to forgo the self-indulgent, environment-bashing, children-negligent policies by which the now developed once achieved their own rapid development. As if today’s developing nations should pay the full price of the developed world’s earlier bad habits. There can be no commonweal among these distrustful forces, among parochial democracies without common global interests who fear one another as much as they fear the free markets that make their workers and farmers so vulnerable.126

Democratizing globalization makes the circle whole. In overcoming civic schizophrenia, it revitalizes capitalism and restores the balance between citizens and consumers. It puts the trump card back into the hands of the public, now stretching across the world, and re-empowers the voice of grown-ups in remonstrating with cultural infantilization’s international influence. In John Updike’s novel *The Coup* an African character named Ellellou observes “I perceived that a man in America is a failed boy.” Consumers are everywhere failed men, rendered juvenile and grasping by a culture of

126 For an elaboration of this argument in the context of the defeat of the European Constitution in 2005 and transatlantic relations among progressives, see Barber, “Dreamers Without Borders,” *The American Prospect,* August 2005, pp. 39-42. My new organization under “CivWorld,” called The Paradigm Project, is designed to facilitate global thinking among internationalists looking for ways to encourage collaboration across borders. See [www.civworld.org](http://www.civworld.org)
infantilism that refuses to let them grow up. The civic calling coaxes boys and girls into maturation and then into citizenship. It resonates with the culture of enlightenment which, in Immanuel Kant’s conception, was defined by “man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.” It points to collaborative norms and an “ethics of care” in which “relationships between persons, rather than either individual rights or individual preferences, are a primary focus,” suggesting that such relationships can both extend and put a limit on markets and inform and strengthen global civil society. 127 The idea of the civic calling relies on innovative forms of the traditional commons, including a new information commons rooted in new technologies. The new commons, mirroring some of the very technologies that contribute to infantilizion, might include democratic versions of “software commons, licensing commons, open access scholarly journals, digital repositories, institutional commons and subject matter commons in areas ranging from knitting to music, agriculture to Supreme Court arguments” – although building such a commons “is neither easy nor costless.”128

It has been my argument here that the cultivation of the commons is the work of adults. The immaturity about which Kant wrote two hundred years ago is today more than just self-incurred, however. It is abetted and reinforced by external cultural forces that impede maturation and stand in the way of the commonweal. Resistance to these forces arises out of the civic calling. The civic calling invokes a society able to respond generously to children’s “irreducible needs” around the world without turning adults into children orseducing children into consumerism in the name of a hollow empowerment.

The civic calling takes Wendy’s part in the age-old struggle that recurs in each generation between Wendy and Peter Pan. It acknowledges the true delights of childhood, and helps children be children again by preserving them from the burdens of an exploitative and violent adult world. It refuses to “empower them” by taking away their dollies and blocks and toy wagons in which to haul them and replacing them with cell-phones and video games and credit cards with which to pay for them. It refuses to ‘free’ them from parents and other gatekeepers in order to turn them over to market-mad pied pipers who lead them down a commercial rabbit hole into the mall. Children should play not pay, act not watch, learn not shop. Where capitalism can, it should help protect the boundaries of childhood and preserve the guardianship of parents and citizens; otherwise it should get out of the way. Not everything needs to earn a profit, not everyone needs to be a shopper – not all the time.

We undoubtedly live in an age of capitalism triumphant, but for democracy and variety to survive, capitalism will have to moderate its triumph and citizens renew their calling, globally as well as nationally. Paradoxically, as its most enthusiastic advocates acknowledge, capitalism itself requires such moderation for its own flourishing. Yet given the realities of the cultural ethos portrayed here, moderating capitalism and renewing the civic calling will be formidable tasks. Formidable but doable. Democracy is always aspirational rather than a done deal, more of a continuing journey than a found destination. Citizenship must have also seemed an improbable destiny for the subjects of monarchical rule in England in 1650 or for the victims of totalitarian Europe in 1940. Yet
by 1688, parliamentary rule was secured in England and by the 1950’s rival European nations at war for 300 years had learned to pool their sovereignty and create the beginnings of a European citizenship.

Today, under the hyper-consumerist conditions we have examined here, the civic calling will feel to many people like a vacant phrase, global citizenship like a utopian dream. I do not have a formula for their realization. Yet the brute realities of interdependence make them both necessary and in the long term (if we have a long term) inevitable. The only question is whether we discover or invent and then embrace new forms of global civic governance which the costs of the infantilist ethos cry out for, and which the crises of consumer capitalism mandate; or whether we first pay a terrible price in puerility, market chaos, and unrewarding private freedom. That price is already being paid, but paid by those who can least afford it, the very children we think to emulate and empower with our foolish addiction to the culture of infantilism. This is the critical point to which the history of capitalism and of its ingenious and ever-changing justifying ethos has brought us. Yet as always, it is a history we have made for ourselves. So that as always, even under the harsh but seductive dominion of capitalism triumphant, the fate of citizens remains in our own hands.

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