AN INVESTIGATION OF SOME IMPORTANT ISSUES CONCERNING NEW COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES AND THE THIRD WORLD.

Serge Walberg

"Twenty-five years ago, the international order could be divided into 3 major groups. The most powerful of these was the so-called First World, including essentially those countries that were grounded in private propertied relations and whose production was undertaken by capitalist enterprise […]The last category (in every sense) was the Third World, containing those countries that had just emerged from the collapsed European colonial empires" Schiller (1991).

1. ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the effects of the advent of new communication technologies on the economies and socio-economic infrastructures of nations of the Third World (who do not yet extensively possess them). The effective exclusion of the very nations who most need them from the benefits of these technologies is analysed in the context of a dialectical understanding of the historical relationship between the developed and developing world.

The research conducted supports the view that the ruling classes of western capitalist economies, specifically their global corporations, developed and maintain control of new technologies in order to consolidate their control of the means of production, and hence to extend their economic and political subordination of the Third World. This has been done, among other things, by the globalisation of communications and the forced propagation of "white western" culture as a norm for adoption by the Third World. Because of the advances in dispersed development of internet based production, today this exploitation can now be extended to cyberworkers, who in effect become a "live-in diaspora", working abroad without ever leaving their home countries (or drawing more than local wages).

The complexity of the issues concerned, coupled with the abundance of available material on the topic, pitch an exhaustive investigation beyond the scope of this paper, and research here has therefore been limited to 3 sequential areas of inquiry:
1. New Communication Technologies and their vital importance to the Third World
2. Cultural Imperialism, hegemony, and the 'Americanisation' of Third World culture
3. Dispossession, and the exploitative abuse of dispersed development of IT products and services

The objective is to trace the exploitative process from the appearance of new communications technologies (potentially of vital assistance to developing nations), through to their use as a method of further exploitation, rather than liberation.

2. INTRODUCTION

On 16th July 1999, John F. Kennedy junior, son of the ill-fated U.S. president of the same name, lost control of his private aircraft on his way to a celebration and plummeted to his death. For at least a week after the event, the complete spectrum of media, worldwide, from print to the Internet, was saturated with reporting related to it, addressing a global audience of over 2 thirds of the human population, many of whom had never heard of him before.

On the same day (almost at the same time), on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, a landslide killed 1,700 people. Only a handful of western newspapers reported the catastrophe, and even then, it was relegated to a minor column in the centre pages, dwarfed by the media '*mega-blitze*' surrounding the death of Kennedy junior. No example of media response in recent times can better serve to illustrate the posit of this paper: that the ruling ideas today are the ideas of the ruling global superpower (the USA). In this sense, little has in fact changed since Marx wrote: "the ruling ideas in every epoch are the ideas of the ruling class. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time of the means of mental production" Marx & Engels (1845).

The appropriation of new communication technologies by the advanced industrialised countries (specifically their global corporations) perpetuates their use in the interests of those countries. The cynical prioritisation of news items that relate exclusively to "white western society" events, cult figures, and perceived lifestyle interests, demonstrate the effective exclusion of Third World countries and populations from full participation in the benefits of these technologies.

As a direct result of the economic exploitation sustained by the Third World, it has incurred a monumental national debt (to its western taskmasters). The burden of servicing this debt is so economically crippling that it effectively prevents the Third World from investing resources into developing the infrastructure that would allow it to benefit from new technologies and, as Donna Demac (1986), says: "Much of the developing world approaches the communications challenge with no existing system in place".

It is intended to demonstrate below that the First World's capitalist technocracy benefits immensely from these new technologies, that the corporate owners of mass communications media use it (both consciously and unconsciously) "for their own purposes, which are domination and control" (Schiller, 1996). It will be shown that this control, *ipso facto* presupposes the dominance of the economies of the First World (or more precisely of its capitalist class) in the global market place, and the corresponding impoverishment of Third World nations and their populations. The so-called communications "revolution" has not brought independence to the Third World, but on the contrary has exacerbated its subordination to the west's economic interests.

3. NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND THE THIRD WORLD

Through armed invasion, European capitalism subjugated the peoples of Africa, Asia and South America, several centuries ago. Through military plunder India, Ceylon, Polynesia, North Africa and Indochina lost their national independence and became colonies of foreign powers. Through fraud, force and violence indigenous African, American and Australian peoples were relieved of their economic power and forced to pay allegiance to foreign monarchs (Mandela, 1958). Clearly defined and historically inevitable economic objectives motivated the expansionism of a newly capitalist Europe. Spices, rubber, rice and tea from Asia; gold, cocoa, diamonds, manganese and slaves from Africa, all found their way to the warehouses of Europe and the recently colonised Americas. This systematic plunder of the agricultural, mineral and human resources of the Third World, weakened their economies, reduced populations to misery and further impaired their ability to resist exploitation.

National liberation of most of these Third World nations (almost in every case through armed struggle and revolution), has not brought substantial relief from exploitation, domination, political interference, and even in some cases overt military aggression by their European ex colonial masters (e.g. Korea, Indochina, Congo, Egypt, Kenya and Haiti) .

This is because biased political treaties, heavily weighted against the new nations, were used to forge disadvantageous economic commitments with the west. These guaranteed the continued dependence of the Third World, economically, politically and in some cases militarily, on its unequal relations with the First World.

Furthermore in many cases, as I have said elsewhere (Walberg, 1997), departing colonial powers (particularly the English) deliberately partitioned their ex-colonies, along arbitrary boundaries, jeopardising the political stability of the nations by creating ethnic and religious tensions between populations. These 'standard' military procedures were deliberately intended to further weaken the newly independent nations, rendering them more vulnerable and hence easily controllable.

It is against this historical backdrop of the relationship between the First and Third Worlds that we shall evaluate the issues relating to the advent of new communication technologies, and the extent of their appropriation by the west to perpetuate its supremacy, and to globalise its markets.

The Third World's critical need of communication technologies
According to a 1984 study conducted by the International Telecommunication Union, and quoted by Donna Demac (Demac, 1986), with over 600 million telephones worldwide (the current number of telephones worldwide is estimated at one billion plus 500 million mobile phones (BTT 101 Online Course, 2003)), two-thirds of the world's population still can't access a telephone. Low levels of literacy reduce the value of newsprint in social communications, and the dispersion of populations in often remote, inaccessible locations further impedes their logistical access to services and markets. With the road systems and transport infrastructure in the Third World dilapidated from the effects of *national debt* repayments, and International

Monetary Fund-imposed austerity regimes, the urgency with which an effective communications infrastructure is required by the developing nations is no longer in doubt. The International Telecommunication Union recommended in its 1986 report, *The Missing Link*, that a sustained global commitment of US$ 12 billion annually would be necessary to give Third World populations access to telephones.

Because of the harshness and expanse of much of Third World terrain, the construction of extensive land-based telephone and data lines would be exorbitantly expensive, placing such projects very low on the priority list of cash-strapped nations struggling to feed their populations. "Developing countries may have other, more pressing investment priorities. Devoting limited resources to ICTs [Information and Communications Technologies] would be difficult to justify" (Bedi, 1999). Hence, the obvious need for providing these nations with access to effective, efficient and affordable *satellite* communication systems.

A large proportion of the Third World's problems (from health and hygiene to industry and commerce) are seen to be related to low levels of literacy and insufficient access to education. An efficient, satellite-based communications system could deliver an unlimited range of vitally important distance education programs into any home, school or workplace in the world (or within the satellites' 'footprint' area). In addition, establishing basic telephone connections would lead to "improved medical and emergency care, communication between town centre and remote areas, and increased commercial activity" *(*Hudson, 1984).

However these vital *survival* needs of the developing countries cannot compete with the *profit* motivated imperatives of western capitalism, which has not only aggressively appropriated the control of communication technologies for its own market objectives, but actually conspired to exclude Third World nations from acquiring equal access in the future, as we shall demonstrate below.

The appropriation of satellite technology by the west
The history of space and satellite technology has been one of *cooperation* rather than *competition* between First World countries (though fierce competition over space characterised the relations between the First and Second World during the Soviet era). The costs of building, launching and maintaining satellite networks were enormous. For this reason, bilateral and multilateral participation turned out to be very advantageous and joint ventures were typical. Because of the huge costs involved, only the formation of space industry '*cartels*' made it feasible for western nations to develop satellite technology so extensively. Satellites were used to colonise space for "wealthy nation-states, enclosed it for private corporations, and exploited it for commercial and military purposes" (Giblett, 2001). Competition between western powers was minimised by simply declaring outer space "*the common heritage of mankind".* Stripping this phrase of its crypto-altruistic euphemism, this simply means: outer space is available on a first come – first served basis *for free!* You cannot actually buy it but if you get there first, you can sit there forever, and act against any other who invades or interferes with your slot.

Third World economies, restricted by lack of sufficient funds were (and in most cases still are) unable to afford developing satellites. By the time they became

wealthy enough to participate, most usable space slots (only certain frequencies and orbital slots permit satellites to function effectively) had already been occupied. The "*common heritage of mankind",* had now been substantially '*squatted*' by powers who not only hadn't paid for it, but had also enacted laws allowing them to protect their "privacy" from trespassers.

Proposed legislation that would allow an egalitarian distribution of *reserved* space slots, (thereby enabling poorer nations who got there late to still find a reserved slot), was vehemently opposed, and successfully defeated by the USA. When UNESCO voiced the concerns of those nations being excluded, the United States promptly withdrew from UNESCO (leaving unpaid bills worth billions), in what Schiller (1991) sees as a deliberate attempt to weaken "the capability of an international organisation to defend the informational interests of its members against transnational corporate activity."

The drain of resources from the Third World to the first
Because of the impossibility of competing (or even of just keeping up) without the use of new communications technologies, Third World countries who cannot afford to develop their own are obliged to lease services from the space 'cartels'. These services are extremely expensive and result in an enormous financial burden on their economies, with a net flow of resources from the poor (Third World) countries to the rich ones, benefiting not the populations of these rich countries as a whole, but only the giant global corporations.

Furthermore, with access to an audience that spans the globe, western marketers and advertisers can develop the concept that western consumerism is the norm, and a lifestyle to be aspired to by all humans. False consumer needs (not least of which are TV shows, broadcasts and other cultural products) are created for impoverished populations, resulting in a demand for western lifestyle commodities, from the sale of which marketers are quick to profit. Again this results in a drain of vitally needed resources *upwards* to the First World.

4. AMERICANISATION OF THIRD WORLD CULTURE

As far back 1982, in a report titled *The Cultural Industries; a challenge for the future of culture*, UNESCO expressed its concern that cultural activities all over the world were being increasingly subject to the influence of the major media and communications companies. It further stated that the international spread of the culture industries over the previous 40 years had resulted in the gradual "marginalisation of cultural messages that do not take the form of goods, primarily of value as marketable commodities."

As the growing media corporations of 'white western society' search for new sources of income beyond their own national borders, so the culture industry becomes oriented towards a global media space and market. This media space will inevitably be used as a forum to propagate the notion, to a largely uninformed and uneducated Third World population, that western culture (including its own political conception of 'democracy') is the only way forward in a technological world. The corporate

stranglehold on our information and communications media "gives neoliberal ideologues a virtually unchallenged platform from which to blast their pro-market messages" into every corner of the planet (Hudson, 1999).

White western cultural and lifestyle icons, such as fast food, Disney theme parks and others are already marching in to the Third World in the wake of the pre-conditioning of the target population by globalised communications networks. Cultural domination, or more precisely "transnational corporate cultural domination" (Schiller, 1996) cannot simply be measured in terms of exposure to American television, but includes "the English language itself, shopping in American-style malls, going to theme parks, listening to music of internationally publicised performers, watching CNN news, reading translated bestsellers and eating in franchised fast-food outlets around the world".

Cultural imperialism and hegemony are the inescapable outcomes of this situation where a provisional alliance of transnational media corporations and governments exert *'total social authority'* over other subordinate groups or nations. This is done not simply by coercion or by the direct imposition of ruling ideas but by winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural. U.S. communications networks have been remarkably successful in securing, not merely grudging submission, but enthusiastic allegiance, both domestically and abroad "by identifying the U.S. presence with "freedom" - of speech, of trade and of enterprise - and offering a vision of the good life patterned on the U.S. model of individualistic consumer affluence" (Hudson, 1999).

The unquenchable drive by transnational corporate media and communications giants for ever increasing profits and control may well be sounding the death knoll of our human heritage enshrined in the diversity, both geographic and ethnic, of our cultural resources.

Four decades ago, the richest and most powerful European countries created the Common Market (now in its expanded form renamed the European Union) because capitalism had evolved to the point where it required a more mobile labour force. The "bourgeoisification" of the white western proletariat and its subsequent demands for better pay and conditions (Marcuse, 1964) forced western capitalism to look to the workers of poorer countries, who themselves were poorer, less educated, less protected by trade unions and willing to work for a pittance on the promise of relocation to the "affluent west" and the dream of a better life. Workers from poorer European countries could travel to the richer ones, competing with the local workforce to drive wages down and hence increase profits. This rationale still drives the desire of the EU to further expand and enlarge its membership, and is creating a "proletarian diaspora" driven from their homes because of economic hardship, unemployment and poor living conditions.

However, the onset of the internet and dispersed development of IT products and services has created an environment where global corporations can exploit these poorer workforces without having to relocate this proletarian diaspora to the west, as we shall see below.

5. DISPOSSESSION AND THE "LIVE-IN DIASPORA"

The recent increase in the use of IT/multimedia products and services has created a new category of worker: the IT/Internet/Multimedia worker, and engendered a burgeoning *cyber-proletariat*. This workforce (primarily comprised of programmers, graphic designers, instructional designers and project managers) is no longer geographically restricted to a specific workplace, but can develop products flexibly, working from any internet-connected location, in a global "virtual workshop" (Walberg, 2004).

Project managers have found that profits can be substantially increased by careful selection of the countries of residence of team-members of a cyber project. Because of the huge differential in wages between countries of the most advanced industrialised countries and those of the developing countries, management can "mix-and-match" their teams of developers according to that differential, and hence reduce costs. This wage differential is made all the more attractive for First World enterprises by the fact that workers in developing countries are less protected by trade unions (if at all), and are not accustomed to receiving the rights, benefits and other advantages that First World workforces have fought for and won in the last 50 years, while the Third World was still fighting for national liberation from colonialism.

India has recently emerged as a leading player in the IT arena. Indian programmers and computing practitioners are amongst the most advanced and sought after in the world, and competitiveness within India's IT workforce (due to locally high unemployment) continually ameliorates these cyberworkers' skills. Yet Indian IT wages are amongst the lowest IT wages in the world, making it an ideal recruiting location for corporations in need of good, cheap programming human resources (Walberg, 2004).

However, graphic designers need to reflect the aesthetic and cultural norms and sensitivities of the end-user (typically from the First World). Indian graphic designers, conditioned by their living environment, may not accurately design interfaces that would contain the 'engagement' characteristics needed to meet the commercial requirements of an IT/Multimedia product being developed for a western client. Italian design, on the other hand, has long been considered by the western world as an icon of good taste (from shoes to furniture), and is unfettered by Third World social and cultural taboos and constraints (such as nudity, colloquialisms, conceptual *laissez faire*, etc.).

However, Italian *instructional designers* would be limited in their ability to accurately identify and create the content and information design needed for a product intended for consumption in, say, the USA or Australia, particularly an educational product. A locally based instructional designer would deliver a much more appropriate design, as well as conduct a more productive (and logistically effective) interaction with the client.

For an international IT or multimedia corporation, (indeed for many smaller, locally based companies), "good" project management procedure might therefore dictate that the programmers be recruited in India, the graphic designers in Europe, the

instructional designers in Australia, and the project manager wherever the capital for the venture is being injected (perhaps Japan or the USA). Here then is our "virtual workshop" in its simplest schematic form, completely populated by a "live-in diaspora" which effectively is working "abroad" without ever leaving its home country, and without benefiting from the better wages, working conditions, trade-union rights and other advantages that prevail in the country of their employers.

With the potential for the increase in internet-based production and the growing cyber-proletariat we may soon see a corresponding increase in the size of the "live-in diaspora" in those countries excluded from the EU, whose workforce is not able to travel freely to seek better wages and conditions. While this diaspora might see itself as an IT elite in its home-country, objectively it is clearly the object of exploitation by multinational IT corporations. The degree of their dispossession is related of course to their country of residence, so that the economic dispossession of the Indian programmer, because of the steep wage differential, the working conditions, trade union rights, etc. is several orders greater than the dispossession experienced by the highly paid, well protected graphic designer in Milan.

6. CONCLUSION

The relationship between the First and Third Worlds historically has been one of exploitation. The advent of new information technologies has only altered the form of this exploitation. The effects of the changes in form have been logistical in the sense that populations have moved during each new phase of the historical evolution of the process, from colonialist through post-colonialist, industrial, post industrial and present day cybernetic society. The colonial era saw the colonial powers' populations move to invade and exploit Third World nations in their homelands, creating a colonial diaspora. Post-colonial and industrial societies saw movement in the reverse direction, with the exploited populations moving to the First World when cheap labour was needed to populate the West's workshops and factories, creating a proletarian diaspora. Finally the cybernetic, online age has spawned the "live-in diaspora" where population shift has been (or is being) eliminated altogether by means of online exploitation where the cyberproletariat effectively works "abroad" without leaving its home country.

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