The process of globalization, neo-liberal globalism in its current form, proceeds, despite resistance, by means of the instruments of power that its dominant institutions have the capacity to deploy in its interests. Of these interests, the primary one is the creation of a global environment for maximum profit-taking by the large multi-national corporations which dominate the global economy. To this end, a global system of domination and subordination is a goal and the economic instruments of power used to advance this goal are multi-lateral and bi-lateral trade agreements, authoritarian global institutions, structural adjustment plans, debt bombs, price shocks, and austerity measures. While these economic instruments have worked quite well in creating the global system of domination and subordination, success, social control with an absence of significance disruption, depends upon other instrumentalities of power.

Two of these other instruments of power, political and coercive, have been deployed to further the goal of neo-liberal globalism, the former, to “manufacture consent” in the face of the overwhelming contradictions of the globalizing world, and increasing dissent; the latter to coerce the “consent” of those who cannot be persuaded. It is not that the use of these instruments of power is new, simply that the ways in which they are now used is different as are the dominant institutions in this form of globalism. During colonialism, the “first world” countries were dominant and the means by which they created their global empires involved, first, the invasion and conquest of other countries, “third world” countries. And, second, after the conquest, the colonizing country would establish political control in various forms and then it would transform the economy of the conquered country into one that would serve the colonizer.

After WWII, the “first world” countries, weakened by the war, and confronting movements of national liberation within their empires, “discovered” a less expensive, slightly more subtle, and equally, if not more successful way, of maintaining the system of inequality that had been created by colonialism. This new way involved a dual process. The first part of the process was supporting “friendly dictators,” or dictatorships. These were individuals and/or elite factions, military, religious, ethnic, committed to governing their country in the interests of the first world. In an attempt to more successfully manufacture the consent, the first world countries have “encouraged” many of its dependencies to become democracies in a very narrow sense, hold elections with predetermined outcomes. The main result has been that former dictators could now be called “presidents” because elections had been held and authoritarian regimes could be called democracies. This has proved more successful in providing “necessary illusions” for the populations of the first world countries, but successful in only muting dissent in the dependent countries somewhat, so instrument of coercive power has been necessarily deployed.

The military is the main means by which the instrument of coercive power has been deployed. And in these dependencies, the military has the capacity to “coerce” consent because through military aid from the first world countries, the military had become the largest institution many of these countries. Most third world countries need no protection from external military threats and their militaries have been deployed primarily to maintain control and coerce consent from its dissident domestic populations. The second part of the process has been debt bondage; this is way neo-liberal globalism is referred to as economic imperialism.

If countries successfully resist the deployment of the above instruments of power, they still find themselves in a position of subordination. Within the global free trade agreements, the structural adjustment plans, and membership in the WTO, is a “trojan horse” which undermines the possibility of autonomy and guarantees a political “unfreedom.” While agreements may have been reached with the governments of “friendly dictators,” and loans from global institutions like the World Bank and IMF may have been appropriated for themselves by “friendly dictators,” and the loans may have gone to developing export infrastructure to benefit multi-national corporations, rather than for social infrastructure, the country must still fulfill the obligations of the agreements and the stipulations of the loans. These obligations and stipulations intrude into the political sphere and undermine the possibility of even a legitimate democracy governing in the interests of its people. The obligations and stipulations of these loans and trade agreements can determine the shape of social policies like education, health care, and social security.

Despite the deployment of these instruments of power, economic, political and coercive, the instrument of ideological power has had to be deployed. The goal of course is to legitimate the system of inequality that has been constructed in the interests of those in power. Ideological power was deployed during the first system of globalisim, colonialism, and was told as the story of the “white man’s burden.”(Kipling) The less overtly racialized ideology of the free market utopianism has been adopted in this latter incarnation of globalism. This utopian ideology accepts the assumptions of the free market theories and claims that a truly global free market where countries and individuals freely compete will lead to a better world for all. It is in essence this a reformulation of the American ideology of the 1950s which claimed that “the rising tide” of the American free market capitalism economy would raise all boats (and all boats might be yachts).

Though broad in range, these instruments of power have been and will continue to be inadequate for achieving the desired goal of a global environment for maximum profit taking of large multi-national corporations. The global economic crisis of 2008 has revealed the ideology of the free market to be a thinly disguised justification for growing inequality. The social movements of 2011 from the Arab spring to the anti-austerity protests in Europe, to the Occupy movements have demonstrated, if not the failure, the inadequacy of these instruments of power to achieve the desired goal. A more subtle and more powerful instrument of power is necessary, and it is being deployed on a global scale. This power is the power of the image. And this instrument of power is being deployed by multi-national media corporations.

As neo-liberal globalism proceeds, so does the expansion of the multi-national media corporations located in the developed countries, especially the United States. Privatization, deregulation and financial liberalization, multi-lateral and by lateral trade agreement, all components of the instruments of economic power, have allowed these corporations to dominate global media. They have done so by various means, ownership, partnership, and distribution agreements. According to Robert McChesney in his book Global Media, only ten multi-national media corporations dominate global media, with forty corporations making up a secondary tier. Obviously this global expansion is beneficial for these media corporations whose primary goal is profit. But the success of neo-liberal globalization depends upon the power of the image deployed by these media corporations. And the images are now being spread globally. Western media content is present everywhere in the world and even where the content does not yet dominate, the content of domestic media is influenced by western media. Globally, the most watched movies, the most listened to music, and the most watched television shows are products of western media corporations. Even hip hop

The power of the image was recognized early in the twentieth century by sociologists, social psychologists, political theorists, the emerging public relations industry, and socialist authors of science fiction. H.G. Wells said that “advertising was the art of making people want things.” And Walter Lippmann argued that the “mass media as a mechanism could shape and control public discourse in ways that surpassed even the coercive powers of the state.” Edward Bernays, the “father” of public relations, believed that the image was so powerful it could create reality. He said, “the truth is not a thing to be discovered but a thing to be created through artful world choices and careful arrangement of appearances.” Their understanding of the power of the image, however, was limited because of a shared assumption. They all assumed that people could be persuaded and deceived by the image because the image appealed to the unconscious, the irrational part of the psyche. But they all agreed that there was a subjectivity, an, at least somewhat, autonomous psyche, that needed to be persuaded, needed to be lied to. This assumption of an autonomous psyche led them to underestimate the power of the image to create the inner, “subjective,” life of the person. Consumer subjects are such creations and they share common psychological traits that make them compliant and easily manipulable. In fact what appear to be the unique characteristics of consumer subjects is really constructed in the “world” of desire created by the image (Inventing Reality).

The first psychological trait and the one that determines behavior of the consumer subject is anxiety. That which drives this anxiety is the continual experience of lack; the consumer subject is never okay, it is produced to perpetually desire that which it lacks (AD and the Ego, Consuming Images). The second trait is that it is unreflective. It lacks the capacity for critical self-reflection because it takes itself for granted; it is an object to itself. The limited reflection it can engage in is what it lacks? It is also not reflective about its relation to the “world” of its desires. The things of its desires are abstracted from the real world, so the social relations under which they are produced, the costs to the environment and ultimately the costs to itself remain beyond critical reflection

. The third trait of the consumer subject follows from the first two. It cannot imagine other possibilities, because it does not experience itself as a real subject, nor the world as something that is humanly constructed. If something from the real world intrudes into the consciousness, like critique, it does not affect it, because the “world of things” it inhabits is a more desirable world. The fourth trait is arrested development; the consumer subject does not develop; it repeats a cycle. The power of the image creates a desire, the anxiety of the experience of lack, drives the subject to consume, but this is only temporarily fulfilling, because the image creates newer, more modern, more desirable things and the process is repeated again. The entire process is more anxiety producing because the desire and the “world of things” has expanded so greatly (Overspent American)..

Traditional social controls are unnecessary, the consumer subject does not need to be lied to, does not need to be coerced. The power of the image produces compliant subjects, who experience the perpetual cycle of anxiety and desire as “freedom,” the freedom to consume and who never develops, matures or becomes wiser. It always only “is” in the process of buying, and never sees other possibilities, other possible worlds, nor would be reflective enough to imagine why a another world would be desirable.

Ruben Alves offers an appropriate metaphor in his book Tomorrow’s Child which captures this psychology and its reality. Alves suggests that we imagine spending our lives in a small cabin from which there is no exit and no view of the outside world, no doors or windows. We would consider ourselves prisoners. However, he suggests that we imagine spending our lives in a mansion with a thousand rooms but still without window or doors. Each day we would be able to go to a different room and experience its delights. This is what he says we call freedom.

The power of the image is not limited in the same ways that the other instruments of power are. Geographical boundaries can not limit the power of the image. All areas of the earth are open to the technology which transfers the image. From the tribal people of Brazil to Figi islanders, media technology and its content, the image, has become ubiquitous. Also national boundaries no longer constrain the power of the image. As mentioned earlier, privatization and deregulation, encoded in free trade agreements and structural adjustment plans, guarantee both the expansion of multi-national media corporations and their content. Cultural values and beliefs offer some resistance, but, once introduced, the image has proven to be more powerful. Most importantly, though, the image is not subject to rational critique, because the image is not discourse; it just is. The power of the image over cultural values and norms and rational critique has been demonstrated in regard to the image of beauty. The devastating effects both psychological and physical of this image on women, especially young girls, has been proven, but the desire to be thin persists and as spread (Kilbourne, Killing Us Softly). The equation of thinness with beauty is being universalized as the global multi-national media spread. And example is a study of young girls in the Figi islands (Study).

The main means by which the power of the image is deployed to create homogenous subjects and stigmatize certain populations is through advertising. Advertising now saturates cultural space in both the developed and developing countries. The amount of money spent globally on advertising $1 trillion and in the U.S. advertising and marketing make up almost one fifth of its gross national product.

"Advertising now compares with such long-standing institutions as the

school and the church in the magnitude of its social influence. It dominates the media, it has vast power in the shaping of popular standards and it is relly one of the very limited groups of **institutions which exercise social control."**

A study by Juliet Schorr which she discusses in her book The Overspent American demonstrates the extent to which advertising is successful in creating subjectivity. In her study, two thirds of those surveyed admit that they were always thinking about something they wanted to buy and just under a third of those surveyed acknowledged that they have dreamed, not daydreamed, but dreamed as they slept about something they wanted to buy. The most interesting result though was both the “wish list” which the respondents shared with Schorr, but also the income that they believed was necessary to get what they “needed.” Both the wish list (exotic cars and vacations, second and third homes, and the swimming pools of millionaires) and the income represented an upper class life style; the life style of the top two percent of income earners.

As Schorr points out, in the 1950s, advertising was directed at the emerging post-WWII middle class, and the “world” of advertising, the world in which the product that was also being sold, was embedded was a middle class world. The “dreams” and wish lists of the newly constructed consumers of the 1950s were middle class dreams, “keeping up with the Joneses.” However, advertising, at the turn of the century, images products that frequently can only be comfortably afforded by members of the upper class. Also the “world” in which the product is embedded is an upper class world. Hence, the new exotic wish lists, and the drive to keep up with what Schorr calls the “new Jonses>” This is not surprising if one understands that advertising is not just selling things but is selling a “world” and a creating a subjectivity.

The most powerful advertising medium is still television commercials. Its power was recognized early when it 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 (Fifties)."

Television commercials are embedded in a world also and that is the world of the television show, and the world of the television show is more and more the world of the upper class. The television show is not “just entertainment,” even entertainment, the main purpose of which is to draw viewers for the advertisement. It is an essential means of deploying the power of the image. In the 1950s, one of the most popular genres on television were situation comedies. The “world” of the comedies was most often the world of the suburban middle class, with the home as the main setting. The narrative with its characters, conflict and humor was fore grounded but it was always taking place in the middle class world of the Joneses. This is quite different currently. Situation comedies are still an important genre, but the world in which they are set is an upper class world, a world of the “new Joneses.”

The images are deployed for two main ends: the creation of compliant subjects who are passive objects of manipulation and social control and to symbolically stigmatize those groups and their beliefs, values, and experiences that pose obstacles to the goals of neo-liberal globalism. The aged and the process of aging pose such obstacles. The questions to be considered are, first, the ways in which aging and the aged are either an obstacle or a problematic for neo-liberalism and, second, how the power of the image is deployed in advertising and situation comedies to define aging and the aged as a way to overcome the obstacle or solve the problematic..

Aging and the aged are an obstacle to neo-liberalism in several ways. First, the aging and the aged in the developed countries are an increasing segment of the population and as such have some political power. They also have in most developed countries common economic interests, the main ones of which are social security and health care.. It is in the interest of large multi-national financial and health care providers to privatize these programs. Public discourse follows two related themes. First is the neo-liberal theme that eliminating these programs and allowing the free market to work its magic will be better in the long run for the aged and for society. The second theme involves identifying the aging and aged population as “parasites” who are at the top of a giant “pyramid” or “ponzi” scheme. And as their population increases, the young will carry an increasingly heavy burden paying for the “entitlements” of the age. social security. The beneficiaries of these programs see them quite differently. This discourse has only been partly successful because even in the U.S., the “model” of free market capitalism, asixty-five per cent of the population believe in social security and also that the U.S. should adopt Medicare for all. The fear is that the political resistance generated by these beliefs will continue to be an obstacle to the goals of neo-liberal globalism.

Secondly, in many countries and cultures, including to some degree, even in the U.S., there is the belief that being human means more than being a consumer and aging involves not just “getting older,” but a involves a maturation process, a process in which one ages and does in fact undergo physical change, but also that as one grows older one gains wisdom and knowledge about “life” itself. This is an obvious obstacle to the creation of homogenous subjectivities which neither mature nor grow, but simply exist in the eternal now of anxiety and desire. In many cultures, cultures which understand aging differently, the aged are the members of the community that transmit the world view of the community to the younger members. The understanding of aging as something more than physical deterioration, a pathology in relation to the norm of health, youth, is a obstacle to neo-liberal globalism.

Symbolic Violence: Aging and the Aged in Advertising

To advertisers, aging and the aged are viewed somewhat differently. The aged are not a desirable demographic group for advertisers. This is demonstrated in the Nielsen ratings for television shows. Television shows are rated by the share of audience that a particular show has in its time slot, for example, how does a show compare with other shows in the Monday 8PM, and then by the viewership of the desirable demographic group 18-49. Only then do the ratings look at total viewership. This latter category would include the aged. But the overall ranking of a show is determined by the first two categories. For advertisers, 18-49 is the desirable demographic because they are considered by advertisers to have disposable income and a willingness to spend it.

Because they are not a desirable demographic, the aged are “disappeared” from the majority of the television commercials; they simply do not exist in that “world.” There are two exceptions though. One exception is television commercials for pharmaceuticals, especially those drugs which have been developed to treat the physical illnesses that are defined by society and the “world” of the commercial has those associated with the aged. Examples of these are cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart and cardiovascular illness, and loss of, or problems with hearing and sight. These commercials dominate the few television shows that have a disproportionately larger aged segment of their viewing audience. Sunday morning news programs and Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune are examples of this. The characters in these commercials are the aged, and their problems are solved by the drug being advertised. The second exception is commercials selling tourism. These commercials are populated by the aged, those apparently without the above health problems, or for whom drugs have provided a cure, and who have disposable incomes The best examples of these commercials are the cruise line commercials, populated by elderly people, enjoying the common dream of travel in their retirement.

While the aged are disappeared and marginalized in the world of television commercials, aging, or prevention of aging, is central. The reason for this is the norm of beauty as youth and that the desirable demographic group can be targeted. Commercials range from beauty products that conceal wrinkles, to hair coloring products that conceal grayness, to skin products that conceal dry and cracking skin, to cosmeseutical drugs that eliminate wrinkles, grow eyelashes, grow hair, to drugs that will increase sexual performance. These commercials are populated by the same demographic group towards whom they are directed.

The images in television commercials define aging as a process of physical change and a process of change that needs to be resisted, because it transgresses the social norm of beauty which is youth. But it also reinforces more, consumer subjectivity, the acceptance that aging is as it is defined in advertising, and that the solution to the anxiety that the commercials creates in the consumer can be resolved by buying and using the product. The images that the commercials deploy to define those who have aged is similar. The aged must cope with the diseases of aging; this is inevitable because those diseases are a normal part of aging. And those aged that have money must spend their money enjoying their retirement, their golden years, which is inevitable.

This is the power of the image deployed to reinforce consumerism, but also as symbolic violence. It disappears and marginalizes a certain group because of certain characteristics, which that group may or may not share, and it devalues the experience of aging by defining it simply as physical deterioration, by what it lacks in relation to the norm. Simultaneously, it reinforces consumer subjectivity, its anxieties, and the world of its “desires.” It also reinforces the belief in western society that disease is inevitable, that individuals get diseases, and that drugs cure diseases or control them. This ignores the social factors related to disease, mainly consumerism, and its sedentary life style. Most diseases that are “imagined” in the commercials are caused not by aging, but by the poor diet of a fast food culture, fat, sugar and salt, lack of exercise because of overwork, when employed, and stress when unemployed, and/or a failed social system. It is both advantageous in terms of profit and necessary for media corporations to deploy this imagining of aging, the aged and disease.

The place, or lack of place, of the aged is not altogether different in current situation comedies. They have been disappeared as central characters, and remain if they do as marginal characters whose main function is comedic interlude and whose main traits are an engaging bewildered quirkiness, a humorous senility, or less engaging, but humorous, bitter and angry cynicism. This place, or lack of place, of the aged has changed and an analysis of the imaging of aging and the aged in early situation comedies is a helpful contrast. Early television in the United States was dominated by situation comedies. Examples of these early situation comedies are Father Knows Best, Leave It to Beaver, I Love Lucy, The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, September Bride, Our Miss Brooks and I Married Joan. These shows and others had certain things in common in terms of the imaging of aging and the aged. First, the main characters were adults, played by adult actors. They were adults in the broad sense, not just in terms of physical age, but in terms of maturity and life experience. Many had jobs and other social roles that they were competently fulfilling; they had families and friends, and they had gained wisdom from their life experience. The children were played by child actors and were depicted as immature, callow youth, who needed to mature as persons. In other words, youth was defined by what it lacked in relation to aging. It was as if television situation comedies on a superficial level had accepted “stages of life” theories. Much of the humor and conflict, such as there was, centered on the situations the children got themselves into because of their youth. The resolution to that conflict was usually mediated by the wisdom of the adults.

A example of this is Father Knows Best. The show starred Robert Young as the father. The character he played was and Young himself was. His wife played by Jane Wyman was also an adult. They had three children, Bud, Sissy, and Kitten. Their family lived in a two story house in the suburbs with all the modern appliances. The stories frequently focused on situations that the children got into and finally had to be solved by Robert Young, the father who knew best. Kitten had found and taken care of a wild bird, but the bird was now healthy. Kitten wanted to keep the bird because she had cared for it and did not want to lose it and was worried that it might get hurt again. In a conversation, in her room, Young explained to Kitten that the bird was wild, that it should not be kept in a cage, and it should be let go. He essentially explained the idea of “freedom from” to Kitten who agreed with this wisdom and freed the bird..

Not all adult characters were mature in the sit coms of 1950s, even some of the main characters were immature adults. For example Lucy in I Love Lucy, or Joan in I Married Joan existed in a state of arrested developed. But humor derived from their characters and the comedic situations they found themselves in was derived by playing against the norm of a mature adult.

The imaging of aging and the aged has changed in the contemporary situation comedy. The tendency now is to “disappear” both the aged and aging. The majority of the main characters in contemporary sitcoms are younger, as are the actors, what are called “twenty-somethings.” And when the actors and characters are older, they still act as if they are twenty-somethings. One can argue that this transformation began with a specific situation comedy, Happy Days. In Happy Days, set in the 50s, but one of the most popular sitcoms of the 70s and early 80s, the main characters were high school students. There are however still adults as central characters, the parents of two of the main characters. In the early years of the show, the father was and adult, the mother was “ditsy,” but in the latter years the father became a comedic figure and wisdom was imparted to the young through the ageless character called Fonzie.

By the nineties, the most popular sitcom, was populated by young “twenty-somethings” alone who lived in New York. This was Friends, and no main characters were adults or the aged. The characters and the actors in the show mirrored the desired demographic group and the “world” of the show mirrored the “world” of the advertisers, an upper class, homogenous world of young, upwardly mobile, “white” (in New York) consumers. The parents of the main characters had no life of their own and were only introduced into the show to create comedic conflict in the lives of the main characters.

When there are older characters, adults, in sitcoms, they are not adults in the sense of the 1950s. They are simply older chronologically. There development has been arrested; they behave as if they were adolescents, even if they are married and have jobs and the obligations of other social roles. Frequently, the arrested development is accompanied by an almost total inability to comprehend and act in the “world.” Older characters are the “butt of jokes” so to speak. They are the source of audience humor, but also the ridicule humor of the younger characters who are now endowed with wisdom. In the popular situation comedy Two and a Half Men, the two adults, “the men” are in a state of perpetual adolescence, while the “half man,” the child, is the wisest and the most mature of the three.

The aged have been disappeared as central characters in contemporary sitcoms. And have been disappeared almost completely except for marginal characters who occur in brief scenes. As mentioned earlier, these characters are of two types, engagingly senile, or humorously cynical. These characters appear for comedic effect; they are humorously senile, quirky, dependent, not occupying any meaningful social roles, and not really being a “subject of a life.” They do not work, have intimate relationships, and they are dependent. They apparently live in a room and only emerge occasionally. The engagingly senile might impart wisdom that is embedded in an incomprehensible language with “comedic” physical gestures , or through an apparently irrelevant but subtly insightful story.

The best example of this imagining of the aging and the aged in contemporary sitcoms is a popular and now almost cult television show, ironically called Arrested Development. There are seven main characters, five adults and two adolescents. Of the five adults, only Michael, the main character is an adult in anything beyond the age. The stories all revolve around Michael trying to hold the family and the family business together. Michael’s father is a corporate criminal, falanderer, with no sense of obligation, social responsibility, and absolutely no moral compass. At the beginning of the series, he is in prison. Michael’s mother, a racist, who has, and continues to, ignore the obligations of parenthood, lives off the very generous illegal income from the family business. She inhabits an upper class mean spirited, self-involved bubble. The other three adults exist in the state of “arrested development.” Michael’s brother, Chip, can not hold a job and can not maintain intimate relationships. Michael’s sister does not work, has no parenting skills and is “arrested” in a relationship with a husband, who is a former psychologist who now just wants “to be.” The two teenagers, victims of parental neglect and lost in the world of adolescence, are still the most sane and most wise, that which they have to fear most is apparently aging..

were situated in from situation comedies to dramas to *telenovelas* take place in an upper class world.

I

Advertising and the Image

Advertising and Aging

Entertainment as a discourse on aging: consumer subject vs aging