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Steven L. Arxer  
John W. Murphy *Editors*

# The Symbolism of Globalization, Development, and Aging

 Springer

# International Perspectives on Aging

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Steven L. Arxer • John W. Murphy  
Editors

# The Symbolism of Globalization, Development, and Aging

 Springer

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# Preface

Presupposed by the contributors to this volume is that a new era has dawned in the field of social theory. Habermas (1992), for example, refers to this period as “post-metaphysical.” At the core of this designation is a dramatic shift in philosophy, almost another Copernican revolution. Gone is the traditional commitment to first philosophy, which is characterized traditionally by a search for an absolute foundation for knowledge and order. Subsequent to the onset of post-metaphysics, this trek is considered to be futile.

The problem is that first philosophy is premised on a rendition of dualism that has lost legitimacy in many quarters. Following the work of a host of writers, in both the humanities and the sciences, this principle is defunct (Caro and Murphy 2002). For example, in both quantum physics and philosophies, such as phenomenology, reality and the human presence are understood to be intimately intertwined. Reality, simply put, is shaped by human intervention. The pursuit of objectivity, therefore, is eclipsed by the idea that all knowledge claims reflect particular judgments and commitments. As Roland Barthes (1988) describes this change, objectivity represents little more than a particular interpretation of acceptable knowledge.

Social gerontology is not exempt from this trend. Aging, accordingly, can no longer be thought legitimately to adhere to a natural trajectory. Consistent with the post-metaphysical thesis, this process is mediated fully by language use and other symbolic facets of social existence. For this reason, while relying on the insights of Simone de Beauvoir (2010), age does not simply exist but is embedded in how persons choose to construct or make their lives.

In this sense, a key point of this book is that aging is symbolic. Certain assumptions are advanced, accordingly, that determine the so-called normal life course. And the outcomes of these beliefs are not natural but simply regularly imbibed by persons. Hence a particular option for constructing a meaningful existence is passed off as natural, even inevitable.

The other side of this message is that this typical interpretation of aging can be rejected, without violating human nature or some other dictum. For this reason, the editors conclude that persons must learn to age authentically, that is, view their lives as possibilities that can be constructed in any number of ways. In this way, social

gerontology recognizes the uncertainty that haunts everyone's existence and can be transformed into freedom.

But this awareness is not limited to philosophical reflection. This change in viewing knowledge has political implications. Questions can be raised, for example, about how certain interpretations of legitimate aging gained dominance over others and, gradually, became unduly restrictive. And in the end, the issue of who benefits from the construction of this illusion becomes important.

Raising issues such as these certainly aids authentic aging. Specifically important is that an alternative context for aging is created where various options can be explored without coercion. An openness is available that, as Sartre (1994) says, condemns persons to be free. Every life thus represents contingency that must be made into reality, without recourse to dominant symbolism that can be treated as existing *sui generis*.

In this regard, aging is affected by post-metaphysics. Even the decay of the flesh, a seemingly natural process, cannot escape from the symbolism that inundates existence. And given that everyone is incarnated in the flesh, aging is of vital importance for most persons (Merleau-Ponty 1968). But like symbolic in general, the fate of the flesh is ambiguous and must be given meaning. Hence aging should not be filled with the dread that accompanies the certainty often associated with decline and death. The flesh does not demand such pessimism but invites the speculation linked with uncertainty and openness.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Steven L. Arxer and John W. Murphy

This book examines the conceptual assumptions that shape and obscure understandings of the aging process, particularly in the current “era of globalization.” To a great extent, globalization constitutes for many scholars the most important feature of the twenty-first century that cuts across and transforms all dimensions of social life, including aging (Dannefer and Settersten 2010). At this juncture of history, knowledge about aging is constructed and directed by specific “deep assumptions” that organize perceptions, attitudes, and practices (Schutz 1964). These theoretical commitments provide a portrayal of aging that emphasizes biomedical perspectives, particular social and political discourses, and professional strategies that determine how this process is viewed.

Specifically noteworthy is that current discourses about globalization supply social imagery that unduly narrows how aging is understood. A claim made in this book is that a message is presented that justifies conditions of inequality, conflict, and reductionism that many social gerontologists currently seek to overcome. As will be argued in later chapters, the source of these problems stems from the alienation of individuals from themselves and social institutions that is encouraged by dominant descriptions of globalization. What happens is that individuals are subtly caged within social imagery that supports a skewed distribution of material and cultural resources that shapes and limits life trajectories.

In their popular book, *Successful Aging*, Rowe and Kahn (1998) imagine the twenty-first century as heralding a new era in gerontology, the study of aging.

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These authors note that throughout the 1970s and 1980s, gerontology was fueled by an awareness of the unprecedented aging of the American population. Despite the foresight of scholars to see the new impending relevance of social gerontology, the development of this field of study was slow going. According to Rowe and Kahn, this occurred because gerontologists lacked the theoretical foundation required to understand aging in all its various aspects—namely, biological, psychological, and social dimensions. Hence, a narrow view of old age is perpetuated without any recognition of the real and diverse nature of older persons.

In the same vein, Bass et al. (1990) argue that until relatively recently little attention was paid to the diversity among the older population. For although gerontologists recognized the rapid demographic changes occurring in this population, many writers in the 1970s and 1980s “view[ed] the elderly as a nameless and faceless mass of persons whose age bracket—65 and older—gives each the same needs and wants” (Stanford and Stanford 2000, p. 97). They assumed that older persons were more alike than different in terms of their needs, desires, and experiences.

This rapidly growing and aging population, which consists of a higher percentage of ethnically and culturally diverse people than ever before, points to the need for better theory and models in gerontology. Indeed, with the prospect of approximately 65 million persons being 65 and older by the year 2030 in the United States, there is a clear need to plan for the recognition and acceptance of this group (Stanford and Torres-Gil 1991, p. 5–6). For example, this emerging diversity calls into question how gerontologists might respond to the needs of older individuals and design social programs. As the demographic landscape of countries changes, social gerontologists must recognize aging to be a heterogeneous rather than a homogenous process. Speaking about the North American context, Stanford (1994, p. 1) discusses the impact of such a diverse older population:

as the older population increases and becomes more diverse, it becomes a driving force for changes required to meet the challenge of providing the quality of life we have come to expect. Aggregate skills and energy will need to be mobilized. Diversity as a social force will require us to consider how different needs can be met . . . Older Americans are no longer bound by locale as they once were. The diversity they have brought to many communities has caused community leaders to re-think the way they plan programs and services. They can no longer plan as if the aged were homogenous. Diversity as a social force will help change the way bureaucracies perceive their roles and responsibilities and the way they operationalize their activities.

Given this juggernaut, Rowe and Kahn mention the need for a “new gerontology.” The goal in this case is to develop a new conceptual framework that allows gerontologists to address the ever-increasing dimensions of aging. In this way, the diverse nature and impact of aging can be appreciated. This book argues that an important obstacle to this goal is a reliance on outmoded symbolization that unduly restricts ideas about and approaches to dealing with aging.

## The Symbolism of Aging

As the etymology of the term suggests, symbols (*symbolē*) represent an active process that gives meaning and direction to reality (literally, “throws” reality together). In this case, legitimacy and necessity are granted to certain assumptions about key cultural concepts, such as temporality, normativity, development, and the body, which come to be viewed gradually as normal and expected. This book recognizes this condition to be the result of two important philosophical positions that are tied to the modern Western intellectual tradition.

First, the cornerstone of gerontology has been a commitment to science as a system of epistemological principles, conceptual models, and practices that trap aging within the confines of biomedicine (Powell 2006, p. 4). What emerges is a new “object” of knowledge that can be empirically studied and verified. And second, the current hegemonic version of globalization—that is guided by neoliberal capitalism—supplies the material and cultural backdrop for guiding the aging process. Most important is the reliance on the market to support globalization.

A key contribution of this book is showing how the biomedical perspective of aging and globalization are deeply interconnected on a symbolic level. On the one hand, science promises to define and improve the “real” possibilities of aging. On the other, the market system inspires persons’ decisions about how to manage the aging process, so that their lives are prosperous. As Murphy and Callaghan (2011, p. 2) point out, a major consequence of this style of symbolization about the aging process is that failures “cannot be blamed on institutional sources.” After all, markets are believed to be self-regulating, while deficiencies are personal and result from not adopting attitudes and behaviors that are rewarded at the marketplace.

Examining the symbolic interconnection between science and globalization can illuminate both the relevance and significance they have for understanding how aging is socially constructed. This outcome requires that the assumptions be unraveled that underpin (1) “gerontology as a science” (Powell 2006 p. 4) and (2) the “mystification of market relations” (Murphy and Callaghan 2011, p. 2).

## Aging, Development, and Power

As noted earlier, Powell (2006, pp. 4–5) argues that the cornerstone of modern gerontology is the utilization of science to specify the nature of aging. This pursuit has been aided by the general “project of modernity,” whereby “the aging subject is constructed as an *object* of knowledge and as a seeker of that knowledge” (Powell 2006, p. 5, emphasis added). The promise of an objectified aging subject is a significant, albeit subtle, philosophical proposal. In particular, objectification implies that identity can be externalized to allow for observation and definition. In more philosophical parlance, dualism is adopted whereby the knower and what is

known are separated. This maneuver is thought to improve knowledge, since the imposed gap fosters clarity regarding the boundaries that define phenomena. A key feature of modernity is a commitment to a dualistic imagination and the application of science that concretizes the aging subject through empirical verification.

To this end, Western gerontology has been associated with and directed by positivistic and quantitative discourses (Katz 1996; Longino and Powell 2004). The focus thus becomes the empirical conditions that constitute aging subjects. Indeed, modern gerontology has sought to locate the aging subject within a naturalistic model; specifically, aging is understood in terms of “individual abilities, needs, and functions” (Powell 2006, p. 4). Furthermore, medical-scientific knowledge plays a significant role in classifying the social and physical facets of existence, so that persons have a clearly delimited identity (e.g., the social construction of different age-groups in society). Popularly known as the “biomedical model,” this outlook remains to a large extent the “master narrative” in gerontology (Biggs and Powell 2001).

To be sure, gerontology today is viewed as an interdisciplinary endeavor. Accordingly, no single discourse should dominate because the aging process encompasses a broad range of experiences and extends beyond the scope of any particular knowledge base. For this reason, gerontologists often adopt a three-pronged strategy (Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields 2002). Researchers and practitioners have argued that aging should be studied with respect to its biological, psychological, and social aspects (Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields 2002, p. 6). A variety of writers, however, have noted that gerontology continues to promote a reductionistic, biomedical view of aging (Rowe 1997; Achenbaum and Bengtson 1994; Baltes and Baltes 1990; Bytheway 1995; Powell 2006). For instance, Rowe and Kahn (1998, p. xi) acknowledge that up until the 1980s the conceptual foundation of gerontology favored biological explanations of issues, even when psychological and social dimensions are obvious.

According to Bytheway (1995), the root of this problem is the manner in which scientific discourses position aging within a developmental scheme. Here the organismic concepts of “growth” and “decline” play a vital role in articulating the empirical or “real” changes that occur to aging persons in terms of biology, with other considerations assumed to be supplemental. In this regard, organisms are imagined to have a life cycle that begins with growth and is marked by life transitions. But eventually, the organism slows and reaches “old age,” which is defined as when decline occurs.

A consequence of this imagery is that growth is equated with positive development and aging linked with entropy. As is well known, this portrayal led early gerontologists (Cumming and Henry 1961) to argue that aging persons’ physical decline should correspond with them gradually disengaging from social life (Cumming and Henry 1961). This preoccupation with the “negative” side of aging hindered the ability of gerontologists to appreciate that aging could be defined in different ways. As Rowe and Kahn (1998) note, by assuming that aging is synonymous with an inevitable degenerative process, the role that individual or social factors play in promoting particular experiences of aging was obscured.

Recent work suggests that the aging process is not necessarily linked to inevitable outcomes and expectations but rather is affected by human volition (Estes and Associates 2000; Lynott and Lynott 1996). What is important now is the interaction

between the individual and environment, along with how this dynamic affects the experience of aging (Gubrium 1973). As a major lens in gerontology, the life-course perspective identifies aging to be a product of both individuals and social structures, thereby illustrating that relevant social conditions can alter patterns of development and aging (Cain 1964; Dannefer and Settersten 2010).

A perspective referred to as “positive aging” attempts to recognize this agenic character to aging, but the biomedical developmental paradigm is not necessarily abandoned (Katz 1996; Powell 2006). The chronolization of life continues to be a deep assumption of this variant of the life-course perspective, in that persons are positioned on a timeline. In this way, later life is still a special moment that signals decline, with persons granted the latitude to manage any outcomes. Aging remains interpreted as decline, as opposed to *change*, and is positioned on a biological continuum.

Aging, therefore, represents a location where power is exercised through the use of discourses. Although this developmental scheme appears to be natural, Powell (2006, p. 5) declares that “power games” are operating behind the scenes through the adoption of specific symbolic formations. These power games are played out at the discursive level where “truth codes and conventions” are constructed through a reliance on privileged knowledge. In this case, particularly scientific and technical knowledge is considered to be universally valid for describing social life. This penchant for introducing biomedical descriptives dominates discussions to the extent that “aging ... cannot be imagined as an alternative except as an abnormality that can be understood only through biomedical science” (Powell 2006, p. 6).

Foucault’s (1977) ideas regarding the relationship between knowledge and power are pertinent at this juncture. In particular, Foucault recognizes that knowledge bases gain status and power through their ability to control bodies. Surveillance, for example, is a strategy that is employed often to ensure compliance from populations. With respect to aging, biomedicine weaves a web of negative ideas and builds a culture of aging that constructs symbolically the aging body as a “problem.” When the aging body is linked to decline, according to Powell (2006, p. 6), institutions emerge to “manage the ‘problems’” related to this process, in the form of nursing care and other social interventions for older persons. In this regard, the market plays a key role in determining who should drop out of society, due to the inability to compete in important institutions.

## **Aging, Globalization, and the Market**

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, discussions of globalization and aging have generated a growing body of literature. Drawing on the life-course perspective, gerontologists generally approach the topic of aging as an issue of “linked lives” and their expanding relevance in a global context (Dannefer and Settersten 2010; Elder and Johnson 2003; Settersten 2003). Simply put, the course of individuals’ lives is interconnected with the needs, conditions, and choices of others. Globalization sets in motion a set of economic, political, social, and other processes that link the lives of



people across the globe. Most notably, the global processes of production and consumption have impact on age peers, as well as across different age groups. For example, the disparate economic circumstances of individuals in the global north and south trigger the northern migration of older women to work in care industries (Calasanti 2010). Coupled with this change is the weakening of the institutions that serve older people and the increased risks that they face due to the reconfiguration of the state in neoliberal globalization (Dannefer 2003; Phillipson et al. 2003).

Although sophisticated, definitions such as these may benefit from examining more closely the symbolic side of globalization for its power to shape constructions of aging. Specifically, detailing the empirical processes and characteristics of globally linked lives (e.g., the risks people face) may side step the important issue of how these aging experiences and inequalities are *legitimized*. This theoretical consideration is important because globalization supplies imagery about the aging experience that leads to the marginalization and inferiorization of persons.

This symbolic process is at the core of this book. After all, simply having different characteristics (e.g., old age) is not sufficient to rationalize exclusion or marginalization. Subordination is not natural; an effort must be made to cast particular people in a negative light. Because empirical elements do not automatically carry a cultural sign of inferiority, specific physical or social differences must be identified as a “risk” or “problem” before persons are legitimately marginalized. This problem raises the question of who has the ability to enact and enforce this process.

Della Fave (1980), in this respect, argues that issues related to social risk and exclusion carry a moment of symbolic legitimation. Before marginalization takes place, the belief must first be impressed on “a large majority of the populace that institutionalized inequality in the distribution of primary resources—such as power, wealth, and prestige—is essentially right and reasonable” (Della Fave 1980, p. 955). Without legitimation the public may regard an uneven allocation of cultural and material resources as distributive injustice. Particularly in a democratic society, where beliefs about equality and fairness are deeply rooted in the citizenry, the maintenance of a system of stratification requires that primary resources be distributed in a manner consistent with the public’s expectations. Without this correspondence, the prevailing modes of resource allocation may come to be viewed as unjust and unacceptable.

A reorientation toward the issue of legitimation is beneficial when studying aging. Such reflection can expose new dimensions in the powerful interplay between aging and global processes. Specifically, the market mechanism that operates within current neoliberal globalization steers attention away from the ways in which the aging process is controlled. This is accomplished through subtle social imagery that naturalizes the effects of the global marketplace. In this way, symbolism supplies the necessary legitimation that supports the uneven distribution of cultural and material resources. As will be shown in the chapters of this volume, globalization’s attendant values shape the social construction of aging in ways that are insulated from serious critique.

The marketplace has a unique role and status within contemporary discussions of globalization. Neoliberal economists argue that as persons compete freely for valued resources, the apolitical laws of the market, such supply and demand, ensure a free, rational, and prosperous society. In other words, inequalities in power, social status,

or wealth are justified so long as these disparities emerged from free competition. As functionalists like to say, social stratification is the outcome of differences in individual merit, abilities, and contributions that have been fairly evaluated at the marketplace. Social disparities are thus not necessarily problematic.

Simply put, neoliberals assume that unless tampering has occurred, the market fosters the common good and justice, *independent of human volition*. The market is capable of producing this result because this device operates on the so-called objective principles of “calculation, preferences, costs, profits, prices, and utility” (Smith 1988, p. 127). There should be no surprise why neoliberals are so excited about and even fetishize the market. For them the marketplace simply represents a mode of interaction that avoids the biases of prior economic forms, such as planned economies. As Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1988, p. 126) reveals, the value and legitimacy of the market stems first and foremost from the ability of traders to “escape or transcend economy altogether.”

The market is described as residing on a different ontological plane than individuals, above the influence of humans, due to the traits allotted to this mechanism. Specifically, the market offers individuals signals of future trends, along with a basis for sound decision-making. Successful aging, for example, is understood to be the result of obeying these signs, while personal and social dysfunction relates to ignoring market tendencies. In this way, the market promises optimal aging, so long as individuals respond appropriately. In more concrete terms, important considerations of aging, such as skills, self-esteem, and utility, are defined by how “in demand” certain qualities are at the marketplace. In the end, however, the desires and experiences associated with aging are divorced from human inclinations, and thus real human needs become ancillary to the institutional demands of global economic and social forces.

The problem with this scenario is that development remains prescriptive, since certain characteristics are believed to be indicative of proper aging. Stated differently, with an indubitable reference point in place (i.e., the market), aging is viewed as a natural process. Persons are expected to participate in their own development; however, their inclusion consists of bringing the self into alignment with the standard aging profile that is best suited for a successful life under global capitalism.

In this way, the ageist dimension of the global market is rendered invisible and difficult to elude. Given that the market is presented as the storehouse of rationality, persons are reluctant to believe that such institutions are corrupt. For if the existing social system is corrupt, in this case the market, citizens will be left without a rational base of order! Indeed, persons may begin to worry whether a democratic society is possible without the presence of an impartial institutional foundation to ensure fair treatment.

Focusing on the symbolic interconnection between globalization and aging fosters critical reflection on the barriers to global integration and fair social outcomes. Given the unique status accorded to the market, inequality may not necessarily be interpreted by persons as a sign of institutional shortcomings. Instead, what is more likely is that individuals may engage in a process of self-inferiorization by applying market reasoning that defines them as losers at the marketplace. Definitions of successful aging, for example, begin to reflect the definitions set by the marketplace, as opposed to aging persons themselves.

A central argument of this book is that social relations are deeply impacted by the *metaphysics of domination*. What has received less attention in scholarship tied to globalization and aging is the entire justification for integration. Specifically, why should the resource allocation strategies of the market be considered inherently universal and legitimate? But such a question is not a product of empirical analysis but philosophical reflection. Nonetheless, because globalization is tied to the market system, market decisions are imagined to be objective and inevitable. In this way, challenges to established age norms, for example, are discredited and their efficacy neatly undermined.

## Embodied Aging

Karl Marx's notion of *praxis* is instructive, in that domination must be understood to be a symbolic practice. That is, specific philosophical principles have to be put into action and made to appear universal to justify acts of oppression and discrimination. Thus, while the process of marginalization may appear impersonal and even rational, particularly at the marketplace, this event is the culmination of elevating the status of particular ideals so that people begin to view them as inherently legitimate. In short, all ideals—and their embodiment in an institution—are in reality contested interpretations of how to organize social life. The significant point here is that all social phenomena, even the market and so-called natural developmental schemes, are the result of human choices and interventions.

While engaging in similar reflection, Gergen and Gergen (2003, p. 204) contend “there is nothing about changes in the human body that require a concept of *aging* or of *decline*. There is no process of aging *in itself*; the discourse of aging is born of interpersonal relationships within a given culture at a given time.” This point is important because, as these authors argue, if aging is to be understood as multifaceted, this process must be stripped of any fundamental nature. While this idea sounds paradoxical, a holistic and dynamic understanding of aging requires that this phenomenon be viewed as a convention, which can assume a number of forms, rather than a normative development or expectation.

To accomplish this aim, the aging body must first no longer be treated as the “object” revealed in the biomedical model (Meador 1998). Moreover, the normative power of the market to orient aging bodies, and prescribe physical and social expectations, should be placed under scrutiny. For instance, the values and culture of specific age-groups (e.g., the young and middle-aged) are presumed unquestioningly to be indicative of an active and healthy life and therefore become the paragon of success in later life. Hence, the door is opened for *particular* norms to be exalted as appropriate because they represent the optimal model of living.

Rather than the result of actualizing certain core qualities, aging should allow for a multiplicity of possibilities. Indeed, developing discrete categories is not thought to be as productive as was once thought. As Biggs (1999, p. 210) explains, aging is marked by a “blurring of categories” that are not easily or neatly organized into an

integrated system. In other words, the use of discrete norms and expectations to describe aging, even if they are compatible with biological decline, has been criticized for being too simplistic, since older persons' experiences do not fit neatly within these parameters.

## Organization of the Book

This book examines a set of interrelated topics that relate to the symbolic relationship between aging and globalization. In this respect, key conceptual issues, such as temporality, technology, normativity, and science are illustrated to influence the symbolic side of globalization and the currently dominant images of aging. Current debates about globalization and aging are expanded to unearth the social imagery that is both subtly behind globalization and at the forefront of shaping the aging experience.

In Chaps. 2 and 3, Vincent Berdayes and Luigi Esposito outline the important role market imagery plays in legitimizing globalization. In the words of Serrano and Hinkelammert, the current version of globalization has led to the creation of a “total market.” Specifically, a new market culture has emerged that shapes all aspects of social life. The total market exists as a “cosmovisión” and influences how social institutions and personal life are conceived. Esposito discusses the social ontology of globalization and the establishment of age-related norms. In Habermas' words, most of these theories are “monological” in character because of their conception of social order. There is a subtle message, accordingly, about the nature of persons, the worth of diversity, the purpose and style of integration, and the prospects for freedom. With respect to globalization, subtle normative messages include a narrow emphasis on roles and utility that limit normal development.

William Van Lear draws attention in Chap. 4 to how classic economic theory not only reinforces neoliberal globalization but also threatens the status of key support systems, such as retirement. The focus of these three chapters is the rendition of the person and social relationships that are central to this conception of social reality. Global capitalism, in this case, carries a particular framework for understanding the notion of development and key issues related to aging.

Chapter 5 makes a link between the construction of the aging body and the powerful images employed by globalizing forces. Tom Semm and Kyra R. Greene investigate the notion of “the image” and the role it plays in globalization. Moreover, the symbolic power of the image represents a central mechanism in the maintenance and reproduction of neoliberal globalization and has particular consequences for conceptions of aging.

Steven L. Arxer, in Chap. 6, focuses on the issue of temporality and chronology. The central thesis of this chapter is that a type of control is enacted that is consistent with the view of time that sustains globalization—namely, Newtonian time. Additionally, accompanying this perspective on temporality is social imagery that may lead to repression and a truncated future. Newtonian time, in other words, can establish an absolute framework that can be used to reinforce norms and provide general stability to the social world. Given this ahistorical context, these rules can

be described as part of human nature or associated with functional social imperatives regarding aging. In any case, norms are provided with a universal status that stifles criticism and reifies norms of aging.

In Chap. 7 John W. Murphy links the social imagery associated with a developmental viewpoint within aging studies. Commonly known as a life-course perspective, there are a set of presuppositions that accompanies the idea of a *course* that rarely receive attention but can prescribe a normative framework with respect to how important dimensions of a *life* are understood—such as temporality, causality, and directionality. The argument is made that the underlying assumptions that pervade the life-course perspective may subtly frustrate the development of the holism and human agency this theory intends to promote.

In Chaps. 8 and 9, the body and successful aging are discussed. In Chap. 9, Jung Min Choi looks at how the body is a central site in the construction of globalization. The body, in this case, becomes a resource in introducing a corporate model of identity. The body is commodified and manipulated in ways to facilitate the sale and consumption of products, images, and ideals. In a related way, Linda Liska Belgrave and Bisma Ali Sayed's chapter discusses the theme of successful aging, which is the new watchword in gerontology. In order for individuals to develop and age well, everything they do must be measurable. Of course, the focus of these efforts is increased testing and the operationalization of knowledge in neat packages of information. However, this modus operandi is reductionistic and attracts attention away from reflection. In the end, people follow prescriptive criteria that foster the correct "lifestyle choices" without much attention to what Moody refers to as the larger economic-political context of their decisions.

Chapter 10 explores how the intersections of technology, healthcare, and aging operate within globalization. Clearly, technology is associated with globalization. At practically every turn, new technology is introduced into social life in order to enhance the experiences of persons. But in this rush to create "wired" institutions and persons, for example, a crucial element is overlooked. That is, at least since the early work of Heidegger, scholars have recognized that the thrust of technology is not technical—instead, the power of technology is derived from particular theoretical maneuvers that transform everything that is placed under the yoke of technology. David Reznik examines how the adverse effects of technology are introduced subtly through new forms of cognition, beliefs about facts, and an obsession with the "new." This process is associated closely with the global spread of Western, techno-centered medicine and its related image of persons.

Eric Kramer and Elaine Hsieh's chapter deals with the topic of anti-culture and aging. An often-ignored dimension of developmental models is how they include a rendition of aesthetics. Related to globalization, subtle imagery of beauty and happiness is proposed that follows a narrowly prescribed view of history and development. In this case, particular ideals of beauty are proposed that effectively marginalize alternative aesthetics. Specifically, globalization and the associated emphasis on market imagery place increased value on notions of "youthfulness" and "the new." Bourdieu calls this process "symbolic violence" because through symbolism specific portrayals of the body are delegitimized while, at the same time, persons feel the need to conform to certain ideals of beauty.

Finally, Chap. 12, the conclusion, focuses on reconceptualizing aging in light of new social theory and the challenges of globalization. The notion of embodied aging is more closely examined in terms of the limits imposed by market imagery. Here the need to move toward a post-market vision is presented as central to thinking about non-essentialistic portrayals of aging. In this way, a more diverse set of aging trajectories is available to better reflect the heterogeneity of the aging population and experience.

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## Chapter 2

# The ‘Total Market,’ Globalization, and Discourses of Aging

Vicente Berdayes

Various scholars have characterized the social conditions brought about by neoliberal globalization as a “total market.” Developed by various Latin American writers, this phrase designates social conditions in which the market has not only achieved global scale but is also identified with the totality of human existence. The total market corresponds to that period in history when political leaders like Margaret Thatcher could paradoxically proclaim, “there is no such thing as society” and propose the market as the only viable model of social order. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, this market-based ideology displaced the more robust social imagery that had legitimated welfare state policies in Western countries while also validating narrow neoliberal models of development for other nations. Neoliberal policies and the total market conditions they foster have also impacted the ways social identities can be imagined.

When society is identified with the market, social relations decompose into a jumble of incidental exchanges engaged in to maximize the satisfaction of personal desires. Though long-range relationships, such as, between friends or spouses, can be imagined using this model, the underlying foundation of such relationships is thought to be a rational economic calculus that relentlessly orients choice and social action. In other words, we shop around for friends, spouses, political leaders, and so forth in much the same way as we shop for cars, and once the costs of those relationships outweigh their benefits, we move on to a new “purchase.”<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the total market comprises not just a set of institutions and practices but also a social ontology and ethos that constrain how human beings and their social relationships may be imagined. The process of aging is no exception. The marketplace imagery that pervades neoliberal globalization informs how aging and personal

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identities are portrayed. Understanding the concept of total market is therefore important for researchers who hope to gain a critical understanding of the relationship between globalization and aging.

## Characteristics of the Total Market

The concept of the total market appears in the work of a group of Latin American researchers that includes Alejandro Serrano, Pablo Richard, Franz Hinkelammert, Wim Dierckxsens, Hugo Assman, and Enrique Dussel, many of whom are affiliated with the *Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones* (DEI) in Costa Rica and its journal *PASOS*.<sup>2</sup> These authors argue that the trajectory of globalization is toward the formation of a total market that excludes alternative models of social development (Murphy 2004). One of the outcomes of this global transformation is a narrowing of the semantic field that comprises traditional social environments. Members of the DEI repeatedly use the metaphor of “flattening” to describe the character of social life within the total market. Phrases like “sujeto aplastado” (flattened subjects) and “pueblo aplastado” (crushed communities) pepper their work and connote both a flattening of subjectivity and social life as well as the oppression of individuals and communities that typifies the total market.<sup>3</sup>

This imagery is reminiscent of Herbert Marcuse’s concept of “one dimensionality,” which characterized the mental and social ambiance of postwar consumer capitalism (Marcuse 1964). But the idea of the flattened world has a different emphasis, as it more centrally references the experience of people outside the core of consumer capitalist nations as well as emerging social conditions in countries where the welfare state is disintegrating. Whereas Marcuse focused on the use of social-scientific techniques to administer mass-consumer capitalism, the flattened world refers to the experience of people largely excluded from this advanced form of capitalism but whose social and natural environment are nevertheless thoroughly disrupted by globalization.

These populations experience directly being pure objects of capital exploitation in the sense that there are no serious proposals to integrate them within a global market. Only a relative few enter the calculations of global capital as sources of toss-away wage labor, while the rest remain invisible or appear as impediments to capitalist exploitation of the natural environment. As such they experience the violent blunt end of globalization in the form of protracted warfare, neocolonialism, environmental exploitation, economic destabilization, and societal disintegration. Such societies are under what Wim Dierckxsens (1999) characterizes as a “monetary attack” that disarticulates the social environment and reintegrates portions into the global market.

This process of societal “aplastamiento” (flattening, crushing), according to Gustavo Gutierrez, produces a social subjectivity that is “simply the replica of this totalization of the market that tries to destroy all instances of cooperation, solidarity, and unity of effort among human beings. Increasing fragmentation and exclusion leads to the situation of a subject flattened by the total market, with no other social

and organizational support to rely upon. It is pure denuded corporeality, in isolation, in submission, and under the temptation of an ever more elusive consumerism."<sup>4</sup>

The total market, then, refers to a social environment that is in the process of being disarticulated by capital. Capitalist deterritorialization flattens the meaningful field of social action, including personal identities, into undifferentiated units of value, which then enter the market as commodities. The total market monetizes all social significations and erases alternative sources of values. As Luigi Esposito argues, the market "unifies by homogenizing social existence." The market seems to proceed by offering people a new world of plenty and ever-broadening consumer choice but at the cost of transforming populations into wage laborers and "an interchangeable mass of consumers" (Esposito 2009, p. 28). A new social architecture is indeed raised by the global market but one based on reconstituting populations into profitable and nonprofitable "market segments" which themselves become commoditized products of world trade.

A second feature of the total market is its status as a "post-utopian" form of capitalism. DEI researchers note that the total market undermines utopian claims associated with earlier versions of liberalism. As presented in the works of Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek, the market is thought to have an inherently liberating *telos*, for as the market integrates additional portions of the globe, it grows, becomes more efficient, and generates prosperity for increasing numbers of people (Murphy 2004). This ineluctable trajectory of social development justifies economic liberalization by leading to a dynamic and global "society without coercion" (Friedman 1962, pp. 7–17; see also Hayek 1974).

However, DEI theorists argue that globalization has not been substantially oriented by these utopian ideals. They recognize both that a tepid narrative of free-market utopianism still circulates among elites and their mass media propagandists and that the current era is oriented by a capitalist "theology" centered on a market-centric "transcendental utopia" (Jiménez 2003). But DEI theorists also note that a fundamental shift has occurred in this market-centric vision of the world. The total market is based on the displacement of an earlier, inclusive form of market utopianism dating to Adam Smith's writings. Smith argued that the benevolent influence of an "invisible hand" operates behind people's backs to promote the interest of society as a whole, even as individuals pursue their apparently transparent self-interests. The result is a broadening and stable division of labor that promotes collective social interests more effectively than if people had set about to consciously create a fair and just society (Smith 1937, p. 423). Yet, as Wim Dierckxsens (2000, p. 18) explains, Smith's stance toward the market results in a "separation of ethics and politics from economics." All values have the same status *within* the market's field of generalized exchange, but no values can be cited as transcending the market in a way that allows people to reflect on and exercise control over the market. In this form of "capitalism without citizens," says Dierckxsens, there is no way to conceptualize the common good except as the inscrutable influence of an invisible hand working through the market. The market thus becomes impervious to critique.<sup>5</sup>

This conception of the market therefore prevents human beings from directing the course of social development in light of ideals outside of the market. The semantic

flattening entailed by conceiving of society solely as a market dissolves history as an open horizon of qualitatively different possibilities. Consequently, society, or rather the totalized market, becomes disengaged from the vital reproduction of life and becomes an end in itself. Within this inverted cosmos, human beings reappear as objects of the market, that is, as sources of labor power bought and sold on the world market. Human beings are accorded no special value within this totalized field of exchange.

This post-utopian capitalism, as Hinkelammert notes, propagates a thoroughgoing nihilism (Hinkelammert 2002a). Because the market collapses all standards and principles into exchange values and world governments are unequivocally committed to perpetuating some form or other of robust market order, their use of discourses that reference transcendental values is transparently insincere. When refracted through a market perspective, references to human rights or world peace serve as legitimization strategies to justify the use of force by power blocks within the world market. Whereas advocates of globalization argue that war and violence are ubiquitous in areas that have yet to be integrated into the world market, DEI theorists note that forces aligned with the total market engage in perpetual war on all values that limit the market's influence on human life. The connection between warfare and the market is thus a prominent theme in DEI writings; warfare corresponds to the centuries-long experience of peoples who remain objects of the imperial world market (Tablada and Dierckxsens 2003; Hinkelammert 1987). Yet such wars and systematized institutional violence are cynically conducted in the name of the highest values (Hinkelammert and Jiménez 2005, pp. 169–171; Gutiérrez 2000, 2002).

The total market also redefines the world-building projects of earlier modernity in line with this nihilism. Although efforts like the Marshall Plan and other development projects were consciously oriented toward extending the market and entwined with imperialistic interests, they were still directed toward integrating the world as a social system rather than as simply a market (Lerner 1958; Murphy 2004). Yet as directed by institutions such as the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and other governmental organizations, contemporary development efforts rework the social environments of other nations so that they advance the dendritic growth of the global market (Cobb 1999). Social development in this sense is reinterpreted as resource exploitation, including the exploitation of human labor, by the total market. Such policies remove impediments to the realization of a totalized market by disarticulating institution and cultural norms that limit the role of the market in social life (Acosta 2002).

A third major theme in DEI discussions is the analysis of the total market's underlying metaphysics. The themes discussed so far indicate that although the total market is antagonistic to transcendental values, it is itself based on metaphysical precepts that isolate its mechanisms from human intervention. Celebrations of the market are often based on a critique of traditional authoritarian conceptions of society. On the surface, the market seems to offer an alternative to traditional social ontologies that posit "society" as a reality *sui generis* and the State as the highest expression of this autonomous social reality (Murphy 1989; Gouldner 1970). For instance, Hayek presents the totality of market relations as a concatenation of smaller markets, each attuned to local demands. This imagery seems to offer a decentered conception of

social order that accords with the liberal tradition's emphasis on personal autonomy (Esposito 2011). But as John Murphy (2004) demonstrates, this shift does not achieve the purported break with traditional authoritarian conceptions of social order. All that is accomplished is that the market takes the place of society as the sacrosanct ordering principle.

Neoliberal theory thus echoes more traditional dualisms that oppose social order and human subjectivity. In spite of their claims to radically break with conservative authoritarianism, these writers recast the authoritarian principle of order in the form of the market. As with earlier portrayals of "society" based on ontological realism, the market is thought to be governed by underlying laws that guarantee social harmony and govern an orderly process of growth (Callaghan 2011). Left alone, the market automatically and inscrutably optimizes the distribution of social goods, and life remains orderly so long as humans treat the market with humility and submit to its demands. Efforts to constrain market forces and direct social development in light of alternative ends, however, inevitably leads to chaos. Human intrusions in the operation of the market, as through the interventions of the welfare state, are futile and serve only to "distort" the market's natural equilibrium (Hinkelammert and Jiménez 2005, pp. 100–105). Such efforts are only acts of hubris because the scope and complexity of markets is beyond human comprehension and demands complete submission (Hinkelammert 1984, pp. 75–80). For this reason, Hinkelammert (1984, p. 79) argues, neoliberal writers attribute a divine and miraculous status to the market, and their work accordingly devolves into an obscurantist mysticism:

This moral of humility and pride leads to a true mysticism of the market, of money, and of capital. By means of this mysticism, a whole vision of reality is constructed, which replaces immediate reality with commercial relations. Concrete reality appears as a by-product of commercial relations, and man is what mercantile relations make of him.... Liberty is the market, and there can be no state intervention in the market in the name of liberty. Liberty is man's submission to the laws of the market, and unrecognized is any human right that is not derived from a position in the market.<sup>6</sup>

This reification of the market has practical consequences; it does not simply provide ideological cover for the rapaciousness of capitalist globalization. Rather, the totalizing metaphysics of the market organizes and propels a specific politics.

This politics is founded on the binary opposition between the market and anything that refuses to be completely subsumed within its processes. In line with the Western metaphysical tradition, this binarism tends to elevate one term in a pairing of concepts while devaluing the other. As the market is accorded a divine or transcendent status, it becomes associated with all that is good, real, and stable, whereas whatever remains outside the total market is associated with opposing values, with evil, falsity, and chaos. In this way the economic language of neoliberal discourse transmutes into a moral framework for judging people and institutions (Hinkelammert 1985). All manner of ideologies and groups are to be fused under the universal label of "subversiveness" (Hinkelammert 1985). This highly polarized discursive field resolves all attempts to place limits on market processes as a singular expression of antimarket thinking, regardless of the orienting principles that guide those efforts. The total market, in other words, creates a politically useful enemy, an enemy that

takes on monstrous qualities in proportion to the extremism of market thinking (Hinkelammert 2002b). The enemy embodies everything that stands outside of the market: if the market is rational, the enemy irrational; if the market is disciplined, the enemy is licentious; and if the market is unequivocally good, the enemy is absolutely evil (Esposito 2009).

The total market's binary logic dispenses with the need to think, to draw distinctions, to interpret ambiguities, and finally to make human judgments when faced with real alternatives (Hinkelammert 2002a, pp. 10–12). The total market makes all these social and existential complexities disappear in a Manichean politics that links the market to the most reactionary elements in a society as well as to a machinery of total war against whatever happens to be labeled as subversive extremism. Echoing historical attempts at national purification, the effort to purify the market inevitably propels a paranoid “anti-subversive total war” with the aim of expulsing and exterminating anything that “distorts” market relations (Hinkelammert 1985, pp. 6–7). Those who oppose economic liberalization become the total market's abject other, a human scapegoat representing all that is despicable and which at best is worthy only of pity.

While appearing to be a narrow economic philosophy, neoliberal thinking offers an entire cosmology, a “cosmovisión,” that allows global elites to maintain political hegemony through complex linkages among representatives of global corporate interests, the military, political elites, as well as disaffected populations that are most brutalized by market forces. The metaphysics underlying this view of capitalism isolates the market itself from criticism by casting its principles in the form of inviolable natural laws. At the same time, the binarisms underlying this simplistic discourse allow the market to acquire additional moral and religious weight that justifies aligning one's entire life and the well-being of nations in accord with neoliberal principles. The total market, in short, emerges as a religious fundamentalism (Hinkelammert 2002a).

## **The Total Market and the Discourses of Aging**

This analysis of the total market can help one understand the significance of certain contemporary representations of aging and the elderly. The elevation of the market above all other institutions entails a corresponding social imagery that defines how people and their social relationships can be understood. This imagery is efficacious not simply in the sense that it is ideologically charged but also in terms of what social theorists refer to as discourses. Following the work of Michel Foucault, discourses are understood to comprise not only images and texts but also affiliated practices and institutions that allow people to be constituted as recognizable subjects of knowledge (Robert D'Amico 1982; Smart 1985). Discourses generate the practical and ideological conditions under which people recognize themselves and their social possibilities. While a social field typically contains a variety of incommensurable discourses that fail to coalesce as a unified all-encompassing ideology, the total market nevertheless promotes some discourses and renditions of the self

while marginalizing others. Certain discourses of aging are therefore more central to the total market than others, and as globalization extends total market conditions around the world, these discourses become more widely dispersed.

As noted, neoliberal ideology relates all social identities to the market. The resulting world picture is based on an acquisitive individualism in which the market appears as the central institution of social life and resolves the universal drive to satisfy individual needs into a stable social order. While other institutions may intrude into the market and attempt to coordinate or limit its reach, all such exercises are considered fundamentally flawed exercises in social planning that distort the market's optimal efficiency. This market-based social ontology contains an implicit argument about the worth of the human being. Because market relations develop from the rational satisfaction of individual desires, those who fail in the marketplace must be mentally or morally deficient. Not accidentally, then, the rise of neoliberal thinking has coincided with the reappearance of social-Darwinist and racist narratives that frame disparities in wealth and power as the result of inbred differences in aptitudes (Lind 1996; Esposito 2009). Additionally, in accord with the market's Manichean ethos, it becomes easy to portray marginalized groups and those who call for limits on the market as degenerates who embody atavistic cultural or social values. Even here, though, the market is cited as a moral purgative that unceasingly imposes its discipline to weed out the weak and reform and the survivors in its image.

This social imagery and adjoining narratives impact the way in which the process of aging can be imagined. Total market conditions define a zone of visibility within which only some people count as fully human. This zone corresponds with periods in which people participate competently in the market, either by laboring or by having access to capital to sustain them as consumers. Before they enter the market, as during childhood, or when they drop out or leave the market, as through retirement, they are in a state of proto-, sub-, or even non-humanity. This feature of total market ideology is clearly visible in the way neoliberals continually depict education as a form of training for the workplace; the child matures into a complete person by being schooled to be a competent laborer (Callaghan 2004).

The process of aging is interwoven with the market in a parallel way. As Manuel (Castells 1996, pp. 445–454) argues, contemporary global capitalism has disrupted traditional human life cycles and made possible numerous distinctive "old ages," yet the fundamental operation of the market remains constant in the sense that the great majority of people remain wage earners whose labor is bought on the global market and until they are discarded as their profitability declines. The total market defines a person's existence in reference to the production and consumption of commodities. When a person's utility as a wage laborer ends, their claim to full humanity depends on continued access to the capital they need to procure goods and services. The dynamics of the market and the dissolution of the welfare state, however, insure that relatively few people are confident of having the resources they need to sustain them through old age. Perceived through the prism of neoliberal rationality aging is therefore a process of drifting out of the market, and elderly people consequently have a tenuous claim on their humanity. These assumptions are clearly discernable in portrayals of aging and the elderly.

Among the most consistent of these depictions is that of the elderly as a frail and dependent group, an assumption that regularly appears in today's political discourse. Old age is certainly accompanied by a decline in physical ability, but even very elderly people can live active lives in which they continue to develop as persons and creatively engage their world. Yet in contrast with the plurality of old ages that Castells mentions as concrete possibilities, contemporary political discourse in the service of the market has one reliable phrase to encapsulate old age, "our seniors." This phrase, notable in its mendacity and condescension to the elderly, illustrates the subtle social imagery propagated by total market conditions.

References to "our seniors" also appear in popular discourse, but the use of the collective possessive pronoun "our," indicating some level of shared social responsibility for each other's welfare, is striking when used by a political class that has consistently undermined any conception of social existence beyond the market. However, "our seniors" is more than just an example of political hypocrisy; it exemplifies the semantic flattening of the social environment that occurs under total market conditions. In this case, the term "our" suggests social dependency and tacitly expresses the idea that as people cycle out of the labor market due to age, they *collectively and immediately* enter a state of dependence, this being the only legitimate social status that can be accommodated by total market discourse. Pure market language cannot conceptualize a period of creative activity outside the work force because of the robust social welfare infrastructure that type of life implies, were it open to everyone. In a completely market-centered society, healthy people should continue to labor, until, that is, they manifestly correspond to the category "our seniors" and are due a miserly quota of social services designed to ease a quick passage into death. This need for people to extend their working years in fact has occurred in the wake of cuts in state benefits and declines in the value of retirement accounts elderly people have experienced as a result of economic liberalization. Within neoliberal discourse, then, the phrase "our seniors" corresponds to a paring down of the broad social meanings aging may take on. The phrase designates a period of frail dependence the elderly impose on the economy of healthy workers and which must be addressed within a free-market framework.<sup>7</sup> In addition to indexing the semantic flattening of the social environment and the oppression it entails, the phrase also reflects the fading of earlier utopian hopes that industrial capitalism would lead to a world of abundance in which people would be largely freed from the need to labor and could devote greater portions of their lives to personal development. Contemporary economic discourse cannot conceptualize such possibilities and instead frames the life cycle in reference to an autonomous market that dictates one's options.

A related aspect of the symbolism of aging is the preoccupation with retirement. There are good reasons people look forward to retirement. Modern work is highly bureaucratized, and the division of labor takes almost all workers away from their homes and families to labor under conditions imposed by others. For such reasons, discussions of retirement are common in capitalist society and tend to reflect the alienated relationship many people have with their work.

In his study of the rise of middle-class professionals following the Second World War, C. Wright Mills (1951) noted that life for these groups had become centered



on “the big split,” that is, on the distinction between work and leisure. Although engaged in professional labor, these groups nevertheless remained alienated by their work and looked forward to periods when they could free themselves from its demands. According to Mills, this alienation was expressed as a constant yearning for more leisure. What Erich Fromm (1955) termed the “ideal of laziness” arises when people engage in work that lacks personal meaning and connection to their creative abilities.

The concern with retirement also illustrates this alienated split between work and leisure. Often, retirement is looked forward to as a reward after a long period of labor—which implicitly frames work as a punishment or as a time when one can finally pursue one’s true interests—which presents the previous decades of one’s labor as a postponement or abridgement of life. Yet Mills and Fromm were describing conditions under the managerial capitalism of the postwar years, when government enforced labor compacts and more robust welfare state policies stabilized class antagonisms. In those years more workers could look forward to a retirement in which pensions and Social Security benefits guaranteed stable middle-class incomes. Those conditions are enviable compared to the futures the same groups contemplate today (Fraser 2001). As neoliberal globalization undermined the relative stability enjoyed by previous generations, workers have had to more actively plan for their retirement. This anxious concern with “planning” has consequently emerged as another aspect of the market-driven discourse of aging.

The imagery of the worker as someone who constantly observes market conditions for their long-range survival parallels the concern with planning that arose among Western governments and corporations as the economy became more unpredictable in the 1970s. At that time, the apparently unassailable dominance of firms like IBM, General Motors, and Mobil Oil eroded as they began to experience the “creative destruction” celebrated by neoliberal economists as an attribute of free markets. Companies were forced to develop new forecasting methods and techniques for strategizing their reactions to increasingly unpredictable market conditions (Kleiner 2008).

Workers and their families have had to respond to the same conditions, and just as a new range of management theorists, strategic planners, and risk managers emerged claiming to be able to help companies “shoot the rapids” (Wack 1985) of the new globalized economy, a wide range of financial service providers now claim to help people navigate their route to an agreeable old age. As Dennis Hopper counsels prospective retirees in one *Ameriprise* commercial, “You can’t start this journey without knowing where you’re going. You, my friend, you need a plan,” and charting that path requires procuring complex financial services and expertise. This commercial discourse of “planning for retirement,” then, is a response to the privatization of risk individuals have endured because of the reduction of the State’s role in economic planning and the pruning of welfare state benefits.

As a commercial discourse, the images and narratives of retirement planning participate in what Raymond Williams (1993) called “the magic system” of advertising. Distributed to targeted audiences over commercial media, the discourse as a whole emphasizes the danger and volatility facing workers as they try to plan for retirement and then offers financial services as the fetish that leads to “financial freedom.” All



such ads operate in the same manner, by constructing a dichotomy between necessity and freedom, danger and security, or even isolation and togetherness, and offering a company's services as the mediating fetish that allows one to pass from one state of being to the other. The important point is that the idyll of retirement remains categorically out of reach without the magical intercession of the financial services provider. As with much advertising, retirement planning discourse exemplifies the displacement of human agency into goods that Marx considered endemic to capitalism. The complement to this reification of commodities lies in the mystification of the market as something that lies outside of human intervention and that people must orient their entire lives toward in order to survive. Like residents of ancient city-states proffering their hard-won surplus to the temple god, people now trade their dollars for "financial services" in the hope of prophesying what the inscrutable god of the market plans for them.

The large number of ads that target workers' preoccupation with retirement, however, does not mean that representations of the elderly are common. Many of these ads do not even portray older people and instead target middle-aged and younger workers who are urged to plan for old age. Except for a few groups of older consumers, the commercialized culture of the market tends to ignore elderly people (Vasil and Wass 1993).

Though there are broader cultural and social influences on people's attitudes toward aging, this lack of rounded and varied representations of aging is closely linked to the rise of media monopolies within liberalized economies. In recent decades, neoliberal policies have pared away ownership and content regulations on communications media, resulting in the rise of global media oligopolies owned by larger conglomerates (Bagdikian 2004). In the United States, this process has coincided with a decline of government support of public broadcasting (including repeated calls for ending all such subsidies) and quasi-commercialization of its services (Schiller 1989).

Communications media become "hyper-commercialized" under such conditions because the profit motive, which by definition is always primary to commercial media, becomes increasingly foregrounded with this growing concentration of ownership (McChesney 2004). The commercial ethos coupled with a neoliberal regulatory environment pushes aside more established concerns with serving the public interest. Indeed, when viewed through the prism of neoliberal policy, the public interest coincides with consumer desires, so that a medium is assumed to be serving the public good if it remains commercially viable, commercial viability being an unequivocal sign that members of the "public" use a medium to satisfy their needs.<sup>8</sup> That there may be substantial differences between a public consisting of consumers and a public consisting of citizens does not figure in the univocal discourse of the total market.

How does this transformation of communications media impact the ability to symbolize aging? The answer lies at the core of the media's commercial model. People commonly assume that when they use a commercial medium of communication they are consuming a product. To the contrary, the product of a commercial medium is its audience. The content of any such medium—a television show, magazine article, a song on the radio—is by contrast only bait designed to lure a group of people to the medium so that they can be sold in groups to advertisers. Advertisers, in turn,

use various media to communicate with specific “market segments,” meaning groups of people who may become interested in purchasing assorted products. The basic business model, therefore, is founded on the sale of audiences to the advertisers’ corporate clients (Leiss, et al. 2005).

Note that not all audiences are equally valuable to a media company. The most valuable people are those whom advertisers are most eager to communicate with and will pay top dollar to gain access to. These groups consist of avid consumers with disposable incomes. Thus, advertisers create campaigns that target select groups of consumers using commercial media as platforms for advertising messages.

What this means is that there is unyielding pressure for *commercial* media to subdivide people into specific “audience segments,” and to develop programming that targets the most valuable of these groups. Conversely, the same commercial pressures insure that the least valuable audience segments have little content produced for them. To use television as a clear example, programming executives faced with the choice of two shows to fill a primetime slot, one targeting and featuring young urban professionals and one targeting and featuring an elderly cast, the commercial imperative makes the choice clear in every case—the show targeting the most profitable audience segment will be chosen each time, and the value of the audience segment will correlate with a group’s ability and propensity to consume. Therefore, commercial media are in the business of manufacturing “audience segments” that align precisely as possible with the coveted “market segments” advertisers hope to reach with their campaigns. It is in this sense that media should be understood as doing more than distributing a class-based ideology embedded in media content.

By manufacturing content designed to draw in certain groups and repel others, media construct “subject positions” that people inhabit as they interact with that content. Rather than simply transmitting ideology, media content works discursively by “hailing,” or interpolating, human beings into the system of consumer capitalism. A media artifact hails a person—draws them in and orients them toward the world—so that they can have certain experiences rather than others. Those experiences correspond to subjectivities programmed into the world of consumer capitalism. A commercial magazine or a tightly segmented radio program interlarded with commercials points beyond its content and indexes a broader circuit of consumerist practices and institutions. Though they may resist this rendition of their identity, the reader of a commercial magazine or the listener of a commercial radio show is already articulated into the carefully engineered subjectivity of a consumer simply by engaging commercial media content (Morley and Chen 1996).

The converse of this discursive mechanism is that subjectivities that cannot be profitably commodified will not be articulated into the commercial field. The commercial segmentation of populations results in a form of economic redlining that marginalizes nonprofitable market segments (Gandy 1993). As noted, elderly people comprise one such group. The thorough commercialization of media relegates the elderly to a discursive zone of invisibility (Abrams et al. 2003). They generally do not appear in substantial numbers or in substantive roles within commercial content, instead often appearing as comedic caricatures, victims, or in supporting roles that index their marginality in the political economy of media (Vasil and Wass 1993;

Zhang et al. 2006). As Kimberly Sawchuk (1995) argues, even when elderly people are commercially targeted, marketers tend to address them as if they were stuck in time by making references to cultural markers from their youth. As in the long running *Ameriprise* campaign noted above, which traded on Dennis Hopper's iconic link to the 1960s, such campaigns implicitly identify "youth as the ultimate virtue" and age as a problem to be defied. In this sense, the commercial media comprise a mechanism of symbolic violence against the elderly that erases aging as an object of detailed representation. The invisibility of the elderly reflects their status as detritus of the total market.

## Conclusion

Neoliberal ideology is an economic doctrine that presents the market as the only legitimate model of social order and development. This assumption has directed the path of globalization toward formation of a "total market," a phrase that refers to the increasingly global reach of market relations as well as the intrusion of market imagery into all aspects of social existence. Because the total market is oriented exclusively toward resource and labor exploitation, its advance changes societies in profound ways.

The dissolution of other societies' semantic fields and oppression of their populations, the ridicule of social alternatives and scapegoating of their proponents, as well as the way in which the metaphysics of market extremism cordons off critique and legitimates the extirpation of social alternative—each of these factors constitutes a milieu in which market-based imagery pervades everyday life and restricts the portrayal of institutions and social identities.

As a dimension of personal identity, the process of aging is also impacted by total market conditions. Such conditions disseminate a discursive field of images and practices that provide people limited ways to understand old age. These discourses are integrated into the political economy of media and orient people in relation to a world that presupposes the sovereignty of the market. Representations of aging thus center on efforts to discern and adjust one's life toward future market conditions, even as substantial portrayals of the aged are filtered out of the social environment. As this analysis illustrates, the ability to broadly disseminate more robust discourses of aging therefore requires both a thorough critique of the total market and coordinated efforts to transcend it.

## Notes

1. For a programmatic example of how "rational choice" economic models are applied to personal relationships, see Laura Stafford (2008). See also Esposito (2011).

2. A complete archive of *PASOS* is available for download at the web site of the *Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones*, <http://www.dei-cr.org/>.
3. See for instance the conference transcripts published as “La Negación del Sujeto en los Fundamentalismos y la Raíz Subjetiva de Interculturalidad Cuarto Encuentro de Cientistas Sociales y Teólogos. DEI, San José, Costa Rica, Diciembre 5–9 del 2002 (Síntesis elaborada por Germán Gutiérrez)” *PASOS*, 106, 4–72.
4. “La crisis de los llamados sujetos sociales es simplemente la réplica de esta totalización del Mercado que intenta destruir toda instancia de cooperación, solidaridad y unidad de esfuerzos entre seres humanos. La fragmentación y exclusión crecientes conducen a la situación de un sujeto aplastado por el mercado total, sin ninguna otra mediación social y orgánica bajo la cual pueda ampararse. Es la desnudez pura de la corporalidad en soledad, en sometimiento, y bajo la seducción de un consumo cada vez más esquivo.” Gutiérrez, Germán. 1999. “Globalización y Subjetividad: ‘Buzos’ y Sujeto Rebelde.” *PASOS*, 81, 16–23, p. 20.
5. This analysis of economic thinking resonates with the critique of instrumental rationality carried out by the Frankfurt School, especially as found in the writings of Jürgen Habermas. See Habermas (1972, 1976).
6. “Esta moral de la humildad y del orgullo desemboca en una verdadera mística del Mercado, del dinero y del Mercado. Mediante esta mística se construye toda una visión de la realidad, que sustituye la realidad inmediata por las relaciones mercantiles. La realidad concreta aparece como un subproducto de las relaciones mercantiles, y el hombre es lo que las relaciones mercantiles hacen de él... Libertad es mercado, y no puede haber intervención estatal en el mercado en nombre de la libertad. Libertad es el sometimiento del hombre a las leyes del mercado. Libertad es el sometimiento del hombre a las leyes del Mercado, y no se reconoce ningún derecho humano que no se derive de una posición, en el Mercado” (Hinkelammert 1984, p. 79).
7. A notable example is George W. Bush’s address of June 16, 2005, *Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits*, in which “our seniors” appears three times. The speech announces the beginning of Medicare prescription drug benefits under the *Medicare Modernization Act*, a program that was roundly criticized as an effort to privatize portions of Medicare and as an expression of lack of political will to create a true drug benefit provision within Medicare.
8. For an explicit statement of these ideas and the role commercial media and advertising are to play within “consumer democracy,” see Sandage (1989).

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# Chapter 3

## Globalization, Neoliberal Development, and Ontological Tyranny

Luigi Esposito

In March of 2011, China's government issued a ban on all movies and TV dramas that featured themes pertaining to fantasy, mythical stories, and time travel (e.g., Voigt 2011). These themes are quite popular in Chinese movies and television and usually center around a protagonist who travels to a bygone era when Chinese society offered the possibility for happiness and fulfillment. The message, therefore, is that contemporary China no longer offers these possibilities. In response, the Chinese government denounced these stories for "disrespecting history" and promoting an absurd form of surrealism that undermines "positive thoughts" and discourages people from adapting to the current social reality.

Not surprisingly, much of the mainstream Western media reported how the implied censorship exemplifies the sort of totalitarianism associated with the Chinese state. After all, liberty cannot exist in a society where people are prohibited from *even imagining* an alternative vision that does not coincide with the "official" version of Chinese history and social reality. Yet while the Western media mocked and criticized this blatant example of tyranny, the idea that people throughout much of the so-called free world are, in one way or another, subjected to a similar form of repression associated with market fundamentalism was never mentioned.

As discussed by various critics, since at least the 1980s, the process known as globalization has centered around the belief that "the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions" (e.g., Giroux 2008, p. 2; see also Hinkelammert 1991; Serrano-Caldera 1995). Far from simply a system of production and exchange, however, the market currently informs people about *what the world is* and *what their roles and objectives within this world should be*. As such, to borrow from Alejandro Serrano-Caldera (1995, p. 10), the market has taken the status of an "ontological" category.

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The term ontological in this case refers to the idea that the legitimacy of market capitalism is predicated on a specific understanding of social reality that, in recent decades, has become not only globalized but increasingly reified. Thus, the basic structures and values demanded by market capitalism—for example, profit, consumerism, competition, individualism, and property rights—are no longer understood as parts of a particular economic model, culture, or belief system but rather parts of an inviolable reality that all rational people must adapt to. And while there are plenty of debates and discussions about how to make globalization more humane and productive, the fact that very few critics envision a model of living outside market capitalism is rarely questioned. Ultimately, the prevailing market society is widely accepted throughout much of the world as synonymous with the “real world.”

What this all suggests is that much like the case in China, a type of *ontological tyranny* exists throughout much of the so-called free world, as people are, in one way or another, socialized to believe that any *radical alternatives* to market capitalism are dangerous, irrational, or simply “unrealistic.” Consequently, with very few exceptions, persons living in every part of the globe have no other option but to assimilate to the current “market reality” that is currently associated with the concept of “development.” Indeed, particularly from the 1980s onward, development is taken to be synonymous with a market-driven type of progress that encourages individualism, competition, and consumerism as the engine of economic growth, prosperity, and personal success. Accordingly, being a productive and worthy member of society requires adapting to the implied status quo.

Presupposed by all this is a constellation of underlying claims that is too often left unexamined. More specifically, the idea that market capitalism constitutes an inviolable reality, or that development is inevitably a market-driven project, makes no sense unless people accept a particular worldview. In recent years, the term “neoliberalism” is often used to refer to this worldview. This chapter, accordingly, proceeds as follows: First, I address the historical development of neoliberalism and how this perspective supports a type of ontological tyranny whereby virtually every aspect of social life is subordinated to demands associated with the prevailing “market reality.” Second, I touch on how this market reality—and the form of development it encourages—is destructive to people and the environment. Third, I discuss how the implied market fundamentalism is predicated on a series of underlying metaphysical assumptions about, among other things, the nature of humans, freedom, and what most people regard as the “good life” (i.e., ideal ways of living). Particular attention will be given to the concept of aging and how, in a neoliberal universe, people defined as “elderly” who cannot meet market norms related to competition, self-reliance, productivity, and/or consumerism are often devalued and marginalized. Lastly, I make the point that once the metaphysical assumptions on which the market/neoliberal worldview rests are examined and problematized, an alternative type of development is possible that is based on a very different understanding of social reality—one that emphasizes values associated with justice, equity, democracy, and reciprocity.



## Historical Development of Neoliberalism and the Market Society

Although recently under attack in various parts of the world, neoliberalism has dominated much of the global capitalist economy for over three decades. At its core, neoliberalism emphasizes a religious-like faith in the free market as a self-regulated entity that ensures an optimal society. Accordingly, neoliberals stress the need to “minimize government” and hand over as much as possible of the economy (and society in general) to the private sector. The basic idea is that private decisions made at the marketplace in the interest of personal gain (as opposed to government mandates) are what ensure efficiency, democracy, and a prosperous society. Accordingly, the less these private decisions are influenced or restricted by state/political demands, the better off everyone will be.

The neoliberal perspective developed in reaction to theories calling for a managed economy. As is well known, throughout the early to mid-twentieth century, much of the industrialized world was influenced by Keynesianism, while many countries in the so-called periphery embraced policies associated with developmentalism. Although different in many respects, these economic theories stressed the need for a “web of social and political constraints and regulations” that would eschew the precariousness and potential abuses of an unregulated market (Harvey 2005). Particularly during the post-World War II era, these measures were quite successful in terms of lowering unemployment, reducing poverty rates, and strengthening the middle class in the United States, Western Europe, and various countries in South America (e.g., Klein 2007, pp. 66–68).

By the end of the 1960s, however, the emphasis on a regulated economy became understood by many people—especially those in the business community—as an obstacle to economic growth and progress. For example, these regulations created an environment in which the wealthy were required to pay more taxes, imports were minimized in favor of domestic production, and labor unions had more bargaining power. For these and various other reasons, Keynesianism in the North and developmentalism in the South was “costing the corporate sector dearly” (Klein 2007, p. 68). Accordingly, there was a demand for “new ideas” (Harvey 2005).

These new ideas were generated by a group of thinkers, notably Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, who were associated with the University of Chicago and had, for years, been part of an effort to revive *laissez-faire* economics. Over the course of many decades, these thinkers—who combined classical liberal principles with neo-classical economics—had produced a large body of work that, although ignored for many years, began to draw a great deal of attention by the 1970s. Central to their project was the idea that a regulated economy invariably entails a series of political impositions that restrain human creativity, undermine freedom, and stagnate the economy. Rather than centralized planning, therefore, a vibrant economy must be organized around policies of deregulation and privatization.

By the 1980s, these ideas—which came to be identified as part of the “neoliberal” agenda by activists and various intellectuals in Latin America—began to have an

unmistakable impact on the global economy. Throughout much of the world, measures such as the elimination of trade barriers, cutbacks in social services, and the privatization of formerly state-run enterprises became increasingly common. These sorts of measures were implemented and enforced either through “free trade agreements” (most of which are negotiated by unelected free trade delegates), so-called austerity measures or “structural adjustment programs” mandated by financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), or otherwise through free trade organizations, most notably—at least since the mid-1990s—the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Important to understand, however, is that the aforementioned measures to promote “free markets” are not confined to the economy but rather designed to spread the logic of the market to every sphere of social life. The ultimate aim, therefore, is not simply to promote a market economy but rather to create a *market society* that Elliot Currie (2006, p. 319) describes as follows:

... the spread of a civilization in which the pursuits of personal economic gain becomes increasingly the dominant organizing principle of social life; a social formation in which market principles, instead of being confined to some part of the *economy*, and appropriately buffered and restrained by other social institutions and norms, come to suffuse the whole social fabric—and to undercut and overwhelm other principles that have historically sustained individuals, families, and communities [e.g., solidarity, social justice, reciprocity, etc.].

The market society, in effect, is one in which virtually every aspect of social existence is submitted to considerations of profitability. Within such societies, most people concern themselves primarily with following what is often referred to as “market rationality”—that is, evaluating the costs and rewards of their actions according to a “calculus of utility, benefit, and satisfaction against a microeconomic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality” (Brown, 2005, pp. 40–41).

According to this logic, virtuous behavior is that which yields “good results” at the marketplace. Choices related not only to consumer products or services but also to everything from careers to social relations (e.g., who one chooses as “friends,” romantic interests) are largely shaped by what the market deems to be “in demand” or “desirable.” The market, in this sense, is assumed to be an autonomous or “disembodied” entity that imposes its demands on human life (Esposito et al. 2004). In the end, this submission to so-called market rationality encourages narrow models of human agency that disregard nonmarket values associated with justice, equity, or any other ideal/objective that either cannot be easily assigned a monetary value or otherwise lies outside the market demand for competitive individualism.

In various ways, this reified logic associated with the market also devalues persons who are socially defined as “old.” As suggested by Richard Posner (1995, p. 17), aging is widely understood as a process whereby persons experience an irreversible “decline in capability.” As a result, those deemed to be “old”—especially those who are not wealthy enough to be financially independent after retirement—are often looked at as a burden to others. Not only are these people assumed to have lost their ability to be productive and self-reliant, but unlike their wealthier counterparts, they cannot be counted on as reliable consumers for the myriad of industries that sell goods

and services (e.g., age-defying products, retirement homes) to the so-called old. Indeed, although much has been written in recent years about a positive shift in the ways Western societies think about people in their sixties, seventies, and eighties (i.e., these people are no longer necessarily looked at as unproductive and decrepit), this shift does not seem to apply to those who are indigent, insolvent, or simply incapable of meeting market demands. In short, these people lose their capacity to live or act in ways that the market defines as “virtuous” and hence become largely disposable.

## **Neoliberalism, Dualism, and Development: Consumerism and the Colonization of Social Reality**

Despite the aforementioned concerns, neoliberals argue that a free market promotes a “beneficent order in the natural running of human affairs.” Far from simply an ideology, set of policies, or economic model, neoliberals insist that a free market is akin to natural law. The market, stated differently, is taken to be a mechanism that works best when it is unaffected by culture, politics, and other human influences that, throughout much of the Western tradition, have been identified as sources of bias, corruption, and error (Murphy 1989). On the other hand, any government that seeks to regulate the economy and guarantee results (e.g., redistribute wealth) is understood as an “enemy of freedom.” To borrow from Hayek, such a government invariably leads society on a road toward serfdom.

This aversion to economic planning or “political intrusion” is tied to a particular philosophical tenet that has a long history within the Western tradition. Stated simply, at the heart of the neoliberal demand for an “unregulated” market as the organizing center of human life lies a dualistic conception of social reality—what has sometimes been referred to as social ontological dualism. Central to this dualism is the idea that an ahistorical reality exists that is categorically distinct from *doxa* or subjectivity (Murphy 1989). Reality is thus understood as a pristine realm that reflects an underlying natural order unadulterated by human influences. An optimal society, therefore, is one that is attuned to this pristine foundation.

Because neoliberals believe the order fostered by the free market constitutes this pristine basis, the concept of “development” is also assumed to be a market-driven project. Development, stated otherwise, is not merely an arbitrary goal but rather an attempt to improve society through the “objective” wisdom of the market. As argued by Friedrich Hayek, although the market depends on human actions and exchanges, the order produced by this entity is “spontaneous” and not built by conscious human effort or design. As long as people are allowed to compete freely and pursue their self-interests without political impositions, the market itself organizes their self-serving actions into a society that is ultimately fair and benefits all.

A market-driven approach to development, therefore, is a fool proof path toward social improvement. Through the liberalization of trade and the privatization of public services, for example, developing countries can strengthen their

local economies and attract the necessary foreign investment that will, in the long term, resolve problems such as extreme poverty, food scarcity, and a lack of adequate infrastructure. Whatever troubles might arise as societies “develop” (e.g., extreme inequality, unemployment, economic recessions) are usually attributed to entities such as the state or labor unions. Other “corrosive” forces include cultural values, personal deficiencies, and social practices that impede market efficiency. Solutions, therefore, involve getting rid of these hindrances from the marketplace. As argued by Franz Hinkelammert, all social or economic problems in a neoliberal society are resolved by a “politics of more market” (Hinkelammert 1991). That is to say, the logic of the market becomes the only legitimate basis on which to address all social/economic issue/s. Poverty, for instance, is taken to be a problem that can only be resolved through deregulation (e.g., weakening or eliminating workplace safety regulations or environmental laws in order to attract foreign companies or keep domestic ones that might generate jobs). Furthermore, by urging the poor to compete at the marketplace (as opposed guaranteeing their basic needs via a strong welfare state), they will be far more likely to attain the necessary character and skills that will allow them to overcome their personal adversity and prosper. The fact that poverty is a structural condition that cannot be resolved solely through an “appropriate work ethic” is overshadowed by the market notion of competition and personal responsibility. In short, the logic of the market frames all social-political decisions.

Particularly noteworthy is that a market-driven approach to development presupposes a social reality in which consumerism becomes the central engine of all economic growth. In poor countries throughout much of the world, attempts to implement this type of development have produced what Alejandro Serrano-Caldera (1993, p. 88), borrowing from Carlos Fuentes, refers to as a type of “social schizophrenia.” By this he means a condition in which a market-driven consumer reality is superimposed on societies plagued by patterns of deprivation. Hence, for example, opulent shopping malls are built alongside impoverished communities, and a culture of consumerism is promulgated in societies where the majority of people struggle to subsist. Yet despite the implied disconnect, most people in these societies—the majority of whom are, in one way or another, considered by much of the business community to be little more than disposable sources of wage labor—accept the market society that exploits them as “reality.” Their only form of defense, therefore, is to enhance their competitiveness or “marketability” and adjust as best as they can to this so-called reality.

In the developed world, the emphasis on consumerism as not only the engine of growth, but the measure of personal success, is perhaps even more pronounced. In fact, as it stands today, consumerism is not only tied to ego and even spiritual satisfaction but also closely associated with personal identity. Driving a certain type of car, living in a certain type of house, or wearing a certain brand of clothes is commonly seen as indicators of a person’s worth and status. These things are taken to be objective indicators of whether or not persons are respectable and desirable. Moreover, the central way to attain these things is to compete with others at the marketplace and “earn” them. Thus, for example, in competing with others for all

sorts of social and material resources, using education solely as a means to become marketable, and avoiding ideals or ambitions that are not valued at the marketplace, most persons do not necessarily think they are conforming to specific market values but rather believe they are simply being “rational” and adapting to the real world. Here again, the market order is assumed to be unassailable and synonymous with reality itself (e.g., Esposito 2009). Anything outside this vision is typically regarded as silly and impractical.

Far from simply an ideological effort, however, the imposition of this market reality entails rearranging the very physical characteristics of a community so as to encourage the consumer-driven lifestyle demanded by the market. For example, during the past several decades, efforts to implement a market approach to development have sought to transform both public and private spaces into settings of consumption (e.g., Perez and Esposito 2010). Mega malls, theme parks, casinos, universities, sports stadiums, schools, airports, and cruise ships have been increasingly turned into what George Ritzer (2005) refers to as “cathedrals of consumption.” Indeed, these settings “have become locales to which we can make pilgrimages in order to practice our consumer religion.” Even private homes, according to Ritzer, “have become means of consumption, penetrated by telemarketing, junk mail, catalogs, home shopping television, and cybershops” (Ritzer 2005, p. x).

## **Citizenship = Consumerism**

Taking all the aforementioned into account, it becomes clear that, in market societies, the concept of citizenship is conflated with consumerism. In fact, the very notion of a “caring citizen” becomes synonymous with a “responsible consumer.” Thus, for example, well-intended affluent people wanting to “make a difference” in the world are often encouraged to buy “green,” “fair trade,” or “organic” products that are significantly more expensive than conventional products. The very act of “caring,” therefore, is commodified and turned into a function of consumerism.

Even WalMart, what many consider the epitome of corporate greed and irresponsibility, has, for quite some time, been selling “green” or “earth friendly” products and is currently in negotiations to sell “fair trade” goods (see WalMart in talks to sell fair trade products 2011). What this all suggests is that even attempts to challenge the potential abuses of the market are themselves predicated on the same image of reality that supports the market. Here again, tempering the most nefarious aspects of market capitalism by exercising one’s “power” as a consumer seems to be the only viable option. This type of power, however, still reduces people’s aspirations to mere “market demands.”

Furthermore, exercising one’s power as a consumer is inevitably unequal, since not everyone possesses the same purchasing power. More importantly, so-called alternatives associated with green or fair trade, at least at this point in time, are hopelessly ancillary to the wider patterns of insatiable consumerism, inequality, and environmental erosion associated with market approaches to development.

## The Current and Potential Consequences of a Market-Driven Approach to Development

Particularly in recent years, the social-environmental consequences—both currently occurring and foreseen—promoted by a market-driven approach to development have generated much discussion. According to various writers, much of the environmental degradation currently occurring throughout much of the planet is, to a large extent, the result of the “more is better” doctrine that currently drives market capitalist economies (e.g., McKibben 2007). The basic logic is that the more that is produced, the more that is purchased, and the more prosperous societies become. For this reason, the market approach to development is based on one central objective: *economic growth*.

An abundance of evidence, however, points to the devastating consequences this obsession with growth is having on the lives of people, particularly the poor. Indeed, according to a recent United Nations Human Development Report, while the sort of excessive consumerism required for ongoing growth disproportionately takes place in developed countries, the negative effects this pattern is having on the environment disproportionately hurt people in developing countries who are already poor and disadvantaged (United Nations Development Report 2011). The poor, in short, tend to face the brunt of what many regard as human-induced environmental phenomena such as floods, droughts, increasingly intense storms, water contamination, and food scarcity.

Furthermore, these unequal environmental consequences are also age specific. According to Susan Pacheco of the University of Texas Medical School, for example, the people most hurt by global warming in particular are children and the elderly (Camp 2009). Children and older adults, for example, are more vulnerable than others to heat stress, water-borne diseases, and extreme weather events.

Several writers, however, emphasize the *long-term* consequences of environmental degradation as potentially catastrophic to *humanity as a whole* (e.g., Brown 2009). On this point, Hinkelammert and Jiménez (2005) have argued that a market approach to development is antithetical to life itself. In a similar vein, Edward Abbey (1977) equated the logic of unrelenting economic growth with that of a cancer cell. Cancer cells, of course, multiply, grow uncontrollably, and unless they are somehow restrained, end up killing its biological host. Likewise, the neoliberal market approach to development—with its emphasis on deregulation, consumerism, and growth—threatens our very survival as a species.

## Human Nature, Freedom, and the “Good Life”

What is particularly troubling about all this is that, despite its destructive results, the dualism that is still pervasive in Western societies continues to legitimize a market approach to development as infallible. At the heart of the implied market fundamentalism are a series of underlying metaphysical assumptions about human nature, freedom, and the “good life.” These might also be referred to as the “common sense”

assumptions that normalize the tendency to make the concept of “development” an exclusively market-driven project. Challenging this type of development must therefore open these assumptions to critical evaluation.

## Human Nature and the Market Society

A particular understanding of human nature constitutes one of the central conceptual foundations on which the market society and a market approach to development are built and legitimized. According to Frederic Jameson (1991, p. 263), for example, the idea that the market is a natural consequence of human nature is one of the central ideological pillars of market capitalism. This understanding of human nature is felicitously addressed by C.B. Macpherson. In his book, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Macpherson analyzes, among other things, the specific conception of people presupposed by classical liberals such as Hobbes, Locke, Burke, Bentham, and James Mill, all of whom were staunch proponents of a laissez-faire economy (Macpherson 1962).

Although Macpherson addresses significant differences among these writers’ social-political philosophies, he emphasizes their deep commitment to the belief that, under conditions of freedom, all human beings have a *natural* desire for infinite consumption, as well as a tendency to “exercise their domination over things” in the form of ownership or possession (Macpherson 1962). This common understanding of humans, according to Macpherson, provided the basis on which the aforementioned classical liberals supported a model of society as a “possessive market.”

Within this possessive market society, the individual actor is the sole proprietor of his/her skills and owes nothing to society for them. Instead, all human skills/capacities become commodities or “possessions” to be bought and sold at the marketplace. All of this, of course, discourages human qualities such as altruism and social responsibility and replaces them with the sort of market rationality that cultivates competitive individualism and personal gain above all other interests (for a thoughtful application of Macpherson’s work, see Duchrow and Hinkelammert 2004).

This same concept of the individual currently lies at the heart of neoliberal/market approaches to development. Indeed, for the past few decades, people throughout the world—particularly in poor countries—have been told that the only path toward development or “progress” (whether personal or economic) is to think of themselves, enhance their competitiveness, remain “flexible” in order to maximize their employment opportunities (e.g., be open to accepting jobs that might require leaving one’s family and community), and ultimately strive to become entrepreneurs and/or “owners” as a way out of poverty.

Of course, these types of expectations are also predicated on a series of age-related norms that are often very difficult to meet among those who are older. Indeed, while the need to invest in human capital and acquire new skills to become “marketable” might be more feasible among younger people who have had little experience but are driven to succeed at the marketplace, the same is not typically the



case among older folks who have to discard or “unlearn” the skills and knowledge that they have acquired during the course of a lifetime. Especially in the developing world, the knowledge and skills gained from those past experiences are often infused with cultural values and traditions that are deemed to be “impediments” to progress/development. Particularly for older people, accordingly, there tends to be a depreciation of their human capital that is difficult to overcome. After all, older people are less likely—because of various reasons—to “be flexible,” “retool,” and find alternative employment in their attempts to become integrated at the marketplace.

The market, however, is largely “blind” to all this. Because everyone is presumably an individual (as opposed to a member of any particular group) and evaluated on the basis of presumably universal or “natural” human drives associated with competition, ambition, and self-interest, these age-related considerations are largely irrelevant in a market society. The end result is that older people are put at a significant disadvantage.

The larger point, however, is that supporters of the market do not see this conception of the human being—what critics often associate with the term *homo economicus*—as something that is constituted but rather something that is fixed or “essential.” In effect, the tendency to compete, consume, possess, and continuously calculate “what will serve one’s best personal interests” is assumed to simply come naturally to all people—irrespective of age—who live in freedom. The market, in this sense, is simply an outgrowth of human nature. Any alternatives to the market are therefore assumed to be deviations from nature itself and hence doomed to fail. Clearly, this undermines the possibility for a society that values ambitions and commitments that might deviate from market demands.

## The Market Conception of Freedom

The version of human nature noted above is consistent with the market conception of freedom. Stated simply, freedom is synonymous with people having the liberty to own property, consume freely, and pursue their self-interests as they see fit, without external/political interferences. In his book *Individualism and Economic Order*, for example, Friedrich Hayek contends that people are free *only* when they are allowed to “strive for whatever they think is desirable” (Hayek 1980, p. 15). Hayek’s point is that when people are constrained in terms of pursuing their preferences, freedom is lost. Of course, what Hayek overlooks is that, in market societies, what people “think” or choose is rarely random and instead reflects patterns of socialization and external influences (e.g., the media, popular culture, the school system) that, in one way or another, convince many people to accept the market and its “demands” as constitutive of an unavoidable “reality.”

Yet because the market is understood—particularly among neoliberals—as an apolitical mechanism that allows people to freely exercise their agency as they compete and pursue their self-interests, this entity is considered to be a requisite for freedom. As stated by Milton Friedman, any argument against the free market is “an attack on freedom itself” (Friedman 1962, p. 15). Any attempt to regulate the market, therefore,



is also typically understood as an attack on liberty. As noted earlier, neoliberals in particular loathe regulations as a corrupt form of social/economic engineering that stifles liberty and undermines efforts toward social and economic development by compromising the market's ability to ensure a natural harmony of interests.

Hayek's well-known aversion to the ideal of social justice is particularly relevant at this juncture. Because Hayek believed that a "free" society can never be planned but rather must be created "spontaneously" as people pursue their preferences, any attempt to ensure "social justice" invariably involves some form of centralized artificial manipulation that invites tyranny (Hayek 1976). After all, this entails people—as opposed to the market—deciding what is just or unjust. The implication, therefore, is that freedom requires that people accept whatever outcomes are produced at the marketplace, as these outcomes are presumably neutral and hence free of corruption or political manipulation.

It is precisely this conception of freedom that legitimizes the status quo in market societies. By equating freedom with the right of the individual to be free from social/political constraints, the notion of power and power differentials is ignored and, quite often, normalized. Indeed, under this type of freedom, powerful individuals—including corporate entities—are given a green light to make decisions and behave in ways that are purely self-serving and anathema to equity, justice, and sustainability. In the end, the neoliberal conception of freedom legitimizes abandoning the notion of "social responsibility" and accepting a social Darwinian type of society as both normal and a requisite for social and economic "development."

## Neoliberalism and the "Good Life"

The understandings of human nature and freedom noted above also shape the neoliberal version of the "good life" (i.e., what an optimal society is and how people should live within such a society). At its most basic, this vision of the good life revolves around the idea of people being industrious and being rewarded for their talent and hard work. In this respect, one of the implicit goals of neoliberal globalization is to globalize the Horatio Alger myth—that is, the idea that a free market allows all people the liberty and opportunity to rise above their circumstances and capitalize on their hard work and sacrifice (Peters 2004, p. 59). The good life, therefore, involves taking advantage of one's individual freedom to turn their hard work, creativity, and talent into prosperity.

Of course, there is nothing entirely novel in this idea of equating the good life with hard work and prosperity. In fact, over a century ago, Max Weber had already made this connection in his classic book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 1958). Weber's point was that Protestant/Calvinist values are central to the "spirit of capitalism," since they (1) motivated people to approach their work with a sense of duty and blessedness, (2) discouraged people from indulging in material excess, and (3) encouraged savings and/or the accumulation of wealth as a moral act. In this case, the good life also involved living in a way that ensured prosperity, which was understood as a sign of living a moral or virtuous existence.

Yet while the emphasis on prosperity has been a central feature in Western capitalist societies since at least the eighteenth century, neoliberalism has largely weakened the value put on personal restraint, savings, and stewardship that Weber addressed. Indeed, under neoliberalism, the so-called good life is one in which people do not have to restrain their material desires, however excessive they might be. Because neoliberals, as noted earlier, assume that persons have an inherent tendency toward insatiable consumption—what the Greeks called *pleonexia*—any attempt to restrain this essential human trait is an attack on nature, freedom, and the good life.

At the same time, it is important to understand that that an optimal society is also assumed to be one in which people “deserve” what they have. As long as persons work for what they desire and hence deserve what they possess, there should be no limit to what they can purchase/consume. On the contrary, allowing persons to indulge in unlimited consumption leads to growth and hence prosperity for all. What people deserve, moreover, should be determined by the market. For this reason, neoliberals reject the idea of entitlements (i.e., ensuring basic resources or services as human rights) as an abomination that discourages hard work, prosperity, and the good life. Thus, under neoliberalism, even the most vital resources and services are kept as market-driven enterprises governed by the profit motive.

Normalizing ideologically this state of affairs is central to the neoliberal agenda. For example, a market approach to development typically involves convincing people in poor countries to abandon their traditional cultures or worldviews in which resources such as water are regarded as a “natural right” and accept the market/neoliberal worldview which emphasizes that everything must be purchased. Maintaining freedom and promoting the good life, therefore, also involves encouraging people—including the most impoverished—to accept their role as consumers and competitors in a market society.

The same is true with respect to those defined as old. Unless these people show sufficient fortitude and distance themselves from stigmas associated with the elderly (e.g., frailty) by remaining viable consumers/competitors, they become “parasites” that impinge on other people’s freedom and threaten collective prosperity. After all, if people are made to “care” about these groups and forced to fund services for the poor and/or the elderly through their taxes, not only does this involve an imposition that threatens liberty, but it also creates a culture of dependency that undercuts the possibility for these people to reach their full potential and hence attain the so-called good life.

In the end, why should people care about the poor or the elderly, and whether or not they have access to clean water or other vital needs? Particularly with respect to the poor, as long as people are allowed to compete freely, they have the freedom to climb the class ladder through hard work, talent, and perseverance. More importantly, once they overcome whatever “personal” factors might be holding them back and become more competitive and productive, they will be able to afford not only clean water and other vital needs but also all sorts of consumer products that presumably lead to greater happiness and a greater quality of life.

Promoting this idea of the good life as consisting of material success, prosperity, and abundance is carried out through various means. Perhaps most notably, the lifestyles of the rich and famous are glamorized in the various media. Accordingly,

these individuals, most of whom are younger or middle-aged adults, become the “reference group” that set the standard of what a good life should be for everyone else (e.g., Schor 1998). It is perhaps this reverence for the rich and famous that encourages many people—particularly young people—to focus their personal ambitions on attaining wealth and fortune. This is certainly the case in the United States. Indeed, in a widely cited Pew poll published in 2007, 81% of 18–25-year-old Americans said that “getting rich” is their generation’s top priority, while 51% said the same about being famous (see Jayson 2007). The fact that this objective is virtually unattainable to the vast majority of people because of larger structural reasons that have little to do with a lack of talent or personal effort is largely ignored.

Furthermore, particularly in the United States, people are taught that their aspirations are attainable only if they “remain positive.” As discussed by Barbara Ehrenreich (2009), in recent years, the ideology of “positive thinking” has become a multibillion dollar a year industry. Even in the face of high unemployment rates, financial uncertainty, and social anxiety, an endless flow of books, DVDs, “life coaches,” and motivational speakers convey the message that the key to happiness and material success is to remain optimistic, refrain from whining, and eliminate all “negative thoughts” from one’s life. In doing so, people will attain the life they desire. The problem with this, of course, is that by being encouraged to “remain positive” under all circumstances, people are implicitly being urged to conform to the prevailing status quo. In this case, “remaining optimistic” becomes a form of pacification that further mystifies the prevailing market system and discourages people from undertaking the necessary struggles and modes of resistance that might challenge the current “market reality” and the patterns of inequality, injustice, and environmental destruction that are promoted therein.

## Challenging Neoliberalism and the Market Society

In the past few years, not only have increasing numbers of people around the world come to realize that a market economy based on competition, consumerism, and growth might literally “kill the earth” (Roberts 2008; see also Bill McKibben 2011), but whatever wealth is generated under this system has become increasingly concentrated among the wealthiest segments of the population. Accordingly, since the 1990s, movements around the world have sought to challenge market capitalism and the neoliberal agenda.

Most recently, there has been much discussion—particularly in the United States—about the so-called Occupy movement. Although this movement began in late 2011 in New York City, it has already expanded to over 100 cities across 82 countries (Occupy Wall Street). Partly inspired by other movements around the world—including the Arab Spring and the Spanish indignants—the Occupy movement has been described as a “democratic awakening.” Often using the slogan “we are the 99%,” Occupiers see themselves as a disenfranchised majority who refuse to let their future be determined by a power elite (i.e., the top 1%) that places little value

on anyone or anything outside the objective of maintaining power and increasing profit margins (see Occupy Wall Street).

Important to understand, however, is that while Occupiers and others involved in similar movements against neoliberalism cannot be fairly characterized as a monolithic group, a significant number of these activists do not simply want a more humane form of capitalism or a less corrupt government but rather a new type of society in which people begin to redefine their connection to one another and to the environment (e.g., Heilemann 2011). Many of these activists understand that the current crisis is not simply about “toxic assets,” “credit default swaps,” “collateralized debt obligations,” or other abstractions that are continuously emphasized by the corporate media (Knight 2011). Nor is the crisis, as is often assumed, simply about the crimes and errors of individual corporations, politicians, and investors. All of this actually obscures the true depth of the crisis, which lies in the market system itself and the image of reality that mystifies it.

## **Conclusion: The Need to Create a New Reality Outside the Market**

In a recent editorial, Eugene McCarragher (2011) suggests that movements seeking to challenge the abuses of market capitalism need to move beyond the goal of simply “reinventing” capitalism, since this system *thrives* on constant reinvention. As the author states, “enclosures, factories, Fordism, automation, and flexible production—metamorphosis for the sake of profit is the only constant in capitalism.” McCarragher’s central argument is that rather than simply attempting to denounce corruption and greed from existing business practices, people committed to social and economic justice must begin to effect change on the basis of larger ontological/metaphysical questions—for example, what does it mean to be human? What is freedom? What sort of society do we want to live in? And so on. Unless people begin to act on the basis of these larger questions and concerns, capitalism will once again be “reinvented” while the status quo remains intact.

Encouraging these types of metaphysical/ontological questions requires, first and foremost, a complete break from the dualism addressed earlier. That is, the market can no longer be understood as an autonomous mechanism that operates outside human decisions and initiatives. The market, stated differently, cannot be legitimately equated with some mystical “prime mover” that exists independently of culture, politics, and other human influences. By demystifying the market in this manner and eliminating its presumed objectivity and unassailability, the stage is set to entertain the possibility for promoting a very different type of society—one built on a radically different type of social logic and praxis. Solidarity movements against neoliberal globalization express this sentiment with their well-known slogan “another world is possible.”

The social logic that guides many of the efforts associated with anti-neoliberal movements is one that redefines some of the central categories addressed in this

chapter, including the market conception of human nature, freedom, and “the good life.” Thus, for example, many anti-neoliberal activists and intellectuals calling for radical change emphasize the need to challenge the mythology that market capitalism is an inevitable outgrowth of a “fixed” human nature. As Michael Hardt (2008) suggests, a revolutionary shift from market capitalism “requires a *transformation* of human nature.” Accordingly, those who desire such a shift might have to expose human nature as something that is thoroughly constituted (i.e., thoroughly shaped by history, politics, culture, etc.) and hence malleable.

Subsequent to this realization, the view that humans are fundamentally and inevitably greedy, calculating, and competitive loses legitimacy. Human nature, in short, is no longer understood as something that exists a priori or beyond human volition. What this also suggests is that *homo economicus* can actually be replaced by *homo reciprocans*. In other words, rather than encouraging people to be purely creatures of self-interests, as if this was an unavoidable “fact of life,” efforts must be made—in schools, the media, the family, and other institutions—to encourage alternative values and modes of living associated with altruism and reciprocity. The idea is not to eliminate the free pursuit of self-interests but rather to promote a non-dualistic type of individualism whereby people’s actions and ambitions are informed by the realization that their personal well-being is inextricably tied to the well-being of others.

The concept of freedom, furthermore, is rethought as relational, as opposed to personal. Contrary to the claims made by Milton Friedman and others, anti-neoliberals contend that freedom is not simply about deregulating the market and/or removing external restraints/interferences in the pursuit of self-interests. Nor is freedom synonymous with “free choice.” On this point, Hinkelammert and Jiménez (2005, p. 35) appropriately emphasize that “to choose,” people must first be able to live. Freedom, therefore, involves eradicating the “culture of death” (i.e., the devaluation of human life and environmental sustainability) that many associate with the market. The Hayekian tendency to associate “social justice” with tyranny, furthermore, has no place in this new conception of freedom. In the absence of an abstract and presumably neutral market to ensure optimal or “objective” results, the ideal of social justice must inevitably involve a conscious effort to ensure fairness and equity. This might entail, for example, *proactive* efforts to redistribute wealth and eradicate completely discriminatory structures from society—something that freedom as “free competition” fails to do.

Finally, the need to build this possible new world that is emphasized by contemporary anti-neoliberal activists involves a very different conception of the so-called good life. Living a good life is no longer simply about attaining material wealth, owning private property, or indulging in hedonism. As should be noted, it is precisely this reified rendition of the good life that often legitimizes the devaluation of older people. After all, those defined as elderly are typically less likely than younger persons to espouse market-related values and ambitions such as competition and material wealth. As a result, the elderly are assumed to be in “decline” and hence incapable of living a worthy existence. What anti-neoliberals envision, accordingly, is a society in which people are not required to adapt their values and ambitions to the prevailing market reality in order to be worthy members of society. More generally,

what is envisioned by anti-neoliberals is a society that abandons the obsession with competition, growth, and material accumulation and replaces them with ideals of diversity, generosity, social justice, democracy, and sustainability (Fenelon and Hall 2008). Ultimately, only by building a society in which all social institutions are guided by these ideals can all people be afforded the opportunity to live fulfilling lives.

Clearly, creating this type of society would require open dialogue and locally/culturally contingent methods. Undoubtedly, there will be disagreements as people attempt to bring such a project to fruition. The ongoing debates at international anti-neoliberal meetings such as the World Social Forum are a prime example of this. But while solidarity is certainly a requisite in efforts to building a new type of global society, maintaining a sense of unity does not have to entail sacrificing differences. As the Zapatistas make clear, an optimal global society must constitute “a world of many worlds” that are in direct dialogue and fit together through mutual respect, understanding, and, most importantly, a common commitment to equity and justice. Through such as dialogue—which is, to a large extent, increasingly taking place due to, among other things, advances in technology—the world’s people can continue to share information about their different realities, build alliances, and engage in efforts to transform globalization into a sustainable project designed to empower and uplift the whole of humanity.

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## Chapter 4

# Globalization, the Labor Market, and Retirement

William Van Lear

This chapter examines the issues of labor and financial markets in the context of two significant macro-global developments, both of which pose challenges to prospects for retirement and to effective policymaking. Economic stagnation, the first of the two developments, is a sustained condition of slow or no growth, so slow as to fail to produce broad-based economic prosperity. This development is impacting not only the USA but also other advanced capitalist economies. This chapter reviews the arguments that explain the existence of a stagnation tendency and discusses its effects for job growth and retirement saving. Globalization, the second major development, involves the growing interconnectedness of nation-state economies. This development too has consequences for labor and financial markets. Specifically these developments have wage, employment, and income distribution effects on people's work lives in ways that affect economic security before and during retirement.

Economic stagnation and globalization represent the central macroeconomic problems of our time, and the discussion about these developments usually tends to be framed by mainstream philosophical concepts. These concepts, and the policymaking so engendered, are specifically the ideas of market efficiency and self-correction, self-interest and individualism, supply-side incentives for risk-taking and investing, and the platform of principles to guide economic restructuring along *laissez-faire* capitalist lines in emerging market countries known as the Washington Consensus.

This chapter is concerned with the modern age, which arrives around 1980 in the USA, and the attending challenges of job growth and retirement faced by most workers. The concept of retirement for much of the population is a mid-twentieth-century creation, brought on by the economic boom following WWII. Substantial wage and job growth, along with corporate pensions and Social Security, allowed more people to comfortably retire. That trend in retirement is now coming up against a potential surge in retirements as the baby boom generation tries to exit the labor force.<sup>1</sup>This new social

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development is occurring concurrently with much poorer economic performance. The policy question that then arises is whether an aging society can still expect to retire in the middle-class fashion of the twentieth century, or will economic conditions conspire with demographics to make retirement prospects bleak for many people.

The thrust of the argument presented here is that economic stagnation and globalization impact labor and financial markets. On balance, these effects are negative with respect to worker earnings, job prospects, and wealth accumulation. Stagnation produces low employment growth rates and high unemployment that depress wage growth. Globalization pressures undermine labor bargaining power, leading to wage depression and higher unemployment. These difficult labor market conditions reduce the gains achievable in financial markets. Slow economic growth limits stock market advances and limits wealth accumulation as well, thereby making retirement account gains inadequate to provide secure retirements. This scenario does not require any demographic pressures per se to work out as described but does direct policy attention to deteriorating labor and financial market conditions that threaten retirement security.

## **Modern Development Number One: Economic Stagnation**

The stagnation thesis dates back to the work of the classical economists (see Heilbroner 1992). Classical economists were concerned about long-term trends that would place limits on the ability of the economic system to continue to grow. Capitalists were seen as accumulators and sought profits for both return and as funding for expansion. Some classical economists were concerned that upward pressure on wages or rents would reduce profits to the point of ending the incentive and means for growth. Or in the case of Marx, cyclical profitability would produce ever more severe boom-bust periods. Crises halt growth, while periods of busts would restore the conditions for growth.

A prosperous capitalist system is one that is growing and meets a minimum growth rate, a rate sufficient to supply broadly distributed business and employment opportunities. Gordon and Rosenthal (2003) argue that capitalist economies face a minimum growth imperative. A complementary argument comes from Binswanger (2009). A certain positive rate of growth is necessitated because firms face future profit uncertainty and that profits can vary over a wide range. Therefore, if firms confront a no or very low growth economy, profit variability and uncertainty increase the odds of bankruptcy. Low growth produces losses for some firms that then create a negative multiplier effect, taking the economy into recession. Meeting the growth imperative means sustaining not only firms but also the capitalist system as a whole. Firms avoid bankruptcy prospects by seeking the competitive advantages of monopolizing markets or by investing less than their profits.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of stagnation reappears during the 1930s depression era. For Keynes, employment is the product of an effective demand that creates economic incentives to hire the number of people necessary to produce the output buyers are willing and able to buy. There are many possible equilibrium employment levels where the

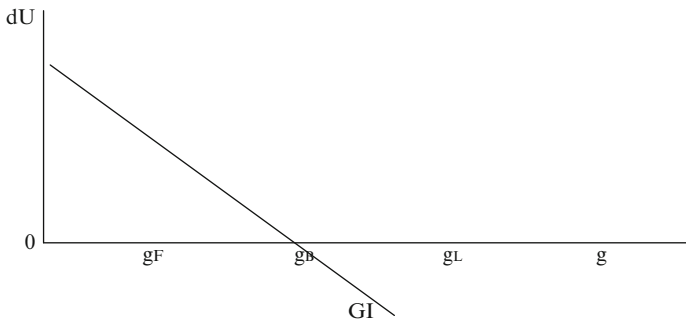
economy may settle, including ones well below full employment (Keynes, 1997, 27–32). Once an economy gets mired in a slump, the revival of economic activity under conditions of laissez-faire may prove to be impossible. Excess inventory, high liquidity preference and risk aversion, and depressed financial markets can make recessions intractable (315–320). Alvin Hansen (1939) argued that a combination of three factors, declining population growth, the end of the American frontier, and inadequate investment outlets, would create conditions of stagnation. Low or no growth would leave the economy well below full employment and the labor force with high underemployment. Hansen believed that new industries would not necessarily arrive at a consistent or uniform rate sufficient to drive investment to a level creating broad prosperity.

Big business capitalism of our modern age may be inherently prone to slow growth. Baran and Sweezy (1966) argued that by mid-century, capitalism had entered an era of industrial concentration where industrial stability and excess capacity undercut investment spending, inhibiting full employment. Only special historical factors that were temporary in duration could create the demand stimulus necessary for high growth and employment. Alternatively, concern may be less that of what oligopoly does to economy-wide competitive forces affecting new investment than the high financial disincentive that exists to not replace current capital until that capital is fully depreciated. Lange and Taylor (1964, 25–27) see the inclination to maintain incumbent industries a major drawback of oligopolistic capitalism, a phenomenon known as asset inertia.

In the aftermath of the 2007–2009 financial crisis, Foster and Magdoff (2009) argue that *financialization* of the economy, the increasing relative importance of finance in the economy since 1980, was a means to offset the inherent stagnation tendencies of modern capitalism. Finance has changed from a supportive role of commerce to one of domination; stagnation in the productive sphere has led to inflation of the financial sphere. Therefore, the 2007–2009 financial crisis was the product of high debt and leverage brought on by stagnation in production. Efforts to regulate finance to stabilize the economy will only reintroduce economic stagnation.

A theoretical way to think about capitalist growth imperatives and stagnation is to think in terms of potential class differences with respect to growth needs. Consider the growth imperative function GI shown below,<sup>3</sup> where higher growth rates ( $g$ ) pull down the change in unemployment ( $dU$ ); a  $g > g_B$  lowers the unemployment level. In the case of labor, relatively high growth rates are desirable in order to lower unemployment close to the full employment mark. High and rising employment puts upward pressure on wages and benefits and strengthens labor's bargaining position. A growth imperative minimum for labor, namely,  $g_L$ , is shown below in Fig. 4.1.

Similarly, growth imperatives for business ( $g_B$ ) and finance ( $g_F$ ) can be theorized. While labor's main concerns are jobs and wages, business interests are driven by the need for profits and finance capital by concerns over inflation. Business desires a positive  $g$  but something less than  $g_L$ , namely, something like  $g_B$ . They want growth to be sufficiently high to propel profits upward but not so much that wage and other costs rise rapidly or that the pool of unemployed labor becomes too small. Finance



**Fig. 4.1** The Growth Imperative Function

desires the slowest growth rates, noted as  $g_F$ . Any inflation undermines the purchasing power of invested money capital, and some modest inflation tends to occur even under recessionary conditions, given government commitment to pursue countercyclical policies and oligopolistic pricing by firms. In theory then,

$$g_F < g_B < g_L$$

A broad-based prosperity entails achieving at least the growth imperative of the business class.

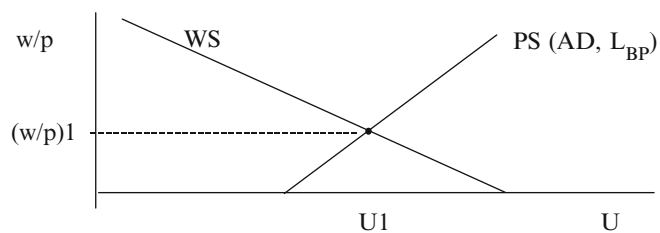
## Modern Development Number Two: Globalization

Globalization, the growing economic interconnectedness among nations, is the second major development of the modern era. Globalization has engendered greater microeconomic instability, a dynamic of rapid technological change, deregulation, and altered money flows. Old patterns of economic flows, business structures, and employment opportunities have been overthrown in recent decades as economies reconfigure themselves in the global economic age. Microeconomic flux plays out in specific ways that make employment stability difficult to realize for many workers. Firms are creating increasingly flexible labor markets where companies more quickly alter workforce levels or rely more on part-time workers or hire from companies that “rent” workers. Total benefit payments are therefore reduced and actual employment of labor occurs to perfectly flex with daily changes in demand. More people are hired onto the payroll than can be fully used in order to give maximum flexibility to management’s use of “labor resources,” the consequence of which is to enhance employment and wage insecurity and inequality.

Employment flexibility has occurred with employer resistance to private sector unionization and from employer escape to nonunion areas. Capital flows run increasingly to emerging market economies and employment growth shifts to new and globally competitive industries located outside the advanced countries. Domestic employment growth lags and is less correlated with output growth because firms can globally source labor as needed and can use productivity growth to limit hiring (Silva 2005). As more domestic businesses build an international dimension to their corporate structures, and labor confronts more flexible labor markets, even relatively low domestic wage growth induces more foreign hiring and more outflow of money.<sup>4</sup>

Crotty (2000) argues that the public policy practiced by many countries combines with globalization of corporate investment to produce excess production capacity in the face of inadequate demand growth. This so-called Washington Consensus policy undercuts demand through restrictive monetary and fiscal policies, and corporate competitiveness strategies do the same by replacing high-wage domestic labor with low-wage foreign labor. Corporate investment leads to excess capacity as companies compete for markets in developing countries and therefore invest much in capital productivity enhancing technology. The end product of these forces is to create demand conditions incapable of buying all the output that can be potentially produced. The consequential financial pressures prompt mergers to cut capacity and costs, which have the effect of further slowing demand growth.

Consider the following wage-price setting model, where unemployment is the consequence of the wage and price setting behavior of workers and firms, labor's bargaining power ( $L_{BP}$ ), and the level of aggregate demand (AD). In Fig. 4.2, the wage setting curve (WS) shows the relationship between real wages ( $w/p$ ) and unemployment ( $U$ ). A strong bargaining position for labor would mean labor can realize a real wage—unemployment combination up and to the left on the WS curve. Firms set prices and thereby affect  $w/p$ , along the price setting curve (PS). Firms will charge higher prices (and pay a lower real wage) when  $U$  is low but will keep prices down (and pay a higher real wage) when  $U$  is high, thus giving PS its positive slope. In the current era of globalization, AD is at times undermined and  $L_{BP}$  is undercut. These effects shift the PS curve to the right, signifying a power balance in favor of business and unfavorable employment conditions for labor. Real wages are depressed ( $w/p1$ ), and unemployment is rather high at  $U1$ .



**Fig. 4.2** The Wage-Price Setting Model

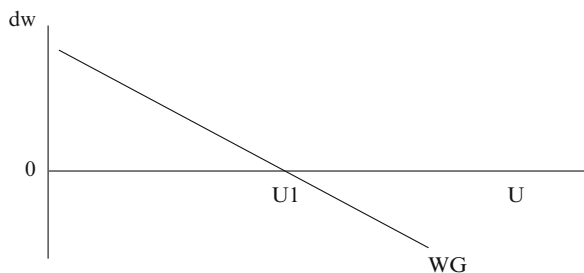
## Labor Markets, Wages, and Employment

This chapter has made the case that modern capitalism is prone to stagnation and is undergoing an era of globalization that is creating flexible labor markets and undermining global demand. These two important developments affect labor market conditions such as wage growth, employment, and worker bargaining power. This section expands on these latter themes.

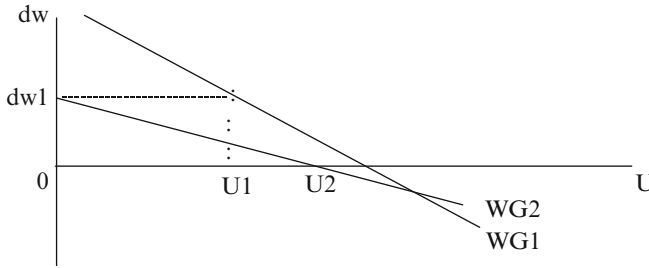
Consider the theoretical model below that builds on the labor market ideas expressed above. Wage change ( $dw$ ) is inversely related to the level of unemployment ( $U$ ), and unemployment depends on the change in demand ( $dD$ ) in the economy and productivity improvements ( $dP$ ) implemented by firms. Higher demand boosts employment as more workers are required to meet sales and production needs. Productivity improvements boost output per labor hour, thereby depressing firm hiring. The difference between the two is the net employment change. Any stagnation tendency ( $s$ ) undermines demand but encourages firms to augment productivity to cut costs. Furthermore, global forces ( $Z$ ) affect labor's bargaining power ( $Lbp$ ) by affecting union strength, labor market flexibility, income distribution, and capital mobility, thereby influencing  $dw$ . Falling union strength, greater market flexibility and capital mobility, and greater income concentration affect  $Z$  in a way to reduce wage growth. Therefore, we have the following equations:

1.  $dw = a_0 - a_1U (dD, dP) + a_2Lbp(Z)$  where
2.  $U = f(dD(s) - dP(s))$
3.  $Lbp = f(Z)$  and
4.  $dU/dD < 0$
5.  $dD/ds < 0$
6.  $dU/dP > 0$
7.  $dP/ds > 0$
8.  $dLbp/dZ < 0$

The graphical model is shown below (Fig. 4.3) where WG stands for the wage growth curve; the lower unemployment goes, the more positive the wage change becomes.



**Fig. 4.3** The Wage Growth Curve



**Fig. 4.4** Wage and Employment Effects

For an unemployment rate of  $U1$ , wage change equals zero percent. The slope coefficient  $a_1$  indicates the wage pressure coming from changes in  $U$ . The greater the slope of  $WG$ , the more enhanced is labor’s bargaining power to demand higher wages as  $U$  falls due to  $dD > dP$ .

Now consider the effects on this model coming from the two major developments described above, namely, stagnation and globalization. Stagnation ( $s$ ) slows  $D$  and boosts  $P$ , thereby keeping unemployment  $U$  higher and wage change lower than otherwise. Furthermore, while some workers and firms gain from globalization, many in the middle class have experienced a loss in bargaining power. The  $WG$  curve shifts left as  $Z$  rises;  $dw$  will be lower for any level of  $U$ . But in addition, globalization can affect the slope coefficient  $a_1$  as lower bargaining power coming from a higher  $Z$  reduces what workers can demand in wages for a given level of demand in the economy. The  $WG$  curve shifts toward the vertical axis and becomes flatter ( $WG2$ ). The implication is that not only will  $dw$  be reduced for any level of  $U$ , but the prevailing  $U$  may rise ( $U1$  to  $U2$ ). Figure 4.4 below shows this outcome.

What evidence exists that the outcomes suggested by the above theoretical model are in fact true?

There is incontrovertible evidence that income and wealth have been concentrating since the mid-1970s, and this is an important factor in encouraging stagnation. In terms of the share of income garnered by the top 10% of the income earners relative to national income, that percentage has increased from 34.6% in 1980 to 48.2% in 2008. The share held by the top 1% has gone from 10% to 21%. Growth in the middle income quintile has been far less than growth in the top quintiles, and the middle quintile income at the cycle peak in 2007 was below that of the previous cycle peak in 2000 (JEC 2010). Similarly, the Economic Policy Institute reports:

The middle class as a whole has not gained wealth or received much of the income gains of the past 30 years. Between 1980 and 2009 the typical or median worker saw hourly wages grow by just 11.2% while income per worker grew by 59%. Since 1979, the top 10% of households have received almost two-thirds of all the income gains, with the top 1% claiming 38.7% of all the gains. (EPI News May 27, 2011)

Current figures indicate that the top 20% of income earners have 84% of the wealth. The fourth quintile has 11%, and the third quintile has 4% (PBS).

Evidence of global economic pressures is well documented. Palley (1998) offers theoretical and empirical evidence for weakening labor bargaining power. Historical

institutional change negatively affecting worker interests is described by Levy and Temin (2007). Some evidence for stagnation is provided by Van Lear (2011): Over the last three decades, the ability of the economy to accelerate growth from its prior income level has diminished, and job growth per month during the last five recoveries is coming down in percentage terms.

Wage growth and unemployment show a strong negative association over the last three decades. Higher-than-average unemployment is associated with lower education and the manufacturing sector (Wells Fargo 3/2011). After a rising trend in the 1970s, decade average unemployment rates have been falling, but mean duration unemployment has been rising. Each of the last three recessions is followed by low job growth during recoveries and high unemployment persistence (Wells Fargo 3/2011). Productivity surges following the last three recessions exceed GDP growth (Wells Fargo 9/2011), causing employment loss during the early parts of each recovery.

The experience of three jobless recoveries, higher and prolonged unemployment, and real wage stagnation (EPI Series 2/2011) are likely to produce greater income uncertainty among workers. A Federal Reserve study by Feigenbaum and Li (2011) argues that

household income uncertainty has risen significantly and persistently since the early 1970s. For example, our measure of near-future uncertainty in total family non-capital income rose about 40% between 1971 and 2002. This rising uncertainty is likely due to the increase in variances of both persistent and transitory income shocks (abstract).

This finding would suggest not only less ability to spend but also an obstacle to consistent retirement savings necessary to produce sizable private accounts that afford real retirement opportunity.

Evidence exists that the bargaining power of workers has fallen in the modern era. Levy and Temin (2010) construct a time series bargaining power index (BPI) by dividing worker annual compensation by the annual value of business sector productivity from 1950 to the 2000s. While the index is relatively steady during mid-century, the BPI fell markedly from the mid-1970s on.

## Financial Markets and Retirement

What do the major, ongoing developments of stagnation and globalization imply about financial markets and hence the retirement accounts of Americans? Stagnation and globalization impact workers directly via effects on labor market conditions but also indirectly and less immediately through effects on financial markets. Labor's economic security and prosperity depend heavily on employment and wage growth but also on the performance of their retirement accounts.

Economic stagnation produces low growth rates, thereby creating too few employment opportunities to create anything approaching full employment. Growth rates may be so low as to allow the unemployment rate to rise over time, as the economy becomes unable to absorb new entrants into the labor market. High

unemployment depresses wage growth, the main source of retirement contributions for most Americans. And if globalization pressures arise as modeled above, labor bargaining power may be depressed, stagnating wages and raising unemployment.

Slow or no economic growth and high unemployment reduce the gains achievable in financial markets. That is, economic stagnation has a deleterious effect for the bulk of the population dependent on returns from basic stock and bond investing. Financial asset values are derivatives of the underlying profitability and sales growth of the firms who issued these assets. Slow economic growth reduces sales and profit prospects, thereby limiting market advances. Strong stock and bond market performance is unlikely, and if such performance occurs, it is not sustainable. Therefore, retirement account gains will be minimal or even zero for long time periods.

Economic stagnation puts downward pressure on interest rates arising from two sources. A low-growth environment minimizes the need for bond sales and commercial loans, thereby lowering rates. Monetary policy adds to the downward pressure on rates as it attempts to resuscitate spending through low rates. But stagnation may prove too intractable to overcome, perpetuating a low interest rate regime.

Low-yield savings vehicles mean minimal growth in retirement accounts beyond contributions that individuals could make. Because most people's incomes allow for little long-term savings, thereby limiting retirement contributions, account accumulations will be modest. With minimal value appreciation, either from capital gains or contributions, market advances would be limited. Hence, instead of living off earnings from accounts, almost everyone retired would have to draw down on principal. Modest accumulations mean that private retirement accounts would be exhausted in a few years. This situation would force people to annuitize private holdings and mainly live off of Social Security.

A second implication stemming from the effects of stagnation and globalization is that mature capitalist economies may not be able to create broad prosperity without producing speculative booms whose eventual busts set back efforts for most people to sustain better living conditions and obtain economic security. By further implication, how can the state, when influenced by mainstream thinking about government intervention, create the demand necessary to drive business sales and investment sufficiently to induce broadly shared economic prosperity among a population dependent on middle-class jobs for their living standards and financial markets for retirement? The historical long-term rise in the percentage of Americans in the wage labor force, and not on the farm or in self-sufficient economic conditions, suggests a real political problem. Higher economic insecurity is occurring at the same time when the current financial system and labor market are predicated on increased private responsibility for saving and self-reliance on the job front.

Globalization offers the potential to offset some of the domestic economic effects of stagnation but not stagnation itself. Stagnation has the negative labor and financial market consequences described above. However, nation-state integration boosts corporate foreign direct investment in high-growth emerging market economies. Such investment has some positive job effect, and stock indices heavily invested in companies with high international exposure offer greater returns



because greater economic growth and profits earned abroad translate into high stock prices on domestic stock exchanges. The issue for better-off workers will be whether these returns can make up for the low yields on other assets that are safer and the more challenging labor market conditions described above. But the issue for middle- and lower-class labor is whether they can take any advantage of higher domestic stock prices given their minimal levels of wealth. Evidence on wealth distribution reveals that the top 20% of income earners control 84% of the wealth (PBS 2011). Wealth gains since 1983 are concentrated in the top income brackets; as reported by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI 9/15/2011), “the richest 5% of households obtained roughly 82% of all the nation’s gains in wealth between 1983 and 2009. The bottom 60% of households actually had *less* wealth in 2009 than in 1983, meaning they did not participate at all in the growth of wealth over this period.” Median wealth of minority groups falls well short of whites, and these groups have suffered greater declines in wealth than whites (PRC 7/26/2011). These data suggest little capacity on the part of most Americans to actually take advantage of stock price gains arising from emerging market investments made by US firms. Globalization, as currently designed, is not a viable long-term solution to retirement and labor market issues of our time.

## Conclusion

Recall the point about ideas framing the theoretical understanding of economic developments and the policymaking that addresses those developments. This chapter has identified specific problems confronting labor and financial markets that undermine broad-based economic prosperity and retirement security. The question before us is whether the mainstream concepts of laissez-faire market efficiency and self-interest individualism, for example, offer a sufficient basis to construct effective policy to address our social concerns. Are the macro problems we face solvable with supply-side tax policies oriented toward work and risk-taking? Or can the conceptual basis for globalization, namely, the Washington Consensus, provide an adequate basis to restore middle-class prosperity? Given that the conceptual basis for modern macro policy and globalization has delivered us to where we now are, such ideas must be called into question.

## Notes

1. The baby boom demographic pressure on Social Security may be mitigated by an inability to retire due to negative trends in labor and financial markets.
2. Binswanger finds that a very low growth rate could achieve a profit growth of zero, but leakages from income, investment risk, and profit uncertainty all work to raise the required rate of growth above this low rate.

3. The GI function is an application of the work done by Okun. For a recent study employing Okun's work, see Knotek (2007).
4. See Van Lear (2008, 56–58, 146–150).

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## Chapter 5

# Globalization, Aging, and the Power of the Image

Tom Semm and Kyra Greene

The process of neoliberal globalization proceeds, despite resistance, through the efforts of key institutions that support the dominant economic interests. Particularly important is the creation of a global environment for maximum profit-taking by the large multinational corporations that now monopolize the global economy. To this end, conventional instruments of power continue to be used, albeit somewhat differently than in the past. These conventional means are economic, political, military, and ideological power. These strategies are carried out, for example, through so-called free trade agreements, support for multinational regimes, covert interventions, and policies formulated at various think tanks. The goal is to create the illusion that there are no alternatives to neoliberalism (Harvey 2005; Klein 2007; Roy 2012).

The recent social movements throughout the world—the “Arab Spring,” the anti-austerity protests in Europe, and the Occupy movements in the USA—have demonstrated the limits of these instruments of power. And the global economic crisis of 2008 has revealed the ideology of the free market to be a thinly disguised justification for increasing inequality in wealth, income, and power. A more subtle but important instrument continues to be deployed on a global scale to promote neoliberal globalization. This element is the *image*, often analyzed and employed by multinational corporations.

As neoliberal globalization advances, so does the expansion of the multinational media corporations that are located in the “first world” countries, mainly the United States. Privatization, deregulation, and open markets guarantee the protection of intellectual property and free trade. All the components of economic and political power have allowed these multinational corporations to dominate global media. They have done so by various ownership, partnerships, and distribution agreements. According to Edward Herman and Robert McChesney (1999), only 10 large multinational media corporations, located mainly in the United States, dominate global media, while

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another 40 large corporations make up a second tier. Furthermore, the trend is for even greater concentration of ownership and control by the largest of these companies.

Obviously, this global expansion is beneficial to these media corporations, especially their pursuit of profit. But the success of neoliberal globalization depends on the power of the image deployed by these media corporations. As Herman and McChesney say, “the global media’s news and entertainment provide an informational and ideological environment that helps sustain the political, economic, and moral basis for marketing goods and having a profit driven social order” (1999, p. 10). The message of the Western media is present everywhere in the world and even where these ideas are not yet dominant. Simply put, the Western media influences the content of local media. Globally, the most watched movies, the most listened to music, and the most viewed television shows are products of these media corporations (Condry 2012; Deloitte 2011).

The image, as an instrument of power, had been recognized since the late nineteenth century. In *The Crowd*, Gustave Le Bon analyzes the relationship between the image and power. He argues that the lower classes are susceptible to persuasion through the use of images. As he says, “A crowd thinks in images and the image... calls up a series of other images” (1960, p. 41). These images create the illusions whereby the masses can be governed. Whoever controls the image, Le Bon concludes, has the power to manipulate the masses. Le Bon’s analysis of the crowd influenced other sociologists, social psychologists, political theorists, the emerging public relations industry, and business people. Edward Bernays, the “father” of public relations, believed that images are so powerful that they could create “the truth” (Ewen 1996).

The argument in this chapter is that neoliberal globalization proceeds by the use of instruments of power. The most subtle of these means is the image that is disseminated by large multinational media corporations toward three ends: (1) constructing easily manipulated consumers, (2) creating a world of illusion, and (3) stigmatizing groups and experiences that are undesirable and/or recalcitrant. This chapter analyzes how the power of the image, specifically in “globalized” advertising, is used to stigmatize and marginalize the aged and the experience of aging.

The symbolic connection between globalization and aging established through the image is examined. Key questions arise pertaining to the power of the image, why it is unique and why it has proven to be a successful instrument of power, and in what ways does the power of the image being deployed by global mass media shape discourses and experiences of aging.

## **The Power of Image in Global Age and Constructed Subjectivities**

Neoliberal globalization has restructured the nature of images in ways that support and expand this economic trend. First, the power of the image is not limited in the same ways as other instruments. Geographical boundaries are not limitations because the technology that disseminates the image can reach anywhere on the globe. Furthermore, the surrender of national sovereignty encoded in free trade

agreements and the statutes of the World Trade Organization have eliminated national borders that restrict the dissemination of the image. Cultural boundaries can still limit the power of the image, but even these boundaries have been overcome through the exportation and sedimentation of Western customs and tastes (Herman and McChesney 1999; Postman 1985).

And second, the image conceals the exercise of power and appears to be an “objective” representation of reality. The truth, though, is that everything in the image, both foreground and background, is selected with a purpose. In television advertisements, not only is everything planned, but also the production techniques are an essential component of the image. Indeed, these are the same techniques that were developed earlier for film and television. They include editing, camera angles and movement, and lighting and sound (Gianneti 1996). But because the image’s relation to power is concealed, most persons are unaware of how they are manipulated. As Stuart Ewen says, in his book *All Consuming Images*, “The secret of all true persuasion is to induce the person to persuade himself” (1999, p. xxx). In this way, the image becomes invulnerable and escapes rational critique because any discourse of manipulation is hidden. Therefore, Ewen concludes that “[t]he image was conceived to be an effective antidote to critical thought” (1999, p. xxxvi).

Most important, the image has the power not only to persuade but to produce, or create, subjectivities that can be easily tricked, in addition to engender a “reality” for these persons to inhabit that is a delightful world of illusion. In this regard, Ewen (1999) remarks that the subjects of this are able to take “delight in the unreal.”

The main end of the mass media is to construct compliant, easily manipulated subjectivities that remain oblivious to the social forces that construct their fundamental desire, namely, to consume. The image is also deployed to create a second-order reality of illusion that these compliant subjectivities can inhabit. Specifically, the mass media are used to stigmatize and marginalize specific groups that have been identified as being “less desirable” and/or recalcitrant with respect to the goals of neoliberal globalization (Parenti 1986).

Due to the influence of the image, typical persons are thought to have several common traits. First of all, they suffer from anxiety. The source of the anxiety is the continual experience of lacking something; these subjectivities exist in a perpetual state of desire. The consequence of this is that “all elements of lived experience constitute potential flaws” (Parenti 1986, p. 89). In the end, the person becomes an eternal object of manipulation by the rhetoric of images.

The second trait is that persons are unreflective. They lack the capacity for critical self-reflection because they are portrayed to be objects that find satisfaction only by participating in the world of desire. In fact, any reflection is thought to be flawed by the presence of this emotion. As a result, persons cannot even imagine other possibilities due to the pervasiveness of the image.

The third trait is arrested development; the personality does not develop. To the extent that goals of global consumer capitalism become mistaken for the real needs of persons, life is interpreted as an endlessly repetitive present, an “eternal return.” Attaining the newest, shiniest, and most up-to-date product becomes a task that eventually obscures their personal histories. In fact, there is no history outside of the

“knife edge” present, to borrow from George Herbert Mead. Progress is defined in reference to how well persons are integrated into the present.

The desire for the present constructed by global mass media also engenders anxious subjects, since they must organize their lives around the ever-emerging prospects for consumption. However, such consumption is only temporarily satiating because the rhetoric of the image continues to manipulate the consumer with newer, more attractive illusions (Schor 1998).

Ruben Alves captures this process in a metaphor. He suggests that persons imagine spending their lives in a small cabin from which there is no exit or view of the outside world, no doors, and no windows. Hence, they consider themselves to be prisoners. Yet through the impact of the image, they hope to live their lives in a mansion with a thousand rooms but still without windows or doors. Each day they would be allowed to go from room to room, and each would have a new experience, but there would still be no exit or view of the world outside. To most persons, this reality is delightful and is called freedom (1972).

Hannah Arendt (1976) analyzes what she calls “the lying world” of totalitarian movements. She says that the ideology of totalitarianism creates a world that is more desirable than the real world and is analogous to the illusions generated by the image. This utopian world is “imagined” in the foreground of media advertisements, but even more important, this imagery is crafted in the background of the editing room and board meetings. The mansion with a thousand rooms is the world of illusion that the image has created for consumers. For example, in this utopian world, there is no traffic, and all inhabitants can afford to look youthful. Work is never onerous, dehumanizing, or alienating. Leisure time can be spent in bars and restaurants filled with beautiful, happy people who consume without limits. All homes are upper middle class and set in idyllic neighborhoods that are uncontaminated by foreclosures, decaying infrastructure, homelessness, or gangs. There is no pollution. Almost everyone is healthy, and if they are not, prescription drugs are accessible and affordable.

Technology is progressive and helps persons communicate anytime from anyplace at faster and faster speeds, with an almost uncountable number of “apps.” This technology allows them to be fully entertained in their affluent households; everyone has access to the internet, children are internet geniuses, and adults through tutoring by their children can become competent at operating this equipment. 3-D movies in Blu-ray and the most technologically sophisticated video games are in every home.

Corporations are good citizens in this utopia. They focus on what is best for the consumer, such as providing expert retirement plans, affordable comprehensive health and comprehensive accident and life insurance, and clean energy to maintain the healthy environment of the utopia.

## **Aging and the Power of the Image**

As mentioned earlier, images are employed to create persons who are compliant, engender a world of illusion, and stigmatize and marginalize groups that do not fit nicely into this reality. The aged and the process of aging are the latter. However, important questions

pertain to why the aged are undesirable and devalued and how the power of the image is used to stigmatize and marginalize this segment of the population.

The aged are a less desirable population for several reasons. First, the aged have common interests, particularly security in their “retirement” and affordable and accessible health care. These interests are in conflict with those of the large multinational corporations. For example, the privatization of the social security system and health care are two of the main goals of financial institutions and the health care industry. And privatization is one of the main themes of neoliberal ideology. The aged are a growing segment of the population in the first world countries, and even in these hollowed out liberal democracies, they exercise some political power.

Public discourse in the United States has been directed at stigmatizing the aged and the aging population. This strategy ranges from blaming the increasing national debt on social security, to comparing this program to a “ponzi” scheme. And as the aged population increases, the young are told that they must carry an increasingly heavy burden to support this unproductive group. Additionally, young persons are informed that social security will be bankrupt and unavailable to meet their needs. However, this discourse, despite being trumpeted by influential members of the economic elite, has been notably ineffective. And attempts to privatize social security have to this point failed. The current beneficiaries of these programs, the aging, along with the majority of the population, view them as successful and necessary. Such resistance like this is serious from the point of view of the institutions that would benefit from the full privatization of both programs. Furthermore, these programs, but especially social security, offer compelling practical examples that challenge neoliberal ideology. Because of their success, these social projects must be stigmatized (Greenhouse 2008).

And secondly, in many countries and cultures, including to some degree even the United States, there is the belief that being human means more than being a consumer, and aging involves not just “getting older,” physical and chronological aging, but maturing. In this understanding of aging, persons undergo a process, through experience, whereby wisdom is gained and character is developed. The idea that aging is a valuable and meaningful experience is an obvious obstacle to the goal of creating homogenous persons who exist in the eternal now of the world of illusion. The aged, those who have undergone this experience of maturation, are responsible for transmitting the worldview of their community to younger members. They embody and transmit values, beliefs, ideas, and norms that often challenge the perspective of neoliberal globalization.

The aged are an undesirable demographic group to advertisers, despite the fact that they are an increasing segment of the population and many have disposable incomes. Most advertisers recognize that the aged are not as easily persuaded and manipulated as they were in their youth and often reject messages based on the “world of illusion.” The undesirability of the aged to advertisers is demonstrated on a near nightly basis in the Nielsen ratings for television shows in the United States. These shows are rated by the share of audience that a particular program has in a time slot. For example, ratings are based on how a show compares with others in the Monday 8 p.m. time period and then in terms of what the viewership (namely, persons 18–49) considers to be desirable by advertisers. Only then do the ratings



look at total viewership. But the overall rating of a show, what is most important to advertisers, is determined by the most desirable demographic group, 18–49.

The main means whereby the image is deployed is advertising. This process now saturates culture in the developed world and in many developing countries. The amount of money spent globally on advertising is half a billion dollars, while in the USA advertising and marketing make up almost one-sixth of the gross national product. The most powerful advertising medium is television, particularly the commercial. Accordingly, 42% of advertising expenditures globally go to television, which now has three and a half billion viewers. Advertising and advertisements are now global, not national.

Consumers everywhere can buy the same products in similar shopping venues, and almost everyone is exposed to the same television commercials (Deloitte 2011). Using television as a medium for advertising was recognized early in the 1950s, when this apparatus was referred to as the “dream machine.” Rosser Reeves, one of the “fathers” of television advertising, boasted that “we could take the same advertising campaign from print or radio and put it on TV, and even when there were very few sets, sales would go through the roof” (Halberstam 1994, p. 255). And, more recently, Juliet Schor’s study in *The Overspent American* demonstrates the impact of advertising on shaping the lives, even the unconscious lives, of Americans. How then is the image utilized in television commercials to stigmatize the aged and the process of aging?

As an undesirable population, the aged are “disappeared” from most television commercials with only a couple of exceptions. Almost any analysis of television commercials, both foreground and background, reveals that the aged are not present. After all, the aged do not drive luxury automobiles on traffic-free highways; likewise, the do not dine at restaurants and socialize at bars with the other inhabitants of the utopia. And for the most part, they do not celebrate the arrival of the newest technology. Commercials by companies such as Apple and Samsung depict almost exclusively young people anxiously waiting outside stores for the product launch of the latest mobile phone device. Due to the awkward fit in the new reality, the aged have been cleaned from this imaginary world.

There are two important exceptions. The aged can be found in television commercials for prescription drugs, especially drugs that have been developed to treat the physical illnesses associated with growing older. Examples of these diseases are arthritis, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart and cardiovascular illness, high cholesterol, and loss of, or problems with, hearing and sight.

These drug commercials are more likely to appear in television shows whose overall viewership has a high percent of the aged. The characters in these advertisements are the aged, their illnesses are associated with aging, and the drugs advertised deal with these problems, or their symptoms, effectively. The aged in the commercial then continue with the activities of their lives of leisured retirement. For example, in a commercial for an anti-inflammatory drug, the painful symptoms of arthritis are overcome to a soundtrack, “celebrate arthritis,” so that the attractive but arthritic elderly person can do Tai Chi, row, and play on scooters with their grandchildren.

The second exception is commercials that sell activities associated with the conventional norm that old persons are expected to focus on leisure time during their “golden years.” These advertisements are populated by the aged, those without



the above health problems, or who have benefited from the drugs, and who have sufficient disposable incomes. The golden years are the centerpiece of these commercials as an idyllic world of travel. The best examples are cruise line commercials. These pitches reveal elderly people who enjoy the wonders of the ship, the exotic ports of call, and the fellowship of other old persons.

While the aged are marginalized in the world of television commercials, the prevention of growing old is central. The reason is that the rhetoric of images has so successfully defined youth as the norm that the physical changes of aging have been defined as deviant, or even pathological. A corollary to this trend is that aging is reduced to mean physical deterioration. Any idea or belief that aging is a positive process is eliminated. A body that is flawed is the focus of attention: dry and cracked skin, gray hair, hair loss, and wrinkles. Commercials that sell products designed to preserve youth range from beauty supplies that conceal wrinkles to cosmeceutical drugs that eliminate wrinkles, grow eyelashes and hair, and increase sexual performance. Without a doubt, the body is stigmatized in these commercials. But the world of illusion provides the solution through magical imaging, as visual techniques show wrinkles disappearing, skin becoming smooth and soft, hair changing color, or just returning, and sexuality being preserved.

In sum, the rhetoric of images in television commercials cleanse the utopian world of the aged, while offering those who remain some hope of a marginal life through the use of prescription drugs. The images conveyed in television commercials define aging as physical change only, mostly physical deterioration, and thus this process must be resisted. This demonization of aging, additionally, is linked to the emphasis placed on consumerism. Young persons, stated simply, are active and participate in every facet of society.

The images found in commercials define those who have aged as similar. Everyone must cope with the pathology of aging; this outcome is inevitable because diseases are a normal part of this process. And the aged who have money must spend it freely to enjoy their retirement. The real power of the image, however, in the portrayal of the diseases associated with old age as natural, like physical change, thereby persuading old persons that prescription drug use and other modes of advertisement are normal. But most of the diseases present in commercials are not caused by aging but by the behaviors normalized in a consumer culture: poor diet of a fast-food culture, lack of exercise because of overwork, and an overreliance on drug remedies.

In the forests of central India, a war is being waged by the neoliberal Indian government against its own tribal people, who have inhabited the land where they have lived for hundreds of years. Trillions of dollars of minerals have been discovered on territory, so the people must be “relocated” or worse. Those who resist relocation are labeled “Maoists” by the government and, once so labeled, can be killed. The conventional instruments of power directed toward these ends—laws evicting them from their land, economic inducements, and extensive and growing military force—have only created more resistance. But a local superintendent of police has the solution! He says that the people are not “greedy.” “I have told my boss, remove the force and instead put a TV in every home” (Roy 2012, p. 51). In this way, due to the influence

of the image, these persons might be enticed successfully into the consumer culture and view their critique, and associated rebellion, as irrelevant to progress.

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## Chapter 6

# Globalization, Time, and Aging

Steven L. Arxer

For the most part, social gerontology has emphasized one temporal orientation. The idea that social gerontology has a penchant for linear, chronological time is well-documented (Adam 1990; Hendricks and Peters 1986; Seltzer 1976; Kastenbaum 1966). Despite efforts to include personal and sociocultural renditions of temporality, gerontological research continues to use chronological age as the primary way to define their population and understand life changes.

As Schmidtke (1999, p. 169) notes, “The Newtonian model of time is the currently predominating conceptualization within Gerontology and within all the Social Sciences.” In this case, Newton (1952) viewed time as an absolute and objective phenomenon that has an existence all together separate from the individual. According to Newton, time is a homogeneous medium that is comprised of discrete units (moments). While the nature of Newtonian time will be discussed in the next section, the point here is that this version of temporality is at the heart of a unidirectional course of human development. Development is portrayed as unidirectional because the present is believed to be a point on a continuous line that divides the future and the past. A clock essentially measures temporality, whereby temporal movement occurs in a repeated and causally ordered manner. The future becomes the present and the present is pushed into the past by a new future.

This clock version of time is at the core of social gerontology’s dominant theories. In this case, while many contemporary theories have included an expanded version of the aging process because they encompass a variety of social factors, these theories still presuppose linear temporality. For instance, the popular life course theory tries to show that aging is a dynamic process that involves a host of social factors. Nevertheless, emphasizing an individual’s social context and biography is not necessarily liberating and indicative of destroying age-related norms. To the extent that persons are viewed to be a product of their environment,

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attention is drawn away from how individuals construct key symbolic images that are used to justify specific aging norms of their sociopolitical environments. Without critical reflection on the symbolism of temporality, for example, certain norms can easily be suggested to an aging population. Clock time fosters this restrictiveness because each moment is assumed to be discrete and not open for interpretation. Thus, one's past history is a definitive event that ultimately determines one's future prospects and possibilities. Moreover, because time is sequential and directional, everyone should experience the present similarly. At each point in time, for example, all persons should have developed to a similar degree.

It is important to mention at this juncture that the logic of globalization, and its core philosophy of neoliberalism, is underpinned by Newtonian temporality. As a perceived historical trend, neoliberal globalization is predicated on the idea that this process is inevitable and beneficial (Johnson 2004, p. 260). Specifically, globalization occurs because both short- and long-term cycles are taking place within an expanding marketplace. The idea is that overtime both efficiency and prosperity will be achieved by those who adhere to market cues. Normative guidelines emerge as market signals that persons and societies should follow. At the heart of these suggestions is a Newtonian image of time. With time represented as an autonomous line, norms associated with this trajectory are also understood to transcend contingency and conflict. In this way, a future becomes clear and enticing. The market, for example, gains legitimacy and an elevated position within key discussions regarding normative expectations.

The main purpose of this chapter will be to show the problems associated with conceptualizations of "chronological age" in two forms. First, linear time requires a Newtonian theoretical backdrop that leads to the chronologization of aging. Second, the current version of neoliberal globalization adopts linear time as a method for the chronologization of the life course. In important ways, both dimensions reinforce each other.

## **Linear Time: The Chronologization of Aging**

The body is significant to social gerontology in an obvious way. For at the heart of this field is a general interest in the nature of life changes. The body, however, has tended to be conceptualized in a particular way within social gerontology. In this case, the biomedical model is dominant in discussions about how the body and the aging process are envisioned (Cruikshank 2003; Shilling and Katz 1996). In short, within a medicalized social gerontology, questions about the nature of the body are answered in terms of biology and the medical sciences.

An important issue is that social gerontology's temporal framework promotes an objectified view of nature, similar to biomedicine. A result of this temporal orientation, according to Longino and Powell (2004), is a naturalized idea of aging in which individuals are described as following a general life trajectory. In this way, "age, as a concept, is synonymous with time" (Botwinick 1978, p. 307). Therefore, investigating the nature of time should be of central importance to this field. Accordingly, this orientation

must be closely examined to expose its theoretical foundation and social implications—namely, the idea of time as clock, the assumption of mind-body dualism, and the adoption of prescriptive normative development.

### *Time as Clock*

Hendricks and Hendricks (1976, p. 42) point out that social gerontology has tended to emphasize one temporal orientation, namely, linear time. They argue that even a cursory review of the literature exposes the field's penchant for linear, clock time. For instance, Feifel (1959, p. 71) praised the idea of a singular temporal view, since he thought a "normal sense of time aids in our adjustment and is an important means of establishing contact with and controlling the material universe." Similarly, Birren (1959, p. 8) recommended linear temporality because "chronological age is one of the most useful single items of information about an individual if not the most useful." In the same vein, an image of linear time is crucial for theories that presume human development progresses through graded stages.

In this regard, this field has been highly influenced by Newton's ideas. Adam (1990, p. 52) points to the great influence that the Newtonian temporal model has had on the social sciences in general and social gerontology in particular:

Today natural scientists recognize that Newtonian physics describes only part of our physical reality, that it does so in a highly abstract manner, and that its validity is limited. Time . . . is the very centre of the changes which have taken place since and which have thus far failed to penetrate social theory. Social science is still imbued with the general classical conceptualization of the time of Newtonian physics and more specifically the time of the clock.

According to Brann (1999), the notion of time as chronology is not only a modern phenomenon but rather can be found throughout the Western tradition. For instance, as early as the Greeks, temporality was associated with the clock. Plato, for example, viewed the heavens to be a cosmic clock that moved according to number. For Plato, "the heavenly bodies are the indicators or, one might say, the moving dial, of the clock" (Brann 1999, p. 6). Some have argued that Aristotle adopted a similar view. In this case, Aristotle believed that persons have a "counting soul," and this ability to count makes time known to individuals. Thus, like a clock, time is something countable (Brann 1999, p. 50). While the Greeks present early examples of clock time, there certainly are more modern ones, such as that provided by Albert Einstein. He substituted Plato's cosmic clock for a more local version. As he once said, "it might appear possible to overcome all the difficulties attending the definition of 'time' by substituting 'the position of the small hand of my watch' for 'time'" (Brann 1999, p. 7). In this case, instead of having a universal clock, temporality is conceptualized as more relative, as made up of innumerable clocks and their observers. But while there are numerous examples of time being viewed as a clock, none of these ideas seem to have shaped the field of social gerontology more than those of Newton.

According to Hendricks (2001), to adopt a Newtonian model of time means to have a chronological image of the universe. By this he means that time is most

closely associated with a clock. Lacan (1977, pp. 77, 98) explains that when time is viewed as a clock, temporality is “mathematized.” In this case, time is viewed as a measure of distance, and temporality is the side-by-side placement of an infinite number of moments. Time is seen as similar to points on a line. As a result, there is a present that resides between the past and the future. This is what George Herbert Mead called the “knife-edge present.” As movement occurs along this timeline, present after present emerges. Each present is self-contained. Time is spatialized with each moment representing discrete objects in space. And because each moment is discrete, no moment should be mistaken for any other. In this regard, each present is considered to be universal, since only one present can exist at any instant.

In this way, Newton believed that time is absolute. His model offers a linear model that can be quantified. Temporality exists when one measures the interval of time between two events. This measurement would be universal and unambiguous, provided that a good clock is used. This model forms the basis of social gerontology’s chronological concept of time and aging. In this case, aging refers to homogeneous and discrete units (e.g., years) that are used to characterize events and experiences. Accordingly, Schmidtke (1999, p. 168) notes, “gerontological research assumes this Newtonian medium as the basis for its structure and understanding.”

In this way, social gerontology’s temporal framework parallels the biomedical model. For when time is conceptualized as a clock, the aging process becomes viewed mechanically as a function of physical forces. The past represents a present that has been pushed back by an emerging moment, while the future is a present that has yet to collide with the now. In this way, time is concretized since it can be empirically defined by observing current trends that signal the present. Time becomes absolute in this fashion since biological, psychological, and social “presents” identify one’s placement on the developmental timeline. Human development is now assumed to be understood for its objective nature, so long as persons’ temporal movement can be measured. As Hendricks and Hendricks (1976, p. 47) point out, when time is imagined to be a clock, “social life, in general, and aging in particular, are explained in terms of discrete data that exhibit repetitive patterns” that can be easily quantified and thus placed into a causal scheme.

### ***Mind-Body Dualism***

According to Newton, a basic and fundamental dimension underpins the temporal relations that are experienced in everyday life. Time, similar to space, is conceived almost as a divine, vacuous phenomenon in which persons reside. This domain is thought to have an absolute character because it extends forward to infinity. Moreover, the identification of a person on this timeline is thought to be possible with the proper measuring device. Consequently, for Newton, time serves as an unquestioned frame of reference for charting the movement of objects and persons. As Stephen Hawking (1988, p. 18) explains:

Both Aristotle and Newton believed in absolute time. That is, they believed that one could unambiguously measure the interval of time between two events, and that this time would be the same whoever measured it, provided they used a good clock .... This is what most people would take to be the commonsense view.

What is important at this juncture is that with linear time specific representations of aging gain a sense of autonomy. Similar to Newton's absolute time, aging becomes a process that is confronted, rather than constructed. The prospect exists for discovering the stages of the aging process because aging progresses along a timeline or developmental pathway. In this case, aging is viewed to be similar to nature, since it is now comprised of certain regularities and properties. In short, aging is materialized.

This materialization of the aging process, however, is not possible without the theoretical maneuver inaugurated by René Descartes. In his quest for certainty in knowledge, Descartes devised a dualistic system that is at the center of a linear conception of time. He sought to establish an "Archimedean point," where a firm base of knowledge could be established. To accomplish this, Descartes proposed that the body be approached as something simply corporeal. Simply put, the body should be viewed as a thing divorced from consciousness.

At the heart of Descartes' position is that the mind (*res cogitans*) could be severed from the body (*res extensa*) (Carlson 1975, pp. 201–202). In this case, everything that is nonmaterial should be considered categorically removed from the material realm. The general idea is that matter is ultimately free from nonmaterial considerations. In this way, matter is thus open for unobstructed investigation. For Descartes, this meant that truth could now be pursued without interference, since uncertainties have been removed. For instance, things such as mind, spirit, soul, or consciousness can no longer compromise the search for knowledge. In short, the effect of these factors is now neutralized through empirical observation. The body, therefore, becomes completely accessible to the trained senses.

Accordingly, investigators should adopt empiricism when investigating the body, because empiricists base knowledge on experience, as opposed to opinion, beliefs, and assumptions. Through direct and strict observation, data are recorded. In this sense, no factors outside of those that can be directly observed should be introduced as evidence. The trained mind works like a blank slate that simply copies the reality of physical events. Accordingly, as Engel (1988, p. 117) writes, "objective observers regard nature as independent from themselves and unaffected by their act of observation."

With regard to social gerontology, the acceptance of a linear, absolute view of time has had a specific result. The "emphasis on the linear, irreversible, and uninterrupted flow of physical time supports the assumption that the normal human experiences a steady, even temporal flow and duration" (Hendricks and Hendricks 1976, p. 39). The traditional view of the aging process coincides with the movement of time in a particular and distinct manner. In this case, the use of linear time in social gerontology is consistent with, as Longino and Powell (2004) describe, a tendency to describe aging along normative stages. This developmental theme characterizes social gerontology's preoccupation with roles among older persons (Longino and Powell 2004). Here, persons are understood to play a variety of social



roles (e.g., teacher, grandmother), and these roles identify and describe the self-concept and social nature of persons. Important to note is that roles are usually organized sequentially, so that they can be associated with a certain age or stage in life (Hooyman and Kiyak 2002). Thus, linear, chronological time is the referent used to organize these roles. Within this scheme, successful aging is determined by how well people adjust to their new role changes and how well they accept these changes.

More recently, a life course perspective emphasizes the diversity of roles and role changes throughout life, since development is not restricted to any one part of the life span (Benson 2002). Two central concepts of this theory are trajectory and transition. A trajectory is a pathway or line of development over the life span, such as work-life and parenthood. Trajectories refer to long-term patterns of behavior and are marked by a sequence of transitions. Further, transitions relate to life events (e.g., first job, first marriage) that can alter a person's overall trajectory by introducing new roles. Human development, therefore, is characterized by the simultaneous appearance and disappearance of roles. To a large extent, the social sciences have imagined roles to be structural characteristics of society and thus are zones that persons enter or exit. In this way, persons remain passive agents in their development, since the behavioral expectations they inhabit are externalized. As will be mentioned later, the externalization of roles opens up the opportunity to construct representations of "normal" aging.

## **Temporality and Age-Related Norms: Chronologization of the Life Course**

A basic question in social gerontology pertains to the content of norms. Simply put, what type of events should be anticipated? In more gerontological terms, what kind of behavior is normal at any point in the aging process? What is important here is the attempt to develop a baseline to determine whether an event is acceptable or not for an individual. The notion of "age norms" serves to open or close off the range of behaviors that people of a given chronological age can enact. In this regard, age norms reflect assumptions of age-related abilities and limitations that specify what persons of a given age can and ought to do.

There is little doubt that the issue of age norms played an important part in early social gerontology. Lynott and Lynott (1996) indicate that during this period social gerontology was organized around the concept of adjustment. One of the earliest examples of this view is role theory, which attempts to explain how individuals adjust to aging (Cottrell 1942). In this example, people are imagined to play a variety of social roles and successful aging results from how well individuals accept and adjust to predefined role changes. Hence, older persons are viewed to be a rather homogeneous group, since old age supposedly brings about the onset of general roles to be fulfilled. Each person, therefore, would have a common experience of being old.

However, as Longino and Powell (2004) point out, since the 1980s, one of the basic findings of social gerontology is that people of retirement age are very diverse



and that generating broad normative prescriptions is generally meaningless. Indeed, rather than homogeneous, this group is extremely heterogeneous (Dannifer 1988, pp. 3–36). For example, demographers have shown that the older population varies in terms of income, education, employment, health status, ethnicity, and so on. Accordingly, as Biggs (1999, p. 210) contends, today social gerontology is faced with promoting the idea of “flexible” age norms.

Nevertheless, this finding will likely be obscured because of social gerontology’s temporal commitment. Linear time fosters a static view of norms and, thus, cannot account for the diverse nature of the aging process. Linear time adopts mechanical imagery. Mechanistic symbolism shapes representations of the aging process through the imposition of normative prescriptions. But how can mechanistic temporal imagery suggest behavior requirements? As was mentioned earlier, Newtonian time is spatialized so that time represents points on a line—namely, past, present, and future. And movement (progress) is defined as the continual emergence of a new present. This suggests that persons are at optimal position on the timeline if they are at the “knife-edge present.” Indeed, being at the “cutting edge” is regularly interpreted as indicative of progress, if only because one is as close to the future as possible. To the extent that the past represents a present that has been forced backward because of a more immediate present, the emerging now gains automatic relevance. Put differently, this newer present is universalized and, consequently, should be considered the reference point for optimal positioning (at least until a new temporal moment arrives). In this way, mechanical temporality suggests persons should orient themselves to the now.

## **Globalization and Time: Life Course as Market Adjustment**

Another primary theme in this chapter is that social gerontology’s dominant temporal model exists within a specific context—namely, neoliberal globalization. Specifically, this version of globalization assumes an image of the identity of individuals and social relationships. What is important to note is that Newtonian time reinforces the normative pressures associated with neoliberal market symbolism. As a result, market normativity is given priority above other ways of constructing and interpreting the aging process.

An examination of current discourses of globalization can help us understand the reliance on a Newtonian model of time for constructing specifically the representation of aging and the elderly. Some have described neoliberal globalization as predicated on a “total market” system (Murphy and Callaghan 2011). In this case, the market is assumed to be a privileged institution in society because only it functions from the rational satisfaction of individual needs. The idea that the market automatically links individual desires with larger society through the unplanned organization of commercial exchanges leads to the elevating of this social mechanism above all others. The market is understood to represent the optimal system to organize all human life and thus should be seen as total in its relevance.

At the same time, the total market also brings with it symbolism that frames the nature of personal and social identity. Specific images of aging, in other words, are

understood to be more important and key to the total market than other perspectives. Temporally speaking, the market suggests what are the most immediate (present) ideas that persons should adopt to optimally position themselves on the global developmental timeline. Globalization can, therefore, be understood as efforts to expand the material and cultural conditions that emphasize market representations of human identity at the expense of others.

The market shapes representations of aging in a specific way. Contemporary global capitalism identifies the majority of persons as wage earners. A key dimension to personal and social identity is based on persons' ability to sell their labor on the global market, at least until their labor loses market utility and they are removed from the labor exchange process. As producers and consumers, persons gain or lose value to the extent that they can secure enough capital to have access to goods and services in the marketplace. In this context, aging is defined as a timeline regulated by persons' position relative to the market. The market determines what is "young" or "old" through a cost-benefit analysis. Take, for example, the way neoliberals define education. Schooling is meant to transmit key skills and abilities that allow persons to gain the most up-to-date skills. In the area of adult education, for example, the idea is to "retool" older persons who possess outdated techniques. This is commonly labeled as increasing persons' human capital. Nevertheless, the underlying message is one of market adjustment, whereby persons must be rejuvenated to improve their competitive edge.

Old age, therefore, is primarily identified as a temporal period of risk for moving away from the present. Persons begin to lose relevance because they fail to possess the characteristics of the current market. In response, persons must undertake readjustments that either extend their participation in the changing, fast-paced marketplace or maintain their capital for survival in their post-work years. Both scenarios, however, frustrate "flexible" age-related norms.

In the first case, human recapitalization is achieved through the adoption of the most current techniques, skills, and value orientations. Here, market-based knowledge and information rely on a linear conception of time for validity. Viewpoints that contradict the market are assumed to be suspect because they are "out of sync" with current ideas (i.e., the present). The skills, talents, and attitudes of older persons, however, may be quickly discounted in relation to emerging market trends. Market language cannot fully speak to the myriad of orientations and skills that may encompass certain segments of the population. For example, optimizing one's competitive advantage is often tied to being a mobile laborer. But this ignores the sedimented relationships persons may have developed in their life. Indeed, these social commitments can limit a desire for or ability to move for a job. Should persons who have invested in building bonds with their communities, families, and peers be asked to develop, instead, the capacity to break ties with persons and geography at any time for the sake of being a mobile laborer? Clearly, pure market language may not correspond to certain persons' definitions of social bonds, yet they are regularly asked to jettison those value orientations that are inconsistent with market mentality.

Another form of market adjustment comes in the form of planning for retirement. Here the idea is to manage capital investments to save enough for survival during

retirement. However, the structural changes to the welfare state due to neoliberal globalization increasingly challenge the ability for a great majority of people to retain enough access to capital to sustain them beyond their participation in the wage system. In an effort to expand the market across the globe, nations have begun to align the state with neoliberal mandates. Rather than seeing the state as an institution that offers a robust social welfare infrastructure that allow persons to remain creative and active after work, the state is nowadays meant to provide the proper conditions for market growth. This has generally meant reducing social services so that corporations can operate in a low tax environment. To be sure, this can disproportionately affect certain aging populations—such as the very young and elderly—who have found themselves irrelevant to the market as wage earners and possess limited personal resources.

With a linear model of time in place, successful aging is proposed to have a unidirectional trajectory, since norms are now identified as substantive. Norms carry weight because the concrete conditions in the market system signal which behaviors lie on the knife-edge present and are thus optimal for all persons. However, persons who refuse or lack the ability to alter their behavior are marginalized in the global market system. The hope for aging to being tied to human agency and understood in a diverse way is severely limited, since “success” and “freedom” are narrowly defined in terms of adjustment or external criteria. In short, persons are divorced from personal and social power, since the etiology of normalcy remains unquestioned.

## **An Alternative Temporality and Genuine Aging**

Lacan (1977, pp. 75, 98) questions the legitimacy of linear, clock time. He argues that when time is described as linear, temporalization is misrepresented. Borrowing from Bergson, Deleuze also says that passage of time fails to mirror a clock. Similar to Bergson, Deleuze (1986; 1988, pp. 51–72) argues that time is *durée*. Rather than a measure of distance and space, the movement of time consists of shifts in conscious attention and focus. Accordingly, the past is not something that disappears behind a time horizon but is a present that has lost some of its importance. Instead of a line, time represents a montage, or collage, of signification. In this case, moments are not discrete entities but rather exist in what might be called an “expansive present.” Accordingly, consistent with many existentialist writers, Luhmann (1979, pp. 10–17) points out that moments in time are not disconnected; time exists as the past-present, present-present, and future-present. Every moment of time is thus underpinned by how temporal movement is interpreted.

Lacan (1977, pp. 44, 48, 75) also believes that time is experiential. Temporalization represents the constant, agenic renewal of the present. According to Lacan, there is a difference between the “*temps pour comprendre*” and the “*moment de conclure*.” What he means by this is that temporal coordination depends on individuals agreeing about the nature of time, rather than simply arriving at a similar or identical present. When time is imagined to be *durée*, the present is constructed and maintained in the

midst of other competing possibilities. In de Man's (1972, pp. 239–267) words, time is the “représentation du présent.” There is no a priori present that exists; the present has to be brought into existence. To be more specific, temporal change (e.g., making a present into a past) depends on persons having a common view of temporality (e.g., a presumed present).

Temporality, therefore, is foremost the experience of time. As opposed to Newton, Deleuze (1972, p. 115) points out that “[t]ime is precisely the transversal of all possible spaces, including the space of time.” Deleuze (1972) goes on to add that time represents the “ultimate interpreter, the ultimate act of interpretation.” Moments are not like discrete stimuli that impinge on the mind and pass away, but rather are arranged depending on their significance and relevance. For instance, during a period of crisis, a person's temporal horizon may shrink or collapse, as the focus of attention is centered on perceived immediate concerns. On the other hand, the present expands during leisure activities, when individuals carry the material and cultural resources to widen the spectrum of possible events.

The main issue here is that because temporality is tied to persons' social consciousness, the ability to understand behavior depends on grasping the respective conceptions of time in effect. Hall (1983), for example, shows how time differs across cultures. Thus, as Husserl (1964, p. 28) argues, the passage of time must be approached as changes in the “lived experiences of time,” instead of the movement of an eternal clock. What is important for social gerontologists is to recognize is that aging, which is basically a temporal concept, should not be reduced to one level of temporality, or else the experiential basis of time in aging will be mishandled.

As a result of this shift in conceptualizing time, various traditional notions and concepts will have to be rethought. The organization of the aging experience around certain normative prescriptions, for instance, cannot be based on an empirical present. Instead, aging emerges from persons coordinating their respective experiences of time. Accordingly, persons establish a span of relevance (a thematic realm), or history, through discourse. Individuals are thus synchronized when their past-presents and future-presents become common present-presents. Schutz (1962, p. 220; 1964, pp. 158–178) calls this activity “growing-old together” and “tuning-in,” since persons are able to make reference to similar themes. Rather than existing as a mechanical association of events, a span of time embodies experiences that are consciously sutured together. This is how persons who experience age similarly, but may not be chronologically identical, are the same age.

## **Temporal Freedom, Market Norms, and Agency**

A particular goal of those who adopt a linear view of time is to dehistoricize norms. Within an absolute temporal framework, an invariant normative scheme may be proposed that transcends the limits of any one moment in time. And while present norms may change, as they often do at the marketplace, the source of norms

remains external and infallible. Within global capitalism, the market determines the most relevant actions for success.

In this sense, removing interpretation from norms preserves a “one-dimensional” (Marcuse 1964) image of the aging process. Specifically, aberrant aging can be distinguished clearly from normal development; the facts about optimal development can be separated from illusory descriptions. As a result, market proponents argue that an effective response can be made to individuals in terms of their needs, problems, and other relevant considerations.

An experiential view of time, however, is inconsistent with this normative position. Rather than universal, an experiential temporal model understands norms to be “locally determined” (Lyotard 1984, p. 61). Because temporal movement represents shifts in consciousness, reality is fundamentally interpretive and discontinuous. Different locations are formed that may be only slightly related to others. In addition, transgressing the boundaries of these normative domains may lead to an encounter with a totally new reality. In this vein, Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 415) claims that every understanding of reality is discontinuous and never finalized, since

[i]t is of the essence of time to be in process of self-production, and not to be; never, that is, to be completely constituted. Constituted time, the series of possible relations in terms of before and after, is not time itself, but the ultimate recording of time, the result of its passage which objective thinking always presupposes yet never manages to fasten on to.

Instead of smooth and linear, reality is recognized to be a collage, a patchwork of competing views.

The idea of universal norms, accordingly, is rejected within an experiential view of time, because these prescriptions are ethereal and disconnected from everyday life. Simply put, norms are not natural and simply traceable to a material origin, as is suggested by a Newtonian model of normality. Thus, the claim that a priori age norms can be derived from a so-called objective temporal referent (i.e., a universal present) is fatuous because even this phenomenon is affected, as Husserl (1970) says, by conscious “intentionality.” Norms are sustained by a “pragmatic motive,” whereby consciousness transforms “natural things into cultural objects” (Schutz and Luckmann 1973, p. 5). For this reason, temporality is referred to by Minkowski (1970) as “lived time,” since cognitive intensity shapes the dimensions of daily life. Rather than constrained by time, human behavior emerges as temporal movement. Prescribed norms reflect social commitments to elevate certain viewpoints as important.

As it relates to globalization, market norms are understood to be situated, or located within particular assumptive regions. What is important to note is that the norms associated with market rationality are supported by one perspective on time and thus open to debate. Simply put, norms based on market adjustment are not ultimately generalizable merely because they are thought to be derived from a “natural” temporal movement. This *modus operandi* is simply one among many ways in which age-related norms can be conceptualized and does not represent a fundamental baseline to judge human development.

Normalcy cannot be divorced from experiential contingencies that delimit the rules for what is considered normal and what is not. In this sense, the issue is no

longer whether a state is normal; instead, the question is which norm applies in a particular situation or context. These considerations are a result of social, and not simply natural, history. Because the interpretation of time cannot be quelled, there is no way to inherently substantiate one normative model over another. As Lyotard (1984, p. 66) contends, those renditions of normalcy that do become paramount, this state of affairs is one that is “agreed on . . . and subject to eventual cancellation.”

The impact of this view of norms on social gerontology is quite significant. To be specific, normalcy cannot be appropriately handled when divorced from persons’ experiential realm, which includes personal expectations, cultural sanctions, and social goals. Instead of natural, all norms, even those prescribed by the market, are political. According to Fish (1989, p. 251), normalcy is political because it “advance[s] or retard[s] someone’s interests and declare[s] itself on issues in relation to which sides have already been chosen.” Through persons’ cognitive or temporal acts, particular assumptions are advanced that allow for one viewpoint to be elevated over others. The arrangement that emerges is then adopted as normal. Acts of will are ultimately responsible for establishing the normative framework for time. What is thought of as the meaningful present is a result of shifts in the personal and collective constitution of time.

Social gerontologists are keenly aware that older persons, for example, no longer constitute an unvarying group whose members are easily comparable; older persons represent a wholly diverse population with members having a variety of different experiences, needs, and interests. As Stanford and Stanford (2000, p. 97) indicate:

[a]s a nation, the United States has a more diverse aged population than any other country in the world. The historical make-up of society dictates the heterogeneity of the current aging and aged population. People differ by race, ethnicity, social economic status, religious preferences, political backgrounds, sexual persuasion, outlook on family configuration, regional preferences, and general lifestyles. While the traditional discussion of embracing a “melting pot” society has continued, the reality is that society has steadily moved in the direction of being heterogeneous.

An experiential view of time may be a beneficial and appropriate model to employ, since this view allows for a host of normative regions to be created and coexist. Simply put, an experiential view of time provides age-based norms with an existential character that can be linked to personal and social commitments. Aging cannot be prescribed by a timeline but is a matter of experience.

## Conclusion

A central theme in this chapter has been that vital to accounting for diversity in representations of aging is the use of new temporal imagery. As has been suggested, focusing on linear time unduly truncates how older persons can define important aspects of their lives. By not going beyond the parameters of linear time, older individuals face prescriptions set by the marketplace that are disassociated from everyday experience. Moreover, important facets of aging are decontextualized and

depicted in particular ways given the focus on market rationality for defining attributes of optimal aging.

However, because all knowledge is experientially constituted, the contextual nature of aging should not be obscured. Further, how persons experience time should not be distorted by preconceptions about temporality within a neoliberal climate.

In order to remedy this situation, Laing (1973) suggests, social gerontologists need epistemologists. What Laing means is that neoliberal globalization uses a linear temporal model to identify aging according to abstract classifications that overshadow persons' actual definitions of themselves. Without raising the epistemological connections between temporality and globalization, representations of aging will likely be manipulated in light of market norms. The diverse nature of aging will be sacrificed so as to achieve a so-called developmental understanding of the aging process. Without critical reflection about the undue dominance of a Newtonian model of time, and its connections to market mentality, a more genuine response to the aging process will not be forthcoming from social gerontologists. New proposals may be introduced that aim to be more inclusive, but attention should be paid to whether these ideas are channeled through a temporal framework that restricts temporary freedom.

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# Chapter 7

## Cultural or Latent Background of Aging

John W. Murphy

### Introduction

Most contemporary writers argue that social phenomena are not simply empirical. Another way of describing this shift in thinking is to say that nothing escapes the influence of culture. Since the onset of various philosophies that challenge dualism, this conclusion is unavoidable (Longino and Murphy 1995). Nonetheless, culture is not viewed in a deterministic fashion, whereby cultural laws pervade a society and shape all behavior. With respect to the changes announced by modern philosophy, culture should not be understood to operate in such a causal and restrictive manner.

Culture, however, is surely operative. But nowadays, culture is thought to influence behavior somewhat indirectly. Authors use language such as “deep structure” or “cultural formation,” for example, to describe this new nature and function of culture (Foucault 1989). The general idea is that various subtle assumptions provide the interpretive context necessary to supply empirical phenomena with their social significance. Without this framework, in other words, these empirical claims would not make much sense.

For example, the aging process is thought to follow a fairly uniform and predictable path. Persons are born, reach middle age, and begin a slow decline. For many years in academic and medical circles, this scenario was thought to capture adequately how all persons age. Some persons might fight this process and try to not act or reveal their true age, but the outcome is inevitable. That is, the life-course will make everyone face reality sooner or later.

But the question that often arises pertains to whether this course, with the accompanying stages, is necessarily natural. Empirical phenomena, such as graying hair or changes in muscle density, do not necessarily signal that the end of life is nearing or that

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certain behavioral responses should be expected. Who, in effect, knows when life is going to end and thus can establish an absolute point to anchor a person's lifeline? Nonetheless, such a framework has been presupposed that allows experts and others to make predictions about a person's normal expectations.

Most persons assume, for example, that the course of life is linear, and thus begins at a particular place, moves in a single and uniformly accepted direction, and is anchored by a final destiny. Each phase, accordingly, has a well-established position and meaning in this overall trajectory. Without this set of assumptions, however, none of the claims about the life-course representing a valid and integrated picture of a person's existence make much sense (Elder 2001). Nonetheless, just about everyone organizes their lives according to this model.

The point of this chapter is to discuss this deep structure in terms of contemporary philosophy, particularly in view of the maneuvers that deny autonomy to the life-course. Various assumptions may anchor the various traditionally accepted stages of life, but these claims have lost a lot of legitimacy lately in some philosophical and sociological circles. Therefore, in the absence of a foundational life-course, the issue becomes how do persons construct and rationalize their existence? Understanding existence to have an *interpretive* deep structure, on the other hand, might be able to provide guidance without the rigid norms imposed by the traditional life-course.

## Discourse on Aging

Discussions about aging are typically very naturalistic in orientation. Basically, humans are envisioned to be a part of nature, and thus aging is thought to follow a law-like progression. Like any facet of nature, persons develop according to universal laws. They grow at a particular rate, pass through a set number of stages, and come to an end when their bodies no longer function. This so-called life-course, accordingly, is imagined to be a path that everyone traverses in a somewhat similar way.

The behavioral expectations for all persons are thus fairly clear. At every stage of life, due to the unrelenting influence of physiology, the acceptable tasks for persons are easily identifiable (Cassell 1991). The ability to perform certain actions, simply put, is restricted by their physical condition and the accompanying social possibilities. In this regard, roles are entrenched that mimic the physical progression of persons and delineate a range of acceptable aspirations and behaviors. How a life evolves is thus orderly without much acceptable deviation.

But this entire scheme is based on a philosophy that is viewed nowadays with skepticism. The central issue pertains to how the life-course has gained such autonomy. The culprit at this juncture is dualism and the illusions created by this philosophical gambit. But recently emerging philosophies have rendered this strategy questionable.

At the heart of dualism, following the principles announced by Descartes, is the assumption that subjectivity can be severed from objectivity (Zaner 1988). As a result of this position, objectivity is valued and treated as a source of valid knowledge, while subjectivity is disparaged as replete with values and never able to rise above

opinion. And given this differentiation, subjectivity adds nothing to the search for valid knowledge and in fact may obscure objectivity. In the end, reaching the truth requires that the influence of subjectivity be controlled and, eventually, overcome.

Presupposed by this Cartesian outlook is the autonomy of objectivity (Bordo 1987). Not only is objectivity superior to subjectivity, but the influence of persons can pervert the search for valid knowledge. The only salvation for persons is that they sequester their values, beliefs, and opinions, so to speak, so that the influence of these contaminants is minimized.

This style of philosophy almost guarantees that a seigniorial status is given to objectivity (Reiser 1978). The life-course, accordingly, owes a lot to this dualism. Similar to objectivity in general, this model of aging is considered to be autonomous. Because of dualism, a space is available for this trajectory to advance without any human influence. A life-course can be posited, accordingly, that is assumed to transcend culture or any other element that might involve interpretation and variability. And as a result of this special status, a reliable mechanism is available to direct the aging process.

Nonetheless, this dualism has been attacked and undermined by contemporary philosophy. The so-called “linguistic turn” that is an essential part of this intellectual trend makes talking about an objective or autonomous reality very difficult. Writers such as Lyotard (1984, pp. 9–11), for example, describe language use to be a game. Their point is that instead of reflecting reality, everything is mediated and changed by language use. Language is a game, in other words, that can be played in any number of ways, with each one providing social reality with a new meaning.

With respect to aging, the impact of this change is significant. Instead of autonomous, the life-course represents a particular “discursive formation” (Foucault 1989). How a life is lived, accordingly, is not necessarily or primarily an empirical question but represents a linguistic game. Various assumptions and definitions, in other words, define and labor to make sense of a person’s existence. Gray hair, for example, may have nothing to do with physical decline, despite the claims made on television by sponsors who sell dye and similar products. Whether or not a life is declining or expanding depends on various decisions persons make and the accompanying interpretations of social reality. The question becomes, simply put, how do persons define themselves and their life-course?

The problem, however, is that the current cultural formation of aging carries a heavy dose of naturalism (Gergen and Gergen 2003). The goal of this strategy, accordingly, is to deny the contingency that is exposed by describing reality, and in this case the life-course, as a product of linguistic discourse. The strength of this method is that life is portrayed as stable and a person’s identity explicitly defined.

On the other hand, persons have no control of their existence and must conform to the ideals of the typical life-course, if they want to be seen as normal. Accordingly, how aging unfolds has nothing to do with personal volition or creativity. As Sartre (1956) might say, they are cajoled into a condition of “bad faith,” whereby they must deny their possibilities and relent to the demands thought to be a natural part of aging.

## Globalization and Networks

Most critics of globalization contend that networks are a vital part of this process. Because of communication, and the related technology, the world has shrunk due to this key facet of globalization. Space and time, accordingly, are no longer impediments to development, given the rapid transmission of all sorts of messages, including money and important data. As Jacques Ellul (1964) pronounced some time ago, a technological society has arrived, with the accompanying leveling of reality.

What Ellul meant is that in this new, globalized society, the rough edges are removed from every facet of social life. The emphasis, accordingly, is on streamlining every process. At the basis of communication technology, for example, is the transformation of messages into “bits of information” that travel along a very refined pathway (Lyotard 1984). Accordingly, other facets of society are reformulated in a similar way. Most aspects of every task, accordingly, are formalized so that efficiency is improved. Ritzer (1993), for example, calls this strategy “McDonaldization,” whereby tasks are gradually quantified and strictly regulated.

Life is changed significantly when the social world is thought to mimic the structures and processes of a large corporation. Everyone, in short, must adjust to a large-scale production process. In many ways, conceiving existence to adhere to a life-course can facilitate this end. In short, the rough edges are removed from persons through the adoption of this imagery. The uniqueness of persons—which would compromise the efficient organization of society—is rendered ancillary to growth. In a word, personal development becomes quite standardized, with growth portrayed as a uniform process with few deviations.

If persons adhere to the life-course, their adaptation is almost guaranteed. They will grow at the proper rate, for example, and fit nicely into the demands of every institution. The efficient operation of society, therefore, will be assured, due to the elimination of any ambiguity concerning a person’s identity and purpose. With growth easily calculated, any corrections can be easily made to ensure that society remains tightly integrated.

## Existence Begins

Life simply begins for persons. For the most part this moment is vague, except for the stories told by parents and relatives. But most traditional explanations do not describe this beginning as contingent. Often some sort of religious explanation is provided for the arrival of this new life. After all, persons are not simply tossed into the world. On the other hand, a quasi-physiological description of these initial and future phases is often provided. In this case, every person is assumed to possess potential.

All persons, in other words, have a set of latent characteristics that stabilize their identities and give their lives direction. Throughout the Western philosophical tradition, describing humans in this way has been viewed quite positively. In short, persons

are thought to be dynamic and capable of development (Crockett 2011). Like an acorn that grows into an oak tree, the respective lives of persons unfold according to this potential. Consistent with this scheme, for example, some persons are basically smart and others less intelligent. And although change is possible, clearly this outlook is very deterministic.

For this reason, a lot of attention is given to books such as the *Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray 1994). With so much at stake, the potential of persons, including entire social or racial groups, is very important. The claim that Blacks may possess less potential than Whites or Asians does not reflect idle curiosity. Access to jobs and schools, not to mention social mobility in general, is an abiding interest in every society. For example, the most intelligent persons should be guided into the most important occupations, so that a society functions in the most effective manner possible.

Therefore, a lot of time and money are spent by persons trying to assess their potential. A myriad of tests have been developed for this purpose. Entire industries, in fact, have arisen to test and evaluate persons in a host of ways. Furthermore, programs exist that are designed to assist them to improve their potential. The claim is made regularly that through systematic interventions the trajectory of a person's life can be altered. Intelligence, for example, can be boosted.

In this regard, a person's life-course is assumed to be a product of both biological and social influences (Gergen and Gergen 2003). But in reality, only so much alteration is possible! As a result of a highly enriched environment, potential can be brought to fruition; on the other hand, without such a supportive context, personal development can be stifled. So, in this sense, parents fight to get their children into the best schools and even go into debt to offer them a range of enriching experiences.

In the end, however, potential sets the agenda for a person's life. The existence of every person thus has a stable course that can be realized within a proper context. Discovering and fostering the growth of this potential has become the obsession in the modern world. In contemporary parlance, most persons are proud "essentialists," who want to know where they stand with respect to others (Fish 1989). A sort of genetic competition has become quite common; in this competitive context, where persons reside on the "bell curve" is crucial for success.

As a consequence, therefore, aging has a firm beginning. A person's life-course has a firm anchor that establishes a general trajectory for all development. Some manipulation may be possible, although the path of life is clear. That is, personal existence develops step-by-step until the logical end is reached where potential expires and no further growth is possible.

## Life Progresses

In many ways, the modern world is also obsessed with the idea of dividing life into various stages. Various psychological theories, ranging from the work of Freud to Piaget, have emerged to explain how persons are expected to develop. And as might

be imagined, the passage through these phases of life has become very ritualistic, with each one marked with celebrations and expectations. As John Steinbeck recounts in *Travels with Charley* (1962), for example, during youth and old age, different pressures exist for persons to exhibit specific behaviors. Each stage, in effect, has certain privileges and obligations.

But similar to the concern with potential, persons have become focused on the normative expectations of each stage. The point is that persons want to know if they are developing correctly. Each stage, accordingly, is accompanied by select characteristics that all normal persons should exhibit during particular periods in their lives (Featherstone and Wernick 1995). And again, similar to the search for potential, a lot of resources are devoted to trying to determine whether children, for example, are developing properly.

In this sense, everyone is afraid of not growing normally. But, as Erich Fromm (2000, 1955) points out, when this fear begins to pervade social relations, an entire society can become ill. Most persons, in other words, strive to become normal by fulfilling the prescribed expectations at each life stage. The problem, however, is that creativity and individuality are often sacrificed as a result of this conformity. And any deviation from the generally accepted developmental path is considered to be problematic. Furthermore, the fact that these stages have been identified and reinforced by mounds of social science research makes any departure even more troublesome.

The issue at this juncture is whether persons are going to be properly aligned with institutional requirements. For example, by a particular age, children have to be ready to function in school. A particular cognitive style, according to Piaget (2002), should thus be achieved. And by the time a person reaches middle age, a certain level of responsibility is expected. Therefore, a particular social and emotional stage should have been reached. In this sense, the survival of specific institutional arrangements depends on correct development.

Although psychological development is at issue, the real focus is social stability. Old persons, for example, have certain skills and many liabilities. And in order for society to continue to function at an optimal level, these persons must recognize their limitations and exhibit age-appropriate behaviors. The problem, however, is that not only these persons but everyone becomes entrapped in a regimen of rigid behavioral expectations. Institutional requirements, in other words, are internalized slavishly in order to promote normal social development (Powell 2006). Passing through the stages of life correctly, and in this case learning how to age appropriately, becomes a high priority.

The life-course, therefore, becomes a very rigid scheme. And in order to foster proper growth, a variety of sources can be consulted, ranging from psychologists to life coaches. In the end, however, behavioral standards are imposed by the life-course that guarantee proper personal development and social equilibrium. The life-course, accordingly, becomes an autonomous measure of progress. The image is thus created that normal lives evolve according to universal laws, rather than shaped by cultural contingencies.

## Life Slows Down

In addition to duration, the life-course also has velocity. Specific stages, in other words, move faster than others; the movement forward does not occur at a constant rate. During middle age, for example, persons are expected to be extremely active while trying to establish their careers and achieve their goals. The final stages of life are supposed to be less active. In a word, life begins to slow down (Meador 1998).

The life-course, in a manner of speaking, can be thought of as a clock. When the spring is tight, in the earlier stages, movement is forceful and continuous. But as the spring is released, action becomes increasingly slow and less dependable. In a word, life begins to run down and gradually stall.

As might be expected, this portrayal of the movement of life is not very favorable to old persons. Time is literally running out for these individuals. They do not have much time left as they face the prospect of death. And because at any moment their existence could end, not much effort is invested in their future. In fact, their future is shrinking, according to this outlook.

Because the final years represent the dissipation of time and energy, this stage is thought of as a period of decline. While at earlier stages energy is conserved and focused, in the final years of existence the opposite is the case (Hendricks and Hendricks 1977). Almost by the day these persons are assumed to lose interest and purpose. As their existence runs down, little is left to do but to engage in ritual activities. Because of this loss of time, and the accompanying momentum, inaugurating any new projects would be futile. Such plans, in short, would never come to fruition, as energy and time are lost.

Although activities theory is considered to be outmoded, and older persons are encouraged to extend their lives, they are still expected to age gracefully. Medicines and diets, for example, are designed to enable them to continue functioning and smooth their decline. But these interventions, according to an equally clear message, are an attempt to simply slow the inevitable advance of age. Persons are not necessarily expected to face death head-on, especially in advanced countries, but merely adjust successfully to the difficulties of old age (Rowe and Kahn 1998). With the right medications, almost everyone presumes that the trials of aging can be ameliorated.

Despite attempts to enhance aging, by declaring that 50 is the new 40, the aging process is disparaged. Women are constantly reminded that they are becoming less attractive, while men are expected to accept a reduction in vitality. A woman at 40 can still be found appealing, but only if she can retain some of her youthful appearance. And without Viagra, men would be simply old and tired, with only memories of the past.

As potential runs out, possibilities narrow and life is lived at the margins of society. And although old persons are encouraged to renew their commitments, and live their lives to the fullest, their prospects are restricted. In short, there is not enough of the future available for them to expand and grow. The future, in many ways, is their adversary, even though no one can calculate when the end of life will arrive, and thus



determine the value of the time that remains for specific persons. Only actuaries can make these judgments, but they simply reduce a life to a mathematical formula.

## Thrown into the World

The image of life as an autonomous course does not treat any period of life, but especially the end, very favorably. Persons have little control of their identities, as they strive for normalcy. Every stage, accordingly, is prescribed and quite restrictive. In a sense, everyone is robbed of the ability to create an existence that is not simply a shadow of an underlying destiny. But if control is of paramount importance, such restrictions are not necessarily worrisome.

But modern theories, ranging from phenomenology to postmodernism, question the legitimacy of dualism. With language pervading existence, the possibility of an autonomous life-course is undermined. Now, to borrow from Heidegger (1962), persons are thrown into the world. And without an anchor in the life-course, existence does not have an inherent destiny. In this sense, they emerge from the fate inscribed by this trajectory and must invent a destiny. As existentialists like to say, they are condemned to be free and must create their identities and purpose.

In this sense, all of the sociological and psychological stages that have been proposed are basically mythological. In a particular context, accompanied by certain beliefs and reinforcements, these periods may capture accurately how persons view their lives. A capitalist society, for example, requires that by middle age every person must assume particularly responsibilities. And a failure to do so is considered to be abnormal. Within such a society, a unique image of human nature, along with the life-course, is conveyed that everyone is socialized to adopt. But in the end, this imagery and the associated institutional arrangements are a social creation and contingent. Hence, the rules and norms are not obligatory.

The life-course, nonetheless, does not disappear but must be thought of in a different way. Rather than simply adapting to a normative course, persons must invent themselves and their fate (Taylor 1989). Persons thus have a course of life, but one that is created and constantly modified. Although they do not have an unquestioned foundation, many positive aspects are derived from this change. Specifically important is that persons are not expected to be normal but rather to live well.

Rather than persons having potential that is either realized or not during specific stages, existence should be viewed to consist of decisions that open and close various possibilities. Whether an older person is vital or not, accordingly, depends on how life is lived rather than the requirements of a particular stage of life. Exercise or the type of occupation, for example, may have more to do with productivity than the aging process. In the end, the question becomes: How do persons define their possibilities? In the absence of a background clock that is believed to be running down, all the phases of a persons' life have equal meaning. Existence is thus simply lived with brio until death intervenes. There is no inherent measure of a particular phase of life, divorced from how each stage is defined and lived.



## Conclusion

A key theme of this chapter is that every facet of existence is cultural, even the life-course. Nothing, in other words, escapes the influence of language use and the related process of identity construction. Even aging, which many critics equate with biological development, does not escape culture (Leder 1992). As persons exist, or age, they make decisions that affect other options. The result of these choices, moreover, may have little or nothing to do with the traditionally conceived life-course. Persons are not necessarily or automatically impressed by these normative expectations. Nonetheless, advertisers continue to emphasize decline and the desirability of not aging.

In the real sense, the life-course is a metaphor and thus a cultural invention. But when tied to a biological clock, for example, this scheme can become a virtual trap. The illusion can be created easily that aging is a natural process with universal consequences. Subsequent to the linguistic turn, however, even age must be treated as a cultural artifact. In other words, the process of self-invention carries on until life ends.

Aging, accordingly, should be viewed as a highly variable activity. In many ways, age is fundamentally existential—age is simply the creation of life (Longino and Powell 2004). Deviating from the so-called normal path is no longer an issue, since this version of the life-course is only one option among many. Now, the aging process no longer represents a model of aging—an abstraction—but the result of persons choosing to live in one way or another. Behavioral expectations, accordingly, should not be imposed a priori but encouraged to emerge from this creative action. Persons can thus age, or grow, freely instead of gracefully.

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## Chapter 8

# Successful/Productive Aging, Responsibility, and Reflection

Linda Liska Belgrave and Bisma Ali Sayed

Successful aging is a central piece of the “new gerontology,” an effort by scholars and others to view aging in a fresh, positive light (Holstein and Minkler 2003; Moody 2005). This new approach must be viewed within its historical and contradictory cultural context (Moody 2002). In the twentieth century, improvements to the public health and social welfare infrastructures, coupled with advances in biomedicine, engendered shifts in the goals of modern medicine. With the increase in life expectancy, chronic health conditions supplanted acute health conditions as the primary threats to health and well-being. To accommodate this shift, healthcare efforts in the twenty-first century were increasingly targeted toward managing quality of life through long-term disease management. The increased prevalence of chronic conditions and the aging of the population are seen as creating tremendous pressure on the healthcare system and society. Indeed, many argue that our social welfare and healthcare infrastructures are not equipped to efficiently handle the burdens of chronic diseases and an aging population (Kovner and Knickman 2011). Recent research suggests that elders consume a relatively large share of healthcare, although they comprise only 13% of the population in the United States (Stanton 2006). This is in part because they are victim to multiple chronic conditions that are expensive to treat and also because of the medicalization of normal aging processes (Illich 2000; Stanton 2006). Accordingly, curbing healthcare costs of elders is a key focus in the battle for efficient healthcare service delivery.

Successful aging is best examined alongside productive aging, its “ideological cousin” (Moody 2001). Despite the promise of the new gerontology to reduce the stigma associated with aging and the devaluing of older adults, there is a risk that this effort will result in glorifying those with the resources to age in good health while continuing to actively contribute to society, while blaming those less fortunate (Eckardt 2005) or who choose to withdraw from productivity (Taylor and Bengtson

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2001). Beyond individual, psychosocial effects, the successful/productive aging discourse plays into the hands of those who would reduce or even eliminate entitlements and services for elders (Dillaway and Byrnes 2009). The potential reach of this dominant perspective is staggering when considering that by 2050, elders might make up a third of the world's population (Rodwin et al. 2006).

Essentially, despite the desires of many scholars and practitioners to facilitate growing older in vigorous, good health, enjoying the later years while contributing to society, there is a dark side to the new gerontology. This includes victim blaming, coerciveness, and supporting unstated but powerful ideological values. Additionally, work on successful aging, productive aging, and variations on these themes tends to be atheoretical and is fraught with measurement problems. We acknowledge the promise of the new gerontology but focus on the weaknesses in this field and the dangers of this movement.

## **Introduction to Successful/Productive Aging**

Although ideas of successful aging have been with us for millennia, John W. Rowe and Robert L. Kahn popularized a particular version of this concept for academics and lay people alike through their scholarly work (e.g., 1987, 1997) and their 1998 book. Rowe and Kahn contrast "successful aging" with "usual aging," which they refer to as a "syndrome" (1998, p. 58). They react with horror at considering people "on the borderline of disease" (1998, p. 53) (e.g., those with slightly high blood pressure, low bone density, those who might be a bit plump) as "normal" and urge reversal of "usual aging" with lifestyle changes. At its core, Rowe and Kahn's successful aging combines gloriously healthy aging with high cognitive and physical functioning and continuing engagement with life. As much as Rowe and Kahn express dismay at thinking of "usual aging" as normal, many are equally disturbed at the thought of labeling elders' aging in the "usual" way as other than successful, essentially failing at "this most important life task" (1998, p. xi) in some fashion. In fact, only about 10–15% of us can hope to reach our graves without living with disability for some time (Richardson et al. 2011), leaving the overwhelming majority to fail.

Rowe and Kahn leave unanswered questions of distinguishing senescence from pathology (Juengst 2005), whether one can age successfully in the face of chronic illness (Moody 2005), the role of stressors (Kahana et al 2005), the place of antiaging medicine (Moody 2005), and more. While most scholars in this field work with Rowe and Kahn's basic definition of successful aging (above), others adapt the concept to their purposes (e.g., Kahana et al 2005). Moody (2005) argues that Rowe and Kahn have a second definition that incorporates adaptation to and compensation for decline and even chronic illness.

The successful aging tradition boasts a tremendous amount of research. Dillaway and Byrnes (2009) report 200+ presentations with the term "successful aging" in their title over a 3-year period at the annual meetings of the Gerontological Society of America and hundreds of links to articles, blogs, and the like from the AARP website.

Much of this work is aimed at interventions to promote successful aging, but there are increasing signs of disenchantment with this framework. There is concern over the implications of “failing” for those who internalize this directive (e.g., Holstein and Minkler 2003). There is resistance to a “succeed or fail” approach in favor of one focusing on balance (e.g., Wiles et al. 2012). There is even rejection of the values and labels involved by scholars and lay people alike (e.g., Richardson et al. 2011).

Although many separate productive aging as a distinct goal, others incorporate the two issues (e.g., Wykle 2005). Rowe and Kahn include productivity as one component of successful aging, for which good health is necessary (1997, 1998). In fact, Butler (see Butler and Gleason 1985; Butler 1997) and Rowe and Kahn (1987, 1997) developed these two approaches (or two sides of the same new gerontology coin) during the same time frame, in the context of the same conservative political climate (Estes and Mahakian 2001). These authors were connected through funding by the MacArthur Foundation (Dillaway and Byrnes 2009).

Most scholars interested in productive aging seem to use similar definitions, typically looking at the extent to which elders participate in some activities that “create goods or services of economic value” (Rowe and Kahn 1997, p. 438) or are of value to society (Morrow-Howell et al. 2005). While expressing concern for the potential consequences for those who must retire for health reasons, Butler (1997) argues that we should rethink retirement and extend work life, since “[i]t is socially unwise and expensive to create a claimant, dependent class that could soon comprise some 40 million retirees” (p. 1372).

Even when including paid employment, volunteer work, and caregiving in their discussions, some researchers express concern over Social Security disincentives to remain in the labor force. This, combined with society’s need for contributing elders, encourages policies that promote productive aging (e.g., Morrow-Howell et al. 2005). In a circular fashion, good health (i.e., successful aging) makes possible productive aging (whether paid or volunteer), which, in turn, is good for elders’ health. Caregiving, on the other hand, while satisfying for elders to perform, negatively impacts their health (Morrow-Howell et al 2005).

“Successful” and “productive” aging fit together almost as two pieces of a puzzle, even to the point of being indistinguishable (Dillaway and Byrnes 2009). We see them as two sides—one medicalized and the other economic—of a single coin and discuss them as such, except when referring to the work of authors who tackle them as distinct approaches. Together, these tell us that we are obligated, as individuals, to take care of our health throughout our lives, in order to age successfully. Assuming we do this, we should continue to be productive members of the economy (whether for pay or as volunteers) well into old age. Thus, elders are urged to avoid becoming a burden on society for healthcare and to continue to contribute to the economy, rather than expect to be supported through social security or other retirement benefits.

Successful/productive aging is referred to by various authors as a perspective, a theory, a paradigm, an ideology, and, simply, terminology (or two of each, for those who separate success and production). We use framework or perspective, since these provide the most inclusive descriptors of the various ways in which successful/productive aging has been, and continues to be, used.

## Concerns about Successful/Productive Aging

Critiques of successful/productive aging involve multiple theoretical, ideological, and measurement concerns. These include consideration of the implications arising from the dominance of this framework.

### *Theoretical and Ideological*

Referring to successful and productive aging as mere buzzwords, Taylor and Bengtson (2001) characterize contemporary gerontology as atheoretical, arguing that recent research has “disinherited theory” (p. 125), though this might be more reflective of how research is done than of an absence of available theory (Estes et al. 2003). Moody is not much more generous, claiming that the framework essentially uses a veneer of positivism to bolster its claims as scientific (2005). Theoretical and ideological critiques of the successful/productive aging perspective are inseparable. The theoretical problems, such as the failure to consider class and race inequities, which influence the ability to maintain health and productivity into old age, and reductionism flow from the unacknowledged ideological and political bases of the approach, including individualism and neoconservatism.

### **Individualism, Structured Inequalities, and Ideology**

The class and individualist biases in the concept of successful aging are noted by multiple authors (e.g., Cruikshank 2003; Taylor and Bengtson 2001; Holstein and Minkler 2003). In fact, Kuhn (1978) indicts gerontology as a whole on these grounds, an indictment echoed, albeit more gently, by Angus and Reeve (2006). Calls for “responsible aging” ignore the lifelong injustices suffered by those who cannot make the “right choices” (Cruikshank 2003). While successful aging relies on individual efforts, ignoring larger structures of inequality, productive aging goes directly for the jugular of continued “economic usefulness” (Estes et al. 2003, p. 70), rethinking old age through the ideology of the market (Estes and Mahakian 2001).

Certainly the association between class and health, including the implications of class for health behavior, was common knowledge before the framework of social/productive aging was articulated, yet this connection was barely acknowledged by the proponents of the framework and certainly not seriously incorporated. Access to resources necessary for leading a healthy lifestyle and promoting good health—fresh, nutritious food; opportunities for exercise; the ability to set aside stress; decent housing; safe workplaces; regular healthcare; and more—is neither equally nor randomly distributed through the population. How are the hotel maids and poultry cleaners and the secretaries and retail clerks to age successfully and continue their productivity into old age? Similarly, this framework, like much of gerontology, fails

to consider the inequities suffered by people of color and the implications of these for health and aging (Cruikshank 2003). The daily abuse of racism, whether in your face, color blind, or environmental; the lack of educational and employment opportunity endured by so many; and inequities suffered in the healthcare system itself all take their toll on health, long before old age. Racial segregation and urban concentration of poverty are also implicated in racial health disparities (Weisz and Gusmano 2006). Ironically, while ignoring the implications of racism for successful/productive aging, middle-class academics fail to see the strengths that minority elders bring to the aging process, strengths from which we all could learn (Cruikshank 2003). The disadvantages experienced disproportionately by older women, such as poverty, widowhood, daily aches and pains, and chronic illness, are not incorporated into the framework. Taylor and Bengtson (2001), after noting women's inequality in the workforce and the likelihood of continued exploitation into old age under a productive aging model, ask whether this is "a goal we want as a society" (p. 133). This question applies equally well to how we want ethnic and racial minorities, the poor and workers more generally, to live out their later years.

The internalization of this framework, at least its ideological underpinning, is illustrated by Fred. At 70 years of age and quite physically active, despite his catheter and multiple episodes of illness, he is able to maintain a positive aging identity through a narrative of "life is what you make it" (Phoenix and Sparkes 2009, p. 225). This eloquently individualistic narrative works for Fred but might prove less effective for someone without the resources, including leisure, for jogging, table tennis, yoga, café meals, and more. Cruikshank (2003) reminds us forcefully that "the only way to make healthy aging a realistic possibility for *most* Americans is to eliminate poverty" (p. 93). Policies grounded in the successful/productive aging framework, however, reproduce, rather than challenge, existing structures of inequality, guaranteeing that these follow us into old age (Estes and Mahakian 2001). While many critique the successful/productive aging framework based on unequal access to resources that make it possible, Jones and Higgs (2010) recommend attention to the lived experiences of elders who "engage, refuse to engage, or are unable to engage" the new landscapes of old age. It is important to note their "refuse to engage" category, since this suggests the possibility of rejecting the framework altogether.

The individualism of successful aging reflects a middle-class bias in its ideological commitment to personal responsibility and tendency to ignore unequal access to all that goes into a healthy lifestyle (Cruikshank 2003). Moody (2001) writes of the successful and productive aging perspectives as distinct ideologies, reflecting "quintessential American values of success and productivity" (p. 196) with an "unrelenting focus on individual responsibility" (p. 179). He sees these two ideologies as flowing from, among other things, cost-containment pressures (especially in healthcare), the dramatic increase in the older population (with the looming crisis of the baby boomers hitting old age), and the move from defined retirement benefits to defined contributions. On the positive side, the improved health and higher education levels of contemporary elders also contribute to these ideologies. Ideological trends that further the growth of these perspectives include the growing promotion of privatization as the solution to global woes, the decline in traditional liberalism, and



the growth in individualism, even libertarianism, especially among youth. What some would call the “manufactured” social security crisis (e.g., Dillaway and Byrnes 2009), looming now for decades, is also a key factor. While recognizing the value of health promotion, Moody does express concern for the possible loss of benefits by the disadvantaged (2001).

Where Moody grounds his analysis in economic and demographic pressures, alongside ideological moves that, together, provide fertile ground for the successful/productive aging framework, Dillaway and Byrnes (2009) examine the national political setting and the involvements of the key developers of the framework, Butler, Rowe, and Kahn. They cite political attacks on Social Security and Medicare, blamed by the conservative right for economic problems of the 1970s, followed by Federal efforts to raise the retirement age and encourage extended work lives, all supported by the media. These efforts coincided conveniently with coincided with scholarly redefinitions of successful old age partly in terms of productivity, including paid labor. The MacArthur Foundation was one funder of the 1987 symposium, “The Promise of Productive Aging,” resulting in a book of the same name with Butler as first editor, and the MacArthur Foundation Studies of Aging in America, with Rowe as lead investigator and first author of the 1997 book that popularized successful aging. Butler was tied in to the Federal government through testimony on aging issues and as founding Director of the National Institute on Aging. Rowe received serious consideration for FDA Commissioner under Clinton. Dillaway and Byrnes (2009) suggest that the intellectual detachment of these two key scholars might be questioned; the political climate, the moves of the Federal government to cut back on entitlements, and the conceptualization of successful/productive aging overlap. Even while giving Butler, Rowe, and Kahn the benefit of the doubt, they “suggest that, at the very least, the initial authors of successful aging discourse were influenced by their career trajectories and the political settings in which they resided” and that the “paradigm might have been written with politics in mind” (p. 714), unless these scholars were merely political pawns. Certainly the positions and prominence of Butler and Rowe ensured the successful social construction and promotion of the framework.

### **Values and Reductionism**

Successful/productive aging arguments are blatantly reductionist. Successful aging reduces the meaning of elders’ lives to their ability to maintain good health (thus minimizing their burden to society), while productive aging reduces the meaning of those lives to their continued contribution to society. Moreover, this framework is grounded in unseen, unacknowledged values. In fact, despite the explicit value of rejecting ageist views, it is deeply steeped in stereotypes of ill health and dependency. Negative images of aging have incredible staying power and permeate the work of those who would change those (Angus and Reeve 2006). Moreover, this framework’s equation of dignity with independence reifies individualism, through a kind of cultural blindness (Moody 2005) that ignores variation in cultural values surrounding self-sufficiency.



The core of “successful aging” is a *medicalized* view of old age solely in terms of health status. Elders are effectively reduced to the status of their bodies and cognitive functioning. This overwhelms perspectives based on class, race, and gender, perspectives that could present challenges to existing power inequalities (Estes et al. 2003). Even when criticizing this view, authors sometimes fall prey to it, for instance, referring to aging as an “important field of health” (Jones and Higgs 2010, p. 1513). Juengst (2005) tries to resist this approach of pathologizing old age by separating aging from senescence, seeking a way to celebrate it, but determines that because the changes associated with aging bring functional loss, medical intervention is appropriate. Holstein and Minkler (2003) critique the “normative standard” of health as reliant on virtues that cannot bring success to the marginalized and oppressed. While this does critique the inequality that makes this standard unattainable for many, it does not call into question the value itself. This normative prescription to set health as the highest standard (Holstein and Minkler 2003) includes the notion that we should devote our lives to preserving our own health, in order to live a healthy, successful old age. This goes beyond individual responsibility to a narrow self-centeredness, essentially calling for people to devote their lives to themselves.

If the overall framework of successful/productive aging perpetuates negative stereotypes of “usual” aging and is used to promote efforts by elders that are likely doomed to failure, at the extreme we find more immediate dangers, with more clear vested interests in play. Antiaging medicine has been interpreted as revolutionary in its efforts to resist biology, rather than associated with successful aging, and characterized as unrealistic (Moody 2005). Others find both approaches to be similarly grounded in a negative view of aging, one that devalues older people in its “war on old age” (Vincent 2007). Either way, the promise of maintaining youth as long as possible, even turning back the clock, is not only appealing but consistent with the goals of successful and productive aging. As of 2004, the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine boasts 10,000 members around the world and 501(c)3 status (Conrad and Potter 2004). There are multiple dangers with such an approach. The use of human growth hormone (hGH) provides a case in point. This powerful agent is used to treat a number of “problems” in healthy bodies, including some of the decrements of aging. Conrad and Potter (2004) note that even though mainstream medicine rejects the use of hGH for this purpose, citing serious potential side effects, somehow this does not capture the attention of the media and public nearly as strongly as does its potential as a “fountain of youth.” Clearly, the construction of “antiaging medicine” has consequences beyond physical side effects of medications used for questionable off-label purposes. This is medicalization of aging taken to the extreme.

Rejections of medicalized old age leave questions as follows: If not health, then what? Can we value good health and extend the means to achieve it, without defining old age in terms of it? Ultimately Juengst (2005) concludes that: “Without an accompanying spiritual vision that can suggest a transcendent afterlife, positive aging risks promoting an incomplete narrative for human life, in which the flourishing we associate with maturity is simply replaced by the finality of death” (p. 16). Although Moody’s (2005) call for transcendence in old age is less bleak, it is also grounded in spirituality. Sensitive to the problems of class cited above, he suggests we be inspired by elders who

age successfully despite chronic illness, through conscious aging, citing generativity and wisdom. In a strong indictment of the medicalized view, Cruikshank (2003) resists giving elders new tasks and responsibilities, instead urging “resistance to white, middle-class male bias in gerontology, to ageist stereotypes, to prescribed business, and to scapegoating the old for population aging” (p. 204).

Productive aging explicitly ties success to *productivity*, reflecting Weber’s explication of the Protestant ethic, whereby one’s worth is measured by one’s material success (Taylor and Bengtson 2001) in a Western celebration of “economic productivity and independence” (Angus and Reeve 2006, p. 138). Productive aging “solves the ‘problem’ of aging by capitulation to the dominant values that contributed to the problem in the first place” and directs elders to “find personal value through becoming a pool of surplus labor” (Estes et al 2003, p. 71). This effectively pathologizes those elders who cannot be, or choose not to be, productive; “The opposite of the term *productivity*” implies “unproductivity” or “laziness,” which in our capitalist society means “failure” (Taylor and Bengtson 2001, p. 138). Even in the midst of criticizing this reductionist approach for its economic focus and “myopic view,” as exemplified by the dependency ratio, Angus and Reeve (2006) point to other contributions made by elders, as do many others. It seems it is almost impossible to get past a perceived need to justify the existence of elders by pointing to their continued contributions to society.

Of course the values that underpin the successful/productive aging framework are not universal. In fact, it seems that elders themselves do not fully buy into gerontological definitions of successful aging (Richardson et al 2011), apparently valuing satisfaction, adjustment, being at peace, and the like more highly than meeting impossible health goals, even defining frailty as “the very essence of old age” and defining success in terms of dealing with such inevitabilities. It seems we would be well advised to listen to our elders, themselves, if we hope to achieve understanding of the experience of growing old.

## ***Measurement***

Efforts to control healthcare costs coupled with calls for successful/productive aging led to development of measures to document successful aging (Neugarten et al. 1961). Quality of life measures were established based on health status and health utility indices that aimed not only to capture subjective health assessments but also to assign economic values to health states that could be used for cost-effectiveness analyses. While originally designed to better understand how quality of life factors (e.g., social well-being) impact people, these measures began to focus on health-related quality of life. Specifically, HRQOL measures are designed to understand subjective health assessments and provide economic insight into healthcare interventions. They also provided a mechanism to measure successful aging. Indeed, Moody (2001) notes that it is nearly impossible to isolate successful aging, quality of life, and life satisfaction, while Neugarten and colleagues (1961) note that successful aging is typically operationalized by the administration of life satisfaction

instruments. In practice, the already problematic measure of quality of life quickly morphed into health-related quality of life (HRQOL).

Successful/productive aging is fraught with theoretical problems that, in turn, plague its measurement as well. Like aging and, indeed, life itself, quality of life is, by nature, multidimensional. Moreover, we have limited understanding of how individuals rate their own health and value health in the future, so it is difficult to determine exactly how quality of life should be conceptualized and measured across populations and individuals (Aaronson 1988; Fryback 2010). If even holistic measures of quality of life fail to tap into meaning (Hughes 2006; Martinez et al. 2006), one can only imagine the dimensions ignored by HRQOL approaches. To further complicate matters, because elders suffer multiple chronic conditions, understanding them requires an understanding of how they experience chronic illnesses. Despite conceptualization and measurement concerns and the lack of a coherent theoretical framework, however, the use of quality of life measures is widespread (Aaronson 1988; Fryback 2010; Halvorsrud and Kalfoss 2007). Such research is used to inform health policy.

### **Conceptualization and Measurement**

Blalock (1982), in his seminal work “Conceptualization and Measurement in the Social Sciences,” notes that proper conceptualization of constructs is integral to developing appropriate measures. Such conceptualization is sorely lacking in this field. Aaronson (1988) explains that HRQOL measures have not been conceptualized in a consistent manner and, thus far, there remains no clear consensus as to what comprises quality of life. Context and interpretation shape how individuals experience the social world (Blumer 1969). This interpretive process colors all human thought, behaviors, and meanings. When HRQOL measures are examined in light of how individuals create meanings and assess quality of life, it is evident that problems of conceptualization extend well beyond a missing dimension or two.

Examining the development of these instruments sheds light on concerns surrounding their conceptualization. Health-related quality of life instruments arose from two primary concerns: recognition that clinical health estimation requires a better understanding of subjective health assessments and well-being and the pressing need to evaluate health interventions, not only for treatment effectiveness but also from an economic standpoint to improve efficiency in healthcare service delivery (Khanna and Tsevat 2007; AHRQ 2005). Consequently, and consistent with the successful/productive aging framework, two types of health-related quality of life measures were developed across disciplines: health status measures that supplement clinical health assessments and health utility measures that are used primarily for economic analyses. Both types of measures have been criticized for not encompassing all facets of quality of life (Aaronson 1988; Fryback 2010).

Recent research suggests that people’s assessments of their own health and quality of life are inconsistent (Allison et al. 1997; Sprangers and Scharwatz 1999). Response shift, the idea that people shift their internal standard when encountering adverse health events, is particularly problematic for health-utility-based HRQOL

instruments since these instruments are based on population preferences of health states (Sprangers and Scharwatz 1999). Population preferences of health states are developed by understanding how the public values different health states through various methods (e.g., time to trade-off, standard gambling) (Gudux et al. 1997). These population preferences are then used to compare, assess, and value health states of specific populations for research and policy purposes. Brower and Van Exel (2005) note that this may help in understanding differences between individuals' subjective assessment of quality of life and the objective measures of life expectancy.

Health-utility-based HRQOL instruments are particularly problematic because they involve value judgments of the future and are typically based on population preferences for health states; however, there is little consensus on the appropriate methods to understand how people value health (Gudux et al. 1997; Sherbourne et al. 1999). Two of the more common methodologies used for these types of instruments are the time-to-trade-off and standard gambling approaches. Time to trade-off involves estimation of the economic values of health states based on life years people would relinquish in exchange for perfect health. For instance, participants are asked to envision the next 10 years of their life. They are told that they can either choose to live a shorter time span but in perfect health (thus, trading off time for health) or they can choose to live the entire 10 years but in their current health state. Participants are then asked to indicate the number of life years they would be willing to trade for perfect health. Standard gambling approaches, first developed by von Neumann and Morgenstern (1953), involve asking participants to assess the greatest amount of risk they are willing to take on a treatment for perfect health. For example, under the standard gambling method, participants are presented choices in health trajectories, including (1) a health state that is expected and (2) a health state that is considered to be a gamble that will result in either a better health state or a worsened health state. They are then asked to indicate the probability they would be willing to gamble on the better health state. The standard gambling approach is based upon standard economic theory, relying specifically on expected utility theory and rational behavior (Tolley 2009).

While Sherbourne and colleagues (1999) note that the standard gambling approach is considered theoretically appropriate, it is not used often because it is too difficult to explain to research participants. There are a number of other concerns with this method as well. The most prominent critique rests upon the idea that people are not always rational actors (Etzioni 1988), and more practical concerns center around how people experience health states and the inability of standard gambling methods to parse out valuation of health state from time spent within the health state (Gafni 1994). A study by Dolan (2011) finds that people have poor grasp of how to value future adverse health events, which is also concerning. Most health-utility-based HRQOL instruments assign values to different health states depending upon preferences for health states. For example, a value of 1 indicates perfect health and is thus valued much higher than a value of 0 that represents the worse possible health condition. Ultimately, the goal of health-utility HRQOL instruments is not only to understand subjective health status but primarily to examine the differences in quality of life across health conditions. Scores are used to estimate quality-adjusted life years (Sherbourne et al. 1999). Quality-adjusted life years are then assigned

economic values and are used for economic cost analyses. Thus, through measurement successful aging is neatly reduced to, and reified as, quantifiable health states and economic value.

### **Applications of HRQOL Instruments Among the Elderly**

Conceptualization and measurement issues for getting at quality of life are particularly problematic for the elderly population, due to limited understanding of how aging affects assessments of quality of life (Molzahn et al. 2011). The problems go beyond the complexity flowing from multiple physical and health problems noted by Fry (2000), who suggests that to better enhance quality of life, we must first tackle problems related to conceptualization and measurement of quality of life and “with identifying the psychological, social and economic indicators that should be used to describe what levels of QOL are acceptable.” This raises the issue of determining a consensus on acceptable quality of life, specifically because quality of life measures were initially designed to incorporate ill persons’ perspectives on their own health and well-being. The salient question then becomes the following: Who determines the acceptable level of quality of life for elderly individuals? The lack of research on elders’ own perspectives suggests that most gerontologists are not especially interested in what they have to say.

Relatively few studies have examined health and wellness indicators that are important to the elderly population. Molzahn and colleagues (2011), using the health-status-based HRQOL instrument, find considerable differences across cultures, with elders in developed countries placing less importance on overall health and physical functioning than those in developing countries. They also find overlap between developed and developing countries indicating that happiness, energy levels, and domestic environment are particularly important and cut across cultures. Other studies examining how elders conceptualize and assess quality of life examine the different underlying methodologies upon which health-utility HRQOL instruments are based (e.g., time to trade-off). Sherbourne (1999) finds that older people are no more willing to trade off increasing number of years for perfect health than their younger counterparts. Findings also suggest that HRQOL measures such as the SF-12 do not adequately capture the differences in health preferences, leading the authors to suggest that the assumption that elders prefer quality of life to quantity of life is not based on solid evidence. Finally, Halvorsrud and Kalfoss (2007) conduct a comprehensive review of quality of life studies to determine suitability for aging populations. They find that most studies using HRQOL measures among the elderly lack conceptual frameworks, fail to incorporate evidence of validity, and generally do not examine methodological issues related to examining an elderly population. This is troubling because extant research documents the changes in health preferences of individuals over time and after encountering adverse health events (Allison et al. 1997; Dolan 2011; Sprangers and Scharwatz 1999).

The situation is further complicated as a result of the increasing medicalization of the aging process. Specifically, medicalization of diseases once considered to be

part of the normal aging process (e.g., dementia) has increased stigma and may contribute to how elders assess quality of life and view themselves (Larkin 2011). The medicalization of aging has perpetuated the notion that health conditions, diseases, and other physical changes associated with aging can and should be prevented or treated by relying on additional medical treatments (e.g., prescription drugs) and/or beauty products that claim to reverse the aging process (Larkin 2011).

### **Policy and Economic Implications**

The current Federal budgetary environment coupled with the widespread belief that healthcare costs have spiraled out of control has brought issues of cost containment to the forefront of health policy. The aging of the population is defined as a key concern, and efforts to contain healthcare costs focus around cost-effective interventions. Thus, HRQOL instruments are becoming increasingly popular because they can be used to determine cost-effective healthcare options and have direct implications for the allocation of what are defined as scarce economic resources. As noted by Sherbourne and colleagues (1999), limited resources result in competition for allocation of healthcare funds across older and younger populations. Increasingly, investment in younger populations is viewed to have a greater return (Eisenberg and Freed 2007) than dollars invested in older populations. To further complicate this matter is the recognition that an increasingly aging population will require a greater portion of the healthcare dollars as compared to their younger counterparts (Center for Health Workforce Studies 2006). All of this effectively distracts attention away from other uses to which the Federal budget is being put, uses that many might find less attractive than healthcare and support for people of any age.

Successful aging as understood and defined by elders is rarely studied and even less understood, suggesting that their views are not valued for policy purposes. Studies examining the importance that elders place on quality of life are limited, and further research is necessary (Molzahn et al. 2011) to better understand and guide policy makers into intervention areas if the goal of policy is to enhance later life. Further, the medicalization of aging has contributed to directing how elders view their own quality of life, experience increasing stigma, and consume ever more health and beauty services/products to prevent the aging process (Larkin 2011).

### **Conclusion**

The successful/productive aging framework is open to criticism from multiple perspectives. It is firmly grounded in an individualist ideology, pervaded with class, race, and gender biases. It promotes a goal achievable only by a small, privileged minority of persons and demands that they celebrate their success with continued productivity. Others, particularly the oppressed and marginalized, are pressured to take individual responsibility for their health, relieving society as a whole of collective responsibility

for each other. Should they be unable to do this, they are stigmatized as failures. Most critiques of this framework from this perspective focus on inequality in access to the resources needed to maintain health and productivity. A notable exception is the analysis by Dillaway and Byrnes (2009), which examines the early construction of this framework, including the political climate and the positions of its developers.

The atheoretical nature of this framework and its reductionist assumptions have also been questioned. In particular, the medicalization of old age and demands that elders justify their existence through productivity reflect the dominance of the healthcare industry in defining old age, capitalist demands, and Western culture. Kuhn (1978) and others point to the negative assumptions about aging that are taken for granted by gerontology as a whole, particularly the image of elders as dependent, underlying the successful/productive aging framework and more.

Finally, the confluence of issues surrounding successful/productive aging comes together in the measurement of successful aging, where the atheoretical nature of the construct as well as ideology and reductionism obviates appropriate conceptualization and measurement. Measurement of successful aging without addressing these issues only serves to further reduce the lives of elders to quantifiable values, the meanings of those lives to their cost to the Federal budget, and to reify the socially constructed problems associated with aging. This is especially dangerous in light of increasing reliance on these measures to guide health policy decisions.

### *Health, Life, Politics, and Policy: Why Frameworks Matter*

The failure to trace through successful/productive aging, from its scholarly base to professional application to popularization, using a social constructionist perspective (Putney et al. 2005) blinds promoters of this framework to the potentially oppressive consequences of their enthusiasm, as aging persons are encouraged and coerced into trying to follow lifestyles consistent with the perspective, regardless of their ability to do so. Remaining healthy and productive has become a mandate for all, though the theory reflects the potential experiences of only the privileged (Dillaway and Byrnes 2009). As these authors note, “the very ideologies and political value that encourage the creation of a successful aging discourse also may thrive on that discourse once it is created” (p. 713). This particular framework is especially significant for the image of aging it promotes and its importance for policy.

Regardless of the origins of the successful/productive aging framework, it continues to be a powerful construction. In addition to scholarly attention (see above), it garners political attention. Dillaway and Byrnes (2009) find continued reference to Butler’s and Rowe’s ideas in meetings of the Congressional Subcommittee on Aging and many testimonies by Butler, along with discussions of the MacArthur study, in connection with Medicare reform, long-term care, and Social Security.

One cannot talk of successful aging without asking the following: Successful aging for whom? Successful aging at whose cost? Since it promotes individual responsibility to age without illness and to remain productive, the new gerontology



plays into the growing political discourse that renders all dependency suspect. In the current political climate, the danger of “defining away” current entitlements, the very rights and benefits for which our grandfathers fought, on which many of today’s elders rely, is very real.

To the extent that the new gerontology extols elders’ success at keeping themselves healthy and productive, it defines their social worth in terms of their willingness and ability to live in accord with the ideological values of individualism and productivity. As seen above, the field does well in reaching the ears of decision makers, enough so to be cited as a good example of public sociology (Putney et al. 2005). The many publics of social gerontology—including elders themselves, service providers, policy makers, and more—do not necessarily share the same interests. Therein lies the rub. The health message to the public is that “to successfully age is the politically correct desire of all human beings. If it isn’t, then it should be!” (Ireland 1996, p. 306); it is up to you to avoid health problems and remain productive as you age. The message to policy makers seems to be that people can and should protect and manage their own health and avoid dependency, so perhaps they do not really need overly generous benefits. It is precisely social gerontology’s success in influencing practice and policy, combined with its enthusiasm for successful/productive aging, that might be putting at risk the very people it aims to help. Successful/productive elders must work more while receiving fewer benefits, regardless of their positions in structures of inequality (Estes and Mahakian 2001). This ignores human dignity and flies in the face of social justice dignity (see Jacobson 2006). Cruikshank (2003) suggests that rather than judging the success and productivity of elders, “we might grade Social Security or Medicare as unsuccessful or unproductive” (p. 204).

If successful aging is characterized solely in terms of good health and continued productivity, success for elders is defined differently than it is for those at other ages. Indeed, elders themselves are now qualitatively different from others. An underlying image of elders as sickly and dependent is implicit in the very naming of successful/productive aging. The end result is that elders are further marginalized. Cruikshank (2003) urges us to overcome mind/body dualism and find new ways to value old age, with more reliance on the humanities as a balance to biomedicine and social science. Woodward (2002) argues against the oft noted alternative of celebrating/seeking wisdom, in favor of anger. Wisdom, with its implied transcendence of the world, can be silencing, an enforcement of detached social roles. Anger, on the other hand, unacceptable for elders, “can be a sign of moral outrage at social injustice” (p. 206); it is an indictment, whether on our own behalf or that of others. Whitehouse (2005) goes further, calling for “just aging,” in part, by asking how we, in the United States, can promote successful aging for ourselves without attending to those around the globe whose lives are cut short before they have a chance to age, without considering the consequences for future generations of our use of natural resources, without questioning unsustainable global capitalism. The justice in Whitehouse’s “just aging” incorporates responsibility for ourselves and all other living beings, now and in the future, a responsibility that is almost violently absent from the public discourse in this election year. These authors highlight what many would see as crucial issues, neatly defined away by the dominance of the successful/productive



aging framework, a framework promoted by many working to enhance the lives of elders. Maggie Kuhn, who saw elders' struggles for justice as inherently linked to all struggles for justice, laid responsibility at the feet of gerontologists: "to the extent that gerontologists fail to challenge the system and its social controls, they become agents of social control for older people" (1978, p. 423).

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## Chapter 9

# Globalization, the Body, and the Corporate Model

Jung Min Choi and Venoosheh Khaksar

Most people understand globalization as a historical process where society continues its march toward technological advancement and universal progress. In short, globalization is thought to be a positive trend that is beyond human control. In a Durkheimian manner, society is evolving like a giant organism and growing more complex and efficient (Durkheim 1933). And with the rise in technological progress, which is also a hallmark of globalization, most believe that the world has become compressed and smaller. With technological gadgets like the new iPad, which was launched a few weeks ago, one can be connected to the rest of the world in minutes, if not seconds. All in the palm of your hands, you can download books and music of all sorts, check the weather in Istanbul, Turkey, take pictures and send them across the Pacific Ocean to share with relatives in South Korea instantaneously, and much more. Indeed, modern-day globalization is quite different than the previous eras where people had to take treacherous journeys on ships through rough waters of the great oceans to meet other cultures and peoples. Exchange of ideas, customs, foods, and languages can happen all in the comforts of one's own room.

To be sure, what is unique about today's globalization is not only the speed at which people and places can be connected but the homogenized worldview of globalization as reflecting the natural progression of human history. Writers like Francis Fukuyama and Thomas Friedman have been giant proponents of globalization and how it has shaped the world (Fukuyama 1992; Friedman 2005). In this sense, people like Friedman are suggesting that personal and social developments should become attuned closely to the process of this global movement. And due to the centrality of the market ethics that underpins globalization, neoliberals are pushing for "one size fits all" moral absolutes to the rest of the world. These moral absolutes, which increasingly guide a wider range of human decision-making, are otherwise known as the "total market" (Serrano Caldera 2004).

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This chapter examines the manner in which the symbolism associated with the market shapes the disciplining of the aging body. As Katz (2010, p. 357) points out, all inquiry in gerontology starts with the body, in both its physical and social characteristics. Despite the relevance of the aging body in gerontology, it is acknowledged that the relationship between ageist discourse and describing the meanings of physical difference in aging is complicated (Katz 2010, p. 357; Woodward 1991, p. 19). To a great extent, this is because meanings associated with the aging body are woven within the larger sociopolitical context. Thus, it is important to unravel how certain positive and negative descriptions of the aging body gain legitimacy from social discourses—namely, the global marketplace. This chapter examines the social construction of the aging body within the global era, with special attention paid to the disciplining power of market symbolism for homogenizing images of the aging body.

## **The Basic Tenets of Globalization: The Total Market**

A host of recent writers such as Noam Chomsky (1999), Murphy and Callaghan (2011), Naomi Klein (2007), and David Harvey (2005) have written on neoliberalism and the laws of free trade. While focusing on and highlighting different aspects of neoliberalism, each writer is united by the belief that neoliberalism is an ideology that sustains and legitimizes modern-day capitalism and its dominance around the world. In particular, they all contend that the market has been granted a *sui generis* position in society. Given this scenario, the market requires no justification other than its own logic of free trade.

Riding the coat tails of classical liberalism and utilitarian ethics, neoliberalism assumes that every act and everything can be evaluated and judged properly by the supply and demand rules of the market. Neoliberals contend that all actions are based on the principle of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. In this sense, maximizing pleasure/minimizing pain is translated to mean accumulation of material goods at the lowest cost. Therefore, any commodity, including human labor, is traded at the market through competitive measures. Just as a commodity will be sold to the highest bidder, so will human potential and labor. Thus, in this era of globalization that is supported by neoliberalism, human beings are seen as commodities to be traded publicly based on the market demands. Even jobs are considered to be a part of the market process whereby a growing field with high demands will yield multiple job opportunities whereas a field on the decline will cut employment. This situation is thought to be natural and reflects the ebb and flow of the market, rather than certain decisions made by those in control of capital. Indeed, competition runs rampant in a neoliberal world of market trading. Other people, in short, become the biggest obstacles in pursuing one's interest and happiness.

Nevertheless, neoliberals claim that the free market system is the best way to ensure creativity and innovativeness through competitive individualism. As argued quite some time ago by Karl Popper, any attempt to constrain the free market system

is an attack on open society and democracy (Popper 1952). Ironically, in the midst of talking about creativity and the freedom to choose from the sea of different commodities at the market, proponents of neoliberalism agree that the market necessarily runs on a universal set of standards and precepts. Although each individual is viewed as being unique at the market, each must succumb to the rules of the market that is already standardized to ensure efficiency.<sup>1</sup>

Freedom of choice, often cited by neoliberals, has nothing to do with the philosophical concept of being able to reach full human potential or self-actualization; instead, freedom in a neoliberal world reflects the freedom to consume and buy whatever one desires. Actually, this is not even true. In a globalized world where there is an overproduction of commodities, most people around the world are not able to afford basic subsistence, let alone high-tech gadgets like iPhones and iPads. Almost half the people on the planet live on less than two dollars a day and far more live under three dollars a day (Davis 2006). Furthermore, freedom is linked directly to the ability of someone to exploit other human beings and all the natural resources that the earth has to offer. To be sure, the fallout from this type of social organization where a “dog eat dog” mentality reigns supreme is that the general welfare of human beings is hardly discussed and presumed to be an anathema to the natural order of things. Basic human needs, such as clean water and air, healthy food, decent shelter, and healthcare, are all privatized and sold piecemeal to those who have the purchasing power. To this end, neoliberalism truly reflects the “survivor of the fittest” model of society where the rich continue on and the poor must perish.

## Western Images of the Body

The sociology of the body has been a growing subfield (Katz 2010). In particular, the body has been a site to investigate and critique larger social structures, such as consumer culture, medicalization, and gender performance, to name a few. As will be discussed, the aging body also plays an essential symbolic role in globalization. As Twigg (2006) points out, the body is a resource for the reproduction of larger social narratives about the nature of the life span. In this case, the body represents a physical marker that defines the current antiaging culture, since it is “the bodily appearance of the old person that places them in the category of old” (2006, p. 45). Much can be learned about the social construction of the aging body today by examining the way in which Western philosophy has understood the nature of the body historically.

Within the Western tradition, the body has been objectified in various ways. From a secular perspective, Rene Descartes ushered in the split between the mind and body, where the mind is definitely given the a priori seigniorial status to observe the natural functions of the body.<sup>2</sup> In religious doctrines, the embodiment of God had to be stored in a physical body. Taking off from this position, the body, throughout the 1600 and 1700s, was the focus of numerous attacks. It was seen as the site of immorality, site of unseemly desires, site of barbarism, and the site of ungodliness.

In order to enter the kingdom of heaven, the human being had to shed all the characteristics associated with the body, especially physical pleasures. Michel Foucault delineates succinctly, in the beginning section of *Discipline and Punish*, the type of assault that was allowed on the body. In describing the torture of Damians the regicide, Foucault notes:

...he was to be taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds...[his] flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand...burnt with sulphur, and, those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, was and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses... and when that did not suffice, they were forced in order to cut off the wretch's things, to sever the sinews and hack at the joints...(Foucault 1995, p. 3)

Indeed, the body needed to be punished and cleansed of the impurities associated with it.

With the rise of classical liberalism around the early 1800s, however, the body took on a different symbol. Rather than a place for extreme physical assault, the body took on a utilitarian outlook. The idea was that human beings operated under the pleasure/pain principle and the body was not immune to this trend. Thus, the body would engage in any activity where the pleasure outweighed any pain associated with it. And if this activity transgressed the morality of a society or individual, the body would be administered just a bit more pain (through various punishments, such as jail time, public ridicule, restitution, and so on) than pleasure. The idea was that if human beings naturally acted in a utilitarian manner, harsh punishment was not necessary to curb their desires. The only thing necessary was to make sure the punishment (pain) outweighed the pleasure (Williams and McShane 2010).

Soon after the 1800s, the biological school of thought became the dominant paradigm in society. And once again, the understanding of the body went through another transformation. The body began to be understood almost entirely on physiological terms. No longer was the body understood as the source of evil or utility; instead, the body was looked at as a biological organism that progressed through the "life course" (Longino and Powell 1995). In this view, the body is a site for aging. This marks an important point in the history of understanding the body, for it becomes linked with the idea of time. Thus, in a scientific manner, the body then becomes demarcated into temporal sections from birth to death where the body is thought to decline and become diseased toward the end of the life cycle.

The interesting aspect of understanding the body in this manner is that it does not address the ethical issues related to the body. Instead, the body is seen as primarily an object that is made up of a "conglomerate of tissues" (1995). Thus, if the body is looked at solely as a biological entity, then it becomes quite easy to homogenize. Since the body resembles a physical unit with various parts, the body becomes a site for alteration and transformation and is open to an exchange of parts to run efficiently and smoothly.

Ironically, the body, that which was so central to Emmanuel Levinas in discussing ethics, has been transformed in the modern era to emulate a giant machinery that has replaceable parts. What is significant about this scenario? In the age



of globalization, once the body becomes identified solely as an objective entity, it is easily turned into a commodity that can be traded at the market. Who or better yet what kind of body becomes marketable in the age of globalization? Bodies that most closely resemble the desires of the corporations and the owners of the means of production are valued. Key characteristics of this “corporate body” include the following: (1) passivity, (2) assimilation, and (3) desperation.

## **Producing the Homogenized Body in the Age of Globalization**

First of all, the new person in the global era must be passive. With all due respect to Ivan Illich, persons must become passive consumers in a globalized world in order to fit into the existing consumer culture (Illich 1971). Being a passive consumer means to support and reproduce the existing social order in an uncritical manner. Similar to the students mentioned by Paulo Freire, citizens of the global era have been socialized through the banking method by the dominant agents of socialization (Freire 2009). Schooling, mass media, and the government have all been involved in creating a social imagery based on the market demands. Therefore, people have been encouraged to be passive and discouraged from being active participants in questioning the market-based model of society.

The body needs to be pliable and easily assimilable. In a global world where transnational corporations dominate the financial landscape, citizens have little option in determining the type of employment they can secure. All they can do is send out their resumes and hope that their educational degree and skill set (usually computer/technology related) match the desires of the corporations. This situation is especially unfortunate because the idea of assimilation is quite nasty. As many scholars in the race-relations field have noted, assimilation requires persons to reject their identity or traits and accept their “inferiority” (Murphy and Choi 1997). Indeed, the assimilation perspective is problematic because this outlook is built on shaky foundations. Particularly troublesome is that the asymmetrical power relationship present in the “globalized world” is never recognized. The general population is expected to be docile and adjust so that they can work toward the “common good,” even at the cost of self-denial. Assumed is that conformity to the demands of the market will bring about social harmony. Rejecting assimilation and celebrating difference are clearly anathema to this project.

But, as mentioned previously, assimilation is hardly an innocuous activity. A major shortcoming of assimilation is that this process is rooted in essentialism. Assimilation in the context of globalization is predicated on essential reasoning where the universal laws of the market are given an a priori status as being natural and superior. Consequently, a natural hierarchy is formed where those who are thought to possess superior genes or cultures dominate society. In this sense, assimilation is closely akin to social Darwinism. A particular ontology is fostered where a vertical hierarchy is formed that limits participation in the polity by the majority.



Instead, all the social and economic policies are made by the power elite who support neoliberal globalization.

In any case, neoliberals argue that those who have abandoned their idiosyncrasies and adopted market-based ethics have found inclusion in the global market, whereas those who refuse to accept the neutrality of the market continue to toil on the periphery and remain excluded from important positions. This result is not intentional, neoliberals argue, but simply inevitable.

And finally, those in power manipulate the market where a majority of people are desperate to have a decent employment opportunity. By having a large pool of “reserved army of labor,” as Karl Marx noted, those who own multinational corporations are able to reap huge profit by cutting down on wages. And because globalization is a worldwide phenomenon, capitalists are able to employ cheap labor from Third World countries to make products and sell them to the consumers in the First World. Through various trade agreements such as GATT and NAFTA, the corporate owners have been able to secure the free flow of currency throughout the world by exploiting human labor and natural resources. As Gustavo Gutierrez points out, it is easy to manipulate and exploit someone when they are poor, uneducated, and hungry (Brown 1990). Indeed, by making the human body into an objective thing, the transnational capitalists have been able to appropriate the body symbolically to sell products, images, and ideals.

According to Jean Kilbourne, the noted author on images of beauty in advertising, the human body has become the locus of manipulation by the media to represent a seductive object of desire. According to Kilbourne, the body in the modern world is turned into objects of desire that can be consumed on a daily basis. In fact, consumers in the USA are bombarded with over 2,000 images of the body as an objectified “thing” (Kilbourne 2010). Most important, in a globalized world, the body is manipulated in a standardized way to sell products, images, and ideals through selling the concept of “normalcy” (Kilbourne 1999). The goal, for the advertisers, is to link normalcy with the product of their choice and convince the consumers that their innate desires happen to match the products sold in the stores. The body, then, becomes the site of battle where various corporate giants wage their war to win over a customer. Indeed, contrary to popular belief, the market does not allow for much freedom for the human body to express itself. The body becomes trapped in a narrow and limited tunnel of homogenization created by globalization that is based on efficiency, standardization, and predictability. In this way, the market is sure to guarantee the highest profit margin for the investors.

## **Beyond Ageist Narratives and Resistance to the Total Market**

So, given the dismal scenario discussed thus far, is the aging body relegated to remain only as an objectified “thing” to be manipulated, exploited, and exchanged at the market? The answer is no! But in order to escape from this situation where the body

is subjugated and de-animated, we need to reject the market driven ethics that define the body as simply a “thing” to be used purely as exchange value. To be sure, neoliberal ethics is quite seductive and powerful, “[as people] are influenced greatly by the images of comfort, convenience, machismo, femininity, violence, and sexual stimulation that bombard consumers. These seductive images contribute to the predominance of the market-inspired way of life over all other and thereby edge out nonmarket values—love, care, service to others” (West 1993, p. 17). Indeed, as West mentions, in order to stem the tide of neoliberalism and globalization, the body must be redefined. The body, although containing the biological components such as the organs, tissues, blood, and bile, is much more than simply a deanimated “housing unit” that holds together these parts. The aging body is not simply a biological organism that goes through a “life course” that ends in demise. It is much more than that. It is a place where ideas are created, love is felt, and action is engaged. Rather than a deanimated “thing,” the body is a place of dynamic encounters. The body must be understood as a resourceful site for the construction of definitions and meanings about aging.

Imagining an ethical aging body suggests that discourses associated with the total market should not be allowed to monopolize the way in which aging is characterized. Specifically, defining aging simply as a site for production and consumption narrows the possible meanings that the aging body can have within the global market. In this sense, Emmanuel Levinas states clearly that the human body must be “better than being” if ageist narratives are to be avoided society (Levinas 1985, p.10). The aging body must go beyond the “is” of the current neoliberal framework. The body must be the site where humans meet to define and give meaning to their lives, without a market intermediary. Rather than synthesizing the human body into a totality as a “thing” to be manipulated and given value at the market, Levinas states that the body is without telos (1985). It does not have a fixed pattern of beginning and an end. Instead, the body escapes “universal identity” (Lyotard 1984, p. 34).

In this manner, the body begins to take on a new imagery—one that escapes the image associated with the global market. If the body no longer reflects a universal identity, the market loses legitimacy in employing the *homo economicus* image of the human being (Patel, 2009).

If the body reflects multidimensional layers of human interaction, the market no longer can rely on the predictability of the body and thus loses efficiency. This is exactly what Lyotard has in mind when he states that when a body lives on the boundaries of interpretation, it “refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable” (Lyotard 1984, p. xxv). This type of society “is absolutely opposed to the [market-based] organization...that characterizes modernity in the West” (p. 33). Indeed, as Derrida is fond of saying, “there is no ethics without the presence of the [body].” (Derrida, 1976, p. 139). In sum, once the body is viewed as a decentered subject that is multifaceted, it begins to defy fixation that is necessary for neoliberal globalization. In this sense, the body must continue to resist any form of absolute principles—whether in the form of human nature or

the law of the market—so that it may reflect a true picture of human existence. As Stanley Fish writes:

...if the true picture of the human situation is... a picture of men and women whose acts are socially constituted and who are embedded in a world no more stable than the historical and conventional forms of thought that being it into being—if this is the correct picture of the human situation, then surely we can extrapolate from this picture a better set of methods for operating in the world we are constantly making and remaking, a better set of rationales and procedures for making judgments, and a better set of solutions to the problems that face us as [ethical beings]. (Fish 1989, p. 346)

## Notes

1. Standardization of norms is not novel or unique to neoliberalism and globalization. Throughout the Western tradition, from Plato to Hobbes to Locke and Durkheim, there was a search for an ontologically autonomous norm to guide social life. Each of the above theorists believed that in the absence of such a universal norm, society would erupt into utter chaos. For Plato, ideal forms served as the guide to save society; for Hobbes, the state served this purpose; for Locke, the public will was thought to protect against chaos; and for Durkheim, reality *sui generis* was key in protecting social order. In today's society, the market is viewed as the guiding principle in making any rational decisions about one's life and the future.
2. Descartes believed that our mind was imbued directly by God as a perfect entity but needed a storage place in this worldly realm, which was the body (see Descartes, Rene. "Meditations on the First Philosophy" in *Discourse on Method and Other Writings*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970).

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# Chapter 10

## Globalization, Technology, and Human Development

David L. Reznik

### Introduction: Arrested Development

There are two recent films that capture the essence of how globalization and technology have impacted human development: Andrew Stanton's *Wall-E* (2008) and Jennifer Baichwal's *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006). These works of cinema are quite distinct in their genre, approach, and intended audience: The former is an animated Hollywood blockbuster about robot romance in a dystopian future, while the latter is an "indie" documentary about a Canadian photographer shooting landscapes of the locations most heavily hit by the forces of globalization. And yet, both offer similarly incisive critiques of the developmental cost brought about by the globalized and increasingly technocratic systems of production and consumption in contemporary society.

In *Wall-E*, the surviving members of the human race, who have fled an uninhabitable Earth due to pollution and waste, live aboard a totally automated spaceship (owned/operated by an intergalactic corporate monopoly named "Buy 'N' Large") that caters to their every need. They move around while seated on flying lazy-boy chairs, drink smoothies to meet all of their nutritional requirements, and communicate only via computerized touch screens that rest a few inches from their face. As a result, these "humans" appear almost alien-like; their bodies are shaped like bowling balls as physical lethargy has withered their muscular structures, their social interactions lack any depth or intimacy, and their faces are perpetually adorned with narcotized grins of ignorant bliss. Indeed, in this sci-fi vision of the future, human adults seem to have been transformed into obese and narcissistic infants, an obvious reference to the seemingly boundless consumer appetites in the global "North" today.

No less harrowing is *Manufactured Landscapes*, which brings into striking focus some of the worst social ills of globalization. The film features a variety of panoramic

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images that highlight the monstrous scale and scope of today's international political economy, from the opening 10-min tracking shot of seemingly endless rows of workers in a Chinese electronics factory to surreal landscapes of mountainous trash heaps of disposed computer motherboards (ironically located in China as well). Equally disturbing is the visual imagery of how unfulfilling human lives have become within this new world order; scenes underscoring the grotesquely stunted contemporary human condition include authoritarian supervisors delivering paternalistic lectures to the electronics factory workers, females of all ages forced to rummage through the electronics trash heaps in search of metals they can sell, villagers demolishing their own houses to make way for the Three Gorges Dam, and Bangladeshi males young and old knee-high in raw petroleum taking apart massive oil tankers that have been resigned from service. In short, the lives of humans in the "developing" world featured in *Manufactured Landscapes* appear just as underdeveloped as those of the infantile "First World" consumers in *Wall-E*.

When synthesized, these two films pose a number of challenging questions for critical reflection: What is the nature of humanity's relationship with technology today? In what ways does globalization influence this relationship? Are we empowered or disempowered by our seemingly growing reliance on technology? And, finally, how does technology in a globalized world affect human development? Inspired by these questions, this chapter will examine the intersections between globalization, technology, and human development.

Specifically, this chapter addresses why human development appears to be arrested amidst the supposedly limitless potentialities that globalization and technology promise to deliver. In the first section of this chapter, the major philosophical tenets of globalization will be outlined with attention paid to how these principles are manifested in the creation of particular forms of technology as well as the promotion of a technological fetishism in society. These symbolic issues will then be discussed in relation to human development using both theoretical arguments from the Frankfurt School and psychoanalysis as well as empirical results from a research project on medical globalization in Trinidad. Finally, this chapter will conclude with some suggestions for holistic human development that are both philosophically reflexive and pragmatically feasible within the current sociohistorical conjuncture.

## **The Globalization Paradigm and Technological Fetishism**

Technology is arguably the most instructive symbol for analyzing globalization or any historical process for that matter since "technology reveals the active relation of [humanity] to nature, the direct process of the production of [human] life, and thereby it also lays bare the process of the production of the social relations of [human] life, and of the mental conceptions that flow from those relations" (Marx 1990, p. 493). In other words, technology emerges from and reflects all of the other dynamics comprising the "social totality" of a given historical epoch, including the modes of material production, ecological relations, and philosophical ideals. This section dissects these

three substrates of globalization, the current historical epoch, in order to contextualize and understand the role of technology in contemporary society.

From the perspective of political economy, globalization can be understood rather simply as the transnationalization of the class conflict between capital and labor. There is significant scholarship on the inner workings of this new “global capitalism,” with a general consensus that technology has been a handmaiden to the development of new means of capital accumulation across nation-state borders. As one important political economist of globalization points out, “new patterns of accumulation opened up by globalizing technologies both require and make possible economies of scale that are truly global and require a more generalized commodification of the world economy” (Robinson 2004, p. 9).

Specifically, the intensified competition engendered by this new global capitalism has stimulated development of “third wave” technologies that “maximize profits by reducing labor and other ‘factor’ costs” (Robinson 2004, p. 21). Examples include, but are not limited to, information technologies like Internet-based communication, transportation technologies like containerization, and other forms of automation like computer-aided manufacture. The result of such innovation has, not surprisingly, been the replacement and/or demotion of hundreds of millions of workers around the world, as made visible by the crises of unemployment and underemployment that currently plague every nation-state across the globe.

Moving on to the subject of the environment, globalization has been characterized by a ruthless expansion of natural resource extraction/usurpation and pollution/waste production, all undergirded by the aforementioned unsustainable model of consumption that has emerged not only in the global “North” but among the middle and upper classes worldwide (Foster et al. 2010). There are theorists of “postindustrialism,” however, who have argued that the rise of “third wave” technologies signifies “a transition from energy-intensive to information-intensive technical systems [and] a new weightless economy” (el-Ojeili and Hayden 2006, p. 31). Such imagery of a more healthy relationship between humanity and nature catalyzed by globalization belies the reality that the explosion of “third wave” technologies actually requires an even greater pillaging of scarce mineral deposits (mainly found in the global “South”) as well as other manufacturing practices that are in many ways more threatening to the world’s environment than the coal mines and plundering of “black gold” during modern industrialization (Foster et al. 2010).

Another symbolic connection between globalization, the environment, and technology is the pursuit of “green” technologies in the hopes of engineering humanity away from the brink of total ecological collapse. These include carbon sequestration and enhanced sunlight reflection schemes, the side effects of which are still completely unknown and whose development may in fact be far more costly resource-wise than the environmental gains they would produce (Magdoff and Foster 2011). In short, rather than addressing the root cause of the problem, global capital’s relentless expansionist imperative promotes the research and development of more technology as the solution to the problem of globalization’s unsustainable demands on the environment.

While political economy and ecological issues are crucial for understanding globalization and its relation to technology, it is important to pay especially close



attention to the mental conceptions that comprise globalization as a philosophical system. In particular, the symbolism and social imagery of globalization espoused by a number of important scholars seem to inform a particular worldview about technology. This “globalization paradigm” has four fundamental principles, each of which factor significantly in the fetishization of technology that one finds in today’s global social totality.

The globalization paradigm’s first principle is a conception of history commensurate with Hegel’s universal spirit. That is, the passage of time is presented as a series of gradual, imperceptible changes guided metaphysically, or above and outside the human. Like Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis (1993) and social Darwinists’ theories of human natural selection, history is considered an evolutionary path of linear progress, with globalization as the greatest (and perhaps ultimate) stage of development.

Several key globalization theorists use this idea of history-as-abstraction. Robertson (1992) characterizes globalization as humanity’s step from traditional modernity into late-modernity. Borrowing from Tönnies, he calls this the move from *Gemeinschaft* (“community”) to *Gesellschaft* (“society”). For him, globalization has a general autonomy and logic that operates independent of societal action. Likewise, Applbaum (2000) argues that globalization has become a “social fact,” a term emerging from the Durkheimian school of sociology. According to Emile Durkheim (1972), social facts are ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that exist outside the individual consciousness. They impose themselves on the individual with an imperative and coercive power. Therefore, as a social fact, globalization is simply a historical epoch that is *sui generis*, the metaphysical realm existing above and outside the individual consciousness. Beck (2000) views globalization as creating a compacted world with a singular temporal axis, again giving globalization properties that transcend differing human conceptions of time. Even Urry’s (2003) idea of “global complexity” suggests that globalization is irreversible. He argues that globalization progresses through “multiple times” (11), including time as dictated by digital technologies. However, he does not suggest how humans can transcend the limitations of their consciousness to access these temporal universes. Therefore, time and consequently history are, at least in part, controlled by factors outside the human realm.

Concomitant with an abstracted ideology of history is the idea that the world has now developed into a “Total Market” (Hinkelammert 2002), the second principle of the globalization paradigm. This neoliberal economic theory attempts to transform all social reality into a commoditized market exchange. As Marx once feared, all social relations are thought to have been reduced to their exchange-value on the commodity market, leaving no room for praxis (Marx 1964). Because the future is considered to be out-of-the-hands of the people and the only certainty is thought to be uncertainty, globalization converts the world into a type of casino where technocratic credentials and adaptation to technical standards are the primary currency (Murphy and Callaghan 2004).

Robertson’s (1992) description of globalization embodies this neoliberal orientation. He claims globalization has produced the “solution” to the classic philosophical debate between materialism and idealism: As he puts it, “economic culture,” or “the idea, values, symbols, and so on, which are more or less directly available for and implicated in economic action” (45) now dominates most societies. He goes on to describe the

world as a “contemporary market” of “universal-global economic practices” whereby all production is tailored to increasingly specialized tastes, a concept he calls “micromarketing” (100, 173). In short, Robertson believes that the marketplace is the centerpiece of the globalized world.

Others have joined Robertson in privileging market imagery for describing the new world of globalization. Some describe contemporary life as dictated by a “managerial capitalist order,” guided by “a universal rationality” replete with “consumers, markets, and competitors” (Applbaum 2000, p. 259). Others argue for “the metaphysics of the market,” a world of economic action independent of culture, characterized by “foot-loose capital” on a race to catch-up to “markets of the future” (Beck 2000, pp. 4, 118, 139, 144). In this regard, others prescribe the necessary path to success in the “Total Market”: “Individual citizens must be empowered with cultural and educational capital to meet the challenges of increased...competition and the greater mobility of industrial and financial capital” (Held and McGrew 2002, p. 93). Given such imagery, technology becomes an end in and of itself and can be misinterpreted as developing in accordance to consumer needs (i.e., market demand) rather than having any alienating/oppressive qualities or connection to the political economy of transnational capital.

The third fundamental principle of the globalization paradigm is the atomistic, self-contained individual. Because the world is thought to be simply a marketplace, individuals are understood to engage in interactions based solely on market logic. Specifically important is that this logic views human nature as inherently self-interested, and therefore interactions are mediated by the “cash-nexus.” Other facets of culture and social identities, accordingly, are secondary to the primary image of the individual-as-competitor. In his schematic diagram of “the global field”—his model of the new globalized social reality—Robertson (1992) divorces the self from humankind and society, characterizing the new “global-human condition” as one where the individual is isolatable. Similarly, Applbaum (2000) describes the new individualist “global lifestyle” (265) as one dictated by the market morality that “self-actualization can only be achieved through consumption” (269). Held and McGrew (2002, p. 101) argue that, in the end, the “consumerist ideology” has displaced traditional cultures and other forms of social life, while Beck (2000, p. 9) describes the fading away of a “social-moral milieu” replaced by a “cosmopolitan republicanism” that is based on individualist freedoms.

Inextricably intertwined with this third principle of atomistic individualism is the last principle of the globalization paradigm: the “centered” imagery of society (Luhmann 1982). Since self-centered behavior, thought to be the hallmark of globalized living, could easily regress into social chaos, personal initiative must be subordinated to a set of abstract social norms that control the individual. Robertson’s work features a square-like structure, with each corner representing a “component” of “the form in...which globalization has in the last few centuries actually proceeded” (1992, p. 27). Urry (2003) extends this systemic imagery by claiming the global to be “an astonishingly complex system, or rather a series of dynamic complex systems” (x). His idea of the global world as a “network” or “set of interconnected nodes (social positions)” (9) sounds strikingly similar to Talcott Parsons’ (1966) cybernetic understanding of society, which has been critiqued by contemporary social theorists as alienating and dehumanizing (Murphy

1989). Structural-functionalism, the basis for centered images of society, lies at the core of Urry's (2003, p. 9) invocation that "what is not in the network will be either ignored if it is not relevant to the network's task, or eliminated if it is competing in goals or in performance." Echoing Urry, Pieterse (1995, p. 50) envisions globalization to represent an "increase in the available modes of (structural) organization" and "a ladder of administrative levels...criss-crossed by functional networks."

The underlying idea emerging from these final two principles of the "globalization paradigm" is that technology, whether in the material form of gadgets or in symbolic form as geometric representations of society, is necessary in order to ensure the structural integrity of human interaction. The nominalist paranoia pervading the globalization paradigm creates conceptual space for the introduction of realist solutions to the supposed disorder that is thought to naturally exist in a savagely atomistic world, the most important of these solutions being "third wave" technologies; innovations in automation, communication, and transportation become essential to creating "communicative competency" in the world. In short, within the globalization paradigm, technology is the only way to mediate the selfishness of human nature and thus avoid the catastrophic "Hobbesian" dilemma of all-out conflict that is a constant threat to social order.

It is not surprising, then, given all of these principles of the globalization paradigm to find that technology has become "fetishized" in contemporary society. Borrowing from David Harvey, "third wave" technologies have been endowed with "self-contained, mysterious, and even magical powers to move and shape the world in distinctive ways...[including] the ability to solve social problems, to keep the economy vibrant, or to provide us with a superior life" (2003, p. 3). In other words, society has come to revere the technologies associated with globalization as absolutes, first principles, and foundations for social living without acknowledging the factors of political economy, ecological relations, and mental conceptions that influence and shape the creation of these technologies. Indeed, if history is autonomous and society requires a "Total Market" to "center" atomistic individuals, then technology appears to be enchanted alchemic savior of globalized society. In the next section, the implications of this technological fetishism on human development will be explored, with particular attention paid to the ways globalization seems to promote the social psychological underdevelopment of human lives.

## **Technological Fetishism and Human Underdevelopment: The Case of Medical Globalization in Urban Trinidad**

With regard to the impact of globalization and technology on human development, most of the literature to date has been firmly situated within the conceptual fields of aging and the life course. In fact, even those studies emerging from the perspective of "critical gerontology" tend to reify an abstracted notion of life as a linear developmental process of quantitative aging. In this section, however, human development

will be approached with a more truly critical lens by applying the insights of critical theory and psychoanalysis. Using the works of Freud and Frankfurt School scholars like Marcuse and Fromm as well as empirical examples from research on medical globalization in Trinidad, the everyday lived realities of globalization and technology will be analyzed to indicate their role in the social psychological underdevelopment of humanity today.

One conventional wisdom about globalization, technology, and human development is that innovative breakthroughs in the scale and scope of material production and consumption (including the creation and distribution of foodstuffs, health care/medical supplies, and energy resources) have increased life expectancy to unprecedented levels and this has in turn led to the demographic “crisis” of increasingly aging populations around the world (Nielson 2003). At the same time, the technological gains engendered by globalization are thought to be responsible for “a new period of life”: “emerging adulthood,” a life course stage connecting adolescence and adulthood that is characterized by “self-focused exploration of possibilities in love, work, and worldviews” (Arnett 2002, p. 781). Exemplifying the principles of the globalization paradigm, scholars posit that “the proportion of young people who experience the emerging adulthood now normative in the middle class is likely to increase as the middle class expands” (Arnett 2002, p. 781). In other words, globalization, here conceived as an autonomous historical force that represents the latest and greatest stage in human evolution, will spread “emerging adulthood” as a beneficent byproduct of the “economic development” inherent to the “Total Market.”

A more skeptical, but no less reified, understanding of human development is the popular notion that the technologies of globalization bring about drastically different fates for the “First” and “Third World.” Specifically, while the populations of the global “North” are thought to have the privilege of experiencing a “prolonged youth,” the swelling populations of children in the global “South” (the “youth bulge” supposedly responsible for everything from poverty to terrorism) are being “thrust” into “early adulthood” as unskilled laborers at the mercy of the ruthless demands of transnational capital, a social problem characterized as “lost childhood” (Ruddick 2003). Such narrative juxtaposition is equally rooted in “the standard trope of development” of the globalization paradigm, as poorer countries are imagined to be “somehow younger or less mature than their wealthier counterparts” (Nielson 2003, p. 164). And while the “Total Market” and its individualism are critiqued as responsible for “the increasingly privatized costs of social reproduction” (Ruddick 2003, p. 340), the claims of youth “exit[ing] more quickly into adulthood” imply the “centered” imagery of a universal life course timeline and thus remain firmly entrenched in the logic of the globalization paradigm.

Strangely enough, neither of these hegemonic discourses about globalization, technology, and human development addresses directly the issue of technological fetishism or the more symbolic side of aging, that is, social psychological development. Therefore, it is crucial here to examine both the theoretical and empirical manifestations of globalization and technological fetishism in the everyday lives of human beings worldwide. Recognizing the unevenness and stratification that global

capitalism engenders and without ignoring the quantitative data about demographic shifts in populations worldwide, there must be an attempt made to comprehend the experiential realm of human development and how globalization and technology impact it.

A fetish is a psychological defense mechanism that develops in response to “the pressing desire in the unconscious for some irreplaceable thing” (Freud 1997, p. 53). Hence, a fetish is an example of “neurosis” in the psychoanalytical sense since it “resolves itself into an endless series...for the very reason that the satisfaction longed for is in spite of all never found in any surrogate” (Freud 1997, p. 53). Put differently, a fetish occurs when humans attach magical qualities to something, what Freud would call a surrogate object, which they hope will rid them of the overwhelming anxiety that is produced by the subconscious drives of desire. The problem with such a “solution” is that it only further reinforces the problem; the fetishized surrogate object can never, by definition, deliver on its promise, and the fetishizing subject becomes stuck in an infinite regress of neuroses which ultimately “block a person’s growth” (Fromm 1947, p. 179).

Similarly, technological fetishism can be understood as a social psychological neurosis that develops in the collective unconscious as a coping mechanism for the anxieties produced by the principles of the globalization paradigm. Indeed, one can argue that the reification of history, submission to the “Total Market”/other “centered” social ideals, and alienation bred by atomistic individualism create an untenable predicament for the global human psyche. Within such a context, the globalized masses “sublimate” their desires for agency, fulfillment, and meaning (Marcuse 1964) by endowing a “surrogate,” in this case technology, with fetishistic qualities like the ability to bring about omnipotence and salvation. It is in this sense that technologies today “correspond to our fantasy ideal of an erotic relationship, in which the beloved object asks for nothing and gives everything, instantly, and makes us feel all powerful...” (Franzen 2011, p. WK10). And technological fetishism, like all fetishes, leads into other social psychological neuroses, including regression, leaving the global populace underdeveloped and incapable of self-actualization in any meaningful sense.

A particularly helpful case study for revealing the experiential realities of this otherwise abstract theoretical argument is a qualitative research study conducted in the capital city of Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain, on medical globalization (Reznik et al. 2007). Specifically, a diverse group of urban Trinidadians working with mainstream medicine was interviewed to discuss their understanding of globalization and its impact on their everyday experiences in health care. Such a study is useful for the topic at hand precisely because urban Trinidad is thought to be “a model of economic, political, and social progress that other ‘developing’ countries have been advised to follow” (Reznik et al. 2007, p. 536). However, an examination of study participants’ responses reveals just how stultifying an effect the aforementioned global technological fetishism actually has on human development.

Without a doubt, the psychic weight of the globalization paradigm hangs heavily on the minds of those who were interviewed. In particular, there is an unmistakable and pervasive sense of fatalism in their comments, whether such

sentiments are consciously expressed or subconsciously implied. As one participant put it:

I'm not sure that we can do anything about [globalization]... I don't think realistically that this is something I would be over-concerned about, because we can't stop it. You know, we can't stop it.

Another participant, providing a more nuanced description of the “boogeyman” haunting the collective unconscious of urban Trinidadian society, added that:

[Globalization] is the manipulation of big business. And big business, nobody can stop it. You can do anything you want, nobody can stop big business... It's something that you can't stop, no matter where you are in the world. Whatever they decide to do, it's going to be done... It's not going to stop. You have to live with it. Your research will see that you will have to live with it.

And a third participant similarly, but more succinctly, characterized the hopelessness that globalization has created among the local populace: “I think...people in Trinidad don't really feel by and large that they have the power to make change.”

In all of these comments, one detects the sort of social psychological resignation that the globalization paradigm itself engenders in human individuals. History is considered autonomous, and “centered” institutions like “big business” run the “Total Market,” leaving ordinary citizens powerless. Add in the fact that “people are not organized, [but] are very often isolated in their homes, [and] not in conduct with many other people” and “everybody is out for what they can get and...looking after #1 instead of caring about the communities,” as two separate study participants described, and life becomes almost unbearable. The aforementioned Hobbesian dilemma emerges, with atomistic individuals ruthlessly and selfishly competing in a political economy that is clearly indifferent to the desires and needs of these individuals.

Given this state of affairs, it should not be surprising that the study participants displayed what Fromm (1947) calls the “receptive orientation” personality character, a social psychological foundation for fetishism. Specifically, those with this personality character profess the need for a “magic helper” (especially “authorities”) to solve their problems and conceive that the “source of all good” (Fromm 1947, pp. 62–3) lies outside of themselves, both building blocks of the neurotic machinations of fetishism. And fetishism indeed arose in the comments of study participants; whether human, institutional, or inorganic, the common thread running through the various fetishized objects they cited was an association with technology. Hence, whether the government (“I think someone in the Ministry should...make a note of all that's going on and fix it”), health care physicians (“Patients are very dependent on [doctors] for advice”), the “First World” (“We must bring in foreigners because they know better”), or medical devices (“Our people believe in machines rather than in their bodies and nature itself”), anyone/anything affiliated with technical credentials and/or expertise was imbued with the fetishistic ability to eradicate the anxieties and traumas associated with globalization and its impact on Trinidadian society. In the words of one participant, urban Trinidadians are “dazzled” by technology, a term that captures the essence of technological fetishism.

Equally unsurprising is the fact that such technological fetishism has manifested in various forms of human underdevelopment in urban Trinidadian society. Particularly prominent in the comments of the study participants is a social psychological regression that seems to take two predominant forms among the masses: consumer addiction buttressed by infantile narcissism and public temper tantrums that double as childish projections/displacements of anger. Before addressing the specifics of each, it is important to note that both of these patterns of regressive behavior that were reported by those interviewed were described as relatively new in their emergence, an indication that globalization and its commensurate technological fetishism are, at least in part, responsible for their genesis.

Scholars have noted for decades the emergence of regressive, addictive-like consumer behavior as a social psychological byproduct of late capitalism (Schneider 1975). More recent literature on the subject has furthered the discussion by implicating the political economy of neoliberalism in the epidemic of consumer addiction worldwide (Pérez and Esposito 2010). Prototypical examples of such regressive behavior can be found in the study of medical globalization in urban Trinidad; one study participant gave a particularly poignant account of how hedonistic, materialistic, and ultimately childish such behavior can get:

You see kids coming into the clinic in the government service who are, they will tell you they can't afford to get this medicine or that medicine if the government doesn't have it, they're not going to be able to purchase it for their kids, but the kid is dressed in the latest sort of Air Jordans and the whole Nike gear and everything else, which obviously money has to be spent to buy that, because that is the priority rather than insuring that they get good quality food or something like that, you know?

However, with globalization, the compulsion to consume as many corporate-branded material products as possible in the misguided hopes of attaining a permanent sense of personal satisfaction has increasingly penetrated areas of the political economy that are either relatively nascent, like consumer information technologies (Kramer 2004, p. 102), or those industries that were previously immune from such consumer demands, like medicine (Sen 2003). In the case of everyday life in urban Trinidadian health care, these two new arenas of consumer addiction are having a jarring effect. As one study participant described:

You...see people becoming...more demanding, or sort of consumer oriented in wanting to have a decision, be part of the decision making with their care, and asking about certain medications...

Along these lines, another study participant gave anecdotal examples of mothers who demand formula milk for their babies from their doctors as a result of massive advertising by milk formula companies on Trinidadian satellite television networks, with these demands continuing even in the face of medical counsel to the contrary.

It is not only in consumer behavior, however, that urban Trinidadians noted new forms of social psychological regression. What became clear in the interviews with study participants was the degree to which the masses now regularly engage in "acting out" or infantile public displays and displacements of anger as defense mechanisms for the anxieties and traumas associated with globalization. For





**Fig. 10.1** Photo of Independence Square in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

instance, one study participant offered the following anecdotal example of the increasingly difficult atmosphere many pregnant women encounter when going into labor at Trinidad’s public hospitals:

And even, you hear horror stories. Nurses telling [patients] all kind of thing about “you’re bawling now, but you didn’t bawl when you was having sex” and saying all kinds of nasty things to women. And there’s a sense of regret for a woman, and trauma of course, because when you hear a nurse telling you “push, push the baby out, you know how to take [you know what], but you don’t know how to push” and those type of things playing on your head. So these nurses don’t have any care for anybody, they coming to do work, they probably don’t get paid enough, but they come to do a job and they get out of it.

As noted at the end of this participant’s quote, in this situation one can only presume that the verbal abuse being perpetrated by these nurses is the result of their own abuse at the hands of the globalized health care industry (i.e., working longer hours for lower real wages). And yet, to use words as weapons against patients who are in such an obviously physically vulnerable position suggests rather strongly the presence of a neurotic defense mechanism, specifically a regressive form of anger displacement. This lashing out was even accounted for by study participants when the targets of the temper tantrum were those in a position of relative authority/power; one participant described how patients will routinely tell their physicians that “they should shut up and not give [their] opinion about medical issues.” Such behavior is totally contradictory and irrational, the hallmark of regression as a neurosis.

A final and particularly symbolic example of the social psychological regression plaguing urban Trinidadian society is the above photograph taken in Port of Spain’s Independence Square (Fig. 10.1). The symbolic center of this bustling metropolitan

hub has traditionally been a statue of Arthur Cipriani, one of the leading political figures in Trinidad's struggle for independence. However, in the photograph, this statue is dwarfed by a massive billboard of Spiderman on top of a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant that, according to informal conversations with locals, has now become the city's most prominent geographical landmark. In short, a figure of the utmost historical and political importance to Trinidadians has been surpassed in social significance by a children's superhero; such visual imagery is clearly symptomatic of a deep-seeded regressive mechanism operating in this supposed "shining star" of globalization.

Ultimately, then, the lives of urban Trinidadians, as with humans living throughout the world, are increasingly marked by a social psychological underdevelopment that is rooted in the globalization of technological fetishism. Despite all of the material "success" that globalization has supposedly brought to fruition, the actual experiential realm of the global masses is plagued by neuroses that attempt to cover up the all-too-real anxieties and traumas that globalization and its technological fetishism incur. In the final section of this chapter, some important theoretical and practical considerations for a healthier and more sustainable global human development will be discussed.

## **Conclusion: Growing Pains**

Obviously the impediments to real human development today are numerous and complex because they include all of the transnational institutions and processes of globalization. Indeed, it is naïve on both theoretical and practical levels to disregard the structural nature of the problems at hand. However, to focus on structural changes without simultaneously, if not preliminarily, addressing the everyday neurotic manifestations of these structural ills among human individuals would be tantamount to changing a broken tabletop without repairing its broken legs. In other words, the question of social psychological development must be fundamental in any discussion of promoting human development.

Even if humans are biologically aging, they are not growing, in the more holistic sense, to reach any semblance of self-actualization. As one participant from the medical globalization in Trinidad study put it, "in our growing-up, we seem to have missed out somewhere in the middle, we've tried to reach there without going through the other stage." It is precisely the maturation process to which this quote refers that is the key to healthy human development, and the solution lies in unpacking and eradicating the various layers involved in its inhibition.

According to psychoanalytic theory and practice, the suffering neurotic must face his/her unconscious "demons" in order to begin the process of ridding themselves of neurosis. In short, defense mechanisms only operate within the safety of denial. Therefore, the solution to global human development does not lie in the employment of more technology, a misrecognition that emerges from the same technological fetishism plaguing the current sociohistorical conjuncture. Instead,

the catalyst for healthy human development lies in the masses consciously and viscerally experiencing the actual alienation, anxieties, fears, and rages that globalization engenders in their lives. Put simply, growing up means experiencing the pain of feeling bad, rather than repressing these realities.

Many social theorists have seized upon this realization in their writings about social praxis. For example, Gramsci used the psychoanalytic term catharsis to describe how the masses could dialectically synthesize and grasp simultaneously both the base and superstructure of the political economy (San Juan 2003, p. 39). Equally astute are the observations of surrealist Breton who insisted that true social change (including, one would imagine, the emergence of healthy human development) requires “a desire to deepen the foundations of the real, to bring about an ever clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses” (San Juan 2003, p. 39). What these avant-garde thinkers are suggesting is that abstraction not only be removed from social theory but from the experiential practice of living itself as well; the first step toward real change requires that humans actually grapple with the messy emotions and contradictory realities of life in all their glory.

Not surprisingly, given the emphasis made at the beginning of this chapter on the power of cinema to capture these social issues of globalization, technology, and human development, it is yet another film that offers perhaps the most theoretically sound and pragmatically feasible glimpse of how such a catharsis and “passionate consciousness of the world” can occur. Abderrahmane Sissako’s *Bamako* (2006) is an African film about transnational capitalist institutions like the World Bank and IMF being placed on mock trial by the very people of the continent hardest hit by globalization; all the surrealist courtroom drama, however, takes place in a small courtyard of a Malian home in the eponymous capital city. It is precisely the quotidian nature of this setting that helps the viewer, and one would imagine the trial participants as well, fuse the otherwise abstract forces of globalization with the everyday consciousness of their lived reality. Indeed, there is nowhere in the social psychological psyche to hide from the horrors of globalization if they are brought onto one’s doorstep, literally, via heartbreaking testimony and debate.

In this vein, one scene from *Bamako* in particular stands out in its ability to capture the spirit of cathartic praxis necessary for real human development. A rural farmer who speaks in a local dialect that is not spoken and/or understood by any of the presiding authorities of the trial nor the other trial participants reaches his social psychological “wit’s end” waiting to testify and begins to wail a song in his native tongue while approaching the podium. The suffering he has endured from globalization is so purely expressed in this moment of audiovisual outburst that the trial is brought to a grinding halt and the viewer, along with all present at the trial, is wholly captivated by the honesty and vulnerability in the man’s cries. Indeed, in the scene that follows directly afterward, the leading female character in the film, a singer at a nightclub in another town, has tears streaming down her face as she croons, a symbolic indication that the farmer’s song has opened up all of humanity to the deepest recesses of its collective unconscious. And while the staging of mock trials and other forms of activist theater are already a mainstay at antiglobalization protest

rallies, there is a level of emotional vulnerability and social psychological authenticity to the proceedings in *Bamako* that can be of great inspiration to those seeking the betterment of the human condition. It appears that for humanity to really grow up, we must first get real.

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# Chapter 11

## Anticulture and Aging

Eric Mark Kramer and Elaine Hsieh

In this chapter, we synthesize two powerful theories: the theory of symbolic violence and the theory of social death. The result is a new concept, a new way to conceptualize social structures, institutions that breed social and physical death, what we call anticultures.

### Modern Segregation

In the summer of 2003, after teaching a graduate seminar in Heidelberg, I (i.e., the first author) found myself stranded for 2 days in Frankfurt, Germany, because my outbound flight was canceled. Little did I know that I was in the middle of the greatest heat wave to strike Europe since 1540, according to the World Meteorological Organization (2012). While I survived, approximately 50,000 Europeans did not (Robine et al. 2008). This heat wave expressed the weakness in the social fabric in Europe but especially France.

Why France? What failed there? It was not that the physical temperatures were higher but that social conditions were different in France than elsewhere in Europe. While many blamed the government, others looked deeper into the sociocultural fabric of France. After working to address the issue, Stéphane Mantion, an official with the French Red Cross offered this explanation, “The French family structure is more dislocated than elsewhere in Europe, and prevailing social attitudes hold that once older people are closed behind their apartment doors or in nursing homes, they are someone else’s problem. These thousands of elderly victims didn’t die from a heat wave as such, but from the isolation and insufficient assistance they lived with

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day in and out, and which almost any crisis situation could render fatal” (Mantion quoted by Crumley, Sunday, August 24 2003, p. 1).

While thousands died in Paris, elderly people in southern Europe including the south of France fared better. That is because they were more integrated into families, so in more rural southern communities, where it was just as hot, if not hotter, such as Nice, Marseilles, and Toulouse, the death toll among the elderly was much lower. “The southeast and southwest had around 46% higher fatalities in the first three weeks of August compared to last year, versus 102% in Paris—a far more private and anonymous place” (Crumley, Sunday, August 24 2003, p. 1). According to Mantion, it was a cultural difference. Mantion says that where “Latin attitudes” prevail, older people are valued and remain active members of society. The operant word here is “valued.”

Before we offer a more general explanation, let’s look at why a more general explanation is necessary and why the “Latin attitudes” explanation is both correct and incorrect. On Friday, March 11, 2011, at precisely 14:46 JST (05:46 UTC), a magnitude 9 undersea megathrust earthquake lasting just 6 minutes occurred 43 miles off the east coast of the Oshika Peninsula, Japan. The “Tōhoku” earthquake and subsequent tsunamis killed 15,850 people, injured 6,011, with 3,287 missing across 18 prefectures as confirmed by the Japanese National Police Agency (Japanese National Police Agency. 20 April 2011).

Like France, rural Japan has been depopulated of young people who have flocked to the major cities. Perceived economic opportunity is motivating the greatest migration of humans in history from rural to urban places. What actually happened in France and Japan are related because in both cases there is evidence that most of these premature deaths could have been avoided if sociocultural structures had been different in historically available ways. How has the history of sociocultural structures changed and why? The operant phrase here is traditional community.

This explanation harkens back to Ferdinand Töennies’ (1887 Ger./2001 Eng.) distinction between traditional *gemeinschaft* community and modern *gesellschaft* society. What Töennies observed was the rising tide, the tsunami of social change resulting in new social formations, and psychological stresses including alienation and *anomie*. The change is what Daniel Lerner described in his 1958 classic, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*. The great cities of the modern era are the result of industrialization, including greater densities of people, especially younger labor, congregated into working class neighborhoods near production facilities.

The modern version of the generation gap is a relatively new phenomenon (Kramer 1997; Kramer 2003). It is surging across the globe as young people leave agriculture and flock to cities for economic opportunity and the entertaining diversion the city offers (Morris 1996). Thus, we have the “left behind” syndrome (Kramer in press) which means an increasingly aging rural population and dwindling numbers of youths who either do not want to move to the big city with its bright lights and stimulation or who have not acquired the skills and competencies necessary for success in the more complex urban environment. The result is a volatile mixture of fear and envy of the city leading to the demonization of all forms of progress represented by the city.



## Our State of Affairs

The human species is undergoing an unprecedented demographic shift. Today, we speak of entire societies as aging. Indeed the entire planet's human population is aging. This is caused largely by a decline in birth rates coupled with very recent, in historical terms, significant and widespread extensions in life expectancy (Congressional Budget Office, December 2005, p. 1).

On February 14, 2012, the US Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, Robert Hormats spoke to a special meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations entitled, "The U.S. Aging Population as an Economic Growth Driver for Global Competitiveness." In that meeting, Hormats said, "By 2050, more than 2 billion people worldwide will be over the age of 60. By then, for the first time in human history, more people will be over the age of 60 than under 15" (Hormats 2012). A day earlier, Standard & Poor's reported that, "no other force is likely to shape the future of national economic health, public finances and policy-making as the irreversible rate at which the world's population is aging" (Standard & Poors, February 13, 2012).

This trend is not unique to the USA. Rather it is an economic and demographic wave that constitutes the hegemonic postindustrial structure that spread across the globe during the twentieth century. Given current trends, by 2050, it is projected that in Italy, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, fully one-third of their respective populations will be 65 or older (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006, p. 18). A similar trend is happening in developing countries such as Mexico and Turkey where 20% of their populations will be 65 or older by 2050 (Ibid., p. 9).

This massive demographic shift is already affecting labor and medical costs. Since a large percentage of medical costs accrued by an individual occurs in just the last 3 years of life, massive expenditures for healthcare are beginning to be manifested. And as the number of retirees rises per worker, productivity is declining and public funding ratios are getting increasingly out of balance. This dependency ratio is beginning to rise dramatically with fewer and fewer active workers supporting more and more retirees. This trope is increasingly pitting the young against the old. And, as this chapter explores, just being old may make people act negatively toward you.

## Aging as the Mortality Reminder

Aging is the accumulation of changes over time. From the beginning, aging and death have been sources of considerable interest and anxiety. From the earliest magical efforts to enhance fertility and combat disease to the Pharaohs of Egypt, from the Christian promise of everlasting life, to the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang's (秦始皇) (259 BC) aging and death have commanded our attention.

Nonetheless, recently, researchers attempting to prevent cancer realized that virtually all people eventually get some form of cancer because the toxicity of oxidative stress increases with age (Aubert and Lansdorp 2008). When oxidation occurs, non-coded genetic material is deleted from the end of the mitochondrial DNA chain. In youth, what is destroyed are the telomeres, ineffectual genetic material. But eventually, after years of replication, the chromosome chain runs out of telomeres at the end thus exposing functionally coded DNA to damage. When this buffer of ineffective genetic material is used up, then oxidation begins to impact the mitochondrial chain higher up into the genetic material that effectively controls cellular activity including reproduction. When this encoded regulatory part of the sequence becomes damaged, not just disease is the result but aging. Researchers discovered that if they can prevent all of the telomeres from being destroyed by raising the level of a protective protein called telomerase, not only can they prevent cancer but aging as we know it in biophysical and cognitive terms (Flores et al. 2008). Fear of the characteristics of aging is so great that most people would prefer to not be immortal unless aging itself could be stopped. Increasingly, research indicates that this may be possible, but the consequences for humanity would likely be profound. Until then, we must address the consequences of aging.

### *Aging as Disease*

The model of interpreting aging and death as a disease is one of the markers or precursors of modernism in the enlightened Muslim world. The first efforts to describe and “treat” senescence or the biological process of aging are found in medieval Muslim texts. However, in Occidental modernity, there was little organized study of aging until the turn of the twentieth century. Elie Metchnikoff coined the word gerontology in 1903. And the discipline focusing on aging was launched in 1945 when James Birren founded the Gerontological Society of America (Liebig 2003). Still, an institutional structure dedicated strictly to gerontological research and treatment was not founded until the Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Center at the University of Southern California began operation in 1964.

No doubt part of the reason is because the *typical* lifespan was not long enough to see the development of specific age-related physical, affective, and cognitive differences until the late nineteenth century and then only in the wealthiest societies.

### **Defensive Reactions to Aging and Death**

Suffice it to say, our species has been concerned with aging and death for a very long time. Rich or poor, powerful or weak, Sam Keen (1992, 2010) argues that the act of dying frightens us all, and it often threatens our dignity and our self-esteem. Earnest Becker (1973, 1962/1971) argues that culture itself was invented and is

maintained as a death-defying system of symbols, which, when synthesized with Emmanuel Levinas', Pierre Bourdieu's (1990), and Loïc Wacquant's (2009) way of conceptualizing the symbolic, constitutes habitus.

According to Keen (1992), Robert Jay Lifton (1979), and others, our anxiety about death prompts us to move from the physical to the symbolic domain. When faced with mortal threats, our instinct is to avoid it (flight) or fight. Reminders of our own death trigger this response in us. We fight symbolically and physically.

The important thing here is that as we confront the claim that meanings are "all in your head," we know that symbolic structures have profound locutionary and illocutionary force that can be violent, messages, the meaning of which I cannot control by merely changing my mind or even the way I talk.

## Anticulture

Anticulture is a circumstance characterized by conditions that lead not to meaningful existence but instead to social isolation and nihilism. An anticulture is a complex of values, motivations, beliefs, and behavior patterns that discourage the formation and sustenance of community. Structure by itself need not procreate meaning, justice, or human dignity but can be coercive, unjust, unjustified, and demeaning.

An anticulture is a social pattern that derogates, demeans, or dismisses the Other as insignificant. If dismissal fails to satisfy the mainstream ideology, to assuage the anxiety of difference felt by those who profit emotionally and otherwise from the status quo, then anticulture seeks to coerce conversion to one belief system. If that fails, anticulture attempts to annihilate those who do not or cannot convert. For those latter individuals who cannot conform even if they want to due to circumstances beyond their control such as their race, gender, or age, anticulture defines their existence as meaningless, a life without value or purpose—a net loss.

When we feel threatened, we act. Either we seek to modify the behavior of other people, animals, or things or we attempt to avoid them altogether. And when confronted with the reality of our eventual deaths, we respond by moving to the symbolic level of behavior (Jost et al. 2004). We create culture, religion, nationalistic symbols, and other means to maintain a habitus that is bigger than ourselves and to which we belong (Batson and Stocks 2004). This symbolic habitus shelters us against both symbolic and real threats of death. It gives us meaning, purpose, and sustains our sense of self-esteem (Salzman and Halloran 2004).

But Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Thomas Pyszczynski have devised a set of simple experiments that have found that when a person is reminded, even subliminally, of their own mortality, they seek refuge by treating others who share their death-defying ideology such as their religious faith positively, while treating others who do not share their ideology violently. Pyszczynski, Solomon, Greenberg, and colleagues (2003, 2006) call this defense of worldview morality salience. These researchers concluded that hostility, symbolic or not, can be triggered by perceived threats to one's identity and group belief system (culture) when a person is reminded of their own

mortality. In short, when threatened or reminded of mortality, people react positively toward those who are similar and aggressively toward those who are dissimilar.

In this chapter, we suggest that the rising number of visibly aging people as a proportion of our populations triggers this sort of anxiety. Thus far, and despite great efforts, aging cannot be stopped. This causes great anxiety, and it proves what Eric Kramer (2003) claims, namely, that the greatest anxieties in our lives are not caused by what uncertainty management theory claims (Berger and Calabrese 1975) but by unavoidable certainties that we perceive as negative. In this case, the result of being reminded of mortality by the very presence of a dramatically rising number of older adults is a form of symbolic violence codified within the very structure of modern institutions that fosters neglect and indifference toward older adults.

What has transformed aging into a threat, a disability, even a disease, is modern modes of production and profit taking. This withering away of social support and insistence upon personal liberty and self-reliance manifested as ultimate and uncompromising virtues of late modernity has left aging people in an increasingly vulnerable situation. At the same time, we see a concurrent erosion of the public sphere as private interests are presumed to be threatened by public interests. The result is isolation and alienation.

## Anticulture and Spoiled Identity

Cultures that breed economic poverty or the constant threat thereof, that count on structural poverty to suppress wages, for instance, also breed spiritual and symbolic poverty. Their motivational fuel is greed and anxiety. Hoarding behavior is a manifestation of anxiety. Poverty and the threat of it and the dawning realization that one's "golden years" are not so emotionally satisfying due to financial ruin and social isolation leads to unhappiness. Unhappiness and bitterness leads to physical illness and higher rates of mortality. In other words, symbolic violence and death beget physical violence and death.

Despite modernity's dialectical-oppositional struggle between extreme relativism and positivism, relationships endure; value and belief systems, cosmologies and ideologies, and languages and identities persist across generations despite calamities. The semantic field, with its various structures and shifting currents, forms habitus, the lifeworld (Husserl 1936 Ger./1970 Eng.; Mauss 1934 Fr./2006 Eng.; Lévinas 1972 Fr./2006 Eng.; Bourdieu 1982 Fr./1991 Eng.). But to go beyond how positivists conceptualize the lifeworld, it is not a sort of objective "background" to our activities. But even Husserl, who links interest, expectations, motivations, and beliefs to the individual ego, fails therefore to recognize that "my" interests, "my" way of perceiving is a marker of my membership in a particular lifeworld. I am "always already" common. But if my interests or capabilities become too unusual as to become unfamiliar to others, then I will generate anxiety among them and will likely suffer stigma or a "spoiled identity" (Goffman 1963/1986).

A spoiled identity means that the structures I find myself in identifying me as evil or insignificant. I can become the target of escalating violence; both symbolic and physical, a hierarchy of defensive reactions that Becker (1962, 1973) identifies as beginning with derogation moving to forced assimilation, and then to accommodation where parts of my being that the mainstream can profit from are co-opted and the rest discarded. If I continue to resist disintegration, the final reactionary move is an attempt to annihilate me (difference).

Fitting in presumes conventions. Culture is a vast accumulation of conventions. This is what Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960 Ger./2004 Eng.) means by the pseudo-objectivity of convention. Conventions, like the rules of language games, are social, and if I become too unconventional, I slip from sense into nonsense, from acceptance, meaning recognition and approval, to rejection. I can become the target of blame or, as Ralph Ellison (1952) puts it, I can become invisible and suffer symbolic death.

Thus, our culture, as shared expectations, beliefs, and values, conditions the reality we inhabit. Communal symbol systems, accordingly, reproduce themselves forming stable habitus for us that continually inspires us, gives us purpose, meaning, and identities, both collective and individualistic (to fall once again into dualism). As Becker (1973) argued, these transcending symbolic structures enable us to think in certain ways and afford us public opportunities to be someone... or no one.

Reacting to the stark contrast between absolute relativism and absolute positivism, Kramer (1997) promoted a relative relativism, which recognizes time, not merely as a disruptor of meaning but as a memorial repository, that recognizes for instance, that aging is a universal process, but how we cope, the sense, or nonsense we make of it, what our culture makes of it, varies. The sense that consensus is reasonable and self-evident is rooted in the *doxic* pre-reflexive mode of being that social psychologists call “equilibrium.” It is associated with sanity, being “well adjusted,” and “balanced.” Such a harmonic psychological state of equilibrium in ideological terms means that the social world is perceived as taken-for-granted, natural, justified, even rational.

As noted below in our discussion on youth-oriented popular culture, the modern lifeworld is spreading in part through mediation, popular imagery, and also through the fetish seduction of technology. And that same technology tends to be focused on the mobility of ideas and things, transportation and communication systems such as the Internet which in turn disseminate seductive imagery forever newer technologies constituting progress in itself—the self-perpetuation of cultural production. But how deluded are we about being “forever young”?

## **Symbolic Does Not Mean It’s “All In Your Head”**

Anticulture involves symbolic and “real” structures that deprive people of self-esteem, purpose, and dignity. What we know is that being unhappy and lonely is not merely symbolic. These states lead to higher rates of mortality. What we know

about loneliness is that it “does eat at you.” In a study at the University of Chicago involving men and women 50–68 years old, researchers found that the morbid health effects of loneliness accumulate faster as you grow older, and the magnitude of the relationship between loneliness and hypertension was “surprising” (Hawkey et al. 2006). Loneliness posed a greater threat to blood pressure and therefore heart disease, which is the number one killer in most industrialized nations, than any other factor such as alcohol consumption, smoking, age, or race and including other psychological or social factors such as stress, depression, and hostility (Hawkey et al. 2006). Loneliness leads people to perceive stressful circumstances as threatening. The overall conclusion is that “[s]ocial trends in the United States suggest a recipe for greater loneliness and thus higher blood pressure and risk of heart disease. The population is aging and more people move around and live alone than ever, contributing to greater separation from caring friends and family” (Lloyd 2006, p. 1).

But money acts as a buffer to protect one’s sense of well-being most especially when it is threatened as during a health crisis. Smith et al. (2005) found, “Happiness and well-being may not depend on a person’s financial state in times of health, but when that health fails, as it will eventually for most of us, money matters” (p. 665). Smith et al. (2005) concurs, “Money may not buy happiness, but it does seem to buy people out of some of the misery that’s associated with a decline in health status” (p. 666). If you get sick in America, be prepared to lose everything you have earned over a lifetime of labor including your house. This puts tremendous stress on both the ill person and their family, especially a surviving spouse. This threat, which is real, not merely in one’s head, combined with social factors that plague aging populations such as social isolation are turning the golden years into something far less pleasant, and it is rational for an aging person to be anxious about this state of affairs.

Medical bankruptcy has been called an epidemic. It is especially egregious in making older Americans vulnerable to financial and emotional collapsed (Thorne et al. 2009). This could also be called a tidal wave of symbolic violence. It is also a major threat to middle-class Americans. In a study based on interviews with 1,771 individuals conducted by researchers at Harvard’s medical and law schools, 931 cited medical bills as the cause of their economic demise (Himmelstein et al. 2005, p. 63). Regarding privations in the period surrounding bankruptcy, David Himmelstein and his colleagues at Harvard found, “In our follow-up telephone interviews with 931 debtors, they reported substantial privations. During the 2 years before filing, 40.3% had lost telephone service; 19.4% had gone without food; 53.6% had gone without needed doctor or dentist visits because of the cost; and 43.0% had failed to fill a prescription, also because of the cost” (Himmelstein et al. 2005, p. 68). They conclude, “Middle-class families frequently collapse under the strain of a health care system that treats physical wounds, but often inflicts fiscal ones” (Himmelstein et al. 2009, pp. 745, 746). In short, symbolic violence has increased sharply and rapidly. Neither insurance nor educational attainment nor good careers are safeguards against this wolf at the door.

## **It's Your Fault, Just Be Happy: Personal Empowerment as Anticulture**

Psychologists and neurologists who presume a difference between intrinsic and extrinsic realities tend to seek intrinsic sources of attitude and conclude that health and happiness may be largely in the mind. And yet they argue that happiness, being well adjusted, means that a person has achieved internal psychic equilibrium with external reality. So to be happy, one need only become “well adjusted.” What is alluded to here is that those older adults who socialize most, fair better—that adjustment always presumes an external reality.

For instance, Diener and Chan (2011) argue that the happiest people are those with strong social support networks and friendships. This is well established. They are happier but then what causes anxiety, fear, dread, and depression? Social interaction is not the only extrinsic or environmental factor. It seems obvious that socio-economic rank and access to wealth are also important when facing health problems. But there has existed a contrary position that still enjoys being counter-intuitive as a scientific mark of discovery.

Early in his career, the Princeton psychologist and Nobel winner in economics, Daniel Kahneman, was caught up in the positive psychology movement that swept academe in the 1970s. He concluded that being happy and satisfied was not effected by how much money a person had, that feelings of pleasure, sadness, joy, and sorrow were largely in one's head, and that the psychology of utility had to do with what Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1996, 2003) called flow, the satisfaction one gets in the timeless moments when one is totally engaged in a task (Kahneman et al. 1999). This state of flow constitutes well-being.

Consequently, a bad attitude that negatively impacted emotional equilibrium, objective productivity, and “competence” at both the individual and societal levels could be corrected. One could adapt and meet objective needs in functional terms, and that would lead to happiness. Being realistic was melded with being “proactive.” Being a visionary was good so long as the vision matched the facts. The onus of success lies entirely on the individual's mind-set and “appropriate” motivation. One merely had to say everything is “glorious” to feel great. A new industry of consultants, motivational speakers, and the profession of life coaching proliferated teaching people how to be happy by just shifting their attitudes and being thankful.

The other explanation for success and failure came from biological predeterminism. This position claimed that some people are coded or genetically predisposed to be disparaging and distrustful cynics, while others are genetically fated to be trusting and happy. This scenario is fatalistic and so the pessimists will self-select for failure no matter what. Again, the onus for reality comes down to the individual, and therefore there is no need to critically interrogate the instituted values, goals, and belief system of the cultural complex.

The personal empowerment movement that promoted the idea that we can choose to be happy was part of the New Age crusade in psychology and existential philosophy of the times. Nonetheless, anxiety is real, and it is often not the consequence of



uncertainty as many social psychologists argue, but, as Eric Kramer (1997, 2003) has argued, the worst anxiety comes from inescapable certainties we encounter in the world. Our vulnerabilities as much as our resoluteness constitute who we are. Being trapped by debt, illness, and other obstacles manifests great anxiety often spiraling and compounding. My response to such threats is limited.

What if I cannot do the activities that lead to flow? What if I could not afford the energy, time, or money to do the things I know give me pleasure, purpose, and meaning? Clearly, social structure is not genetic fatalism and is available for discursive interrogation and modification. However, such change requires a great deal of effort and community. Despite the motivational speakers' standard trope, it takes more than one person to make a difference in social structure, and community is precisely what anticulture annihilates. While memory may tend to distort the past into something more pleasant than it actually was (Walker et al. 2003), optimism about the future can be equally delusional which implies that things are not "all in our heads."

### ***\$75,000 Buys a Lot of Optimism***

In a 9-year-long study, investigating the health effects of attitude, researchers at the Psychiatric Center GGZ Delft, The Netherlands, found that of a group of 999 older adults, optimistic participants had a 55% lower risk of death than pessimistic subjects (Giltay 2004). The study concluded, "we found that the trait of optimism was an important long-term determinant of all-cause and cardiovascular mortality in elderly subjects. Our results, combined with the finding that hopelessness was associated with an increased incidence or progression of disease, suggest that dispositional optimism affects the progression of cardiovascular disease" (Giltay 2004, p. 1135). Here, we must focus on trait psychology that suggests that attitude is an inherent attribute of certain types of personalities suggesting that pessimism and optimism are independent of environmental factors. This approach presumes that there are optimistic or pessimistic people, not social conditions.

Similar to Erik Giltay's (2004) work, Dilip Jeste (2005) conducted a study of 500 Americans age 60–90 who live independently and who had serious diseases including cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and so forth. Jeste found that "optimism and effective coping styles were found to be more important to successfully aging than traditional measures of health and wellness. These findings suggest that physical health is not the best indicator of successful aging—attitude is" (2005, p. 323). Jeste found that the old criteria of level of disease and disability did not indicate happiness. But is there a connection between the symbolic and the physical, and if so, the what is the nature of that connection?

The research thus far does not tell the whole story. Jeste and others have found that attitude is not affected by disease and disability, that older adults who are ill and disabled are often as happy as others. Why are some who are ill optimistic while others are not? While they claim to prove that disease and aging does not affect attitude, they fail to get at what does. The disability itself may not be the problem

but rather its broader social and economic connections and consequences. In this regard, Deaton and Kahneman claim to have found the “magic number” for happiness to be \$75,000 annual household income.

### *Symbolic Violence and Real Disappointment*

Disappointment and expectancy violations are real. Affective forecasting is often wrong as when people dream of moving to California believing that living there will make them happy or happier than they currently are only to make the move and find they were wrong, that they were living a “focused illusion” as surveys of people who actually did move to California revealed (Schkade and Kahneman 1998). Romanticizing mediated images of places, including the wonderful future presented by World’s Fairs and the like, impact the imaginations of individuals and entire societies.

The same sort of anticipatory delusion can occur with growing old and pondering “carefree” retirement. Even when expectations are violated and a contrary reality sets in, still people often exhibit “making the best of a bad situation” by attempting to hedonically adapt, to make excuses for the less than satisfying reality in a manner that is the opposite of buyer’s remorse. People do attempt to adapt to and excuse unsatisfying facts by rationalizing the status quo (Kay et al. 2002).

In economic terms, romanticizing the future can involve delusions of what wealth will mean to a person. Kahneman and colleagues were suggesting that when people do come into money, they are wrong, it does not solve problems or make them happier (Kahneman et al. 2006). This was a case of affective forecasting. While Kahneman and his colleagues admitted that having enough money to escape objective poverty did make a person happy, any additional money had little effect on increasing their measure of happiness, their measure of subjective well-being as self-reported memories of moment-to-moment activities (Kahneman and Krueger 2006). Kahneman thought he had solved the Easterlin paradox whereby self-reported life satisfaction had changed little in prosperous countries over the past several decades despite large increases in standards of living (Easterlin 1974, 1995).

Richard Easterlin was not alone in claiming that wealth and income are not connected to happiness. As late as 2005, drawing on data from the World Values Surveys that were conducted in over 80 countries in four waves (1981, 1990–91, 1995–96, and 1999–2001), Richard Layard concluded that for “the Western industrial countries, the richer ones are no happier than the poorer” (p. 32). However, he and others did take away from the World Values Surveys a growing understanding about the gaps in wealth and happiness between rich and poor countries.

But already in 2000, Ed Diener and Oishi Shigehiro had begun to look at income and well-being across nations. When one of Kahneman’s collaborators Angus Deaton extended this research by turning to evidence gathered in 2006 from 132 countries by the Gallup World Poll, the results demanded a fundamental reversal of their thinking (Deaton 2008). The wake-up call came when they realized that their

“solution” to the Easterlin paradox had been limited by the scope of their own studies. Because they had not previously taken an international view, they could not explain the global frustration of rising expectations as the symbolic field had expanded via new communication systems letting people see what others had and how they lived.

Average life satisfaction is strongly related to per capita national income; each doubling of income is associated with a near one-point increase in life satisfaction on a scale from 0 to 10. Unlike most previous findings, the effect holds across the range of international incomes; if anything, it is slightly stronger among rich countries. Conditioned on national income, recent economic growth makes people less satisfied with their lives, improvements in life expectancy make them more satisfied, but life expectancy itself has little effect. In most countries, except the richest, older people are less satisfied with their lives. What was revealed was that being satisfied is not the same thing as being happy and that earlier claims that “the effect of income on life satisfaction seems to be transient. We argue that people exaggerate the contribution of income to happiness because they focus, in part, on conventional achievements when evaluating their life or the lives of others” were false (Kahneman et al. 2006, p. 1908). In short, relative poverty is not a “focusing illusion.” And the pain of it, both symbolic and actual, is real especially when older adults face sudden and significant health expenses, which underscore the contingent, relative nature of their wealth.

So let’s put this all together. The population of the USA and other industrialized countries is aging rapidly. Most catastrophic illnesses strike in the last 5 years of life. A single catastrophic illness can wipe out savings even where health insurance is involved, dropping not only those already struggling into the suffering category but even those in the thriving category can be devastated financially and emotionally with one major bout of ill health. The link to wealth and happiness has been repeatedly established both within the USA and around the globe. Thus, the threat to financial health is concomitant with threats of illnesses associated with aging. Along with this is the specter of loneliness that comes from the loss of a spouse or the sense of being “left behind” by family members and/or disengaging from workplace social connections after retirement especially in places like Japan. The link between loneliness and health has been established. The consequence is a maelstrom of challenges to older adults making them vulnerable to symbolic violence that is directly associated with deteriorating physical power. Symbolic death and physical death are connected in anticultural societies manifesting social structures that foster social isolation.

A 2006 Gallup World Poll found that GDP difference between countries did indeed have enormous and highly predictive differences in life satisfaction. Gallup sampled over 130,000 people from 132 countries, something Kahneman had never done (Kahneman 2008). And the correlation between the life satisfaction of individuals and the GDP of the country in which they lived, Gallup found to be very strong at over .40. Kahneman and his colleagues had to admit that people everywhere were increasingly evaluating their lives by a common global standard of material prosperity. The effect of income on measure of life satisfaction was profound.

People in different countries do *not* adapt to their level of prosperity. Instead, we see a strikingly strong correlation between happiness/frustration and income. But

this always seemed obvious to anyone who surveyed the history and founding motivations for modernity itself. For this is why people around the globe exhibit ambition and migrate by the millions seeking better economic opportunities leading to the social issues we see across the globe and across time from slavery to imperial struggles for domination to today's concerns and unease, from Japan to Sweden, from the USA to Saudi Arabia, about large-scale immigration.

## Happy Happy, Joy Joy<sup>1</sup>

### *Death-Defying Delusions and False Affective Forecasting on a Mass Scale*

In this section, we retrace how commercial media responded to the growing “threat” of aging. What was invented was the global slogan, “forever young.” From its inception up into the 1970s, American television looked very different from what it does today. Suddenly, in the mid-1970s, network television executives canceled all the top-rated shows, replacing them with what every critic of the day and since, such as Horace Newcomb (1974, 2007) and Hal Himmelstein (1981, 1984), decried as insipid programming lacking in substance, redeeming sociocultural value, even internal narrative coherence. Shows that had garnered huge audiences such as *Studio One*, *The Defenders*, *The Philco Television Playhouse*, *Kraft Television Theatre*, *Playhouse 90*, *Route 66*, *Naked City*, *Mr. Lucky*, *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*, *Family Affair*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Red Skelton Hour*, and so forth were all replaced by cheap sitcoms such as *The Monkees*, *Giligan's Island*, *The Munsters*, *The Adams Family*, *Petticoat Junction*, and so forth. Initially a few, such as *All in the Family* and *MASH* held the high ground. But they too ended and have not been replaced by shows of equal quality on network TV.

Relevant writing, writing that had sociocultural import, was replaced with writing found on shows such as *Cheers*, *Seinfeld*, and *Friends* that is utterly irrelevant to any context and so is perfect for endless syndication. Jerry Seinfeld himself marveled at the success of his namesake show, because it connected with Millennials and was “about nothing.” Even zany shows of an earlier era, such as *Gomer Pyle*, *USMC* (1964–1969), the pilot for which aired as a spinoff of *The Andy Griffith Show* about a hapless underemployed youth from Mayberry, North Carolina, who liked everybody and hated to shoot guns, presented political sub-currents as Gomer found himself preparing for war against the backdrop of the Vietnam conflict.

Older shows had extensive scripts, many of which dealt with issues of social justice, structural inequality, and production values featuring professional actors, sophisticated lighting, and cinematography. Norman Lear (writer and producer), who declared himself a “born-again American” at the US Presidential inauguration in 2009, convincingly observes that today, one cannot find anything rivaling pro-

grams such as *All in the Family*, *Soap*, *Mary Hartman*, or *MASH* (Lear 2008). Shows with strong philosophical narratives such as *Then Came Bronson*, *Kung Fu*, or even *Star Trek* that had stories typically touching on race relations and even “half-breed” main characters vanished. Eventually those contents, despite their youthful characters were regarded as appealing to an audience that was too old, and so they were replaced by even cheaper to produce reality programming that is all about the machinations of marginally literate adults caught in extended adolescence. Why?

### ***Youth Fetish: Money and Globalization***

Because by 1975, a new approach to programming had finally solidified as the industry standard. The shift, initially rejected by advertising experts, began earlier in the 1950s. While industry types were slow to come around, academics were pushing the new social scientific paradigm of audience research from rough demographics and mass appeal to psychographics. Eventually, sponsors realized that they were reaching a massive older audience that did not spend money the way they want them to (Schudson 1984; Ewen and Ewen 1982; Ewen 1976). At the same time, the economist Walter Rostow, who was National Security Advisor and arch anticommunist in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, was formulating a major propaganda push initially in Southeast Asia but then around the globe to encourage people to develop—but to develop into what? American-style consumers of course, and Rostow sought to achieve this goal by promoting American popular culture around the globe through US media content (see Rostow’s *Anti-communist Manifesto* 1960).

The kind of popular culture Rostow had in mind had to be irrelevant; when taken at face value, perceived to be dissociated from local political and cultural standards. *I Love Lucy* was perfect. It was the first postmodern television show that had appeal everywhere precisely because it was about nowhere and nothing significant. Few American cultural products since have rivaled its international appeal except *Bay Watch*. Like the Beatles singing inane lyrics like “I want to hold your hand,” and “I say hello and you say goodbye,” the new powerful media found contents that were truly massifying. *I Love Lucy* became the new standard vehicle to accompany commercials.

Rostow wanted to exterminate “traditional society” by promoting “maturity” and “evolution” toward high mass consumption, ostensibly of American manufactured goods (Rostow 1960). It worked, perhaps all too well, as we have seen the emergence of the “generation gap” everywhere along with a rising tide of expectations for consumer culture and frustration at “culture lag,” a euphemism for the death of traditional cultures. Young people judge cultures by who gets the latest video game platform or iPhone first.

In the home of this colonial effort, the largest audiences ever produced were abandoned and content was systematically restructured to produce a younger more economically impulsive audience for sale to advertisers (Barnouw 1978; Arlen

1981; Gitlin 1994). Publications such as *Ad Age* and *New York Magazine*, the forums for Madison Avenue news, heralded the brilliant new application of survey data, and the new computing power with its statistical software that was enabling greater control over mass mediated messages and targeted consumers. This new computational power massively enhanced the initial efforts and dreams of mass manipulation cherished by the social scientists who made their ways to Madison Avenue.

What was the goal? What, according to consumerism, was to be done? Change American's attitudes about money, debt, wealth, and aging. What sells is what is fun, what makes you feel young—not complexity and nuance. Immediate gratification became the mantra. Initially, commercial network television featured the likes of Leonard Bernstein and Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC symphony orchestra at Carnegie Hall and presented performances composed and produced specifically for telecast such as Tchaikovsky's ballets *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* and the first opera composed for television, Gian Carlo Monotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, which debuted live on the *Hallmark Hall of Fame* (1951). The work was the first of many commissioned by Peter Herman Adler, a famous Czech conductor who became Director of Opera Programming for NBC. Yes, the commercial networks had such positions.

Television was a boon to artists and the arts. It brought the best available talent into living rooms across the nation. Carnegie Hall and Broadway had never been so relevant before or after the sudden shift in programming. The networks commissioned many artists including such notable talents as Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. Their fame was already solidified by Broadway successes such as *South Pacific*, *Carousel*, *The King and I*, *Flower Drum Song*, *Oklahoma!*, and *The Sound of Music*. They brought their collaborative talents to television with the debut of the musical *Cinderella*, starring Julie Andrews. *Cinderella* aired March 31, 1957 on CBS and was watched by over 100 million people.

Theater houses of the air proliferated. The masses could partake of William Gibson's *The Miracle Worker*, a teleplay written specifically for *Playhouse 90*, or watch Alistair Cooke on *Omnibus* (1952–1961) interview Frank Lloyd Wright or watch one of the many “music lectures” given by Leonard Bernstein on topics such as Handel's *Messiah* and Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. The mass American audience looked forward to telecasts of Shakespeare and ballets by Tchaikovsky. The audience numbers were staggering.

With the exit of older sophisticated directors and writers went an entire apparatus that had been writing and producing complex scripts specifically for television such as *The Haven* (1953) for *Philco Television Playhouse*, *Other People's Houses* (1956) on *Goodyear Television Playhouse*, *Twelve Angry Men* (1954) written by Reginald Rose for *Westinghouse Studio One*, *All the Way Home* (1960) by Tad Mosel that won the Pulitzer for Drama in 1961, and *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1959) by Abby Mann, *Days of Wine and Roses* by J. P. Miller, and *Requiem for a Heavyweight* written by Rod Serling, all three written for *Playhouse 90*. These original teledramas were replaced with cheap sitcoms (Maniewicz and Swerdlow 1978). And the writers were replaced with much younger people, often their interns. Characters in scripts and guests invited onto talk shows got younger. Gone were older adult sidekicks like the



“toastmaster general” George Jessel, Arthur Treacher (Merv Griffin’s sidekick), and Ed McMahon (Johnny Carson’s sidekick). News anchors got younger. Comedians got younger. Even children’s television hosts and televangelists got younger, prettier, and more bombastic. Other countries around the world are following the trend.

*The David Frost Show* and *The Dick Cavett Show* featured guests such as the presidents of countries; ambassadors; novelists and poets including Hunter S. Thompson, cofounder of *The Village Voice* Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, John McPhee, and Truman Capote; political leaders and activists such as Lester Maddox (who stormed off the stage of *The Dick Cavett Show*) and John Lennon; and artists and architects such as Salvador Dalí. On one show, to commemorate the knighting of Noël Coward, the prolific playwright and author of *Private Lives*, Cavett not only had Coward on but a panel of other literati including Alfred Hunt, Lynn Fontanne, and Brian Bedford. This was not an isolated event.

Today, most purveyors of broadcast talk and comedy either propagate thoroughly inane chatter such as Regis Philbin and Kelly Ripa on *Live! With Regis and Kelly* or like Andrew Dice Clay, Daniel Tosh, and others who thoroughly confuse critical social commentary with juvenile vulgarity (Dalton and Kramer 2012). No such equivalent to earlier mainstream TV talk exists today on the major broadcast networks. To find an equivalent forum today, one must invest in premium cable—in other words, pay to watch commercially supported television. Examples include Bill O’Reilly on *The O’Reilly Factor*, Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, Stephen Colbert on *Colbert Nation*, and Sean Hannity, Rachel Maddow, and Bill Maher. Limbaugh offers no such forum. He never hosts guests but prefers to speak for them, especially his straw man version of the categorically stupid and dangerously anti-American “liberal.”

Times have changed and much of the change involves the abandonment of older adults and their sensibilities. Millions of older Americans suddenly found themselves watching shows not written with them in mind, selling products not intended for them. We can see a sudden change in philosophy governing US commercial media, and its attitude toward older adult Americans in the mid-1970s gaining momentum up through the period of the Reagan administration. *The Phil Donahue Show* started in 1967. It typically hosted long discussions with the likes of Alex Haley, Mother Teresa, Ayn Rand, the Dali Lama, and other influential people in political and intellectual circles.

*Donahue* was the undisputed top-rated TV talk show for years, and then in 1986 Oprah Winfrey introduced a new genre known as tabloid talk. Winfrey was famous for spending 5 hours a day in makeup and wardrobe making herself look anything but herself, some would say making herself look safe to “Middle Americans” (Isa and Kramer 2003). Winfrey climbed in the ratings against the established Donahue by featuring episodes dedicated to male strippers, prostitutes, transsexuals, and promoting a pseudo-psychology of positive thinking. Donahue’s rating plummeted. Watching Winfrey made people think less and feel good.

Put into political context, things really changed during the Reagan administration (1981–1989). This was the time when Generation Y or Millennials (also called Echo Boomers) were born and grew up. The new emphasis in media was directed



toward younger and younger audiences. Gen Y members don't remember the world without MTV or the great distractor the Internet, a field where everything becomes equally trivial (Jackson 2008; Carr 2010; Weinberger 2007) and attention blindness intensifies (Oppenheimer 2003). In August 1993, the moniker Generation Y was coined in the magazine *Ad Age* to describe people who were in their mid- to late teens by that time. The first president they knew was Reagan. They are characterized by demographers as heavy Internet surfers (some say addicts), consumption-oriented, politically apathetic compared to previous generations, and "increasingly narcissistic" (Twenge 2007). Some call them the "boomerang generation."

While the previous Generation Xers are the first generation to make less than their parents, the Generation Y youth are the first to expect to make less than their parents, and thus they tend to have lower measures of life satisfaction (Howe and Strauss 2000). And yet, according to William Strauss and Neil Howe (1997), they exhibit a deep trust in authority leading to apathy. This is the progeny of the time when the cultural industry became super commercialized and obsessed with youth as consumers. They have been called the "Me First" generation when and where "everyone gets a trophy" (Lipkin and Perrymore 2009). The economic realities belie the notion that Gen Y's are spoiled brats except that in the history of the USA, this generation is the most likely to be obligated to take care of its elders.

The point is that a new habitus has been encouraged. Simply put, the image has been created that societies are homogenous, at least the mainstream. Youth are the centerpiece, while the rest of the population is marginalized and generally denigrated. People should not be reminded of their mortality. The world is now a safe place, without worries or other indications of frailty. The message is "be happy"!

## Note

1. These are the immortal words of the sickeningly optimistic and moronic cartoon character Stimpson J. Cat from *The Ren & Stimpy Show* (1991–1992), Nickelodeon Animation Studios, John Kricfalusi creator.

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# Chapter 12

## Conclusion

Steven L. Arxer and John W. Murphy

### Disembodiment

A key problem in the modern world is the high level of alienation that is normative. Many persons, for example, experience a general malaise. Feelings and meaninglessness and powerlessness are thus common. And in the midst of this turmoil, practically everyone longs for the return of a sense of community. The pain of isolation, as Putnam (2000) notes, has become pervasive and very troublesome.

But these feelings are related to another side of this issue. Specifically, key institutions appear to be autonomous and oppressive. These organizations, for example, seem to be operating according to their own logic and purpose. The general result of this trend is that a “credibility gap” has emerged in modern society (Mickunas and Murphy 2012). Most persons, simply put, do not believe that these fundamental institutions meet their needs. These organizations are literally adrift.

Nonetheless, the question remains: How does this trend affect aging? The answer, in fact, is fairly straightforward. These institutions establish the guidelines and expectations for aging. And due to their autonomy, aging is portrayed as natural and inevitable. Rather than a matter of definition, interpretation, or disposition, the aging process is described in institutional terms that stress directionality and decline. In point of fact, psychological and developmental theories abound that are presumed to reflect accurately this reality.

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The path of aging is thus clearly marked. And how persons define this process is irrelevant! What is important is that they understand the nature of aging and manage effectively their decline. For this reason, the idea of “successful aging” has become quite popular (Rowe and Kahn 1997). How persons navigate their psychological and physical loss is thought to be crucial to maintaining a healthy and functional outlook.

The general result of this perspective is that aging is disembodied. In other words, aging represents a trajectory that imposes universal standards of growth and adjustment. And in the end, persons lose control of their identity and destiny. After all, guidelines are revealed that specify how every stage of growth should be experienced or evaluated and life should end. All that remains for persons to do is follow this script.

## Globalization and Alienation

In many ways, globalization contributes to this scenario and produces widespread alienation among the populace. For example, this economic trend is thought to be inevitable. Underpinned by long- and short-term cycles, economies are thought to have an intractable destiny. And therefore, the current phase of neoliberal globalization cannot be avoided; in fact, most persons admit that no one can escape from the impact of globalization. Everyone must simply adjust to the demands of the current economy. Aging is thus ensnared in this economic juggernaut.

In this particular economic framework, the market becomes the centerpiece of social life. And because this device is imagined to be rational and neutral, and thus above the political fray, resources are believed to be allocated at the market place in the most efficient manner possible. Every facet of social life, accordingly, would be improved by a good dose of the discipline imparted by the market. As observed by Harvey Cox (1999), the market assumes a role reserved formerly for God.

But the aged, for example, do not fare very well at the marketplace. Most often, they are not envisioned to be very productive and worthy of much attention or positively rewarded. As a result, these persons are devalued and marginalized. At this final stage of their development, persons are not thought to be very competitive or productive. What they are advised to do, accordingly, is become involved in leisure activities or some other pastime.

At the marketplace, aging is a liability. Most advertising, in fact, conveys this message. For example, beauty and agility are reported to be essential for successful competition and advancement. Bereft of these qualities, decline should be expected. Only within this context, however, this outcome is described as natural. Therefore, what else should be expected from old people?

Although in the so-called new global economy retirement age is dismissed as a myth—persons can work as long as they desire—the reality is not so enticing. The Social Darwinism that supports the market provides a very different picture. Indeed, persons have the right to enter or leave the marketplace at any time, but as they age

success becomes less likely. In this regard, the market culture reinforces a dismal view of aging. Any praise of aging, in effect, appears to be little more than an advertising ploy.

Consistent with the demands of the market, neoliberal globalization reinforces the disembodiment of aging. At the marketplace, the aging process is naturalized and stigmatized. What older persons can actually accomplish is concealed behind images of frailty and decline. How these persons might redefine themselves and their capabilities is dismissed as wishful thinking and unrelated to actual competition. The so-called new fifty is “forty” only in the imagination of some unrealistic persons and cosmetic companies.

Although the market is supposed to be neutral, everyone, but especially old persons, is influenced by the accompanying imagery. The central message is that all persons have basic traits, but only some of these characteristics lead to success. Old persons, therefore, should recognize their limited role at the marketplace and withdraw to a safer and more commodious realm. As a result, their identities are preserved but removed from their control.

## **An Authentic Existence**

In order to eliminate alienation, persons must be able to live an “authentic” existence. In other words, their identities and the accompanying institutions must be embodied. When this goal is achieved, persons are able to define themselves and defy destiny. Sartre (1947) characterizes this condition by declaring “existence precedes essence.” As a result of living authentically, persons invent themselves and their history.

Everyone, including the aged, benefits from this change in orientation. Without a doubt, older persons have been disenfranchised traditionally by the imposition of inauthentic standards and expectations. Due to the adoption of universal developmental schemes, for example, they have been terribly stigmatized.

In a manner of speaking, persons are simply a product of the aging process. Their potential at each developmental state is outlined in advance, with only their ability to adjust properly in question. Some persons accept their fate better, or more gracefully, than others and find peace in their final years. Those who make these concessions will likely find their niche in society.

An authentic existence, on the other hand, is not so compromising. As Heidegger (1962) notes, as persons begin to understand that they are “thrown” into the world, without a destiny, they must give their lives meaning and purpose or live authentically. Aging is no exception to this realization. Aging, accordingly, does not represent a trajectory but the accumulation of the personal and communal choices that form the identities of persons. Authentic and successful aging are thus very different!

Rather than adjusting, those who age authentically create their own expectations. They exhibit the courage, as described by Paul Tillich (1952), to be themselves in the face of powerful institutional pressure to conform to traditional age norms.

They are not intimidated by the market, for example, and do not follow the usual advice to withdraw from certain areas of life. Stated simply, there is nothing inevitable about growing old, when authentic living is emphasized.

## A Key Theoretical Maneuver

Living authentically, however, rests on a particular theoretical maneuver. Specifically important is that authenticity requires the resurrection of *praxis* or the ability of persons to create themselves and their respective futures. But when the focus is on successful development, and fulfilling the associated institutional demands, persons tend to “forget” that they are responsible for their growth. As a consequence, they most often let nature run its course.

Subsequent to the retrieval of *praxis*, however, every facet of existence is appreciably changed. Particularly noteworthy is that this human action begins to pervade the world. Accordingly, the dualism that allows institutions, and their normative expectations, to appear autonomous is undermined. The key point at this juncture is that persons no longer confront but make reality. The norms related to aging, for example, no longer have the autonomy necessary for them to be treated as universal and necessary.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968) introduces new imagery to describe the resulting world. Because personal existence and the world are intertwined, he claims reality should be compared to a “chiasm.” In this discussion, a chiasm represents the inextricable association between human action and reality. Every faced of social life is thus mediated by this *praxis* and has an interpretive character. The results of this action are truly embodied; as Merleau-Ponty (1968) says, an embodied world has a “fleshy” texture.

Within the confines of a chiasm, persons are not trapped by the aging process. Rather, their actions chart a course that embodies their existence. As a result, nothing is dictated by age; age, instead, is simply a proxy for various choices and their consequences. And how these prospects are arranged represents how a person ages.

## A Practical Element

In addition to the theoretical reflection that is necessary to foster authentic action, and thus aging, there is a more practical side to this endeavor. Due to the collapse of dualism, and the pervasiveness of *praxis*, aging is thoroughly cultural. That is, persons can define or construct their lives and, if desired, age in an idiosyncratic manner. But before aging can be truly authentic, institutions must be amenable to the various ways that *praxis* can be exercised. The so-called dominant signifiers must be held in abeyance, due to the influence of the chiasm (Deleuze and Guattari 1977).

To borrow from Karl Mannheim (1950), the multivalent character of existence, including aging, can be realized only if culture is thoroughly democratized. In other words, key institutions, particularly the definitions that sustain these organizations, should not be dominated by any specific modality of *praxis*. In this way, the aging process is unrestricted and can freely unfold. These institutions, in short, no longer have the task of socializing persons into an acceptable life-course but simply chart the decisions persons have made about the future.

What these institutions represent, accordingly, is the embodiment of certain values, beliefs, or commitments that serve to organize social reality. The result is what Canclini (1995) calls a “hybrid culture,” whereby different modes of existence exist side by side. Clearly, this arrangement is consistent with the imagery of the chiasm. After all, within this framework, the products of *praxis* exist together and reinforce one another. The resulting institutions resemble mosaics rather than systems and hierarchies.

The basic idea is that institutions do not have the stature required to enforce a monolithic culture. At best, these organizations recount a particular history of action. Certain institutionalized strategies for existing, or aging, can thus be either resisted or adopted without severe sanction. None of these options, when viewed from the perspective of the chiasm, is idealized as the standard of assimilation. The result is a setting where authentic aging is not only allowed but expected.

## A Truly Worthy Life

Persons who age authentically do not necessarily live novel lives but ones that they choose. Even when a traditional lifestyle is adopted, notes Sartre (1956), a choice is involved. How a person should age, accordingly, is not inscribed by nature. In reality, those who age authentically never adapt but create; they never assimilate but innovate. A person who ages in this manner lives an existence that is truly realized.

But aging in this way is not simply a matter of self-actualization. On the contrary, persons never exist alone; they share a space and are part of a broader community. This collective, however, is not an abstraction but a collection of persons who are trying to live authentically with one another. In this sense, institutions are not mysterious, and worthy of autonomy, but are merely strategies for meeting the needs of their creators.

Most important is that persons are not atoms. With respect to the work of Levinas (1969), they exist face-to-face and thus are embodied together. In other words, because their association is not optional, they are responsible for one another; others are always implicated in any personal act. The presence of others, therefore, does not limit personal freedom and is not a burden but always accompanies the realization of *praxis*.

What is the importance of this awareness for aging? According to the imagery provided by the chiasm, the presence of others is neither a threat nor a liability to persons. This nexus of actors, in fact, is unavoidable. In the end, everyone benefits

from this discovery but especially old persons. At the marketplace, for example, these individuals are treated as if they are invisible. Their existence is practically denied.

In a community, on the other hand, everyone has a place. Every style of aging, and stage of life, fits into the implied mosaic. And given this “hybridity,” authentic aging is encouraged in a true community (Canclini 1995). All persons have dignity and are supported. Hence, incorporating the traits of everyone into the social mosaic is a creative process that is expected, rather than a sign of inefficiency. Instead of an indication of weakness or at least faulty thinking, mutual aid is viewed as beneficial to everyone.

In such a community, alienation is seriously challenged. The basic institutions, for example, are assumed to embody the collective *praxis* of the citizenry. Furthermore, the marginalization of persons violates the principle that everyone has dignity. Aging, accordingly, is not a liability but merely the accumulation of a person’s life experiences. Authentic aging is thus not an anomaly but expected from every member of this community.

Authentic aging, not to mention other facets of existence, rests on nothing but creates everything. Persons invent themselves as possibilities in the face of others. Social life is thus ongoing experimentation. But the end result, writes Levinas (1969), is an ethic of acceptance and inclusion. Nonetheless, inclusion is not earned but a part of communal life. Within this context, appeals for recognition are not necessary. Those who are authentic are thus responsible for others, in a location where alienation has no appeal. In view of authenticity, stated simply, alienation is revealed to be absurd. Taking into account this bigger picture, the point of talking about authentic aging is to bring about a less alien world.

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