

Dogmas of Inevitability: Tracking Symbolic Power in the Global Marketplace

Peter Shorett

Introduction

Among the defining features of the current era is a widespread regard for global capitalism as ‘second nature’—an immutable and taken-for-granted condition of life. Most contemplate the economy as though it were objectively there, overlooking the social forces behind its production. The world we live in is increasingly explained and justified through an appeal to the principle of inevitability, and through the implicit assumption that markets conform to fixed laws and are impervious to human intervention. In the past half-century, rhetorics of destiny and progress diffused through literature, the mass media, and political institutions have popularized the view that economic forces shaping the world are pre-determined and beyond human control. Similar metaphysical rationales have accompanied past periods of geopolitical history, from early European colonialism and the decimation of Native Americans through the Industrial Revolution and the ‘development’ of the Third World.¹ Like so many “ideas [that] take hold and become institutional in relation to power,” the concept of inevitability has slid almost unnoticed into the languages of popular culture and civil society so that it now appears natural (Nader 1997:711). An impersonal world economy operated by “strangers from an unknown shore” serves as a common symbolic currency, uniting debates on globalization across the political spectrum. To stand in outright opposition to such a state of affairs, we are told, is a form of denial. As Richard Haass and Robert Litan wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, “globalization is a reality, not a choice. ‘You can run but you can’t hide’ might serve as the mantra for the age” (1998:9).

This vision relegates the public to the status of passive observers. Historian Isaiah Berlin noted in 1953 that such a worldview “makes it inconceivable that anything could be other than it is” and serves to eliminate questions of human motive and responsibility (1953:17). As I will argue, the sense that there is no alternative to corporate globalization works as a form of cultural control by generating complacency and resignation. It disables our reactions to the world, which we come to see through

¹ Such an investigation is beyond the scope of this paper. See, for example, Gary Nash (1999) on the historical role of inevitability doctrines in European-Indian relations; David Brion Davis (1979) on presidential speeches regarding the “destiny of the Indian race” from James Monroe to Andrew Jackson and Theodore Roosevelt; John Bodley (1975) on the use of beliefs in pre-ordination to justify the forced modification of tribal cultures at the hands of industrial expansion.

the eyes of ineffectual bystanders rather than active participants. As a powerful rhetorical device, the invocation of inevitability helps to shift the parameters of public debate and cordon discourse away from alternatives to the status quo.

Struggles for political power are waged not only over material resources, but also over the principles involved in the construction of social reality. There is already a wealth of literature on the mechanisms of symbolic power—the capacity of symbols outside formal systems of control to become embedded in the structures of societies and to guide their collective behaviors (Elias 1978; Bourdieu 1992). A monopoly over the symbols that occupy the public imagination enables powerful groups to achieve domination without resistance. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, “the instruments of knowledge of the social world are. . . political instruments which contribute to [cultural reproduction] by producing immediate adherence to the world, seen as self-evident and undisputed” (1990:164).

This paper covers a novel area of social inquiry. Few if any writers have analyzed the instrumental role of ideologies of fate and destiny in insulating markets from public control and accountability. My central interest is in examining the process by which particular constructions of the international economy operate as cultural forces. Beyond the question of what ‘globalization is inevitable’ means as a logical claim, I will look at how that concept functions in different settings and the related principles that give it force. This paper is divided into three parts. The first section traces the governing ideologies in U.S. House of Representatives Hearings on the WTO before and after the Seattle Ministerial. The second section illustrates how global economic integration is represented as a natural and inevitable process through the examination of reports and editorials published in national newspapers. Section three looks at the role of inevitability as a psychological device for managing troubled workforces.

United States House Hearings on the WTO

The failed round of trade liberalization talks in Seattle at the end of November 1999 marked a major event in the post-World War II economic order. To many, it represented a victory for activist movements over global rule-making institutions. To others, it was an ominous signal of oncoming threats to ‘open markets’ worldwide, exposing international trade as a vulnerable and contested arena. The Economist spoke to the sense of foreboding among free trade advocates after Seattle:

Failure in Seattle . . . leaves the WTO’s authority in ruins. To be sure, the multilateral trading system has suffered such setbacks before... but there is only so much more that the WTO can take... The [activists’] claim to have single-handedly derailed the Seattle summit is wrong. But by failing to launch a new round, governments have nevertheless allowed the WTO’s opponents to make it seem that way.

Unless America and the EU in particular now do more to fend off the threat they pose, free trade could fall victim to them. [1999:20]

A sense of cognitive dissonance prevailed on the floor of Congress in the months before and after Seattle. Business and political leaders faced a torrent of opposition on issues related to global economic integration that many had previously thought uncontroversial. Leon Festinger (1957) has shown that when confronted with an inconsistency between theory and reality, people will resort to a myopic focus on facts, logic, and experience that reinforce their pre-existing worldview. In an atmosphere of uncertainty during House WTO hearings, speakers drew on the ideologies of technological progress and inevitability as a source of assurance.

The social dramas that played out in the House of Representatives over the WTO provide a window into the symbolic politics of the global economy at a peak period of public interest. Many of the speakers embraced the notion that global trade expansion is inevitable and beyond political control. Few participants challenged this representation to reveal its ideological content. This section analyzes the themes and rhetorical strategies employed in four Congressional hearings on the WTO from 1999 to 2000 (two before and two after the November trade negotiations in Seattle).

The Role of Metaphor

Metaphor acts as a powerful persuasive device by endowing the global economy with an ordered frame of reference. The metaphor may provide a forceful vision or totalizing system of logic that leaves the audience feeling powerless. My concern here is with the use of metaphor in conveying a sense that global market patterns are natural and unalterable. Among the images that Congresspersons made use of in the four House hearings was Thomas Friedman's famous 'electronic herd' of stock, bond and currency traders, and multinational investors that he used to describe global financial markets. Representative Billy Tauzin (R- LA) discussed the metaphor in a dialogue with Timothy Regan, Vice President of Government Affairs at Corning Inc., and Brant Free of the Chubb Corporation:

Tauzin: [Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir] Mohammed blamed everybody in a speech to the World Bank following the Asian crisis. He blamed George Soros . . . He blamed the international electronic herd for abandoning his country and savaging his markets and depressing his country. Thomas Friedman . . . was in the audience that day, and he imagined a speech that [Secretary of Commerce] Rubin might have given, and it is an interesting couple of pages. Have any of you read it?

Regan: Yes.

Tauzin: I recommend it to you. Mr. Free, he basically makes these points: Quit trying to blame somebody. The electronic herd is going to desert you. [USHR 1999b:56]

For Freidman, the perception of an invisible “power shift from the state and its bureaucracies to the private sector and entrepreneurs” reflects an underlying reality that “no one is in charge” of these transformations (2000:112). His analytical frame captured the floor of Congress, so much so that in a later speech, Mark Brickell, Director of J.P. Morgan, reiterated its prescriptions:

For every Southeast Asian country that laments the fact that the electronic herd has deserted it because its policies are not attractive, there is an Italy where improvements in policy have resulted in attractive investment opportunities which bring the hedge funds in as investors. That makes stock prices rally, it brings interest rates down, and it lets Italian workers borrow money to buy homes at lower rates than they could before.

We don't hear enough about the good results that come from that kind of market discipline, but it helps the man on the street who has some other force exerting useful pressure on his government to adopt desirable economic policy. [USHR 1999b:57]

On many occasions, the use of images of crisis worked to create urgency and generate a will to action, making hard decisions seem unavoidable. Chairman of the Subcommittee on Trade, Phillip Crane (IL), introducing the first hearing on the WTO after Seattle, saw trade as a ‘vehicle’ of progress at risk of being misdirected:

Our focus here today is to *steer a course* for returning America back to its historic position of strong influence and leadership in the trading system. Clearly, the *train has jumped the track* and must be prepared and redirected if we are to preserve our prosperity and unbeatable success in international markets... [USHR 2000a:4-5]

The vision that Crane presented was one of path-dependency. All other factors being equal, the natural course of global trade politics pointed in one inexorable direction, toward greater interaction and less regulation.

The next set of metaphors prevalent in Congressional WTO hearings draw on the concepts of biology, where processes of global capitalism are justified as organic and inescapable phenomena. Raymond Williams (1977) contends that the transposition of ‘nature’ onto social life serves to convey an innate, self-evident constitution of the world. Ideas of what is natural “are means through which both established and novel inequalities become inherent ways of life” (Franklin 2000:20).

Evolutionary analogies forge a symbolic relationship between biology and social questions. Michael Rothschild, in *Bionomics: The Inevitability of Capitalism*, writes: “a capitalist economy can best be comprehended as a living ecosystem. Key phenomena observed in nature: competition, specialization, cooperation, exploitation, learning, growth, and several others—are also central to business life” (1990:xii). The naturalizing process is thoroughly embedded in political discussions of the international economy. Assumptions that markets follow an irreversible ‘natural’ course serve to conceal the political forces and institutions that govern them. In an exchange between Representatives Levin and Dawson on information technology, the use of nature as a form of control was salient:

Levin: You do not want us to push issues before they are ripe, but I take it you want us to press issues to help *make them become ripe*. I think we need to do exactly that at Seattle to set the stageAnd it will be controversial, but we in this country have certainly *faith in the evolution of free markets*, and I think they should include all kinds of markets, capital markets and labor markets, and . . . information technology. And I think we will expect some resistance, right?

Dawson: I did not mean to paint a picture that was without controversy.

Levin: They are doomed to be controversial because they are meaningful, right? And we have to figure out how far we want to go at Seattle. Expect resistance. But we have in mind the *evolution of markets* in terms of information technology. [USHR 2000a:183]

Members of Congress deployed the “faith in free markets” as a tool for overcoming resistance to the neo-liberal trade agenda. The use of evolution provides a type of implicit persuasion, generating consensus through an appeal to dominant, internalized systems of belief.

Organic metaphors supplied an immanent logic to an otherwise chaotic picture of global trade politics. During a February hearing, Becerra conceded after a debate on labor standards, that “we can wait, certainly, until the economics help a lot of folks rise out of poverty . . . and let the natural course take place . . .” (USHR 2000a:106). In the words of former U.S. Trade Representative Clayton Yeutter, western economies “influence other nations by osmosis” (USHR 2000b:27). Chairman Crane introduced the session on “The Future of the WTO” by emphasizing a need to “grow markets” and help sectors in the economy “reach a higher stage of development” (2000b:27).

Cordoning Off Alternatives

As Laura Nader notes, “a key factor in constructing dogmas is the restriction of discourse on alternative conceptions of reality” (1997:721). The process through which political-economic forms come to be understood as non-negotiable and beyond dispute is crucial to the exercise of power. To obtain consent and overcome resistance to domination, it is necessary that instrumental concepts of the world colonize the consciousness of intellectual elites, political leaders, and culture writ large.

Chief among these ideologies is that of irreversibility, or what some economists have called lock-in. Once certain techno-economic arrangements are progressively favored while others are excluded, a trajectory is put into motion that is difficult to reverse or control. Michel Callon argues that options “are definitively closed before even being completely explored” (2001:8). The discourse of ‘no alternative’ permeated all levels of debate on the House floor. Wes Watkins (R-OK) told Congress in August that they would have to impose “less regulation if we are going to be competitive . . . What we do has got to lay a foundation in the global economy, and *we are not going back and we all know that*” (USHR 1999a:128). Sander Levin (D-MI) reflected later on the post-Seattle uncertainty:

In the first half of his Davos remarks the President vividly described the important role of trade in an era when globalization is on the march. He described what I believe to be true and what I saw in my recent intensive 10 days in China—*globalization is here to stay...* These new trends demand new ways of thinking. [USHR 2000a:22]

Noam Chomsky describes the process as a tightening of the ‘boundaries of thinkable thought,’ where discourse is restricted within the narrow parameters of the status quo (1988). The goal is to foster a conception of the world as self-evident, rather than as one established order among competing possibilities. Drawing on an omnipotent status quo to disarm the audience, Frank Yeutter bluntly told Congress, “walking away is not an option” (USHR 2000b:27). Similarly, on the issue of opposition to the WTO, Governor Ventura exhorted, “one hand can’t block the sun” (2000b:9).

The concept of globalization as ‘a reality not a choice’ carried sway in both pro-WTO and opposition speeches. Mark Van Putten, Director of the National Wildlife Federation, illustrated just how hegemonic this idea had become in his statement to the House in February:

[But] let me be clear. To the degree that a stereotype has been created that the environmental community wants to shut down international trade, that stereotype is false. The National Wildlife Federation

believes globalization is a fact, not a policy choice. And we want the international trading system to succeed. [USHR 2000b:115]

Such rhetoric is distinct from reasoning, which “proceeds by logic and offers propositions about facts for empirical validation” (Bailey 1981:27). The Alliance for International Auto Manufacturer went further in pushing Congress to act through emotional appeal:

With the opportunities presented by the global economy come fears. It is, therefore, important to . . . lay these fears to rest. The United States must lead in promoting trade liberalization around the world because the U.S. economy has become internationalized. The United States cannot hide from the reality of globalization, and cannot afford to turn its back on the opportunities it presents. [USHR 2000a:23]

The Autonomy of the Market

The logic of capitalism is that markets, if allowed to, will regulate themselves. Economies are commonly imagined as impersonal spheres, developing according to their own dynamic. To the founders of political economy, market activity consisted of individuals privately exchanging for mutual benefit in the absence of political intervention (Caporaso and Levine 1992). The market was expressed through neo-classical theories of exchange equilibrium: the free play of forces of demand and production would tend to establish, under competitive conditions, an equilibrium pattern in the prices of commodities that maximizes utility. There is thus a certain ‘circular flow’ of economic life, where all suppliers and consumers are mutually dependent (Hirschman 1977). Economics lends its hand to disciplining of the public mind on issues of globalization. Escobar notes that, “in their long and illustrious realist tradition, [economists’] knowledge is taken to be a neutral representation of the world and a truth about it,” which conceals its paradigmatic bias (1995:58-59). However, the acceptance of these notions serves, according to Bourdieu, “to construct, in reality, an economic system corresponding to the theoretical description, in other words, a kind of logical machine, which presents itself as a chain of constraints impelling the economic agents” (1998:96).

A belief in the autonomy of markets was implicit in the language of congressional debates. A congressman from Florida stated, “we realize the globalization of commerce,” to summon its justification (USHR 2000a:288). Rep. Grogan described “integration as ‘nations’ struggle to cope with the new realities” of a “complex world economy” (USHR 2000b:54). Global trade machinery needed to be “attuned to both the scope and pace” of economics (USHR 1999a:24).

Reification

Under corporate capitalism, the economy is organized according to various rational models of efficiency. In public discourse, the organization of economic *means* takes priority over any particular *end* (or value). The Frankfurt School termed this process “instrumentalization,” where goal-oriented activity is hidden by its surface production (Jameson 1990). Reification, or the treatment of abstract relationships as though they were entities, provides a way of representing the global economy that imbues it with coherence and logic, while masking the social processes involved in its continuity and reproduction. Robert Samuelson, in an article in the International Herald Tribune on January 2, 2000 just after the Seattle Ministerial, expresses this concept: “Global capital and trade will go where they are most welcome and productive... it is precisely this logic that has persuaded so many countries to accept globalization. If they don’t, someone else will.” In this example, two different economic exchange relationships are re-constituted in terms of things that “will go where they are most productive and welcome.” The complex set of relationships that make up “global capital and trade” is turned into a determinate object and endowed with rational norms of behavior.

The construction of the global market, as an end in itself rather than a means to promote social and individual welfare, came into the public consciousness in the 1980s through political campaigns against the ‘welfare state’ in America and Western Europe (Chauddry 1993). This attitude is so commonplace today that figures such as Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Harvard Institute for International Development, argues that “the main debate in economic reform should be . . . about the means of transition, not the ends” (1993:272). The doctrine of “the one true way,” as Roberto Mangabeira Unger and Cornel West call it, thoroughly imbricates mainstream political thinking (1998:2). The same notion was expressed in various forms in House debates on the WTO. Daniel Griswold of the CATO institute told Congress that “ultimately, the argument for free trade does not depend on current economic conditions. If the United States were mired in recession, free trade would still be the best policy both in theory and in practice” (USHR 2000b:86).

According to F. G. Bailey, the technique of ‘obscuring by mystification’ is often employed in public settings to argue for the inevitability of a phenomena in question (1981). To demonstrate the inevitable, the rhetorician draws on a *procedure* (as opposed to *goal*) that commands legitimacy. This focuses the audience’s attention on “what is derivative (the method) rather than what is primary (the question at issue)” (1981:30). Griswold employed this strategy in a March Congressional debate on the effects of free trade on manufacturing. “The debate over jobs is irrelevant,” he claimed, “because the real measure of a nation’s industrial might is not the number of people employed . . . but the value of what they produce The shift to service-sector jobs is a natural consequence of a more advanced and prosperous economy”

(USHR 2000b:83-84). Here, an original question of the public good (employment) is repositioned as a question of raw economic power (productivity).

An emphasis on techniques over norms echoed in the planning of future trading agreements. The Alliance of International Auto Manufacturers stated after Seattle:

the benefits of open trade for consumers and workers have been amply demonstrated . . . the trading system works. Now it is time to begin new technical negotiations to remove remaining barriers to trade and investment. [USHR 2000a:236]

This optimism parallels such writers as Francis Fukuyama, who envisions a fast-approaching post-ideological world in which the role of the state and public life in general would be reduced to “economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems . . . and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands” (1989:18).

Technological Determinism

The notion that advances in technology are the prime movers of the global economy was among the prevalent ideas that influenced public debates on the WTO. Technology governs its own course, independent of human direction, while creating and destroying existing social forms in its image. David Noble noted that “a stock device of recent social analysis is to view modern technology as though it had a life of its own . . . Propelled according to its own immanent logic and operating through witting and unwitting human agency, it ultimately outstrips the activities which gave birth to it” (1979:xviii).

Speakers on the floor of Congress treated technology as a monolithic, ethically neutral phenomenon with a determinant influence on history. This technological determinism was often combined with an enthusiasm for technological progress and “an unmistakable tone of moral disapproval directed against . . . resistances to structural and normative adaptations accompanied by innovation” (Moore 1974:485). According to Joseph Papovich, Assistant US Trade Representative, the Internet was “moving too fast, and governments, by nature, are too slow” to justify regulation. Capable of organizing themselves independent of politics, emerging technologies “needed to be left free to develop” (USHR 1999b:20). Levin (D-MI) stressed that the “evolution of information technology” needed to be insulated from regulation so that it could run its “natural course” (USHR 2000a:183).

Propaganda

This discussion has examined the ideological campaign by members of Congress and business interests to expand the global free trade agenda after Seattle.

Theoretical questions regarding how the economic order should be framed and classified were as important as practical concerns over how it should be constructed and managed. The hearings can be seen as part of a larger effort to control the symbols that occupy the public's imagination on trade. The House was not convening to pass legislation, but to discuss propaganda strategies, or what Chairman Crane called "getting the word out." He emphasized that a crucial role for Congress was to get "chief executive officers to communicate to their employees that the company's survival is dependent on the world market" (USHR 1999a:147). To Amos Houghton (R-NY), the central issue of the hearings was how to "drive these things through" to the public and particularly labor groups (USHR 2000a:38). Kittredge noted that industry needed to "collaborate with Congress" to "increase public awareness of the benefits of rules-based trade expansion . . . and [identify] factual errors that have been propagated by WTO opponents" (98). The key phrase of the hearings was stated by Bill Thomas (R-CA): "perception is reality" (38-40).

Perspectives on the Global Economy in National Newspapers

Over the last ten years, the term "globalization" has come from nowhere to being one of the most talked about topics in academic literature and the media. Although the processes to which it often refers—namely, the increasing transnational flows of goods, services, and information²—have been in place for over a century, only recently has discussion become so pervasive on how to describe and understand the forces at work in the global economy. News sources such as the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times play a key role in defining the parameters of these emerging debates.

This section analyzes how major national newspapers represent global economic integration as a natural and inevitable process. These messages permeate the public mind, encouraging attitudes that support the established order of corporate capitalism and restricting discourse on alternative economic possibilities. Market ideology in the news is largely naturalized and taken for granted, as it is veiled behind a surface appearance of neutrality and objectivity.

In the United States, for much of the last century, the practices of the news media have been organized around what Hackett and Zhao refer to as a regime of objectivity—an assemblage of ideals, assumptions, practices and institutions which emphasize its role as "a mirror of society" (1998). News institutions use the criteria of objectivity to enhance their professional status and gain credibility as neutral actors in

² Globalization can be understood in many other ways, including: the global spread of free market economies; the increasing mobility and power of multinational corporations beyond the reach of national controls; or the homogenization of global cultural forms. The term sometimes refers to non-economic issues, but this paper will focus on its economic dimensions.

the public sphere. Both journalists and editors communicate their purported neutrality through the methods they employ in publishing both “facts” and “opinions.” By taking themselves out of the picture and adopting a stance of impartial observer, news providers present themselves as representing the universal public interest.

Chomsky (1988) and others have shown, however, that the news media are dependent on the special interests that dominate the economy and state for both their legitimacy and financial survival. Thus, underneath a veil of unbiased criteria, powerful groups are able to direct the patterns of news content in favor of preferred readings that legitimate existing social and economic arrangements. Empirical indicators reveal that “objective news” continues to be “what affluent white males define it to be” (Bailey 1981:31).

Perhaps nowhere is this external influence more ever-present than in the coverage of global economic issues. Far from being detached observers, the transnational media conglomerates within which most US news is produced are central to the forces propelling corporate globalization. Corporations based in media and information sectors have helped to spearhead free trade agreements such as NAFTA and the MAI (Hackett and Zhao 1998:172). This hidden economic agenda penetrates both the language in which economic “reality” is described and the selection of economic news items for coverage.

In covering globalization, newspapers transmit market liberal values in two ways. First, the deregulation of international trade and factor markets is described, based on simplistic cost benefit analyses, as a “net positive development” and an “overall boon to global welfare.” Second, and more importantly, the global spread of the market system is endowed with a sense of underlying logic and inevitability. The universalization of western corporate capitalism is characterized as an end of history, the final stage of “mankind’s ideological evolution” (see Fukuyama 1989). The characterization of globalism as “here to stay, whether we like it or not” is explained by factors and configurations that are beyond human control. What to many represents an increasing corporate control and a total commercialization of social life worldwide, is re-inscribed in neutral terms through news editorials and reports. It becomes a force not subject to debate, described instead in distant terms as the increase in transnational flows of trade that have led to a growing inter-penetration of national economies.

Paradigms get their power not only from institutions but also from their embeddedness in basic social beliefs. News institutions transmit market-oriented views in part because their financial lifelines (major corporations) demand it, but also because the Americans by-and-large support these views and expect to see them when they open the paper. Gramsci (1971) describes hegemony as the process by which concepts of reality become diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, political principles, and social relations. To Jean and John Comaroff, it is “that order of signs and

practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies . . . that come to be taken for granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it" (1992:23). Hegemonic ideology represents not simply a dominant view, but a world view that is implicit and assumed. These values and attitudes are inculcated by simple repetitive exposure, rather than considered judgement.

Herbert Gans has observed that hegemonic ideas permeate the news through the "unquestioned cultural or political assumptions and values" that underlie the descriptive facts that form their reports. Reporters, journalists, and editors use common sense "covert assumptions and value judgements" of society in the organizing process" (1979:702). An aura of objectivity surrounding news institutions thus provides legitimacy for the ideological optics and power relations they reinforce. While news provides a partial representation of the world, its skewed toward dominant institutions and values, at the same time it disguises ideological role from its audiences; "[it] thereby wins consent for preferred readings [that] ratify and reproduce the ideological framework of liberal-democratic capitalism" (Hackett and Zhao 1998:168).

Implicit Messages

Globalization is largely spontaneous—propelled by better communications and transportation. [International Herald Tribune: January 4, 2000.]

In my survey of newspaper articles, communication and transportation technology were repeatedly described as the self-propelling forces of change in the global economy. Nowhere was there an analysis connecting those technological changes to their political and social roots. Absent from the discussion was the role of nation-states, particularly the US, in creating the conditions that made an unrestricted flow of goods and capital possible. A reader unfamiliar with the history of the GATT, World Bank, or IMF will not grasp how historically situated and reversible these "spontaneous" developments really are.

Ten years after the fall of communism, the forces of globalization and technological change have made it a small world after all. The market economy has triumphed, and governments everywhere are finding that free markets engender free minds. [Bill Bradley, FDCH News Capital Report: 2000]

The profit-making strategies that have penetrated all dimensions of news production cannot be separated from the content of the information newspapers present. Many observers have pointed to the ways that corporate conglomerate ownership of the news media has eroded the autonomy of editorial and marketing functions. As a result, "the occasional descriptions or predictions about the global

economy that are found in the media usually come from the leading advocates and beneficiaries of this new order . . . the visions they offer us are unfailingly positive, even utopian” (Mander 1996:9). It is no wonder that newspapers declare the triumph of the market economy, given that they play an active part in its global realization. A consensus of values and interests among news institution produces uniformity in descriptions of the global marketplace.

Rhetorical Techniques

According to Bourdieu, “the power of words and commands . . . lies in belief in the legitimacy of the words and of the person who utters them, a belief which words cannot themselves produce” (1992:58). Newspaper articles and editorials employ “expert authority” to explain global economic dynamics in two ways. First, through the language they use, editors and columnists invoke a monopoly on knowledge of a topic. The use of terms such as “most economists agree” and “scholars have shown” with or without specific reference is one way this authority is established. Second, newspapers employ well-renowned experts and public figures to make critical arguments on globalization. The quotes included in this paper by Paul Samuelson (a leading authority on economics), Anthony Giddens (a sociologist) and Bill Bradley (2000 Presidential Candidate and former Senator) are just a few examples of the use of statements from popular figures to establish credibility in describing the global economy.

My interest, however, has been more in the language that newspaper articles used on the issue of globalization and how it could be conceptualized as an attempt at cultural control of the audience. On this issue, I discovered three instrumental rhetorical techniques used in these articles: (1) a-historical descriptions, which strategically separate the status quo from its roots in the past; (2) the passive voice, employed to establish the news source as a neutral observer describing reality; (3) equating what is real with what is rational, thus giving the powerful actors of the global economy an unquestioned legitimacy through their role in the production of present conditions. Each of these techniques encourages the newsreader to misrecognize the global economy through the lens of neo-liberalism. The following section textually analyzes examples of each technique in newspaper articles.

[The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs] represents another stake in the heart of the idea that governments can direct economies. The main purpose of GATT is to get governments out of the way so that companies can cross jurisdictions with relative ease. It seems to be dawning on people . . . that government is simply too slow and clumsy to manage trade. [Wall Street Journal:1993]

It requires ignoring history to believe the notion that the GATT represents a response to rather than a cause of national powerlessness on trade. Since the Kennedy

Round of trade negotiations in 1962, the GATT has laid down broad global limitations on the ability of nation-states to subordinate commercial activity to domestic goals. Governments are ineffective in managing trade flows because they have been banned from using the tools required to do so. By omitting this inconvenient fact, the Wall Street Journal instead communicates the notion that global free trade agreements have emerged as natural solutions to the void left by inherently “slow and clumsy” governments.

Newspapers often use the passive voice to signify dispassion and neutrality. As Alexei Yurchak has pointed out, the use of the passive voice in explaining political phenomena is often a mechanism of control. By cognitively repositioning the relationships involved, passive sentence construction diverts the reader’s attention away from systemic forces at work. The key phrase in this sentence is that characteristic institutions of modern life are *inadequate for the tasks they are called upon to perform*. Instead of global corporate control demanding too much of the world’s life support systems, the picture is reconfigured so that these systems are seen alone—inadequate in the face of unarticulated (but legitimate) demands. The portrayal both hides the agent of change (corporations and governments) and attaches a pre-supposed legitimacy to the “tasks” institutions are “called upon” to perform.

According to Marcuse (1968:84), in modern industrial societies, people tend to believe that “the real is rational.” The “objective order of things”, which is itself a result of domination, assimilates everything it touches, absorbs the opposition, and thus, through its sheer power, demonstrates its superiority. This news story utilizes the concept of an all-powerful status quo to disarm the reading audience that might have aspirations for change. The concept that “globalization is a reality, not a choice” is powerful both because it presents the trend as self-evident and because it places alternative economic options beyond the limits of what is rational and credible.

Weighing the Press against TV : different objects of control

The role of newspapers in shaping public opinion has changed significantly over the last half century. Other types of media, some argue, have replaced the social control functions of the press. According to David Korten, “television is the primary medium through which corporations shape the culture and behavior of Americans”(1995:152). Even within the community of newspaper producers, there is some agreement that they are not as influential as they once were.

These perceptions are flawed, particularly in relation to the influence of newspapers over public dialogue on the global economy. First, the simultaneous trends of persistent readership figures and an increasing monopoly in the newspaper industry mean that a large body of Americans has become more dependent on fewer newspapers for detailed information on the global economy. This has rendered

obsolete the notion of a competitive marketplace of ideas and made it possible to implant similar ideological configurations into the minds of millions of people.

Second, and perhaps less recognized, newspapers continue to command a central influence over the college-educated and politically powerful. While less than half of non-high school graduates read US papers on a daily basis, 77 percent of college graduates do. The numbers for public officials and business executives are even higher (Scarborough Research 1998). The dominant market-liberal narratives in the press are thus involved in the production of an elite political culture that conforms to the global economic imperatives of corporations. As the most powerful citizens internalize the message that corporate globalization is both permanent and inevitable, justice and equity will continue to be pushed outside the realm of political debate.

The Strategies of Human Management in the Workplace

The boardrooms of multinational firms have been quick to appropriate ideologies of fate and destiny as a psychological tool for managing conflict in the workplace. In a national bestseller that circulated through the executive suites of major American corporations, Rosabeth Moss Kanter outlined what she saw as the most effective means of implementing innovations in a global era, based on a “survey of successful corporate business practices” (1984:12). Ideas for reorganizing, cutting costs, putting in new budgeting systems, expanding communication, or assembling products in teams are often met with hesitation and resistance from workers accustomed to the “comfortable past.” In order to cultivate a “readiness to readjust in response to the changes that . . . innovations will require,” the manager/entrepreneur must choose from a set of strategies to win over the lower tiers of the workplace. First, she explains,

to get commitment and support for a course of action may require that it appear *essential*—not as one of a number of possibilities. By the time a decision is announced, it may need to be presented as *the only choice* . . . The announcers—the champions of the idea—have to look unwaveringly convinced of the rightness of their choice to get other people to accept the change. Unambivalent and unequivocal communication . . . provides security. [1984:285]

In convincing people of the need for reorganization, Kanter explains, “change masters must be historians as well.” When managers define a new strategic vision for their company, they are encouraged to use the past “in the construction of a story that makes the future seem to grow naturally out of it in terms compatible with the organization’s culture” (1984:283). Studies of organizational storytelling suggest that they are an effective means of generating employee commitment while functioning as an important form of symbolic management.

Proposals for “change” introduced from the top-down can be symbolically redefined as managers involve others to “make them feel they have initiated and own the change” (1984:284). The disappearance of individual will into collective inertia carries instrumental value. As Kanter notes:

In American companies, this transformation smoothes power relations. The use of “power” is made possible partly by the power user’s tacit agreement to keep his or her power invisible once others have agreed to participate. Others’ participation may be contingent on a feeling that they are involved out of commitment or conviction—not because power is being exercised over them. Successful innovators know this, and so they often down play their own role in an accomplishment in official organizational communications in favor of credit’s going to the whole ‘team.’ [1984:284]

Convincing a workforce that restructuring is “inevitable and necessitated,” the wounds of opponents of management proposals are more easily healed after the changes take place. Conflicts and opposition, once silenced by the mutual belief in the inexorability of an outcome, can slow mold into consensus. “Just as in the treaties after a war,” according to Kanter, “‘losers’ may disappear into allies. Pain, suffering, trauma and resistance may disappear into ‘necessary evils’”(1984:285).

When a manager mobilizes her corporate inferiors behind a transformative idea, she embarks on a “series of emerging constructions of reality, including revisions of the past” that appeal to the psychologies of potentially resistant workers. Most important in overcoming these barriers is inculcating the belief that “the ultimate choice is the only logical one, unfolding naturally and inevitably from what preceded it” (1984: 288).

Kanter, et al. (1992) devote a chapter to the topic of “Execution,” an explicit discussion of how managers implement effective structural changes (e.g., mergers, acquisitions, restructuring the production process, or takeovers) within a corporation. Among the Ten Commandments of strategy is the creation of a “shared vision.” Central “organizational dreams” that appeal to the “cultural sensibilities” of the group can provide an impetus for acceptance—awakening the workplace to a new reality, free from “the old ways of the past which can no longer be maintained.” The second guideline that Kanter et al. put forth is the need to “generate a sense of urgency” as a call of dissatisfaction to rally an organization behind change (1992:378-79).

The process of naturalizing a managerial strategy for change in the workplace develops through an appeal to potent symbolism. The images of a corporate “life-cycle” and the pressures of “youth,” “growth,” and “maturity” provide a justification for the “aches and pains” (e.g. job loss, pay reductions, and undesirable work) of organizational re-adjustment to natural laws. Similarly, managers and CEOs evoke

narratives of evolution to explain “adaptive” strategies of restructuring to their employees. Kanter, et al. write that, according to this doctrine, “change for a particular organization occurs through an evolutionary process involving random mutation, environmental selection of those forms fit to survive, and retention or reinforcement of the selected pattern” (1992:27).

The publication of Michael Hammer’s *Reengineering the Corporation* in 1993, which sold over 2 million copies world wide, brought about a veritable revolution in the sphere of corporate management. From the giants of American Industry to companies as small as fifty employees and a few million dollars in sales, corporations across the country and in Japan and Europe began to apply a strategy to drastically “redesign business processes” to take advantage of “new technology, a new regulatory environment, and . . . constantly changing competition” (Hammer 1995:3-5). In a follow-up guidebook released two years later, Hammer outlines the mechanics involved in putting the concept of “reengineering” into practice, most importantly, “how to prevail at the most difficult part of reengineering: overcoming workers’ resistance to change.” To “manage” the “emotional realities” of a workforce facing downsizing, job reorganization, and insecurity, the CEO is compelled to subtly manipulate the psychological dynamics of the workplace to make it more conducive to change. This means,

convincing people that reengineering change is absolutely inevitable—not an option, but a necessity. The message must be sent out loud and clear that there is no choice. This can eviscerate the basis of resistance. One union local president was kept fully informed about the motivation and progress of a reengineering effort. At one point, he confronted the business unit head and said, “I know what this reengineering is, and I don’t like it.” But then in a resigned tone, he added, “But I do understand that it must be done.” [1995:130]

Many corporations have become adept at symbolic means of communicating information about their philosophy of management, the ‘culture’ of their organization, and the humanistic rationale for their policies. Symbolic forms of management include the telling of organizational stories, sagas, myths, and legends. A study by Martin and Powers (1983) shows that corporate storytelling can be an effective means of generating commitment and reducing resistance to proposed changes in labor conditions. Management can use, and has used these stories to manipulate beliefs about the nature of and motivations for corporate re-organization (e.g., at IBM and Electrotec). The authors conclude, in passing, that these forms of propaganda can be “powerful and potentially dangerous tools” (1983:167)

Conclusion

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, in a speech on economic integration in the 1980s, summarized the dominant economic ideology of our era in a single phrase—"there is no alternative." The mantra is echoed in official circles, corporate boardrooms, television news programs, and the floors of Congress. According to a New York Times editorial on April 15, 2000, society's "real challenge" today is to recognize that "there is no realistic way to reverse or even slow the forces that are driving the world economy." Relations of power direct these currents of ideas and claims to knowledge, which are in fact instruments for constructing the world as natural and unalterable. Together, they form a symbolic arena of political struggle, a competition over the definition and legitimation of such concepts as the economy and market. Foucault (1977) observed that what is accepted as true and real at any given point depends on the conformity of those elements of knowledge with set rules and constraints characteristic of dominant discourses.

Inevitability is central to the process by which elite consensus is engineered and through which the public at large comes to accept unequal configurations in the economy. It serves as a boundary marker, designating some issues as outside of the realm of democratic assessment. Visions of the economy as inexorably pre-determined help to shift public debate away from critical normative questions, including: who gains and who loses from the current organization of the economy? Is exponential growth sustainable? What rules and regulations (or lack thereof) make the hierarchies of ownership and control over markets possible?

Neo-liberalism is a strong ideology in part because "it has behind it all the powers of a world of power relations which it helps to make as it is" (Bourdieu 1998:95). But the issue is somewhat more complicated, given that individuals often consent to and participate in their own domination. Ideologies draw their strength not merely from the force behind them or the status of their truth content; they also depend on an embeddedness in basic social beliefs. The "irreversible destiny of economies" has been treated here as a question not of ontology (a knowledge claim in need of confirmation or criticism) but of cultural control (a worldview shaping social practices in a form that yields to the interests of powerful groups). Nader and others have argued that the impersonal mechanisms of power increasingly characterize industrial democratic states, and to a great degree supplant more repressive methods of social control. Ideas such as inevitability serve instrumental goals, but their form is de-centered and misrecognized, so that the purposes they serve are often obscured. As such ideas become hegemonic (that is, widely shared and taken for granted), they "enter the minds of participants across spatial and temporal boundaries" (Nader 1997:720). Often, they find their way into the vocabulary of unexpected actors, such as the compliant union official or the "pragmatic" leader of an environmental organization.

This paper has explored contexts in which individuals and groups employ inevitability as an instrument of persuasion. The claim that economic phenomena are

beyond society's control can produce different effects depending on the conditions under which it is made and received. It is a powerful persuasive device that, if effective, makes no further dialogue necessary. As F.G. Bailey notes, this rhetoric "explicitly closes off options by appealing to fear, to a sense of helplessness. It can be presented in the invocation of authority: why debate alternative courses when the authorities will certainly not allow them to be put into practice?" (1981:28). As a consequence, it may close off meaningful public discussion and prevent power-holders from weighing the ethical costs of their decisions.

The notion of inexorability, as it is mobilized in speech and writing, provides symbolic support for global capitalism by persuading audiences to participate in 'rising tides of progress' that are impossible to reverse or deflect. The belief in neo-liberalism as destiny is a strategic form of misrecognition, which produces passivity and acquiescence. Public audiences are resigned to watch the "creative destruction" of markets over which it is said they have no control. Precisely this consequence makes such doctrines dangerous to the functioning of democracy. It is no coincidence that the proliferating vision of an implacable global economy has come on the back of an era of declining civic engagement and political participation in the United States. Late capitalism depends on a submissive popular faith in the progress of markets and technology.

But as Marshall McLuhan once wrote, "nothing is inevitable provided we are prepared to pay attention." Meta-historical appeals should not substitute for adequate explanation. What is needed is a more committed effort to trace the connections between the material forms of the economy and their symbolic representations. The ultimate antidote to the dogma of "no alternatives" is to embark on an honest dialogue between corporate and political leaders and the public over the consequences of current global economic arrangements. A crucial starting point would be the recognition that market dynamics are not the natural unfoldings of history; they are contingent on and made possible through of a dense infrastructure of rules and institutions, all of which are subject to political will.

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