

# **THE MILITARY AUDIENCE COMMODITY: REOPENING THE BLINDSPOT DEBATE**

by

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the requirements for the degree of

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## **Abstract**

This thesis attempts to establish the existence of the military audience commodity, while simultaneously reopening and addressing the shortcomings of the “blindspot” debate concerning Dallas Smythe’s concept of the audience commodity. Organized around three pillars of the blindspot debate – the role of the state, industry, and labour – this thesis argues that the U.S. military plays a role to play in “putting audiences to work”. An historical analysis is augmented by a case study of the Pentagon’s recent “America Supports You” public relations campaign. It is argued that attending to the social and cultural specificities of this case study provide novel ways to expand the political economic theory of the audience commodity.

**Keywords:** Political economy of communications; audience commodity; military communications; propaganda

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Senator Fulbright and the Pentagon Propaganda Machine

In April 2008, the *New York Times*' David Barstow broke the story about what is now known as the "Pentagon Pundit scandal" (Barstow, 2008). The scandal involved over seventy-five former military officers who, after being briefed extensively by the Pentagon, achieved heavy media saturation during the lead-up to the Iraq War through 2008 when the story broke. These on-air pundits appeared as independent analysts, misattributing the source of their information, and managing to ensure that Pentagon talking points dominated American news media. Despite Barstow winning a Pulitzer Prize for the story, there has been no television coverage of the scandal, and outside the *Times* it has received little coverage.

After Barstow's story broke, the United States Congress became aware of the program, and many saw it as form of propaganda. Notably, U.S. Congressman Paul Hodes passed an amendment to the 2009 Defense appropriations bill stating that "no part of any funds authorized to be appropriated in this or any other Act shall be used by the Department of Defense for propaganda purposes within the United States not otherwise specifically authorized by law" (Hodes, 2008). Hodes also commissioned investigation reports from the Pentagon's Inspector General (IG), the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> At the time of this writing – July 2010 – the FCC's report is still forthcoming.

Though the releases of these investigation reports were rife with controversy,<sup>2</sup> they unanimously cleared the Pentagon of wrongdoing.

Drawing upon a traditional crux of any debate concerning propaganda, the reports cite the difficulty of defining and identifying the phenomenon of “propaganda” as justification for refusing to identify the program as such. On this account, the Inspector General’s report cites a U.S. Congressional Research Service document concerning the difficulties of regulating propaganda:

Beyond accounting for public relations activities is the challenge of distinguishing propaganda from appropriate agency communications with any precision. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives one definition of “propaganda” as, “[t]he systematic propagation of information or ideas by an interested party, especially in a tendentious way in order to encourage or instill a particular attitude or response.” This definition is quite broad and not especially helpful in the present context, since it captures any coordinated activity aimed at persuading others of the wisdom and veracity of one’s ideas and positions, something that is part and parcel of politics and governance. (Congressional Research Service, 2005, p. 7)

As a first occasion for skepticism regarding the efficacy of Congressman Hodes’ amendment to the *U.S. Defense Spending Act*, the vagaries attaching to the word “propaganda” appear reliable enough to consternate serious oversight of Pentagon public relations. A second occasion for skepticism occurs when legislators attempt to curb Pentagon propaganda by means of “controlling the purse strings”. On this account the above-mentioned Congressional Research Service report notes that “any effort to curb agency expenditures on allegedly inappropriate communications with the public will face [the challenge of] tracking government expenditures on communications” (p. 7). In

<sup>2</sup> By its own admission, the Pentagon Inspector General’s report was inaccurate and methodologically flawed (Barstow, 2009). The Pentagon officially withdrew the report and did not furnish another, essentially leaving the matter uninvestigated. Furthermore, with respect to some of the more serious allegations, namely that the “pentagon pundits”, many of whom represented military contractors, exchanged cooperation in the media campaign for lucrative defence contracts, was not investigated by the GAO under the false pretence that the inadequate IG report had already done this work (Government Accountability Office, 2009).

other words, as one of the largest sectors of government, it is difficult to track all military expenditures on communications and public relations, especially when there is institutional resistance to the accurate representation of these figures.

Such was the case over forty years ago when Senator J. Fulbright attempted to impose spending restrictions to curb military use of propaganda against American audiences. In his investigation of Army, Navy, and Air Force public relations at the end of the 1960s, Fulbright (1970) found that, when asked, each branch of the military significantly underrepresented their expenditures (pp. 25, 32, 51, 69, 88). Indeed, Fulbright notes that in the eight years between 1951 and 1959 when the U.S. Congress limited the amount of money that the military could spend on public relations, the military simply changed its accounting procedures to comply with the limits. In contrast, when Congress lifted restraints in the years between 1959 and 1969 because of, as Fulbright writes, “the difficulty of verifying and auditing the fragmented reports of military PR spending..., admitted public relations spending by the military soared from \$2,755,000 to \$27,953,000” (p. 27).<sup>3</sup>

Taken together, the difficulty of both defining and enforcing regulations against military propaganda spell out serious challenges facing would-be regulators. As the spirit of Congressman Hodes’ amendment runs up against these informal institutional safeguards protecting the military’s ability to conduct its communications programs in an unregulated manner, a revisitation of Fulbright’s work on the deeper problems regarding the military’s political, economic and ideological power over American society remains a relevant resource for the contemporary analyst. Though Fulbright addresses the issues of slippery terminology and spending loopholes, his analysis points past these initial

<sup>3</sup> This number was eventually raised to an admitted \$44,062,000 in a report submitted to the Senate Appropriations Committee by the Department of Defense (p. 27).

problems to what he understands as the primary mechanism of American militarism: the increasing integration of the military into civilian life. “We have become a nation of veterans,” writes Fulbright. “With one-fifth of the adult population subjected to some degree of indoctrination in military values and attitudes...they have been, whether they liked it or not, that dream of the public relations man – a captive audience” (p. 45).

Fulbright’s 1970 *The Pentagon Propaganda Machine* deals with the importance of media, journalists, and military-industrial public relations for the creation of American militarism. The brilliance of Fulbright’s analysis, however, lies in his understanding of how the state of American civil-military affairs underwrites the success of these communication efforts. In particular, Fulbright points to the *economic* dimension of American civil-military affairs, noting that:

violence is [America’s] most important product. We have been spending nearly \$80 billion a year on the military, which is more than all the profits of all American business, or, to make another comparison, is almost as much as the total spending of the federal, state, and local governments for health, education, old age and retirement benefits, housing, and agriculture. (p. 12)

From the outset, then, Fulbright points to the unique role that the military plays within the American economy. Moreover, he understands that an analysis of the military’s economic role in civilian life can provide insight into what he called “the pentagon propaganda machine”:

there are 22,000 major corporate defense contractors and another 100,000 subcontractors. Defense plants or installations are located in 363 of the country’s 435 congressional districts. Even before it turns its attention to the public-at-large, the military has a large and sympathetic audience for its message. (p. 12)

For Fulbright, then, the economic function of the military system has a corresponding political function: creating a brand of American militarism that extends beyond wartime contingency planning into the fabric of civilian life. Indeed, Fulbright’s

chapters are long on examples of the explicit and calculated militarization of civilian life. As a central criticism of the Pentagon's public relations, Fulbright points to various Pentagon programs designed to enhance "community relations" between civilians and the military:

Department of Defense Directive 5410.18 of February 9, 1968, defines a "Community Relations Program" as "that command function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the mission of a military organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance." The activities to be carried on are listed in an interesting order: "liaison and cooperation with industry, with industrial, technical and trade association, with labor" lead all the rest. (p. 45)

Fulbright also points to military involvement in civilian education. As an example, he points to the mission statement of the U.S. Industrial College of the Armed Forces that, at the time, was conducting "National Security Seminars" for civilian audiences: "to conduct courses of study in the economic, industrial aspects of national security, and the management of all resources under all conditions, giving due consideration to the interrelated military, political, and social factors affecting national security" (p. 40). Similarly, Fulbright cites the stated objective of the U.S. National War College's "Fourth Dimensional Warfare Seminar" held in 1961:

to provide guidance to military reservists and to selected *civic and business leaders* regarding the deceptive Communist subversive efforts being directed towards the United States...To reveal areas of Communist influence upon American youth through infiltration into the theater, motion picture, television, and other entertainment media. (p. 38) [emphasis mine]

In addition to his blanket criticism that the military has no place in "ensuring the proper education of American youths," Fulbright notes that a preponderance of these "educational" seminars are conducted in concert with local Chambers of Commerce. The above-mentioned "Fourth Dimensional Warfare Seminar", for example, was sponsored by the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce. Indeed, Fulbright notes that with the

rise of these civil-military educational seminars, “the sponsors in almost all cases in recent years have been local Chambers of Commerce” (40).

Taken together, these examples paint a picture of tightening civil-military affairs wherein strong economic relationships between the military system, labor, and industry form both direct and tacit political bonds. It is interesting to note, on this account, Fulbright’s insistence on the role of labour in creating ideological hegemony for the military system. Though Fulbright is careful to note that the process of ideological construction between taxpayers and military/industry is essentially exploitative,<sup>4</sup> he is also careful to note the important function that military jobs play in creating ideological support for American militarism. However, though Fulbright is careful not to underestimate the power of military-labour relations, he is primarily concerned with the way in which tightening civil-military relations were assuming the form of *corporate-military relations*. Indeed, at the end of the 1960s Fulbright made several important observations about the character of the corporate-military relationship, particularly with respect to communications. In his framing of the problem Fulbright began to note that, as corporate-military relations tightened, the logic of one began to influence the other. “The military public relations campaign” wrote Fulbright “is directed at all of the American people. ‘Targets’, as they are called in the manuals, a nice military word adopted by Madison Avenue and readopted by military PR people in its new sense” (p. 28).

This observation of the congruencies between Madison Avenue marketers and military PR men gives this study a first occasion to think about war as a type of product for which the conventional adjuncts of commercial communications can be thought to

<sup>4</sup> Taxpayers, after all, pay the taxes that fund military-industrial advertising and public relations, essentially paying for their own indoctrination. See Fulbright, p. 6.

apply. Indeed, in his interviews with military service members, Fulbright discovers exactly this connection. One such interviewee recounts his experience:

for two and one-half years of my recent term in the U.S. Air Force, I was assigned to one such “information” office...Our mission was identical to that of any commercial advertising agency: to “push” our product (the Air Force) as hard as we could – to capitalize on its successes and to conceal its blunders, creating a favorable public image of the Air Force. (p. 88)

And again in his own words, Fulbright relates how:

another section of the Office of Information, the Special Projects Branch, “conducts the Air Force books and magazines features program. It maintains the Air Force storybook and recommends marketing procedures for these themes and performs liaison with industry concerning public information programs of mutual interest.” “Marketing procedures?” Use of the terminology of Madison Avenue appears somewhat unseemly for a military organization, but then it could be that the young man who served at Lackland [above] was right in his “advertising agency” analogy. Beyond the terminology, however, is the explicit statement that the branch works with the arms industry on public relations activities of mutual interest. (pp. 89-90)

As the spirit of the Hodes amendment to the 2009 defense spending act runs aground, Fulbright’s account of what are essentially the same obstacles to curbing Pentagon propaganda is sobering. In what follows this study shall conduct an analysis of the way in which these historical precedents, outlined by Fulbright at the end of the 1960s, represent historical continuity with, and intensification of, the character of contemporary civil-military relations. In particular, it shall be seen how increased integration of commercial communication practices into military operations have acted as an agent and index of the evolution of civil-military affairs along corporate-military lines.

## **1.2. The Military Audience Commodity: State, Industry, Labour**

Following Fulbright, this study shall explore military propaganda through an analysis of the role played by *the state* (Chapter 2), *industry* (Chapter 3) and *labour*

(Chapter 4). As these categories interrelate in complicated ways, this study shall attempt to focus these analyses through Dallas Smythe's concept of "the audience commodity." Insofar as leftist analyses of military propaganda often focus on the production and propagation of *ideology*, they often carry an implicitly *idealist* epistemology. Through Smythe's concept of the audience commodity, this study shall attempt to ground itself, rather, in a *materialist* analysis of military propaganda.

To the end of demonstrating the need for such a materialist account of military propaganda, Chapter 1 advances a review of literature tracing the recent historical procession of civil-military affairs to a point where mass-mediated "superstructural" activities become integral to military operations. It is argued that whereas under modern industrial warfare the defining characteristic of civil-military affairs is *industrial* labour, more recent advances into what is sometimes called "postmodern war" highlight the necessity of ideological production within military operations. It is the purpose of this chapter to show how these various estimations of "postmodern war" display a conspicuous absence of *materialist*, political economic explanations of the changing way in which ostensibly superstructural activities are integrated into warfighting. It is this shortcoming that this study seeks to address through recourse to Dallas Smythe's concept of the audience commodity, particularly with respect to the idea of *audience work*. Insofar as it is the audience commodity concept that shall be used to explore the interconnectedness of state, industry and labour with respect to military propaganda, it is first necessary to introduce both the concept and the controversy left in its wake.

An initiate of communication studies will be familiar with Smythe's (1977) concept of the audience commodity: the primary commodity produced by the mass media is not, as the popular conception would have it, "messages", "information", "images", or "meaning", rather it is *audience work*, produced by the mass media via "free lunch"



content, and sold to advertisers. This economic formulation of the way in which the mass media functions was an explicit attempt to address what Smythe understood to be a “blindspot” in the Western Marxist tradition. Western Marxists, Smythe argued, had not attended to the political economic structure of the mass media, and as such tended to view its “propaganda” function as a more or less “superstructural” activity. Though today it is widely accepted that advertising-supported media use complex ratings systems to sell advertisers access to certain audience demographics (Meehan, 1993), several aspects of Smythe’s argument remain contentious.

Perhaps the most outspoken of Smythe’s critics was Graham Murdock (1978) whose exchanges with Smythe in the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* constitute the core of what is now known as the “blindspot debate”. Though Murdock concedes many of Smythe’s arguments, his central objection to Smythe’s theory of the audience commodity is that it “drastically underestimates the importance and centrality of the state in contemporary capitalism” (p. 111). Murdock writes:

the state has assumed a larger and larger role in formulating and directing economic activity and policy in order to guarantee the necessary conditions of existence for continued accumulation. The result is an indissoluble but contradictory relationship between the centralised capitalist state on the one hand and concentrated monopoly capital on the other. Consequently, as Bob Jessop has recently noted, “the analysis of the state . . . is an absolute precondition of adequate economic theorising today.” (p. 112)

In his rejoinder to Murdock, however, Smythe (1978) asks: “is it necessary to regard work on the theory of the state and work on the theory of the audience commodity as mutually exclusive? I had thought each could benefit by work on the other” (p. 122). Indeed, it appears as if Murdock is making something of a straw man of Smythe’s position. Nowhere does Smythe suggest that the role of the state in mass media is at

odds with the functioning of the audience commodity. On the contrary, Smythe's original essay proposes *exactly this connection*, on which Murdock is conspicuously silent:

The prime purpose of the mass media complex is to produce people in audiences who work at learning the theory and practice of consumership for civilian goods and who support (*with taxes and votes*) *the military demand management system*. (Smythe, 1977, p. 20) [emphasis mine]

Far from ignoring the role of the state in the workings of the audience commodity, Smythe suggests a protean example: the military demand management system. It appears, then, as if Murdock himself is underestimating the role that the military plays both in the mass media *and* as a crucial intermediary between the state and capital. Indeed, the militarization of the audience commodity with which this study deals represents *convergence*, not contradiction, between state and capital. This position is in stark contrast to Murdock, whose justifications for positing the audience commodity outside the workings of the state appear incomplete. On this account, Chapter 2 of this study shall explore both historical and contemporary examples of the involvement of the military – the strong arm of the state *par excellence* – in the production of audience commodities. As one might suspect, the examples furnished make no explicit reference to the commodification of audiences. Therefore, it shall be the task of Chapter 2 to interpret these instances as precedents of military involvement in audience commodity production.

A second criticism of Smythe's concept of the audience commodity argues it to be an *economistic* account of both the mass media and ideological production. Nicholas Garnham's (1990) essay "A Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass Communication" is a notable advance of this criticism. Garnham argues that "no political economy of culture can avoid discussion of the base/superstructure relationship, but in doing so it needs to avoid the twin traps of economic reductionism and of the idealist

autonomization of the ideological level” (p. 23). Indeed, this caution appears to inform Garnham’s criticism of Dallas Smythe’s concept of the audience commodity. Though Garnham admits the concept of the audience commodity is valuable for thinking about the political economy of the mass media, in his final analysis Garnham understands it to be an “extreme reductionist theory” (p. 29).

Addressing this criticism of the audience commodity as an “extreme reductionist theory” informs Chapter 3’s analysis of a contemporary case study in military public relations. Drawing primarily upon a 2009 Pentagon Inspector General’s report detailing the operations of the Pentagon’s “America Supports You” (ASY) public relations campaign, Chapter 3 shall examine the *role of industry* in the production of the military audience commodity. In showing that the ASY program was aimed explicitly at organizing and exploiting audience work, this chapter shall argue that, far from falling victim to “extreme economic reductionism” an application of the audience commodity theory makes great strides in connecting individual agency (in this case *labour*) with the larger economic process of audience commodification within contemporary capitalism. Chapter 3 shows, then, that an analysis of the role of industry, far from being rooted in extreme economism, highlights precisely the interrelation of state, capital and labour in the production of audience commodities. Furthermore, the peculiar case of the ASY program suggests novel ways of interpreting and expanding upon Smythe’s original concept of the audience commodity and its work.

Finally, Chapter 4 shall address Smythe’s contention that, not only are audiences produced and sold in commodity form, but that they also *labour productively* in the service of capital. On this account Smythe’s most notable critic is Sut Jhally (1982), who argues that Smythe’s audience commodity theory is incompatible with a Marxist position regarding the labour theory of value. Indeed, this is a crucial issue, for it is precisely the

intention to preserve the labour theory of value that informs Smythe's project of exploring the audience commodity.<sup>5</sup> Jhally argues that, though audiences do perhaps work when they consume media, they do not *labour productively*. By recourse to Marxist political economic theory this chapter attempts to refute the lines of argumentation advanced by Jhally. Furthermore, drawing upon both these conclusions and Chapter 3's case study analysis of novel forms of audience work, this chapter hopes to make a contribution to the theory of the audience commodity.

On the whole, this study advances a series of arguments and refutations concerning the nature of war, communications, and political economy. It is hoped, however, that by attending to the complex relationalities of its constituent parts, this study can advance a clearer understanding of the dynamic political economy of military communications. In the first instance, this study is an attempt to provide a *materialist* account of military propaganda in the context of contemporary capitalism. To this end, the concept of the audience commodity appears as an appropriate tool insofar as it, like Marx, deliberately begins its analysis with an examination of the (mass media) commodity. It is from this starting point, then, that Smythe makes his discovery of the necessary relation between this commodity and the audience labour that produces it.

The purpose of this study, then, is twofold: to establish the existence of the military audience commodity, and to reopen the audience commodity debate. Indeed, Mosco (1996) notes that "the dispute over the audience commodity has lost some of its edge" (p. 148), though the reasons for this are far from clear. A crux of the original debate concerned differences in the degree of privatization between European and

<sup>5</sup> Smythe notes: "as we will see, when these [media] institutions are examined from a materialist point of view, the labour theory of value, the expenses of circulation, the value of the "peculiar commodity" (labour power), the form of the proletariat and the class struggle under monopoly capitalist conditions are...deeply involved" (p. 1).

North American media, however, as the privatized model of mass media has become more diffuse in the European context, it is unclear why the audience commodity framework should be thereby blunted. Similarly, Mosco cites a more unproductive aspect of the debate – whether the audience is the *only* commodity produced by the mass media – to explain its curious foreclosure. On this account Smythe is portrayed as simultaneously “too strong and too weak”, eschewing a fair treatment of the importance of media content (p. 148). It is the intention of this study to reopen this debate without falling into the twin traps of reductionism or idealism. Indeed, it appears unclear as to why the audience commodity debate has so lost its edge. In his concluding remarks on the topic Mosco echoes this sentiment: “it is difficult to comprehend the reluctance of Marxian analysis to find more than marginal room for a materialist analysis of the media” (p. 150).

Given the contentiousness of Smythe’s argument, then, this study is heir to a host of criticisms that must be addressed in the in the course of positing the military audience commodity. This study, therefore, is simultaneously advancement and retrenchment. The arguments and refutations that follow are a result of the necessity of a “double movement” to expose the existence of the military audience commodity, while simultaneously using this exposition to refute existing criticisms of the audience commodity as such.

## **2. Post-/Modern Warfare**

### **2.1. Introduction**

To the end of understanding contemporary military communications, it may do well to abstract the present analysis a step beyond the scope of communication studies as such to consider civil-military affairs from an historical perspective. As this chapter will reveal, many scholars agree that at some point in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century a shift in the nature of warfare occurred that, among other things, has centralized the role of communications. As critics disagree about exactly when this shift occurred and what it entails, the following review of literature shall be conducted to the end of situating the rising importance of communications in warfare within the overarching procession of civil-military affairs.

The labels for this military paradigm shift are many: total vs. limited; conventional vs. counterinsurgency; symmetrical vs. asymmetrical; modern vs. postmodern, etc. On this account this study shall not advance an ontologically binding definition of the changing nature of warfare, however, it will attempt to apply a political economic perspective from which to interpret the changing nature of civil-military affairs in the procession of 20<sup>th</sup> Century warfare. Indeed, the present review of literature shall reveal a conspicuous lack of political economic perspective once war is thought to become “postmodern”. It shall be argued that this lack of political economic perspective is correlated to the belief that war becomes “ideological” in the wake of the above-mentioned shifts. In contrast, then, to analysts who argue for the validity of these shifts,

this chapter shall attempt to highlight not only departures, but also *continuities* within the historical trajectory of 20<sup>th</sup> Century civil-military affairs. This continuity, it is argued, consists of an *increasing breakdown between the categories of civilian and military*.

## 2.2. War and Civil Life

At the outset it should be noted that, though the collapse of the civil-military divide can be thought of as central to “postmodern war”, the phenomenon is by no means new. Indeed, the connection between civilian and military life runs deep. As early as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, in his *The Art of War*, Machiavelli argues that:

Many are now of the opinion that no two things are more discordant and incongruous than a civil and a military life. But if we consider the nature of government, we shall find a very strict and intimate relation betwixt these two conditions; and that they are not only compatible and consistent with each other, but necessarily connected and united together. (as cited in Gray, 1997, p. 112)

Machiavelli precociously notes the interconnectedness of military and civilian affairs. Similarly, the German sociologist Georg Simmel, writing on war and peace at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, notes the false intellectual tendency to demarcate conceptual categories and bestow upon one a sense of primacy, out of which the other emerges. “This applies to conflict and peace,” writes Simmel.<sup>6</sup> “Both in the succession and in the simultaneity of social life, the two are so interwoven that in every state of peace the conditions of future conflict, and in every conflict the conditions of future peace, are formed” (pp. 107-110). The present inquiry, therefore, wishes to avoid any naiveté involved in reifying the concepts of “civilian” (peace) and “military” (war). Rather, it is

<sup>6</sup> Bob: I may need help citing this passage!

hoped that the present review of literature is able to situate itself historically to the end of articulating the complex relationship between categories of civilian and military life.<sup>7</sup>

As a point of departure, the epilogue to Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" provides a useful theoretical handle for thinking about the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century modernization of war, and its specific relationship to civilian life. Writing in the wake of the First World War, and observing Germany's advance toward the second, Benjamin argues that the formation of mass society is correlated with the rise of war as a political aesthetic. The passage is worth quoting at length:

The growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life.

[...]

All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war. War and war only can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale while respecting the traditional property system. This is the political formula for the situation. The technological formula may be stated as follows: only war makes it possible to mobilize all of today's technical resources while maintaining the property system. (Benjamin, 2001, p. 33)

There is much in this passage to consider. Like Machiavelli, Benjamin argues that the relationship between military and civilian life is crucial, if not apparent. Benjamin posits two interrelated dimensions to this relationship: the *aesthetic* (a chance for the masses to "express themselves") and the *political-economic* (proletarianization without altering property relations). In what follows, an attempt shall be made to trace the character of

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this study wishes to avoid any normative assumptions about distinctions between civilian and military affairs. That the tightening relationship between civilian and military affairs serves as the framework for the present chapter is perhaps indicative of a Western liberal bias that permeates the political discourse surrounding this study's subject.



civil-military affairs with respect to these categories. The argument shall be made that within critical Communication Studies, the aesthetic/ideological dimension of warfare has received the most sustained scrutiny, with serious political economic consideration of civil-military affairs decreasing as theoretical work on “postmodern” war came into vogue.

Beginning with the political-economic, Benjamin counts proletarianization as a crucial link between war and civilian life. Indeed, Benjamin’s assertion that war allows for the mobilization of mass society while denying it redistributive property rights appears borne out by history. As the protean “modern war”,<sup>8</sup> World War I was the first to mobilize mass industrial power, a mobilization that came at the cost of a burgeoning labour movement. In the United States, for example, the First World War helped solidify Taylorism in American factories. Gray (1997) notes that:

the U.S. Army's official interest in the scientific management of itself can be traced back to 1909, when Frederick W. Taylor's principles were initially applied at the Watertown Arsenal. Taylor's development and codification of earlier military-industrial management was a serious attempt to seize control of the shop floor from the workers...Taylorism was met with a great deal of worker resistance, including bitter strikes in 1908 and 1911 at the Rock Island and Watertown Arsenals... [however] worker's strikes and anti-Taylor legislation from pro-labor members of Congress were swept away by the U.S. entry into World War I.

<sup>8</sup> “Modern” here is meant to denote primarily the phenomenon of mass industrialism. Modern war, of course, can be conceived in a number of ways. Machiavelli is thought to be the grandfather of “modern war” insofar as he was the first to apply Enlightenment principles of reason and scientific thinking to the conduct of war. Gray (1997) notes that Machiavelli “shared the belief of the Renaissance in man’s reason and its optimism that, by the weapon of reason, man was able to conquer and destroy the realm of chance and luck in life” (p. 112). It is not difficult on this account to see World War I as the intersection of mass industrial production with ‘rational’ war fighting. “This is precisely”, notes Kellner (1999), “what Adorno and Horkheimer conceptualized as the dialectic of Enlightenment, when Enlightenment turns into its opposite, when instruments of liberation become means of domination, and a mode of objectifying thought that was intended to control and dominate nature also becomes a mode of objectifying and dominating human beings” (p. 202). Indeed, after World War I, a loss of faith in the modern narrative of progress was endemic. Against the notion that rationality and science were to be agents of peace and freedom, trench and gas warfare provided a sobering check. As Gray (1997) notes, “for many people the belief in modernism, in progress itself, was fatally wounded. . . [B]efore the war it was ‘a culture of hope, a vision of synthesis.’ After the war it was ‘a culture of nightmare and denial’” (p.122).

Militarization consolidated Taylorism in the arsenals and in many other industries. (p. 118)

As with Taylorism, the relationship between the World Wars and Fordism as a political economic system is crucial. As David Harvey (1989) notes, “war-time mobilization... implied large-scale planning as well as thorough rationalizations of the labour process in spite of worker resistance to assembly-line production and capitalist fears of centralized control” (p. 127). Similarly Merritt Roe Smith argues that:

when one understands . . . that Fordism traces its ancestry to the military arms industry of the nineteenth century, one begins to appreciate how deeply military-industrial rationality and centralization are implanted in American culture. The history of virtually every important metalworking industry in nineteenth-century America – machine tools, sewing machines, watches, typewriters, agricultural implements, bicycles, locomotives – reveals the pervasive influence of military management techniques. (as cited in Gray 1997, p. 118)

Perhaps nowhere is the first “modern” link between civilian and military life so apparent as in the World Wars. As civilian mass-industrial labour output became crucial to warfighting, any ostensible separation of military and civilian affairs effectively vanished. The march toward “total war” meant that conceptions of warfare could not be formed apart from a state’s industrial labour force.

The subsumption of civilian labour by the military establishment produced, during the Second World War, a further transformation of the role of the civilian worker with respect to the war effort, particularly the introduction of the civilian as legitimate military target. Insofar as civilian industrial capacity became central to the war effort, targeting civilian populations became a paradigm of “total war”. Though there were aerial bombings of civilians during the First World War, the practice did not become widely used until the second. “Strategic bombing”, as it was euphemistically called, further collapsed the tenuous distinction between civilian and military life:

On the day World War II started, September 1, 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt. . . issued an 'urgent appeal' that 'under no circumstances' should civilians or unfortified cities be bombed from the air. He called such bombing 'inhuman barbarism.' The year before, Secretary of State Cordell Hull had said of the bombing of Barcelona, 'no theory of war can justify such conduct.' That same year the U.S. Senate had condemned the 'inhuman bombing of civilian populations.' Yet, while American politicians were denouncing these attacks, the U.S. Army Air Force was itself preparing for strategic bombing, developing the new planes, bombs, institutions, and doctrines that would make the United States the world's largest strategic bomber by 1956. (Gray, 1997, p. 131)

In his book *Postmodern War*, Chris Hables Gray, telling the story of a young Robert McNamara, recounts how strategic bombing came to be the dominant paradigm of the Air Force establishment. Robert McNamara, then a young Harvard professor noted for his mathematical talent in organizing systematic air strikes, was praised for his ability to maximize civilian casualties – creating what was euphemistically called “workers’ absenteeism” – through incendiary bombings. In stark contrast to the public statements of political leaders, the emerging logic of total war prescribed the bombing of civilians in Tokyo, Dresden, and London, among others.<sup>9</sup> *Labour power*, then, became a crucial target within the paradigm of total war.

The cataclysmic event of the Second World War – the development and use of nuclear weapons – at once realized and ended this paradigm of total war. Gray (1997) suggests that, "the story of modern war is also a tale of the decline of moderation in war until it perished in the fireball over Hiroshima" (p. 110). In Gray's analysis, the end of World War II, symbolically represented by the American nuclear strikes, ended the

<sup>9</sup> This tension between official declarations and the gruesome reality of total war gave rise to an awareness of the need to address this discrepancy (today sometimes called the 'say-do gap'). One strategy that the military adopted for 'closing' the gap was to obscure language. Now standard practice, euphemistic 'military jargon' reached new levels in the Second World War. Michael Sherry (as cited in Gray, 1997), in his history of U.S. airpower notes that, "'dehousing' [was] the favorite euphemism for a variety of virtues perceived in an incendiary assault, [along with] 'workers absenteeism', 'lower morale', [and] 'paralyzed systems'" (p. 136). The functioning of these sanitizing euphemisms within a highly organized institution highlights not only what Hannah Arendt would later term the 'banality of evil', but also a growing awareness that the military was in the business of shaping perceptions.

paradigm of modern, total war. The introduction of nuclear weapons changed the logic of war fighting such that total war was no longer viable among nuclear-armed states. This shift in logic is now commonly understood as 'mutually assured destruction' (MAD), and since the end of the Second World War, many argue it is responsible for the absence of total state-on-state warfare. Every major war since 1945 has, therefore, been a *limited war*, wherein the logic of total annihilation no longer prevails. "Conventional wars" wrote historian David Chandler in 1975, "will concede primacy in the spectrum of warfare to guerrilla and revolutionary struggles in which the political and psychological factors predominate over the military" (as cited in Gray, 1997, p. 168).

On this account McLuhan and Fiore's *War and Peace in the Global Village*, written at the height of the Vietnam War, notes the role of the atomic bomb in collapsing the civil-military divide. Connoting the transition from total-industrial to limited-political warfare, McLuhan and Fiore (1968) underscore this collapsing effect of the shift from military "hardware" to military "software":

the atom bomb, the fine flower of the scientific efforts spurred by the Second War, has hastened the arrival of 'software' and automation that are swiftly undermining the entire industrial establishment so long devoted to hardware. Electric 'software' abolishes the division between industrial worker and savant as much as between civilian and soldier. (p. 121)

Though there is an ineffable dimension to much of McLuhan's writing, the above passage highlights the role that the atomic bomb has played in transitioning from the industrial logic of total war ("hardware") to the political nature of limited war ("software"). Indeed, for many analysts the advent of nuclear weapons is considered the watershed moment in the transition from "modern" total war to "postmodern" limited war. It is at this point that the literature first posits a critical juncture in the history of military affairs. This transition – from "hard" to "soft" in McLuhan's imagery, and roughly corresponding to the beginning of the Cold War – marks the beginning of serious attention being given to the

*ideological* aspects of warfare. It is on this account that the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War are presented as a potential critical juncture between “modern” and “postmodern” war.

Until the Vietnam War, there had been a general symmetry in civil-military affairs. On both sides of World War II, for example, civilian industrial labour became a military target. With respect to civil-military relations, however, the Vietnam War ushered in an era of *asymmetrical warfare*. The logic of modern total war, with its emphasis on industrial production, no longer prevailed in Vietnam where the logic of limited war demanded *political* victory. In Vietnam the United States found itself mired in a counterinsurgency war where overwhelming firepower no longer met the conditions of victory. This had a devastating effect on civil-military relations in occupied territory. Indeed, while many civilians were targeted in the Second World War, *the fundamental distinction between civilian and soldier was still apparent*. When factories in Dresden were firebombed, despite official euphemisms, it could still be understood that the victims were civilians. In Vietnam, however, the logic of asymmetrical counterinsurgency warfare effectively erased this distinction. As Colonel Robert Trinquier wrote in his account of the French experience in Algeria:

in modern<sup>10</sup> [counterinsurgency] war, the enemy is especially difficult to define. There is no physical frontier separating the two camps. The line between friends and enemies is drawn within the same nation, within the same village, and sometimes even within the same family. (as cited in Mattelart 1979, pg. 413)

To American soldiers, therefore, differentiating between Vietnamese civilians and Viet Cong guerillas was at best difficult, and at worst unimportant. During the first Winter Soldier investigations where veterans of the Vietnam War testified to crimes they and

<sup>10</sup> “Modern” here only in a chronological sense.

fellow soldiers committed, one Marine explained: “the way that we distinguished between civilians and VC [Viet Cong] – VC had weapons and civilians didn't, and anybody that was dead was considered a VC. If you killed someone they said, 'how do you know he's a VC?' and the general reply would be, 'He's dead,' and that was sufficient” (Vietnam Veterans Against the War, 1971). Indeed, the atrocities of the Vietnam War bear witness to the implosion of this distinction between civilian and military life.

The asymmetrical, politically-oriented warfare precipitated by the Vietnam War also hurried a redefinition of *American* civil-military relations. Domestically, American civilians were not targeted as industrial workers, and an ever-growing military-industrial complex combined with the relatively limited violence of the Vietnam War to make total labour mobilization unnecessary.<sup>11</sup> Despite the prevalence of McCarthy era anti-communism, the doctrine of containment contained none of the existential gravitas that had mobilized the public against the German *Blitzkrieg*. The elective nature of the Vietnam War – the fact that it could be *lost* in an existentially unthreatening way – created a crisis for the military establishment whereby *lack public support had the ability to lose a war*. This ushered in a new era of military interest in public opinion and mass media that would bring civilian life further into the fray of military affairs.

Though many argue the Vietnam War was lost “on the ground”, its aftermath saw a general acknowledgement (perhaps a general scapegoating) in the military establishment that a failure to win domestic public opinion had lost the war. The failure, whether perceived or real, was dubbed “Vietnam Syndrome”, and awareness of this

<sup>11</sup> Though the horror of the Vietnam War should not be underappreciated, the absence of tactical nuclear weapons – which were a real contingency – denotes a relative restraint indicative of limited war. The Vietnam War was also, significantly, the last to issue a draft.

“syndrome” meant that military planners began to see media representations of war as *part of war itself*.<sup>12</sup> As the Daily Telegraph's Patrick Bishop observed, "if there was one 'lesson' the US military learned from the Vietnam War, it was that journalists lost it for them. It was a never-ending refrain from the General's office to the Mess Hall chow line that the networks and the *New York Times* had done it for the American effort" (as cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 2).

This increasing awareness of the importance of public opinion on the part of the United States military can be seen in its public relations of the era. For example, John Wayne's 1968 film *The Green Berets* (Wayne, 1968) was heavily subsidized by the U.S. Department of Defense through equipment loans and production assistance. Significantly, the antagonist of the film is less the Viet Cong – who appear in the film as a nameless, faceless, almost disembodied and abstract entity – and more the stereotypical “antagonistic reporter”, who after a tour with John Wayne's Green Berets abandons his critical stance toward the war, and promises to convey the importance of the Vietnam mission to the American public.

The limited nature of the Vietnam War, then, meant that domestic American civilians no longer *directly* produced war with their labor power; rather they produced it indirectly through tax dollars and *political consent*.<sup>13</sup> This importance of this shift in military “modes of production” shall be taken up again below. For the current inquiry it shall suffice to say that the shift in civil-military affairs precipitated by the Vietnam war can be understood as having: 1) weakened effective distinction between civilians and

<sup>12</sup> Propaganda, of course, is as old as war itself. See Taylor (1995) for a history of propaganda. This is only to say that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Vietnam War precipitated an increased military interest in mass media and public opinion.

<sup>13</sup> Political consent, at least in theory, was required for the Vietnam War. If the war continued past the point of public political approval, this only testifies to the power of the military establishment over the will of the civilian population.

soldiers in foreign theaters of war, and 2) created awareness within the U.S. military establishment that civilian public opinion is crucial to the propagation of limited warfare. In both cases – foreign and domestic – civilian life is drawn into the fray. It can be seen here, then, that despite the genuine “shifts” in the nature of warfare – from total, conventional, and modern, to limited, counterinsurgent, and postmodern – there is continuity insofar as there exists a steady procession of subsuming civilian areas of life into military affairs.

### **2.3. Postmodern War**

Though it is here argued that from the perspective of civil-military affairs there is continuity in the procession of 20<sup>th</sup> Century warfare, it is necessary to examine how tightening civil-military affairs have precipitated real changes in the character of this relationship. As mentioned, after the Second World War the civilian production of warfare no longer consisted of the total mobilization of mass-industrial labour. Though the ubiquity of military-industrial employment within the American economy should not be under-represented, the relationship of the average American to the war effort began to consist of paying taxes and, as the Vietnam War proved, providing ideological support for the war. With respect to the latter, critical literature surrounding civil-military relations began to focus less on its political economic aspects and more on the political *aesthetics* of war. The remainder of the present chapter will review post-Vietnam era literature, highlighting the extent to which the civil-military relationship comes to be viewed as an immaterial, ideological exercise.

Hannah Arendt, in her seminal *Lying in Politics* provides an early account of the consequences of this new ideological warfare. Quoting heavily from the then recently published *Pentagon Papers* Arendt (1972) paints a picture of a war whose “goal was



now the image itself" (p. 17); a war based more on projecting perceptions of power than power itself:

"To convince the world"; to "demonstrate that the U.S. was a 'good doctor' willing to keep promises, be tough, take risks, get bloodied and hurt the enemy badly"; to use a "tiny backward nation" devoid of any strategic importance "as a *test case* of U.S. capacity to help a nation meet a Communist 'war of liberation'"; to keep intact an image of omnipotence, "our worldwide position of leadership"; to demonstrate "the will and the ability of the United States to have its way in world affairs"; to show "the credibility of our pledges to friends and allies"; in short to "*behave like*" the "greatest power in the world" for no other reason than to convince the world of this "simple fact" – this was the only permanent goal that, with the beginning of the Johnson administration, pushed into the background all other goals and theories, the domino theory and anti-Communist strategy of the initial states of the Cold War period as well as the counterinsurgency strategy so dear to the Kennedy administration. (p. 17)

Arendt is attempting here to show that the Vietnam War was in large part an act of *public relations*; an attempt to make a political-military statement about the United States. Focusing on disparities between government intelligence about the war and official government statements, Arendt iterates the collapse of the civil-military divide by showing that the *American public* was the main target of deliberate military lying:

that concealment, falsehood, and the role of the deliberate lie became the chief issues of the Pentagon papers, rather than illusion, error, miscalculation, and the like, is mainly due to the strange fact that the mistaken decisions and lying statements consistently violated the astoundingly accurate factual reports of the intelligence community...The crucial point here is not merely that the policy of lying was hardly ever aimed at the enemy...but was destined chiefly, if not exclusively, for domestic consumption, for propaganda at home, and especially for the purpose of deceiving Congress. (p. 14)

In addition to highlighting the extent to which Pentagon lying in the age of limited warfare targets a *domestic* civilian population, Arendt points to the conscious and deliberate nature of the lying – lying *not* based on "illusion, error, miscalculation and the like" (p. 14). Making an epistemologically modern argument, Arendt argues for the *primacy of truth over lies* presiding over the "whole operation of deception":

If the mysteries of government have so befogged the minds of the actors themselves that they no longer know or remember the truth behind their concealments and their lies, the whole operation of deception...will run aground or become counterproductive...For the trouble with lying and deceiving is that their efficiency depends entirely upon a clear notion of the truth that the liar and deceiver wishes to hide. In this sense, truth, even if it does not prevail in public, possesses an ineradicable primacy over all falsehoods. (p. 31)

This argument is in keeping with a view that, despite the aforementioned breakdowns in civil-military affairs, the Vietnam War can essentially be understood as an epistemologically “modern war”. Arendt here appears to be articulating a position for the primacy of a *modernist* conception of the Vietnam War – one in which *the crucial distinction between truth and lies still adheres*. Interestingly however, Arendt’s optimism is predicated on the supposition that only lies underwritten by an understanding of the truth can be successful. As per above, Arendt asserts that once political liars lose sight of the truth behind their lies then “the whole operation of deception will run aground” (p. 31).

Douglas Kellner (1999) advances a similar argument, suggesting that the epistemological tenets of modernity remained intact over the duration of the Vietnam War. Kellner points to journalist Michael Herr who, in his famous *Dispatches*, observed that “always, [soldiers] would ask you with an emotion whose intensity would shock you to ‘please tell it’, because they really did have the feeling that it wasn’t being told for them” (as cited in Kellner 1999, p. 209). Continuing, Kellner writes:

the troops and some of the reporters in the Vietnam War wanted to maintain a rigorous classical distinction between truth and lying. Unlike the Gulf War, there was no systematic implosion between truth and lies, between the hyperreality of the official discourse and the reality of the war itself. That is, both the troops and the reporters in Vietnam knew that the official lies and hypes were transparently ludicrous, that the body counts and optimistic reports were pure fabrications, that the official discourse was transparent propaganda. In the [first] war against Iraq, by contrast, the lies were equally extravagant, but the troops, media, and public

seemed to accept at face value the mendacious discourse of the war managers. (p. 210)

In addition to its epistemological modernism, Kellner argues that the Vietnam War and the Cold War generally were underwritten by powerfully modern themes. Kellner argues that "Vietnam should be read in the context of the Cold War as an imperialist war designed to combat the spread of Communism...Accordingly, the U.S. military developed counterinsurgency strategies and tested these policies and new weapons systems in Vietnam in an attempt to impose capitalist versions of modernization on the developing world" (pp. 200-201). For Kellner, what is essential about the Vietnam War was not the type of fighting (total vs. limited; conventional vs. counter-/insurgent, etc.), but the narratives that underwrote it. From the Vietnamese perspective the war was one of national liberation – a deeply modern theme – while for the United States the meta-narratives of containing communism and spreading capitalism fueled the war. "Although postmodern theory has appropriated the metaphor of the guerrilla for its political strategies" writes Kellner, "one could argue that the war of national liberation fought in Vietnam was a form of modern warfare and thus it is problematic to describe the war as "postmodern" tout court" (p. 203). From this theoretical perspective, then, Vietnam appears as a transitional war, neither wholly modern nor postmodern "tout court".

If there is debate about the post-/modern status of the Vietnam War, there seems to be no disagreement about that fact that the first Gulf War was indeed postmodern. Making much of the fact that the Gulf War was the first to be broadcast on live television Kellner notes that military media managers largely succeeded in controlling the war's television coverage. "[The Gulf War]," writes Kellner "was postmodern in that, first, it was experienced by most of the world in real time and hyperreal media space as a political spectacle, as a carefully manufactured attempt to mobilize consent to U.S. policy, in

which the distinction between truth and reality seemed to blur, and image and spectacle prevailed" (p. 218). By tightly controlling press access, and releasing its own video footage of the conflict for distribution to private media, the Pentagon was able to successfully control the media coverage and the subsequent narratives surrounding the first Gulf War.

Kellner's analysis here owes much to Jean Baudrillard's (1995) trio of essays concerning the 'non-existence' of the Gulf War. One commentator sums up Baudrillard's position:

firstly. . . the conduct of the war was new, using 'smart' computer-guided weapons to kill from a distance: America's technological superiority and use of overwhelming force made the conflict so one-sided that it could not properly be understood as a war in the traditional sense. Secondly. . . the deluge of information and images produced, not a representation of the reality of the war, but a sanitized media spectacle in which it was impossible to distinguish the virtual from the actual. (Hammond 2007, p. 18)

For brevity's sake, we will not dwell too long on the finer points of Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality. It is sufficient to note that the advent of satellite television and the instant transmission of video created a space where carefully constructed representations of reality could be organized, over time and consistently, in such a way as to create an impression that what was seen was in fact reality, and not an image of reality. Indeed, the crux of Baudrillard's argument rests on the collapse of this very distinction. Baudrillard's account of the Gulf War would seem to confirm Arendt's worst fears that "the whole operation of deception" need not rely on a firm distinction between truth and lies; between reality and fiction. If Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality can be taken seriously with respect to war, it can be understood as analogous to what Ardent (1972) had hoped would not be an enduring state of political-military affairs – what she calls the process of "self-deception":

The presence of...the process of “internal self-deception” is beyond doubt, but it is as though the normal process of self-deceiving were reversed; it was not as though deception ended with self-deception. The deceivers started with self-deception. Probably because of their high station and their astounding self-assurance, they were so convinced of overwhelming success, not on the battlefield, but in the public-relations arena, and so certain of the soundness of their psychological premises about the unlimited possibilities in manipulating people, that they *anticipated* general belief and victory in the battle for people’s minds.<sup>14</sup> And since they lived in a defactualized world anyway, they did not find it difficult to pay no more attention to the fact that their audience refused to be convinced than to other facts. (p. 35)

Here Arendt questions her aforementioned assertion that “the whole operation of deception” requires an understanding on the part of the deceiver of the distinction between truth and lies. Against her former, perhaps optimistic, assertion that deception *requires* a concept of the truth, she here advances an argument regarding the relationship between deception and self-deception wherein *self-deception is the primary element*. A possible precursor to Baudrillard’s idea of hyperreality, Arendt’s identification of the process of “internal self-deception” contributes to the “implosion” between reality and fiction that analysts have found so symptomatic of the Gulf War’s postmodernity.

As fiction and image became the operating principle of media coverage surrounding the Gulf War, the prescience of Benjamin’s assertion that war is the ultimate tool for aestheticizing politics was again borne out by history. Alluding to Benjamin and his concept of aesthetic “auras”, Kellner argues that:

the 'reality' of Iraqi suffering and ecocide [was] erased by high-tech simulacra that conveyed instead a vision of U.S. power and aestheticized war. Fascination with video and computer images also generated an aura of magic and power around the military that produced such spectacles, and it enhanced their credibility in a public eager to believe whatever it claimed. (p. 220)

<sup>14</sup> This is reminiscent of the arrogance of Cold War era military-funded Communications research. See Simpson (1994) on Leo Lowenthal’s concept of the “push-button millennium”, p. 66.

Indeed, these 'auras', or 'meta-narratives', are central to many theorists' estimation of "postmodern" war. One such theorist, Philip Hammond (2007), taking postmodernity to be essentially an attitude consistent with Lyotard's famous maxim,<sup>15</sup> suggests that war only became postmodern in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse: "contemporary warfare is 'postmodern' insofar as it is driven by a collapse of 'grand narratives' in Western society" (p. 14). Hammond continues:

In postmodernist terms, one might say that the end of the Cold War represented a collapse of grand narratives...The 'crisis' of meaning has fundamentally affected western societies and their governing elites. Put at its simplest, the West has lost its cohesion because it has lost its enemy. The ideological cement which anti-communism provided as a negative justification of Western capitalism has crumbled away. (p. 14)

Hammond's view is similar to Kellner's in that it sees postmodernity in warfare as something that happened after the Cold War, which in their analysis represented a conflict of (modern) narratives *par excellence*. This lead, Hammond argues, to an ideological vacuum in the West. Robert Cooper highlights this phenomenon by pointing to post-Cold War recruitment efforts. Notes Cooper, "consumerism is the one cause for which it makes no sense to die...Where once recruitment posters proclaimed YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU!, they now carry slogans such as JOIN THE ARMY: BE ALL THAT YOU CAN; self-realization has replaced patriotism as a motive for serving in the armed forces" (as cited in Hammond 2007, p. 32).

The thread running through all of these accounts of "postmodern" war is, as Arendt puts it, a "psychological premise about the unlimited possibilities in manipulating people" (p. 35). Again, it can be understood that in these estimations the ever-tightening relationship between civilian and military life is one that takes place on a *primarily ideological level*. As Baudrillard contemplates the ontological power of the military-media

<sup>15</sup> An "incredulity toward metanarratives".

apparatus, the “image”, the “spectacle”, “auras”, aesthetics – in a word, the *ideological* – are understood as the primary link between civilian and military affairs.

## **2.4. Wither Political Economy?**

As argued above, various analyses of what can loosely be called “postmodern war” lend themselves to consideration of the ideological dimensions of contemporary warfare. At the outset of this chapter it was argued that an analysis of the historical procession of civil-military affairs could proceed, following Walter Benjamin, by attending to the relationship between the political economic and aesthetic dimensions of war. As per the above review of literature, this study submits that “postmodern” analyses of war have largely focused on the aesthetic or ideological dimension of civil-military affairs to the detriment of sustained political economic analysis.

On this account, it is often noted that political economic research on the military constitutes a “blind spot” in communications scholarship. “With few exceptions,” notes Vincent Mosco (1986), “communications research has ignored the role of the military in the media and information systems” (p. 76). More than twenty years later Dan Schiller (2008) echoes this criticism, suggesting that “the dynamic political economy of...the militarization of communications has been all but ignored” (p. 126). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that when political economic analyses of military communications are undertaken they often focus on communication technology, systems, and infrastructure. Though political economic analysis of military

communication technology and systems warrants close scrutiny, what these analyses often omit are the low-tech, *content*-related aspects of military communications.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.5. Conclusion

Employing Walter Benjamin's ideas about the political economic and aesthetic dimensions of warfare, this chapter has sketched the procession of American civil-military affairs in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is concluded that, whereas the political economic dimension of civil-military affairs is discernable from the total economic-, industrial-, and labour mobilization of the World Wars, this dimension becomes obscured once war is thought to become "postmodern". With the rise of limited warfare produced by taxes and (ostensibly) votes, an analysis of the ideological dimension of warfare comes to the fore at the expense of a political economic analysis. To address this perceived shortcoming of critical literature surrounding the advent of "postmodern" war, in what follows a political economic analysis rooted in the concept of the audience commodity shall be brought to bear on the phenomenon of ideological, limited, "postmodern" warfare. To this end the next chapter shall present precedents for the application of an audience commodity analysis to contemporary ideological warfare. In doing so this study shall also attempt to address critics of the audience commodity by highlighting the extent to which military use of audience commodities is a paradigmatic case of the state's role in audience commodity production.

<sup>16</sup> So-called Information Operations (IO) divide into five "pillars": Psychological Operations (PSYOP), Military Deception (MILDEC), Operational Security (OPSEC), Electronic Warfare (EW), and Computer Network Operations (CNO). Christopher Paul (2008) notes that "three of the pillars of IO concern information content: PSYOP, MILDEC, and OPSEC. Two of the pillars of IO focus on information systems: EW and CNO. This logic appears to underlay USAF (United States Air Force) IO doctrine that divides IO tasks into three baskets: influence operations (content), electronic warfare (systems), and computer warfare (systems)" (p. 37). So while technological considerations of military communications are extremely important, *content* related communications present a qualitatively different set of issues to address.



### **3. Martialing Audience Work: The Role of the State**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

As argued in the previous chapter, the relationship between military and civilian affairs consists of both ideological and political economic dimensions. It was argued that the character of this relationship could be read into various conceptions of what constitutes “modern” and “postmodern” war. Though critics disagree about when this fundamental shift occurred, it was argued that the shift between “total” and “limited” war roughly corresponds to this shift, with the former connoting a primarily industrial mode of warfare, and the latter focusing more on questions of persuasion and propaganda. This latter demarcation lends itself to understanding modern total warfare as being premised on a political economy of mass-industrial labour, while understanding postmodern or limited warfare as “a battle of hearts and minds”, ideology, and culture. Much of the popular critical communication scholarship on military communications/propaganda has, on this account, tended to focus on this latter ideological dimension.

This chapter will attempt to shift the analysis of limited postmodern war from these idealist trappings to one that examines changes in civil-military affairs from a primarily political economic perspective. As a point of entry, looking to the Latin American military dictatorships in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is instructive. On this account it can be understood that new conceptions of “total war” focusing on “hearts and minds” were simultaneously wars over the political and economic administration of

these countries. It will be argued that in the context of the Cold War, the spread of capitalist social relations, namely advertising supported media, was understood to have a strategic military function, especially within the United States.

Having established the Cold War imperatives of spreading capitalist social relations, this chapter will turn to an early paradigmatic case of U.S. Cold War era Communications scholarship to introduce congruencies between this work's ostensibly positivist epistemology, and Dallas Smythe's concept of audience work. Finally, this chapter will look to the contemporary context of U.S. Public Diplomacy and its relationship to the U.S. military establishment. It will be argued that the currency of counterinsurgency theory within contemporary military practice has led to the military's discovery and use of mass-mediated audience work. By looking to leading U.S. Public Diplomats and military communications experts, this study argues that contemporary military communications is moving toward the production of audience work for the purpose of ideological construction. As with entirety of this thesis, therefore, this chapter shall at once advance the theory of the military audience commodity, while defending the audience commodity theory as such, in this instance against the charge that it "ignores the role of the state".

### **3.2. The New "Total War"**

As per the theoretical rubric outlined in the previous chapter, the breakdown of traditional conceptualizations between civilian and military affairs can be found in an examination of critical literature dealing with the political economy of military communications. Armand Mattelart, for example, in his 1978 "Notes on the Ideology of the Military State" makes several important observations about the relationship between that decade's Latin American military dictatorships and the role of capitalist forms of

communication. Prefacing his discussion, Mattelart points to the collapse of civil and military affairs within the Latin American military juntas:

the Armed Forces no longer accept the limitations of their traditional mission and have now taken control of the entire State apparatus...The military institution assumes power, and military values are substituted for civilian principles for organizing society. The 'civis', base of *civilization* is being replaced by a veritable 'Garrison' state, by militarization. (p. 403)

On this account, and in contradistinction to the received notion of "total" war with which the previous chapter dealt, Mattelart cites Brazilian General Golbery do Couto e Silva, then advisor to the Brazilian president and founder of the Brazilian National Intelligence Service, whose *Geopolitica do Brasil* conceived a new definition of "total war":

From a strictly military conception, war has now been converted into *total war*, a war that is economic, financial, political, psychological, and scientific, as well as being a war of armies, naval forces, and aviation; from total war to *global war*, and from global war to indivisible war, and why not admit it, permanent war.

[...]

It is total war because it does away with the previous distinction made between civilian and military categories. All of society has become a battlefield and every individual is in the camp of the combatants (sic), either for or against. It is a total war because the battlefields and the arms used pertain to all levels of individual and community life...This is a total war because the distinction between peace-time and war-time has disappeared, and the war is now permanent. (as cited in Mattelart, 1978, p. 406)

This redefinition of total war juxtaposes itself with the received notion that total war had passed with the advent of the Cold War. In doing so, however, this definition provides insight into the way in which traditionally conceived "limited" warfare opens up and greatly expands military terrain within civil society. Crucial here is the assertion that with the advent of this new type of total war *the political and the economic become part of the military terrain*. Conceived thusly, what had been considered a *limitation* turns out to be an *expansion* of the purview of military affairs.

Mattelart identifies this expanding role of military affairs as intimately involved in the Cold War project of capitalist expansion. An example of David Harvey's concept of a "spatial fix",<sup>17</sup> Mattelart (1978) identifies the underlying political economy of the Latin American military dictatorships:

Their emergence is in keeping with the present crisis that the world capitalist economy is undergoing, a crisis of the historic form of the accumulation of capital. The military State apparatus, in fact, is part of these new political, ideological and cultural forms which are intended to remedy the precarious nature of the balance permitting the bourgeoisie's maintenance in power. In this sense, the militarization of the State should be considered as the paroxysmic phase of a global process assuring the re-deployment of the capitalist system, which demands the reinforcement of social control.<sup>18</sup> (p. 404)

This new conception of total war, with its political economic focus, represents for Mattelart a shift towards the *internalization of repression*. The "internalization of repression" writes Mattelart, "is one more reason to persist in our efforts to perceive universal constants in the 'national security' ideologies underlying the foundations of the military States in the Southern Cone of Latin America" (p. 404). This internalization of repression, moreover, can be understood to have congruencies with the overall articulation of monopoly capitalism. Citing a report by the 1975 Trilateral Commission,<sup>19</sup> Mattelart sees the process of monopoly capitalism, whereby competition between firms

<sup>17</sup> "The absorption of excess capital and labour in geographical expansion. [The] 'spatial fix' to the overaccumulation problem entails the production of new spaces within which capitalist production can proceed, the growth of trade and direct investments, and the exploration of new possibilities for the exploitation of labour power. Here, too, the credit system and fictitious capital formation, backed by state fiscal, monetary, and, where necessary, *military power*, become vital mediating influences" (Harvey 1989, p. 183) [emphasis mine].

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the "spatial fix" is here combined with what Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession". On this account Mattelart notes that "in Brazil the net earnings have decreased 40% since the *coup d'Etat*. In Argentina, they have also fallen by 40%, but in less than one year. In Chile, the figures for reductions in net earnings are very similar to those for Argentina: they have decreased by 50% since September 1973" (p. 418). These trends seem to support Benjamin's contention that militarization accompanies the suppression of the proletariat's imperative for economic redistribution.

<sup>19</sup> "A group of private citizens, founded in 1973 on the initiative of David Rockefeller, president of Chase Manhattan Bank, is made up of more than 200 corporation executives and political personalities from the United States, Western Europe, and Japan" (Mattelart, 1978 p. 404).

is replaced by *cooperation* between firms vis-à-vis competition between firms and consumers,<sup>20</sup> as congruent with the internally-directed repression of the military juntas.

The Commission's report concludes:

The more democratic a system is, indeed, the more likely it is to be endangered by intrinsic threats. Intrinsic challenges are, in this sense, more serious than extrinsic ones...The vulnerability of democratic government in the United States thus comes...from the internal dynamics of democracy itself in a highly educated, mobilized, and participant society. (as cited in Mattelart, 1978, pp. 404-405)

This candid passage from the Trilateral Commission articulates the capitalist class's concern about the prospect of democratization, making imperative a mechanism for its suppression. On this account, Mattelart is attempting to underscore the congruency between the anti-democratic imperatives of both the capitalist class and the Latin American military states. The 1969 Brazilian National Security Doctrine, which Matellart writes, "constitutes the basic text of the [military] regime" and "served as a guide for other Latin-American military States" (p. 407) is paradigmatic of this new military imperative of internal political and psychological repression:

- *Article 3* of the Doctrine states "national security is essentially comprised of the means intended to preserve external and internal security, and includes prevention and repression of adverse psychological warfare as well as revolutionary or subversive war". (p. 407)
- *Paragraph 2* states "adverse psychological warfare may be defined as the use of propaganda or counter-propaganda, and all political economic, psycho-social and military activity which attempts to influence or provoke the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behavior of

<sup>20</sup> On this account, in his short history on the development of Consciousness Industry, Smythe cites Veblen, who makes this same observation: "The competition...which used to run mutually between the producing-sellers has since increasingly come to run between the business community on the one side and the consumers on the other. Salesmanship...has grown gradually greater and keener, at an increasing cost...On the earlier plan the net gain was sought by underselling an increased output of serviceable goods in an open market...*The later plan, so far as it has gone into effect, is a competition in publicity and scarcity*" (as cited in Smythe, p. 58).

foreign, enemy, neutral, or friendly groups against the realization of national objectives". (p. 407)

- *Paragraph 3* states "revolutionary war is an internal conflict, generally inspired by a certain ideology". (p. 407)
- *Article 34* goes so far as to make "factiousness" a criminal activity! (p. 407)

The centrality of ideological warfare to this new "national security" model of total war is plain. Mattelart is careful, however, not to submit this ideological warfare to a purely "superstructural" analysis. "We would be adopting an idealistic viewpoint," argues Mattelart "if we believed that it were possible to inject ideologies and doctrines from the outside" (p. 409). Rather, Mattelart is interested in exploring the political economic underpinnings of this ostensible "ideology":

the Latin-American version of the National Security Doctrine, like any ideology, only provides the rationalization for a *real process*. It reflects the changing elements in the model defining the existence and expansion of capital in these countries. (p. 417) [emphasis mine]

To emphasize the interrelatedness between the South American military regimes and the project of capitalist expansion, Mattelart draws attention to the way in which the military coups affected trends of advertising in these countries. In a similar vein, Schiller and Smythe (1972), commenting on the state of communication in pre-coup Chile, note that, "the state of advertising, its level of development, its share of the national product, its growth rate and its influence in the society are basic indicators of the nation's integration into modern capitalism" (p. 36). Though Schiller and Smythe express concern over the state of Chilean media, they optimistically document Chile's overall *decline* in advertising under the Allende administration (p. 36). In sharp contrast to this downward trend in pre-coup Chile, Mattelart notes the revival of advertising after the coup:

In 1975, the advertising agencies located in Santiago declared a gross income that was ten times superior to that declared two years earlier [the time of the coup]. The revenue of the largest agency in the capital, connected with *El Mercurio* [a prominent newspaper], went from \$274,000

to more than \$2.5 million in 1975, and approached the figure of \$3.5 million in 1976. In addition, there was a return *en masse* of the branches of U.S. agencies that had preferred to move back to Madison Avenue under the Popular Unity government. Thus, J. Walter Thompson, which left Chile in 1970 when Allende came to power, came back to resettle in Santiago. (pp. 420-421)

Following Mattelart, it can be understood that the Latin American military dictatorships' new "total war" correlates to the expansion of capitalist forms of communication, as evinced by the sharp rises in advertising expenditures in these countries.

From these examples, a sketch of the role that the military-media complex plays in this new conception of "total" war can be drawn together. As Mattelart notes, however, the ideological imperatives of these military regimes, like all ideologies, are underwritten by real processes. To the end of exploring this "real process", this study shall turn to a paradigmatic case of this new "total" war.

### **3.3. Weaponizing Empathy**

From its beginnings, American Communication Studies have been connected to the military establishment. Christopher Simpson (1994), in his *Science of Coercion*, demonstrates the overwhelming dependence of post-war American Communication Studies on military funding. On this account the case of Daniel Lerner's (1958) *The Passing of Traditional Society* is a paradigmatic case. Emerging from MIT's Center for International Studies (CENIS), Lerner's *Passing of Traditional Society*, based on Voice of America studies in the Middle East,<sup>21</sup> "is today widely regarded as the foundation of the development theory school of communication studies, [but] in reality was conceived

<sup>21</sup> Voice of America is the radio component of America's international propaganda effort. See Simpson, p. 113.

and carried out for the specific purpose of advancing U.S. propaganda programs in the Middle East” (Simpson, 1994, p. 10).

Indeed, Lerner was an avowed Cold Warrior who on many occasions spoke of the responsibility of social scientists to contribute to the fight against Communism. Simpson (1994) notes that in a special issue of *Public Opinion Quarterly* – the academic home of the greater part of military-sponsored communications studies – Lerner

provided ideological guidance for readers...Lerner’s contention, which was presented at length and without reply from opposing views, was that scholars who failed to embrace U.S. foreign policy initiatives “represent a total loss to the Free World.” As Lerner saw it...campaigns against purportedly “neutralist” sentiments such as “peace, safety [and] relaxation [of tensions]” were the “responsibility of everyone able and willing to improve the coverage, depth and relevance of communications research.” (p. 71)

Though Lerner’s work “is usually remembered as a politically neutral scientific enterprise” (p. 10), Simpson argues that his “development theory, which combined propaganda, counterinsurgency warfare, and selective economic development of targeted regions, was rapidly integrated into U.S. psychological warfare practice worldwide as the [1950s] drew to a close” (p. 84).

Concerned primarily with the psychological role that mass communications played in paving the way for the spread of capitalism and modernization, Lerner’s articulation of these processes within the context of the Cold War demonstrates the extent to which even by the 1950s there was a considerable collapse between military and political economic affairs. This is to say that for Lerner the spread of market economies was coextensive with the emerging conception of security that came to dominate the Cold War logic of containment. Indeed, it is this conception of warfare precipitated by the Cold War that would later be the basis for General Golbery’s above redefinition of “total war” more than two decades later.



Though the Communications research of this era is often thought to suffer from an overly simplistic positivist epistemology – “who said what to whom with what effect” – a closer examination of Lerner’s work reveals a striking parallel to Dallas Smythe’s contention that ideological production is essentially *work* performed by audiences. On this account Lerner’s concept of “empathy” is revealing. Consider that, for Smythe, the primary function of the audience commodity is its working at its own ideological production to the end of managing demand for consumer goods and the military system (c.f. p. 33). On this account Herbert Schiller, in the introduction to Smythe’s *Dependency Road*, summates the argument:

it is corporate capitalism’s creation of consumer demand that most occupies Smythe’s analytical interest...It is his contention that production of consciousness has become a major site of human labor, one that is totally unacknowledged. He claims that audiences work at their own ideological production and reproduction, under the stimulus of an industry devoted to the manufacture of consciousness. (as cited in Smythe, 1981, p. xxi)

Now consider this passage against Lerner’s understanding of *his own* project of mass-mediated modernization.<sup>22</sup> The following passages are illustrative:

The rapid spread of...*new desires*, which provide the dynamic power of modernization, is most clearly perceived in the coming of the mass media. (p. 46) [emphasis mine]

It is this interplay of *new desires and satisfactions* which characterizes the third phase of modernization, namely media *participation*. Once people are *equipped* to handle the new experiences...conveyed by media (via their literacy), they seek the satisfactions which integrate these *skills*. (p. 62) [emphasis mine]

We stress that the transition to participant society hinged upon the desire among individuals to *participate*. It grows as more and more individuals

<sup>22</sup> For Lerner, it should be noted that “modernization” implicitly connotes capitalism, or at least the struggle to insure that the developing world modernizes along capitalist lines. Lerner writes, “Middle Easterners more than ever want the modern package, but reject the label ‘made in U.S.A.’ (or, for that matter, ‘made in USSR’). We speak, nowadays, of modernization” (p. 45). This passage seems to carry a sense admission that his usage of the term “modernization” is essentially euphemistic; a pseudo-neutral term meant to connote the spread of a capitalist political economy.

take leave of the constrictive traditional universes and nudge their psyche toward *the expansive new land of heart's desire*. (p. 72) [emphasis mine]

As a preliminary remark it should also be noted that “participation” is a motif of Lerner’s work. However, close examination reveals that participation always appears as passive and consumptive. As Simpson (1994) notes, the communications research of the time, “often presented the de facto voicelessness of ordinary people – voicelessness in all fields *other* than the selection of commodities, that is – as though it was communication itself” (p. 20). Indeed, Lerner’s telos of development is telling:

everywhere...increasing urbanization has tended to raise literacy; rising literacy has tended to increase media exposure; increasing media exposure has “gone with” wider economic participation (per capita income) and political participation (voting). (p. 46)

This formula is repeated throughout Lerner’s work, with political participation (always limited to voting) always subordinate to economic participation (always limited to increased income/consumption).

Returning to the aforementioned passages, it is clear that Lerner understands the project of capitalist modernization as commensurate with the creation of new desires, or in economic terms, demand. That early post-war mass-mediated demand creation should be the engine for capitalist modernization is perhaps not surprising, but Lerner’s concept of “empathy” – the psychological mechanism<sup>23</sup> he posits as the crux of demand creation – is interesting insofar as it contains striking similarities to Smythe’s concept of audience work. “Empathy” writes Lerner, “[is] the inner mechanism which enables newly mobile persons to *operate efficiently* in a changing world” (p. 50) [emphasis in original]. This concept of “mobility”, it should be noted, is what Lerner calls “psychic mobility”, and

<sup>23</sup> A combination of the Freudian concepts of projection and introjection. See Lerner, p. 49.

is (supposedly) the result of empathic individuals' consumption of American media exports.

On this account, that the media products to be consumed by Middle Eastern audiences is American, when it is not explicit, is implicit. For Lerner, the empathic individual is to be "psychically mobile", but seems only to have a passport to the world of American consumerism. Consider on this account the follow passage from Lerner's "parable of the Turkish grocer":

the theater was [the Turkish grocer's] avenue to the wider world of his dreams. It was in a movie that he had first glimpsed what a *real* grocery store could be like – 'with walls made of iron sheets, top to floor and side to side, and on them standing myriads of round boxes, clean and all the same dressed, like soldiers in a great parade'. (p. 28) [emphasis in original]

Considering Lerner's emphasis on the mass-mediated revelation a *real* grocery store, it requires no exaggeration to suggest that Lerner's goal is nothing less than ontological. Schiller (1969) makes a similar point, noting that, "communications material from the Unites States offers a vision of a way of life. The image is of a mountain of material artifacts, privately furnished and individually acquired and consumed"<sup>24</sup> (p. 47).

Lerner further suggests that this empathy-enabled "psychic mobility" involves a "rearrangement of the self-system", and that "it has been the work of the twentieth century to diffuse widely a mobile sensibility so adaptive to change that rearrangement of the self-system is its distinctive mode" (p. 49). To the contemporary student of Communications, Lerner's vision of the mobile personality – able to "rearrange the self-system" – is a familiar one. Indeed, this characterization of the cultural affects of capitalist modernization is in keeping with theories of postmodernity that understand it

<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note that Lerner employs a metaphor equating commodities with soldiers – perhaps a telling remark with respect to his own ideological position. This equation is also in keeping with Smythe's assertion that commodities are themselves a form of propaganda. See Smythe, 1986, p. 67.

essentially as a political-economic phenomenon; as a product of late capitalism. At its very outset, then, the intersection of military-funded Communication Studies with modernization theory has presaged the reciprocal relationship between the flexibility economy and the flexible self. Here, then, is an early predictor of the postmodern condition of the flexible self, simulacra, etc., that is predicated on the economic precepts of modernity. Empathy, it seems, is Lerner's discovery that the conditions of modernity contain the symptoms of the post modern.

It is here, moreover, that the concept of *audience work* can be glossed from Lerner's concept of empathy. That Middle Eastern audiences are *working* when they "rearranging the self system" seems supported by Lerner's characterization of the process. Even literacy is posited as desire-in-training:

the primitive function of literacy, as of all *skills*, is to reduce waste of human effort. Its higher function is to *train* the skilled labor force with which cities develop the industrial complex that produces commodities for cash customers, including newspapers and radios and movies for media consumers.<sup>25</sup> (p. 61) [emphasis mine]

The concept of audience work, then, provides a framework with which to begin a critical analysis of Lerner's work. On this account Lerner's concept of "empathy" as a psychological mechanism for the "rearrangement of the self-system" can be understood as unpaid labor that audiences perform when they consume media products, be it "free lunch" programming or advertisements. That Lerner consistently characterizes the capacity for novel mass-mediated desire as a "skill" (c.f. p. 44) seems to support this contention. Understanding Lerner's notion of "empathy" as a type of *work*, then, makes great strides towards demystifying what is otherwise presented as a natural, *apriori*

<sup>25</sup> Lerner continues: "Of this second phase, *literacy*, is both the index and agent. To spread consumption of urban products beyond the city limits, literacy is an efficient instrument. The great symbol of this phase is the Sears-Roebuck catalogue" (p. 61).

psychological mechanism. Indeed, identifying Lerner's concept of empathy as a form of work allows for an analysis of the power relationships that adhere in Lerner's vision of capitalist modernization.

It will be recalled that Lerner held "media participation" to be the primary correlate of demand creation. As mentioned, a motif of Lerner's work is that media participation creates the demand that leads to "economic participation" (industrialization) and "political participation" (voting). The process, it should be noted, always occurs in this order, with political participation last. On this account, Lerner argues that a person "becomes a participant by learning to "have opinions"" (p. 71). Lerner's ironizing use of quotation marks around "having opinions" here seems to connote the contradictory nature of this brand of liberalism. "Having opinions" is seen, not as a tool for autonomous democratic participation, but as a type of *work* that audiences perform at the behest of opinion shapers like Lerner and the establishment of post-war Communications scholars. Indeed, Lerner argues that media participation has a disciplinary role, highlighting the sense in which media participation – the "skills" of empathy, and the subsequent formation of opinions – takes the form of work:

The mass media...have been great teachers of interior manipulation. They *disciplined* Western man in those empathic *skills* which spell modernity. They also portrayed for him the roles he might confront and elucidated the opinions he might need. (p. 54) [emphasis mine]

Identifying Lerner's concept of "participation" as a form of work allows for a consideration of the possibility that this work, as surely per the above passage, is

*alienating*; that alienation from this type of work is the counterpart to the alienation of labor that occurs on the assembly line:<sup>26</sup>

In Marx's period and in his analysis, the principle aspect of capitalist production has been the alienation of workers from the means of producing commodities-in-general. Today and for sometime past, the principle aspect of capitalist production has been the alienation of workers from the means of producing and reproducing themselves. (Smythe, 1981, p. 48)

That audiences perform work from which they are fundamentally alienated appears, moreover, in contemporary literature surrounding the rise of "immaterial labor". Brophy and de Peuter (2007), for example, posit the phenomenon of "precarious labor" as:

not necessarily imposed from above on a docile body. Instead, it entails the management of "life from its interior" by active subjects, or a certain mode of "care of the self," an ensemble of techniques and practices through which one relates to or sets oneself to work on oneself. In an age of precarity, entrepreneurialship in particular becomes an increasingly widespread form of care of the self and treatment of others...Ultimately, this pattern of self-constitution under post-Fordism entails a tendency toward what Brian Holmes theorizes as "the flexible personality".<sup>27</sup> (pp. 182-183)

The connection to Lerner's concept of empathy is apparent. What Lerner introduces as an apolitical, *apriori*, and natural mechanism of the human mind can be understood as a type of *work* from which one is alienated. Moreover, this work is explicitly performed in the name of mass-mediated demand creation for consumer commodities.

In Lerner's project of modernization, then, one finds an early example of the ideological mobilization of mass-mediated audience work. It is crucial to understand this

<sup>26</sup> Smythe cites Livant: "[The Audience Commodity] is the other side of the labour power that Marx discovered in the production of commodities-in-general, and it is as Protean in its capacities" (as cited in Smythe, 1981, p. 49).

<sup>27</sup> Though it is outside the limits of the present inquiry, the concept of audience work and empathy has a strong affinity to Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self". Foucault (2008) writes: "*Homo Oeconomicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. This is true to the extent that, in practice, the stake in all neoliberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo oeconomicus* as partner of exchange with *homo oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer" (p. 226).

project not simply as the ideological accoutrements of an organically expanding market economy, but as a deliberate project of the United States and its military establishment, the latter of which provided much of the funding for Lerner's work (Simpson, 1994). Indeed, this example of state involvement in the production of audience work can begin to address criticisms of the validity of the audience commodity as an analytic framework. Turning now to contemporary U.S. military communications, it shall be argued that the contemporary context reveals strong congruencies with the precedents set by Lerner's research. Indeed, the themes of harnessing audience work have become central to U.S. military communications within the context of contemporary counterinsurgency warfare.

### **3.4. The Contemporary Context**

With respect to contemporary U.S. military communication efforts, Lerner's Cold War vision of the mass-mediated production of consumer subjectivities can act as a foil. On this account, Robert Duffy's (2009) exposition of contemporary U.S. Public Diplomacy reveals striking continuities with Lerner's project of capitalist expansion via demand creation. In contrast to Lerner's contention that media usage would be both an "agent and index" of capitalist modernization, Duffy argues that contemporary Arab media usage, particularly Al Jazeera, constitutes what Lerner would call "media participation" along lines that are unfavorable to US interests – notably the production of political, rather than consumer, subjectivities.<sup>28</sup> Arguing that "active" Arab audiences, working at their own ideological production, constitute a contested space of power relations, Duffy demonstrates that contemporary U.S. government communication efforts

<sup>28</sup> Note that this is a reversal of Lerner's "telos" of development that begins with economic participation (consumerism) and ends with political participation.

in the Middle East seek to address the “problem” of Arab audiences constructing political anti-American subjectivities. To address this “problem”, argues Duffy, U.S. government efforts have sought to depoliticize audiences, attempting to channel Arab audience power into producing consumerist subjectivities. Citing a 2004 report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication,<sup>29</sup> Duffy notes that U.S. Public Diplomacy understands its task as:

communicat[ing] what our definition for the future promises on individual terms, not national or pan-national religious terms. We should personalize the benefits of our defined future: For example, personal control, choice and change, personal mobility, meritocracy, individual right. (as cited in Duffy, 2009, p. 97)

Similarly, Duffy points to the case of Norman Pattiz,<sup>30</sup> the US Broadcasting Board of Governors, arguing that

rather than appealing to audiences at the level of formal politics, Pattiz proposes a mobilization of affect and subjectivity around an individualized definition of ‘empowerment’. Pattiz’s vision for Alhurra<sup>31</sup> suggests a rechanneling of audience practices of meaning making and ‘self’ production towards the production of individualized, liberal, consumer subjects, more interested in lifestyle, entertainment and technology features than they are in ‘hard’ news. (p. 98)

Duffy, adopting the concept of audience work, notes the similarities between Smythe’s concept of audience work, and the production of these consumer subjectivities. “In essence then”, writes Duffy, “these [U.S. Government] stations parallel

<sup>29</sup> “Strategic Communication” is a term gaining currency in the Defense, State, and Intelligence establishments. Arguably, Strategic Communications is a euphemism; a “rebranding” of older and more pejorative terms like “Psychological Warfare” or “propaganda”. If Strategic Communications denotes anything truly novel it is a sense of interagency cooperation between State and Defense departments. Again, this points to a collapse between political (State) and military (Defense) affairs.

<sup>30</sup> Pattiz, head of the United States Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) from 2000 to 2006, before his appointment to the BBG was the founder and chairman of Westwood One, America’s largest commercial radio network. Westwood One’s mission statement, Duffy notes, is to “deliver audience to advertisers and also deliver traffic, news, talk, sports and entertainment programs to its affiliate stations” (p. 80). The case of Pattiz is a paradigmatic case of the “revolving door” between industry and government.

<sup>31</sup> The United States’ Arab language broadcast television network.



the logic of what Dallas Smythe called the audience commodity, but with various forms of political messages substituting for the advertising messages found in American commercial media” (p. 88). Indeed, in contrast to Murdock’s contention that the theory of the audience commodity ignores the role of the state, here is a paradigmatic case of the mobilization of audience work by the state.

Indeed, state utilization of audience work is a defining characteristic of contemporary Public Diplomacy and its militarized cognate, “Strategic Communications”. On this account, addressing an audience of both U.S. State and Defense Department communicators, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Doran urges his peers to utilize “the power, especially in a networked age, of *messages delivered by third parties to their peers about themselves*” (p. 8) [emphasis mine]. That Defense and State communicators should be concerned with audiences’ delivery of messages *to themselves* lends further weight to this study’s assertion that producing working audiences is easily integrated into mechanisms of state power.

Indeed, this cooptation of audiences’ work at producing themselves ideologically is a motif of so-called “Public Diplomacy 2.0”. Doran continues:

to address the strategic threat posed by hostile information networks and to tap into the constructive power of the new media, a revamped public diplomacy enterprise must be tasked with supplying local credible voices with material and resources tailored to their specific environment.

It must, in other words – and this is my key point – create networks that promote the strategic interests of the United States. This is not to suggest that the new enterprise should be engaged in covert or clandestine activities; it simply needs to support third parties whose efforts dovetail with those of the United States even if those efforts are not directly engaged in telling America’s story. (p. 7)

This passage is particularly illuminating. Diverging from a traditional sender-receiver model of influence, “Public Diplomacy 2.0” aims at strategically intervening in communication environments so as to encourage and amplify the communication of pro-

American, as opposed to “problematic”, audiences.<sup>32</sup> In other words, this new paradigm of military communication in the context of social, population-centric warfare is concerned with *the management of the communicative labour of audiences*.

Though Duffy here describes a process of producing audiences via free-lunch enticements – with U.S. government messages substituting for advertiser messages – it can be argued that insofar as the U.S. government is both the “producer” and the “purchaser” of these audiences, market forces no longer adhere in fact, and these audiences cannot properly be thought of as a commodity. This would lend credence to Murdock’s contention that the concept of the audience commodity is not appropriate when considering the role of the state in ideological production. This criticism can be addressed, however, by looking to the way in which U.S. government communications situate themselves with respect to hostile communications markets. This is to say that, though initial government intervention in communications practices may appear to contradict the purely market function of the audience commodity, it can be seen that the goal of this intervention is precisely to create the conditions for a functioning market for audiences.

Following the examples laid out by Lerner and Duffy, a major contradiction in U.S. communication policy can be glossed: the United States Government advocates market-driven social relations in the Middle East, but has communication policies that are heavily interventionist. The way in which the U.S. Government resolves this contradiction – drawing upon an implied rhetoric of “market failure” – is interesting for the

<sup>32</sup> Again, Foucault’s concept of “biopower”, though outside the scope of the present analysis, is interesting on this account. As Dillon (2008) writes, “the problematic of biopolitical security apparatuses is fundamentally that of securing the contingent freedom of circulation” (p. 282).

present analysis into the role of the state in the use of commodified audience work. Duffy writes:

Fuller's<sup>33</sup> report on Muslim youth, the Advisory Council on Public Diplomacy and others have identified the failure of US entertainment products to establish themselves amongst the masses in the Arab World. From this perspective, US radio and television projects can be viewed as efforts to address a '*market failure*' of the US entertainment industries by providing Arab youth, beyond just the elites, with a model of 'normal' media use and model subject positions to occupy – in essence as a pleasure and entertainment seeking audience.<sup>34</sup> (p. 95) [emphasis mine]

The idea, then, that the failure of private American media to penetrate the Middle East to the end of producing depoliticized consumer subjectivities constitutes a sort of "market failure" sheds light on the peculiar *normative* ideological role that markets are here expected to play on a geopolitical level. On this account, little seems to have changed since Herbet Schiller's (1986) observation that the "free flow" of information is "the channel through which life styles and value systems can be imposed on poor and vulnerable societies" (p. 53).

In *The Rhetorical Presidency*, Shawn Parry-Giles (2001) similarly notes that U.S. Government involvement in foreign broadcasting took the form of subsidies to favorable American news organizations that could be thought of as simultaneously at arm's length *and* representing the strategic interests of the United States with respect to harnessing audience power. In particular, the "information media guarantee" took the form of addressing this type of "market failure" in the early post-war years:

<sup>33</sup> Fuller, ex-CIA official and former Vice President of the U.S. National Intelligence Council, writing here on behalf the Brookings Institute. See Duffy, p. 85.

<sup>34</sup> This concept of "market failure" is repeated in the U.S. Public Diplomacy literature. Duffy writes: "the US advisory Council on Public Diplomacy actually constructs [the failure of U.S. private media in the Middle East] as the result of a sort of '*market failure*,' reporting in 2004 that the "United States held no effective presence in the Middle Eastern media until recently. Broadcasting in the region was largely unprofitable for the private sector..." (U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2004, p. 30), implicitly positioning MBN projects as efforts to address this failure of market forces to develop a 'normal' commercial media culture" (p. 87).

As part of the debate over international propaganda, administrative officials insisted that the U.S. news media distribute newspapers and magazines abroad so as to educate the world about the country's ideals and initiatives. In response to this call, industry leaders claimed that the distribution of news abroad was too expensive for them because of exchange rate losses. For several years, the State Department and media leaders discussed ways to rectify the financial question. The debate was finally resolved in 1948 with the passage of an "information media guarantee" (IMG), which subsidized exchange rate deficits for news organizations disseminating their messages internationally. *Although State Department officials stressed that news organizations benefiting from the IMG program would be free to print what they wished, an internal document of the State Department indicated that those "information products [which] most successfully present[ed] a true picture of the United States abroad" would benefit most from the IMG program.* (p. 10) [emphasis mine]

Indeed, the situation has changed little into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In the opening keynote address to the 2009 Smith-Mundt Symposium,<sup>35</sup> then Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs James Glassman (2009), makes explicit the role of U.S. State policy in facilitating the emergence of market economies, especially communications markets:

Today's "Public Diplomacy 2.0" involves interaction – a deep, multi-sided conversation...Our role in government is often to bring domestic, private-sector actors into contact with foreigners, rather than bringing government into contact with them. (p. 5) [emphasis mine]

It is clear from Glassman's comments that U.S. Public Diplomacy understands its task as a surrogate for market-forces; as a facilitator of market forces; and in both cases addressing a kind of would-be "market failure". Again, it is of note that this contradiction of U.S. foreign communication policy – advocacy of "free markets" coupled with heavy

<sup>35</sup> Organized by Matt Armstrong, whose blog [mountainrunner.org](http://mountainrunner.org) has become a forum for political-military conversation on communications, the Smith-Mundt symposium gathered leading Public Diplomats, top Department of Defense officials, as well as journalists and U.S. lawmakers to discuss the Smith-Mundt act of 1948 which simultaneously provided the legal framework for the creation of the United States Information Agency (USIA) as well as creating a "firewall" ostensibly protecting American audiences from persuasive State Department media products intended for foreign audiences.

interventionism – is justified as necessary for the creation of capitalist social relations, which are implicitly understood as being good in and of themselves.

What the preceding passages reveal is that the perspective of U.S. Public Diplomats assumes a normative role for markets within the social relations of foreign countries. This normative role, as mentioned, consists partly in the creation of consumer, as opposed to political, subjectivities. This contention is supported by an analysis of the way in which U.S. public diplomats and “strategic communicators” approach their task. On this account Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Doran (2009) frames U.S. Government influence goals as addressing “markets”, not civilians:

I think – when I look at it, this influence enterprise, I think there are... areas where we need to be focused. The first is understanding the environment, creating cultural competency in and out of government, *researching the flow of information through key target audiences, much as marketing companies do.* (p. 8) [emphasis mine]

This equation of civilian populations with markets is in keeping with the notion of consumerism as the preferred mode of subjectivity for U.S. interests. On this account Duffy argues that “[U.S.] media projects seem to be viewed by their personnel as surrogates for the role marketing plays in the development of consumer subjectivity in the ‘developed’ world” (pp. 100-101).

In particular, the concept of employing marketing techniques in the service of influencing populations is important for the present inquiry into the role of the state with respect to the audience commodity. That the tools of marketing have been integrated onto the political-military terrain seems plain. Consider on this account Michael Doran’s (2009) euphemistic concept of “strategic listening”:

We need to be much more attuned to local political and intellectual discussions, not just among our enemies but also among our friends. Strategic listening requires paying more attention to open-source information, the kind of intelligence that anybody who has run a political campaign is intimately familiar with: conducting polls, focus groups, and

simply identifying the key people who have their finger on the pulse of their community. (p. 7)

In describing “strategic listening” Doran is clearly pointing to the techniques of marketing professionals, tellingly those involved in the marketing of politics, thus furthering the integration of the political onto military terrain. With respect to the concept of commodified audience work, these marketing practices are particularly relevant. For Smythe, the role of marketers and demographers are essential steps in the production of the audience commodity.<sup>36</sup>

the audience commodities bear specifications known in the business as “demographics”. The specifications for the audience commodities include age, sex, income level, family composition, urban or rural location, ethnic character, ownership of home, automobile, credit card status, social class, and, in the case of hobby and fan magazines, a dedication to photography, model electric trains, sports cars, philately, do-it-yourself crafts, foreign travel, kinky sex, etc. (p. 27)

### 3.5. Occupied Customers

In looking toward the integration of marketing practices onto the political-military terrain it is hoped that insight into the problem of the state’s role for the audience commodity can be gained. To this end, an examination of a 2007 RAND corporation monograph titled *Enlisting Madison Avenue: the Marketing Approach to Winning Support in Theaters of Operation* can shed light on the process of integrating the audience commodity into military operations. The introduction to this monograph spells out its overarching goal:

<sup>36</sup> It is important here not to confuse the production of the audience commodity with its work. The commodity is *produced* by free-lunch enticements targeting specific demographic markets. The process of marketing here serves to refine the process of commodification. Though the *work* of the audience commodity is performed by the audience itself, Smythe argues that audiences *do not* produce themselves as commodities. See Chapter 4 of this study for a further analysis.

counterinsurgency (COIN) and other stability operations are prominent in the contemporary operating environment and are likely to remain so in the future. These operations demand a keen focus on shaping [influencing] indigenous audiences through the synchronization of both word and deed. U.S. force actions can set the conditions for credibility and help foster positive attitudes among an indigenous population, enabling effective and persuasive communication. Alternatively, they can undermine opportunities for success. *The authors of this monograph review the challenges the U.S. faces in this regard, drawing on lessons from commercial marketing practices that may assist the U.S. military in its shaping endeavors.* (Glen et al., 2007, p. iii) [emphasis mine]

Particularly interesting is this monograph's positioning of occupied populations as "customers" of war, which, extending the metaphor, is transformed into a "commodity" consumed by these "occupied customers":

the United States and its coalition partners should arm themselves with information about their prospective "customers," whose support the military requires to conduct effective COIN and other stability operations. Like a business selling a product, the military cannot expect everyone in a given region to accept its presence and message equally. (p. 62)

Immediately discernable from this passage is the continuation of the metaphor that transforms political subjects into consumers. No longer do these occupied civilians make autonomous, collective political choices – it will be remembered that the Iraq War (eventually) claimed the spread of democracy as a primary end – rather they make individual consumption choices. In this metaphorical construction of occupied populations, marketing practices can be deployed to garner information about "consumer preferences", euphemistically connoting political opinions and positions.<sup>37</sup>

As demonstrated, it is a common trope of the defense establishment's "battle for hearts and minds" to position civilians as consumers; as economic agents, not political ones. This further integration of the logics of war and capital lead to occupied civilians

<sup>37</sup> The glibness of the consumer metaphor extends to imply torture as a form of "market research". Glen et al. write: "to conduct segmentation research in a theater of operations, the military must collect as much information as possible on the population. It can collect information through individual interviews and enemy *prisoner-of-war interrogations*, focus groups, and surveys" (p. 62) [emphasis mine].

becoming thought of as “customers” of a U.S. security “product”. Rhetorically, this conceptual framework is one that draws upon the associations of consumption and consumer sovereignty with political freedom. The metaphor of the “occupied customer” rhetorically invests the occupied civilian with an ephemeral capital that ostensibly “consumes” the American security product. Thus an act of political-military violence is fetishized into a sovereign act of economic exchange.

Similarly, the RAND study charges the U.S. military to adopt the concept of branding. “Like consumer products positioned and branded for a day gone by,” write Glen et al. (2007) “so too is the U.S. military brand identity now—at least in part— out of date. A new and more effective U.S. military brand identity is critical to the success of stability operations” (p. 75). The brand incongruity referred to here is a symptom of the U.S. military’s larger institutional difficulty adapting to the requirements of counterinsurgency warfare, namely the use of non-kinetic operations – “winning hearts and minds” – over traditional kinetic operations. To address this problem the RAND study suggests that U.S. military Information Operations can take lessons from the marketing models of the service industry. “The U.S. military, particularly the ground forces of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps” reads the RAND report, “function very much like a service firm when it comes to conducting stability operations”<sup>38</sup> (Glen et al., 2007, p. 86).

That the U.S. military structure should reflect the post-Fordist American political economic base is interesting on this account. Indeed, just as Harvey (1989) notes that in a post-Fordist economy “the rapid contraction in manufacturing employment after 1972

<sup>38</sup> The study continues: “service firms present a unique challenge to delivering on a firm’s brand identity...Unlike products such as blue jeans and laptops, services are intangible, unfold in real time, and are often complex. Because of these factors, consumers judge services based on the most tangible information available: the interactions they have with the personnel delivering the service (p. 83).



has highlighted a rapid growth of service employment,” (p. 156) so too is the military seeing an increase in service labour. In 2006, for example, the Defence Department “acquired \$295 billion worth of products and services. More than half – \$152 billion – was for services...The Pentagon is not buying massive quantities of new hardware, but it is spending far more on so-called services” (Erwin, 2007).

In the battle to “win hearts and minds,” then, markets have been opened to communications and marketing professionals whose job, following Smythe’s concept of the audience commodity, is to produce audiences for consumption in the process of marketing the U.S. Army’s “service commodity”. Quoted in the *Washington Post*, former Defense Intelligence Agency officer W. Patrick Lang notes the recent spike in funds for Information Operations contractors in theaters of war. “Information operations is the hot thing” says Lang, “and somebody turned on a hose of money...Retired colonels and senior executive service officers are forming teams to compete” (Pincus, 2010).

Another example can illustrate the point. At the time of this writing, the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) is hosting a proposal workshop for a new computerized human intelligence (HUMINT) program called “Graph Understanding and Analysis for Rapid Detection - Deployed on the Ground” (presumably an attempt at humour with the acronym GUARD-DOG). *Wired* magazine reports that the GUARD-DOG system is to be a:

computerized intel analysis system [that] could rapidly grasp the size and complexity of the “human terrain,” and create new scenarios based on constantly-updated inputs. The real-world social networks in which troops operate have thousands of variables: people, locations, social affiliations, and organizations, to name a few. Spotting one small, hard-to-detect change in that landscape can be significant. (Drummond, 2010)

Conceived along similar lines to the Pentagon’s “Human Terrain System” – itself a militarized anthropology akin to market research – GUARD-DOG’s ostensible purpose is

to collect demographic information on occupied populations to the end of providing actionable military intelligence. Taken together with the charge to win the “hearts and minds” of occupied populations, this process of refining audience specifications appears consistent with Smythe’s concept of producing audiences in a consumable form.

This “marketing approach” to counterinsurgency war is complimented by a large-scale outsourcing of military Information Operations. Citing a recent investigation of the Pentagon’s outsourcing of intelligence and communications services, the *Washington Post’s* Walter Pincus reports that

purchases of products and services made through major contracts included "military analysts, development of television commercials and documentaries, focus group and polling services, television air time, posters, banners, and billboards...Smaller individual purchases under information-operations programs included magazine publishing and printing services, newspaper dissemination, television and radio airtime, text messaging services, internet services and novelty items. (Pincus, 2010)

Taken together the above examples demonstrate the extent to which current counterinsurgency operations have precipitated a reliance on marketing and communications practices to “win hearts and minds”. This chapter has attempted to argue that these efforts are predicated on the logic of audience commodification through militarized market research and demography, variously referred to as “human intelligence” or “human terrain”. This has been partially achieved by long standing efforts to interpellate foreign (occupied or otherwise) audience subjectivities along the lines of capitalist social relations, particularly the construction of consumer over political subjectivities.

### 3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to trace historical and contemporary precedents for the application of the audience commodity as an analytical framework with respect to military ideological production. As seen in the case of the Latin American military dictatorships, the new conception of “total war” emerging in the 1970s was predicated upon conditioning these societies to a capitalist political economy. Notably, there is a strong correlation between the rise of commercial advertising (and the subsequent commodification of audiences) and the militarization of political economic affairs. Earlier precedents, notably Daniel Lerner and the cohort of Pentagon-funded post World War II Communication scholars, similarly show that the creation of international consumer demand for commodities was framed in the *military* terms of the Cold War.

As made clear by Duffy’s analysis, a key strategic goal of U.S. Public Diplomacy has been to create consumer rather than political subjectivities. This is congruent with the general tendency of capitalism to substitute social relationships with economic relationships. This process of depoliticization also has precedents in the work of Daniel Lerner who, it will be remember, posited political participation as subordinate to economic participation in his teleology of modernization.

In keeping with this overall process of depoliticizing civilians is the U.S. military’s adoption of branding as an Information Operations tool. An analysis of the RAND Corporation’s *Enlisting Madison Avenue* reveals a stark economic epistemology wherein political beliefs and choices, notably with respect to military occupation, are transformed into “consumer preferences” mediated by the U.S. Army “brand”. This continues the process of commodifying and depoliticizing social relationships within the context of population-centric warfare.

Though early Communications Studies are often thought to suffer from a simplistic positivist epistemology, an analysis of Daniel Lerner's work reveals strong correlates between his concept of "empathy"-driven demand creation, and Dallas Smythe's concept of audience work (though they are obviously on opposite sides of the political spectrum). In both cases "desire" or "demand creation" appears as a function of mass-mediated "skill" or "labour" that deeply affects populations' ideas of the world and their role in it. Similarly, contemporary cases of U.S. Public Diplomacy – so called "Public Diplomacy 2.0" – are explicitly predicated upon "messages delivered by third parties to their peers about themselves." As warfare becomes increasingly concerned with the political economic administration of populations, the ability to mobilize the social labour of audience takes on increasing military import.

In all of the above cases, the *role of the state* is writ large. This chapter has attempted to show that the state has played a crucial role in integrating capitalist forms of communications into the complex of civil-military affairs. The political economic warfare germane to the Cold War involved heavy state intervention by the United States to create markets for audience commodities. Moreover, within the contemporary context the new imperatives of counterinsurgency warfare have drastically increased military reliance on the tools of marketing and advertising. In highlighting these historical precedents of the state's role in the production and consumption of audience commodities, it is hoped that steps can be taken to dispel criticism regarding the incongruence of state ideological production and the audience commodity.

On this account and again addressing what he understood to be another "blindspot" in Marxist literature, Smythe (1986) argues that the role of the military (and by extension the role of the state) has been crucial to the capitalist system. Against the traditional Marxist view that the role of military production in a capitalist system is to

“[pile] up deferred demand which stimulates investments in the “aftermath,” (p. 74) Smythe argues that nonmarket military demand has been integral to the maintenance of the monopoly capitalist system.

On this account it is particularly interesting that Smythe, both in his analysis of the audience commodity and the political economy of armaments, focuses on demand management. If Smythe’s analysis of the military’s role in the creation of nonmarket demand for military commodities can be extended to a consideration of the military’s role in the production of *audience* commodities, then steps can be taken toward addressing critics who see the State’s role in ideological production as inimical to the functioning of the audience commodity.

Murdock (1978), for example, appears not to account for the role of the military in communications, as evinced by his suggestion that armaments and communications are somehow exclusive. Murdock writes: “indeed, some commentators have argued that recent developments, particularly the general shift from manufacturing to service industries and the investment switch *from armaments to communications*, have made the information industries “one of the economic leading edges of developing multi-national capitalism” (p. 110) [emphasis mine]. This study submits, on the contrary, that investment has not “switched from armaments to communications”, rather communications have *become armaments*.<sup>39</sup>

If Smythe is correct in asserting that state production of nonmarket military demand is essential to the functioning of many commodity markets, it stands to reason

<sup>39</sup> On this account, a recent two-year investigation by the *Washington Post* reveals that large portions of the U.S. national security infrastructure has undergone a huge process of privatization and expansion since 2001. The process is particularly pointed in the field of communications. Addressing an audience of national security contractors in the communications industry, Kevin P. Meiners, a deputy undersecretary for intelligence, advised his audience to “describe what you do as a weapons system, not overhead... Overhead to them is IT and people... You have to foot-stomp hard that this is a war-fighting system that’s helping to save’s people’s lives everyday” (as cited in Priest & Arkin, 2010).

that far from representing an antagonistic relationship with respect to the functioning of the audience commodity, the role of the state can be understood as integral to its production.<sup>40</sup> From this perspective, it can be understood that criticisms of the concept of the audience commodity that argue its ignorance of the state are themselves predicated upon views of State-Capital relations that are not bourn out by an actual analysis.

Surely Murdock could not have, at the end of the 1970s, foreseen the extent to which government functions would be subject to outsourcing and privatization. Nevertheless, since the 2001, especially in the field of national security, what Naomi Kline (2007) identifies as a “corporatist new deal” has come to dominate the American military system. On this account Kline writes:

According to the Bush vision, the role of government is merely to raise the money necessary to launch the new war market, then buy the best products that emerge out of that creative cauldron...In other words, the politicians create the demand, and the private sector supplies all manner of solutions – a booming economy in homeland security and twenty-first century warfare entirely underwritten by taxpayer dollars.<sup>41</sup> (p. 360)

In showing that, via the creation of nonmarket military demand, the state has played a primary role in the maintenance of the capitalist system, Smythe provides an avenue for analysis that should *expect* the military to be a producer and consumer of nonmarket demand for audience commodities.

If the logic of Smythe’s argument can be applied, the above cases of both militarizing the audience commodity, and commodifying the military audience, can be understood as part of the same process of state-capital relations, with the creation of

<sup>40</sup> Even Jhally makes this case with respect to the role of the state in producing the conditions for the production of the American football audience commodity. See Jhally, 1982 p. 209, fn. 8, and Chapter 4, this study.

<sup>41</sup> Indicative of this process, Kline argues, is George W. Bush’s budget director, the think-tank ideologue Mitch Daniels, who argues that “the general idea – that the business of government is not to provide services, but to make sure they are provided – seems self evident to me” (as cited in Kline, 2007, p. 354).

nonmarket military demand as the crucial link. Indeed, far from ignoring the role of the State in ideological production, Smythe appears to have discovered a possible clue to the mass media's internal unity. Again, Smythe's original contention appears bourn out:

the prime purpose of the mass media complex is to produce people in audiences who work at learning the theory and practice of consumership for civilian goods and who support (with taxes and votes) the military demand management system. (p. 20)

This chapter has, again, had a dual role: it has attempted to advance a theory of the military audience commodity while also defending the theory of the audience commodity as such against detractors, in this case against Murdock's contention that the audience commodity does not account for the role of the state. The next chapter shall continue this argument, presenting a case study of contemporary military public relations from a consciousness industry point of view.

## 4. “America Supports You”: The Role of Industry

### 4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was argued that the exploitation of audiences' work on their own ideological production has become a mechanism for military propaganda. Following the logic of Dallas Smythe's concept of the audience commodity and its work, it was argued that the nature and content of this work has become a military concern. In the present chapter, it shall be argued that the U.S. military's "America Supports You" (ASY) public relations campaign is exemplary of this mobilization of audience work. A close analysis of this campaign will reveal the specific ways in which audience labour is produced, and valorized through sale to corporate America. As with the previous chapter, this chapter shall at once advance the theory of the military audience commodity, while simultaneously responding to critics who have cited "extreme economic reductionism" as a demurrer of the audience commodity concept as such. This chapter shall attempt to show that the *actual* economic processes that govern the commodification of audience work, far from being economic, are deeply involved in both the political process and human agency.



## 4.2. America Supports You: Overview

The public relations campaign in question – the “America Supports You” (ASY) program – ran from 2004 to 2007. The ASY program’s primary mission was to:

showcase and communicate to U.S. military members defending our freedom around the globe what thousands of individual citizens, community groups, corporations, businesses, and others are doing to support them and their families. (p. 1)

The public relations campaign was contracted to Susan Davis International (SDI), a private public relations firm with close social ties to then Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ASDPA) Allison Barber. As an official investigation of the program by the Pentagon Inspector General (2008) shows, “the preponderance of the program funding was spent on contracts with Susan Davis International (SDI) for public relations services for the program. A total of six contracts or delivery orders were issued that had payments totaling more than \$8.8 million from September 2004 through FY 2007” (p. 2).

The primary findings of this investigation report are unusually critical when compared with similar investigations of military communications. Against the above stated purpose of the ASY program, the investigation report found that:

the ASY program has spent more than \$9 million and produced results that were not consistent with the program’s objective “to showcase and communicate to U.S. military members defending our freedom around the globe what thousands of individual citizens, community groups, corporations, businesses, and others are doing to support them and their families.” (p. 4)

Moreover, pointing to the program’s actual operations, the report found that:

[The ASDPA Allison Barber] used contracts with Susan Davis International, a public relations firm, with payments totaling more than \$8.8 million (since September 2004) to primarily solicit or build support from school children, corporations, celebrities, and the media, and to organize ASY special events and procure promotional items to promote or “brand” the ASY program during the past 3 years. (p. 4)

Though the Inspector General's report focuses mainly on violations of ethics regulations with respect to soliciting support from the public, misappropriating funds, and failing to adhere to the stated goals of the ASY program, this study shall consider the extent to which the ASY program follows the logic of Smythe's concept of the audience commodity. It shall be argued that the primary function of the ASY program has been to transform audience work into commodity form – in this case the ASY “brand” – that could be sold to corporate America. Furthermore, it shall be argued that this commodification of audience work constitutes a default deregulation of standing laws against domestic military propaganda.

Methodologically, the present analysis of the America Supports You program is based largely on the aforementioned 2008 Pentagon Inspector General's report that was commissioned by the U.S. Congress in response to the primarily *financial* mismanagement of the program by Susan Davis International. The allegations leading to this investigation came largely from the editorially independent military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*,<sup>42</sup> whose financial department was linked to the misappropriation of funds for the program. Though the report is highly critical, its criticism centers on financial mismanagement, ethics violations, and the failure of the program to carry out its stated objective of communicating support to American service members. Interestingly, the report does not investigate whether the ASY program constituted propaganda against the American public.<sup>43</sup> It is the intention of the present inquiry, then, to draw upon the investigation's extensive documentation of the ASY program to the end of providing an analysis of its functioning as a propaganda outlet. Moreover, the report's findings shall

<sup>42</sup> See Schogol, 2007a and 2007b.

<sup>43</sup> Though propaganda is technically illegal, a combination of loose terminology and regulatory inaction have traditionally combined to make enforcement of the law virtually absent in the history of military communications. C.f. p. 2.

be used to argue that the influence/propaganda function of the ASY program structurally follows the tenets of Smythe's concept of the audience commodity. This will require an interpretation and synthesis of disparate elements of the investigation report to construct a clearer picture of how this military public relations program produced laboring audiences in commodity form.

### **4.3. Breaking the Law, or Deregulation**

One of the primary functions of the ASY program was to create a promotional relationship between corporate America and the U.S. military. This was done in clear violation of existing law and ongoing guidance from the Department of Defense Standards of Conduct Office (SOCO). On this account the Inspector General's report is explicit:

According to the DoD Standards of Conduct Office (SOCO), historically, DoD has not solicited support for programs from the general public. Thus, the advice from SOCO as well as Department ethics counselors is for DoD employees not to solicit support for programs. In 2005, while SOCO worked with the Senate Armed Services Committee to amend title 10 of United States Code section 2601, "General Gift Funds," DoD requested explicit authority to solicit support. However, the Senate Armed Services Committee did not approve the solicitation language and indicated that should DoD ever try to solicit, Congress would enact legislation specifically denying DoD solicitation authority. (Inspector General, 2009, p. 4)

Against these precedents, then ASDPA Allison Barber, the sole overseer of the ASY program, consulted SOCO attorneys between 2003 and 2005 for guidance on solicitation, fundraising, and endorsement (p. 5). Citing emails between SOCO attorneys and Barber, the Inspector General's report reveals that Barber had asked for permission to solicit corporate America for support, and was denied. Barber's email reads:

Issue:

Overseas, we make troops buy a digital receiver for their televisions so

they can see AFRTS [American Forces Radio and Television Service]. If they live on base, it is free but if we don't have base housing for them, we make them buy the receiver. It is a few hundred dollars.

[...]

I would like to provide the boxes free of charge, the DoD would own them and loan them out to the deployed troop. The cost of this is a one time charge of \$55 million dollars.

[...]

Comptroller isn't interested in coughing up that much money right now.

So here is my question . . . Is there a way for me to make this situation know [sic] to corporate America and offer them the option of "sponsoring" a receiver? So the receiver might have a sticker on it that says "brought to you by Sears. (p. 5) [Emphasis added in report]

To this query the SOCO attorney flatly responded, "of course, you may not solicit anyone, especially corporate America, to sponsor the receivers. That's a no-no". (p. 5)

Despite this guidance, over a year later in September of 2005 Barber again emailed a SOCO attorney regarding DoD involvement in a fundraiser, this time by the Professional Golf Association (PGA). Barber's email reads:

[T]he [PGA], as you know, has been doing fundraisers for different military charities. [T]hey would like to present a token check to a senior [D]o[D] person at their year end event. [T]he check would be symbolic of hte [sic] money they have donated to the military charities. [S]o it isn't an actual check it is more of a demonstration of what has happened. [T]hey have raised over [\$]300,000 for the military charities. [I]sn't that great?

[I]s a senior [DOD] person allowed to accept the "check". [sic] [T]o be clear, the money has already been donated so the person won't be accepting any money at all. (p. 5)

In response, the SOCO attorney unequivocally denied Barber's request to participate in the publicity event, citing ethics regulation against DoD endorsement of any "non-Federal entity, event, product, service or enterprise" (p. 6):

A senior DoD person could certainly thank the PGA for providing funds that will benefit members of the Armed Forces. *This DoD representative could not endorse the PGA or solicit funds, but could acknowledge their contribution.* Since the check is not real, he or she is not acting as an agent for the military relief societies, nor should it appear so. A better milieu would be for the DoD representative to thank the PGA and stand

on the perimeter of the presentation of the bogus check to a representative of the military relief societies.

You also mentioned that this will occur at the PGA year-end event. *Is this event appropriate for DoD to participate in? Is it a fundraiser?* (p. 5) [emphasis added in report]

Despite repeated rebuffs by both the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee and the Standards of Conduct Office, the ASY program under the leadership of ASDPA Baber, continued to solicit endorsement from corporate America. Indeed, one of the primary functions of the ASY program, though not officially stated, was to solicit support for the program from corporate America.<sup>44</sup> These solicitations took the form of *quid pro quo* exchanges between the Pentagon and corporate America. “SDI was...used to build support from corporations for the ASY program” reads the Inspector General’s report. “SDI solicited corporations directly to support the program and created a corporate toolkit that marketed the publicity DoD can supply in return for joining with the ASY program” (Inspector General, 2009, p. 8).

On this account the Inspector General’s report directly cites passages from ASY’s “corporate toolkit”, a virtual laundry-list of marketing benefits for corporations that “co-brand” with the ASY program. “*America Supports You,*” reads the corporate toolkit, “works with each corporation and organization to communicate its efforts for the troops and their families with specially designed programs” (p. 10). As part of these “specially designed programs,” the ASY corporate toolkit advertises its benefits for corporations:

Companies can highlight special promotions for the troops and their families through approved use of the *America Supports You* brand in their advertising and marketing materials.

Corporations or organizations can co-brand special events with the *America Supports You* program. (as cited in Inspector General, 2009, p. 10-11)

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix D.

Though this is only a partial list of the benefits advertised by the ASY program,<sup>45</sup> it serves to highlight the program's primarily *promotional* nature. It is clear from the program's "corporate toolkit" that, despite repeated legal guidance against soliciting corporations, corporate outreach was a fundamental component of the ASY program. Indeed, an examination of Susan Davis International's daily activity logs reveals numerous such instances of corporate solicitation:

January 9, 2007. Edited the outline for ASY Partnership Portfolio for use in meeting with corporations on behalf of Homefront organizations.

January 15, 2007. Developed tactics for approaching corporate prospects for Homefront partnership initiative.

January 16, 2007. Compiled list of prospective corporations for partnership with Homefront groups.

March 12, 2007. Began drafting corporate invitation letters to meeting in April to discuss homefront adoption program.

March 15, 2007. Participated in conference call with PGA Tour and TPC [Tournament Players Club] to discuss their outreach to their major corporate sponsors encouraging support for ASY.

March 26, 2007. Drafted corporate partner invitation letter for possible Pentagon Roundtable Discussion event. (as cited in Inspector General, 2009, p. 10)

These examples show that, far from the ASY program's ostensible purpose of communicating domestic support for service members to service members, the ASY program *actively* solicited corporate support and publicity.

<sup>45</sup> Among other benefits offered by the ASY program are:

New team members are featured on the official Department of Defense *America Supports You* Web site and, via the American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) and Pentagon Channel, broadcast to the military in 177 countries.

Companies can post a link to [www.AmericaSupportsYou.mil](http://www.AmericaSupportsYou.mil) on the home page of their corporate Web sites.

*America Supports You* and corporate team members issue joint press releases announcing new team membership.

*America Supports You* dog tags and lapel pins are available for purchase to be used for employees, fundraising activities, grassroots groups, or other special projects.

A weekly e-newsletter is delivered to thousands of key supporters nationwide, to Congress, and to the news media, announcing new members and other activities of the *America Supports You* team.

To furnish an example of this corporate-military “co-branding”, the case of the Professional Golf Association (PGA) is instructive. Beginning in late 2004–early 2005, the PGA partnered with the ASY program to hold fundraisers for several “homefront groups”.<sup>46</sup> As part of the effort to “co-brand” the PGA and ASY, the PGA TOUR created a brochure (Figure 1):

**Figure 1. The PGA Tour Brochure**



*Note.* Adaped from Inspector General (2008, p. 9).

<sup>46</sup> For a definition and discussion of Homefront Groups, see below p. 82.

According to the Inspector General's report, the brochure violates Joint Ethics Regulations, as "the use of the ASY name, logo, and a military color guard picture on the back cover implies endorsement of the PGA TOUR fundraiser by DoD" (p. 9). Furthermore, the brochure was "not submitted for legal review because the brochure had been created and paid for by the PGA TOUR. It was not until a legal staff member came across the brochure that it was finally reviewed" (p. 10). Once the brochure was discovered, Pentagon legal council advised that Public Affairs could no longer use the promotional brochure, as it violated rules against DoD endorsement of a private fundraising event.

From these examples, it is clear that the ASY program solicited and endorsed corporations in violation of DoD ethics regulations of which it had been made repeatedly aware. Furthermore, this general lack of oversight seems to have been "built in" to the program. Indeed, the Inspector General's report found internal program controls to be inadequate:

[The Inspector General's report] determined that material internal control weaknesses in the Office of the ASD(PA) office (sic) existed as defined by DoD Instruction 5010.40, "Managers' Internal Control (MIC) Program Procedures," January 4, 2006. The Office of the ASD(PA) did not have effective internal control procedures to ensure proper contract administration and organizational management to include adequate tasking of the contractor and oversight of contractor charges, accounting and use of funds, and proper segregation of duties. (p. 1)

This lack of oversight is largely due to the fact that the sole overseer of the ASY program was ASDPA Barber, the program's chief progenitor. Despite a 2006 memorandum outlining the organizational and managerial responsibilities of the ASY program, a steering committee was never established to provide oversight:

the ASD(PA) did not establish the ASY steering committee with representation from the Military Departments and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to recommend and coordinate policies and programs that provide similar support and recognition to Service members and their



families. Additionally, the ASD(PA) did not provide the Secretary of Defense a status report of past and future ASY activities or implement any of the other oversight mechanisms. As a result, the Deputy Assistant Secretary has had complete autonomy over the program.<sup>47</sup> (p. 28)

On this account, it is interesting to note the intersection between the outsourcing of the ASY program and deliberate attempts to subvert regulations governing DoD interaction with corporate America. It appears as if the regulatory freedom afforded to Susan Davis International is a direct product of its distance from internal government mechanisms of oversight. Indeed, as the next section will reveal, violation of ethics rules regarding the solicitation of corporations is only one instance where the ASY program relied on private industry to subvert public regulation.

#### **4.4. The ASY Private Fund**

The Pentagon Inspector General's report reveals that in 2007 Susan Davis International set up a *private* fund to the end of soliciting corporate donations to the ASY program. As mentioned above, both the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Pentagon Standards of Conduct Office had advised DoD Public Affairs that it could not solicit funds from corporations to support the ASY program, as this would violate ethics regulations against DoD endorsement of private corporations. Though it is clear that the ASY program ignored these regulations, an examination of the way in which the ASY program drew upon corporate partners to subvert regulation underscores the extent to which corporate partnership was a primary vehicle for the "default" deregulation of military communications.

<sup>47</sup> When program controls were discussed internally, emails show that ASDPA Barber attempted to nominate *herself* to the position of Public Affairs Coordinating Official (PASCO), which would make her the *only* DoD officer involved in oversight of the program. See Appendix A for a more detailed account.

According to the Inspector General's report, in 2007 "the Internal Revenue Service granted nonprofit status to [a] private ASY fund. According to documents obtained, the private fund was established as an adjunct to the DoD ASY program and to allow individuals and corporations to make tax deductible contributions" (p. 35). The report continues on a critical tack:

a private nonprofit fund using the ASY name and logo has been established to collect monetary donations, creating confusion between the DoD ASY program and the private ASY fund; the Deputy Assistant Secretary [Barber] was directly involved in obtaining monetary donations for the private fund. The confusion occurred because the Office of the ASD(PA) does not regulate the use of its trademarked program name and logo and the program was originally designed to come under the sponsorship of DoD. As a result, the public may be unable to differentiate between the DoD ASY program and the private ASY fund; allowing the private fund to operate under the official DoD program's name basically constitutes implied DoD endorsement, presenting additional liability for any misuse of donations, and the private ASY fund unfairly benefits from the "branding" of the ASY program name by DoD. (p. 35)

Though the language of the Inspector General's report is reserved, it is clear that the private ASY fund was deliberately established to solicit "arms-length" funds from corporate America, essentially violating the spirit, if not the letter, of ethics regulations. An examination of attempts to create an *official* ASY fund further supports this contention. Indeed, ASDPA Barber was twice denied official permission to establish such a fund for soliciting corporate donations:

Initially, in October 2005, the Deputy Assistant Secretary submitted a legislative proposal to formally establish a DoD ASY fund that would allow DoD to solicit and accept monetary donations from citizens. The DoD ASY fund also planned to have the usual powers of a nonprofit organization that would let it promote voluntary partnerships between the Government and the private sector in activities to support the Military and their families. *Congress denied the proposal in its entirety.*

Subsequently, in November 2005, another legislative proposal from the Deputy Assistant Secretary again failed to establish a DoD ASY fund. Then DoD attorneys advised the Deputy Assistant Secretary that *the only way to establish a foundation was in a personal or private capacity.* (p. 35) [emphasis mine]

Having been denied official avenues for their corporate outreach program, Susan Davis International proceeded to use corporate partners to establish a private ASY fund that would function as a proxy for the official ASY program. Again, though the language of the Inspector General's report is reserved, it can be readily concluded that public confusion between the official ASY program and the private ASY fund was deliberate. Indeed, the Inspector General's report reveals evidence that even ASY corporate partners were unaware of the difference between the private fund and the official program. Discussing the largest donation received by the private fund, the Inspector General's report reveals that:

according to the Bank of America Military Segment Executive, another bank employee, who also acts as the chairman of the [private] ASY Fund Board, introduced him to the Deputy Assistant Secretary to discuss the ASY program. After the discussion with the Deputy Assistant Secretary, the executive made a \$50,000 donation to ASY and mailed a check to SDI, the DoD contractor, address. The Deputy Assistant Secretary's direct involvement in obtaining monetary donations for the private ASY fund is not appropriate and increases the chance of confusion between the official DoD program and the privately managed fund. Our discussion with the Bank's Military Segment Executive clearly showed that he did not understand that the ASY fund is privately managed and not part of the official DoD ASY program. (p. 38)

From this passage, it is plain that conflation of the private ASY fund with the official ASY program was deliberate. This contention is furthered still by an examination of the private fund's usage of the official ASY logo, allowing it to operate under the umbrella of the ASY "brand". "For example" reads the Inspector General's report, "on December 18, 2007, the ASY fund sent a letter that had the official DoD ASY logo on the top to Bank of America thanking it for its monetary donation to the private fund" (p. 36). In addition to this conflation, the official ASY program made all of its logos and branding available on its website for public use. In the estimation of the Inspector General, "clearly, the private fund's use of the official DoD-trademarked logo causes confusion for the public and

constitutes implied endorsement by DoD” (p. 37). Taken together, the above examples of corporate solicitation and the “laundering” of donations through a proxy organization constitute a serious breach of law primarily carried out in the regulatory hinterlands that accompany the outsourcing and privatization of government functions.

#### **4.5. Supporting the Troops?**

In addition to the above-mentioned ethics violations, the ASY program ironically represents a material *loss* to American service members. Through a labyrinthine series of financial procedures, the ASY program was able to funnel appropriated funds<sup>48</sup> to itself through the ostensibly independent military newspaper *Stars & Stripes*. This financial mismanagement occurred partly because ASDPA Barber was in charge of the American Forces Information Service (AFIS), the Public Affairs body that oversees and funds *Stars & Stripes*. As the Inspector General’s report shows,

AFIS, working under the authority of the Deputy Assistant Secretary [Barber], inappropriately transferred \$9.2 million of appropriated funds to *Stars and Stripes* through “uniform funding and management procedures” to finance ASY program expenses through its nonappropriated fund. The preponderance of those funds (about \$5.1 million) was used to fund the SDI contract. (p. 67)

Significant here is the use of “uniform funding and management procedures”, which are “the merging of appropriated funds with nonappropriated funds for the purpose of providing morale, welfare, and recreation support services using nonappropriated fund rules” (p. 67). On this account, according to Public Law 107-314, the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2003:

<sup>48</sup> Appropriated funds are those provided solely by Congress. This is in contrast to nonappropriated funds that are commercially raised to fund “Moral, Welfare and Recreation” (MWR) activities for American service members.

funds appropriated to the Department of Defense and available for morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) programs may be treated as nonappropriated funds and *expended in accordance with laws applicable to the expenditures of nonappropriated funds*.<sup>49</sup> When made available for morale, welfare, and recreation programs under such regulations, appropriated funds shall be considered to be nonappropriated funds for all purposes and shall remain available until expended. (as cited in Inspector General, 2009, p. 69) [emphasis mine]

Nonappropriated funds, then, exist to fund MWR programs for the benefit of American service members. However, as the Inspector General's report reads, "*Stars and Stripes* officials failed to perform their fiduciary responsibility...by permitting the unauthorized expenditure of nonappropriated funds outside the purpose of the nonappropriated fund entity" (p. 67).

This transformation of *Stars & Stripes'* appropriated funds to nonappropriated funds spent on the ASY program is, first, illegal. The Inspector General's report states that "DoD policy prohibits nonappropriated funds from being used for or to support Public Affairs or other activities or programs outside the purposes for which the nonappropriated fund was established" (p. 78). Second, the ASY program was able to use uniform funding procedures to have appropriated funds transformed into nonappropriated funds because the ASY program ostensibly fell under MWR provisions. In other words, despite the fact that the ASY program was primarily concerned with soliciting the ASY "brand" to corporate America, it used its ostensible troop support function to subvert regulations on the distribution of appropriated funds.

<sup>49</sup> It is unclear from the report exactly how the regulation of nonappropriated funds differ from that of appropriated funds. However, an article in the *New York Times* cites looser financial regulations on nonappropriated funds:  
"The inspector general inquiry is looking at the relationship between America Supports You and *Stars and Stripes*, which have different types of financing. Because *Stars and Stripes* relies partly on advertising revenue, it operates with fewer guidelines and restrictions than other Pentagon programs that rely solely on appropriated funds, including America Supports You.  
Ms. Barber said the choice to involve the *Stars and Stripes* business department was made out of expediency and had nothing to do with the looser financing regulations." (Abruzzese, 2007)

The ASY program, therefore, exploited funds earmarked for MWR programs that provide real, tangible support for service members. This created a situation where funds intended to provide troops with material support were transferred to a public relations firm that not only provided no material support, but exploited civilian empathy for the troops' hardships to the end of building promotional opportunities between itself and corporate America. Ironically this state of affairs represents an *inversion* of the stated objectives of the ASY program: in practice the ASY program in consumed *material* resources intended for troops while simultaneously providing them with dubious *immaterial* resources ("support"). The ASY program's mis/use of service members constitutes an inversion of the ostensible relationship between the supported and the supporting. In other words, the troops have ended up supporting SDI and the ASY program, not the other way around.

#### **4.6. America Sells You**

Having demonstrated that the ASY program purposely subverted regulations governing corporate-military solicitation, this study shall turn its attention to the ways in which the ASY program can be thought to mobilize commodified audience work. As a point of departure, it is instructive to contemplate the nature of the ASY "brand". As noted in the previous chapter's analysis of *Enlisting Madison Avenue*, "branding" the United States Army appears as a manifestation of tightening civil-military affairs along *commercial* lines. Indeed, a deeper consideration of the nature of the ASY "brand" reveals itself as symptomatic of the larger process whereby the logic of economic exchange is substituted for political processes. This is to say that as politicians and

political campaigns come to be seen as “brands” or products, the social process of political participation is substituted for one of economic exchange.<sup>50</sup> It is in this sense that wars are thought to be “sold” to audiences who “buy” with both their ideological support and tax dollars.

Continuing this line of reasoning, it is important to consider the nature of the product “sold” by the ASY brand. As per above, a traditional reading of wartime propaganda understands the war itself to be the product “sold” to the public. Indeed, the ubiquity of the “selling” metaphor is plain from even the most cursory review of military propaganda literature. However, a political economic analysis rooted in the concept of commodified audience work reveals a different, though not mutually exclusive, perspective: in addition to “buying” the war, working audiences are *themselves* sold as products consumed in its manufacture.

As noted, the ASY program was ostensibly designed to communicate American civilian support for troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, but has overwhelmingly been used to “brand” the ASY program and solicit support from corporate America. This study submits that *the “product” represented by the ASY “brand” is a working audience whose labour, reified into the ASY “brand”, is sold to corporate America*. Insofar as this study argues that the primary function of the ASY “brand” is the sale of audience work to corporate America, it is perhaps wise to begin this analysis with an examination of the audience work itself.

Referring to numerous heterogeneous non-profit and grassroots organizations, “Homefront Groups” are typically made up of American civilian volunteers making efforts

<sup>50</sup> Indeed, this is in keeping with the previous chapter’s assertion that transforming political relationships into economic relationships (active citizen to passive consumer) is a crucial aspect of American Public Diplomacy, and a lynchpin of capitalist ideological power. This process of depoliticization also seems to underwrite the “support the troops” trope.

to provide material support for American service members. Though these groups are many, and range from large philanthropist organizations to small groups of military families, they all seek to provide support for military members in ways ranging from sending care packages and housing veterans, to providing medical support for wounded soldiers.<sup>51</sup> Though these groups are varied and heterogeneous, they generally consist of volunteer workers, many of whom have ties to the military community through personal or family service. What a cursory look through these disparate troop-support efforts reveals is, as mentioned, their disparity. In its effort to “brand” these previously disparate troop-supporting organizations, the ASY program has attempted to consolidate these efforts under the umbrella of the ASY “brand”.

Upon first glance there does not seem to be anything particularly suspect in the consolidation and publicity of badly needed troop-support efforts.<sup>52</sup> A closer analysis, however, reveals that both troops and home front groups stand in exploitative relation to the economic exchanges between corporate America and the ASY program; exchanges predicated on “brand value” created by the labour of homefront groups. Through its branding initiative, the ASY program is able to transform the volunteer labour of homefront groups into a commodity – the ASY “brand” – that is sold to corporate America for advertising purposes. Revenue generated by these sales are, as shown above, laundered through the (quasi-)private and illegal ASY fund. These funds are then distributed to ASY-supported homefront groups.

<sup>51</sup> Some of the better known Homefront Groups include the Wounded Warrior Project, Homes for Heroes, and the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund. A list of over 100 ASY Homefront groups can be found at [http://www.ourmilitary.mil/pdf/ASY\\_Homefront\\_Groups.pdf](http://www.ourmilitary.mil/pdf/ASY_Homefront_Groups.pdf), in areas as various as “care packages, phone cards, education and scholarships, housing assistance, entertainment and recreation, physical rehabilitation, mental wellness and counseling, etc.” (<http://www.ourmilitary.mil/help.shtml>).

<sup>52</sup> That crucial services such as housing and mental health counseling are provided by volunteer and charity organizations in a *quid pro quo* relationship with the promotional imperatives of corporate America may speak to the state of veterans affairs in the United States, however this discussion is beyond the scope of the present inquiry.



Again, at first glance this may not appear to be an overly exploitative relationship. However, as revealed by the Inspector General's report, many homefront groups complained that the ASY program gave preferential treatment to homefront groups it felt reflected the public relations objectives of the Department of Defense:

During the course of the audit, [the Inspector General's office] spoke with a few ASY homefront groups that made informal complaints about the operations of the ASY program. The complaints alleged that there was no DoD criteria established to review and accept grass-roots organizations; the ASY program was attempting to take corporate sponsors from nonprofit organizations; and that the ASY program was taking credit for the nonprofit organizations' accomplishments even though the DoD program did nothing to help them accomplish their mission. One group felt that the program was inappropriately focused on gaining corporate support instead of advertising the public support to the troops. (p. 26)

In addition to these allegations, the Inspector General's report shows that Susan Davis International actively ranked homefront groups slated to receive the corporate donations over which it had control:

[The Inspector General's] review of SDI daily reports and agendas provided another example of the ASY program involvement in ranking homefront groups:

[From SDI daily logs]: February 26, 2007. ASY to provide NASCAR with a list of on-site and homefront components we are most interested in and rank these items in order of priority.

[DoD's] or its contractor's involvement in ranking or providing preferential treatment to nonprofit organizations is questionable and creates a potential liability for the Department. (p. 26)

Taken together, the ranking of homefront groups and their subsequent preferential treatment constitute an exploitative relationship wherein a large heterogeneous collection of homefront groups are laboring to produce the value of the ASY "brand" which is sold for promotional purposes to corporate America with little or no return for their efforts.

## 4.7. The ASY “Freedom Walk”

The national Freedom Walk is the largest public relations event coordinated by the ASY program. Held on the anniversaries of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, Freedom Walks have been organized in communities across America, ostensibly to honor the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>53</sup> The Inspector General’s report notes that:

the Deputy Assistant Secretary [Allison Barber] used [Susan Davis International] to organize and coordinate the National Freedom Walk in Washington, D.C., as well as secure entertainment and purchase logistics support for the event. SDI also solicited community groups and schools to put on Freedom Walks in their towns. (p. 17; see Appendix B)

This solicitation can be understood as an attempt to harness free audience work for the purpose of ideological production. As a specific example, the case of Colton Lockner, a *nine-year-old* boy, shows the ASY program explicitly soliciting audience labour. Lockner, thanks to the ASY program, became something of a grassroots celebrity for his involvement in organizing ASY Freedom Walks. As SDI daily reports reveal, the ASY program made concerted efforts to solicit media coverage of Lockner’s work in promoting their brand:

June 25, 2007. Spoke with Access Hollywood producer regarding Colton Lockner appearance on set of Hannah Montana.

July 3, 2007. Started filling out application with CNN Heroes Special for Colton Lockner’s nomination. (p. 16)

<sup>53</sup> Strengthening the conflation between the Sept. 11 attacks and the Iraq war is surely an objective of the Freedom Walks. Indeed, A September 2003 poll by the Washington Post (Deane & Milbank, 2003) revealed that almost seventy percent of Americans wrongly believed that Saddam Hussein was involved in the September 11th attacks, while a Zogby International poll (Zogby International, 2006) showed that as recently as 2006, as many as forty-six percent of Americans still made the same connection.

Interestingly, Lockner's work at promoting the ASY brand intersects with another of ASY's questionable communication campaigns, namely the solicitation of support from school children. Consider the following first-person narrative<sup>54</sup> from Lockner's website:

When I was 9 years old, I was in my 3rd grade class reading our *Weekly Reader* and I came across an article about America Supports You and hosting a Freedom Walk to honor our military and remember the terrorist attacks of 9/11. I read the article and thought of all the people who died in the towers and I thought of my uncle Brian who at the time, had already been to Iraq and was getting ready to go back for his second tour. I thought of how I wanted him and all the other troops to come home safe so I decided to host a walk to honor and remember those who died on that tragic day and to show support for the people who gave us our freedom, like my grandpa, Gary Lockner Sr., an army veteran and my grandpa, Dennis Rasile, an Air Force veteran. (<http://coltonsfreedomwalk.com/aboutus.aspx>)

From this passage it appears as if Lockner had read an independently published article in his school reader, and decided to organize a Freedom Walk. As revealed by the Inspector General's report, however, the ASY program was directly responsible for having promotional material distributed to millions of public school children. As the Inspector General's report reveals:

SDI solicited support from school children, teachers, and administrators by entering into five separate agreements with Lifetime Learning Systems. The agreements totaled \$600,720 and created inserts about the ASY program to the *Weekly Reader*,<sup>55</sup> including posters that solicited support for the ASY program from school children, teachers, and

<sup>54</sup> Though the narrative on Lockner's website is first-person, it seems unlikely that a nine-year-old boy possess the literary elegance displayed therein. The testimony is, presumably, ghost-written.

<sup>55</sup> ASY's partnership with Lifetime Learning Systems Inc. (a subsidiary of Reader's Digest) is itself noteworthy. *Weekly Reader*, one of Lifetime Learning System's products, promotes itself to teachers, parents and children as "[providing] teachers with fresh, relevant classroom resources that ignite a passion for reading, teaching, and learning" (<http://www.weeklyreader.com/archive/12>). However, Lifetime Learning Systems' promotion of itself to corporate advertisers is conspicuously different. A promotional flyer from *Weekly Reader's* business oriented website reads: "Weekly Reader Custom Publishing sponsored educational programs are *branded, curriculum-based marketing platforms* that get information into receptive hands in an uncluttered environment" (<http://www.weeklyreadercustompub.com/mediakit/downloads/RED1.pdf>) [emphasis mine]. With respect to this study, it can be seen that *Weekly Reader* promotes its ability to deliver audiences to advertisers, essentially creating a marketer's dream: an audience commodity of more than 50 million captive-audience school children.

administrators and conducted a survey of grades 3–6 on their awareness of the program. (p. 7)

One specific instance in 2006 of a *Weekly Reader* supplement entreating children to “thank the troops” and organize a Freedom Walk is recorded by the Inspector General’s report. The supplement reads:

**Hold an America Supports You Freedom Walk at your school**

You can even hold an America Supports You Freedom Walk at your school. By working with your principal and teachers, you can be involved in creating a special event that helps all of your classmates remember what happened in our country on September 11, 2001. And it’s a chance to say thank you to all of our veterans, past and present, for protecting your freedoms. (as cited in Inspector General’s report, p. 7)

The Inspector General’s report also notes that the children’s supplement contained a checklist to help direct children’s labor in organizing a Walk. The checklist “included the date of the walk, for students to talk with principals/teachers, pick a walk location, time, length of walk, and to *advertise the walk*” (p. 7) [emphasis mine]. Indeed, the ASY program went so far as to encourage children to labour as advertisers in the service of building the ASY brand! Appendix C shows an example of a poster designed to solicit the labor of schoolchildren by the ASY program.

## **4.8. Analysis**

From the above exposition, it is clear to see that the ASY program aimed at fostering positive civil-military relations. As argued in Chapter 1, the cultural dimension of these civil-military affairs is often treated in Communications literature. However, the dynamic political economy of civil-military communication efforts is often left unexamined.

On this account, the work of Dallas Smythe has been illustrative. Addressing what he understood to be another “blindspot” in the discipline, Smythe (1986) writes, “critical theoretical work (Marxist, etc.) has been strangely unconcerned to analyze military demand as the driving force for the growth of monopoly capitalism” (p. 74). Arguing that the history of American technological advancement has involved massive research and development funding for military technology that is subsequently “spun-off” into consumer goods, Smythe attempts to address what he perceives as a pervasive misunderstanding of the relationship between civilian and military affairs. Smythe argues that “the notion of a Military-Industrial complex is outmoded. The reality increasingly evident since 1945 is that *the monopoly capitalist system is organized as a Military-Civilian-Industrial Complex*” (p. 70) [emphasis in original].

Indeed, Smythe’s insistence on the importance of the civilian dimension within the military-industrial complex is congruent with the previous chapter’s analysis of the new “total” war epitomized by the Latin American military dictatorships. As shown, the military dictatorships played an overwhelming role in creating a capitalist political economy, crucially in the area of communications. Similarly, in the case of the ASY program, capitalist forms of communication – namely the *branding* of material and immaterial troop support – were the primary avenues through which civil-military relations were affected. On this account, the civil-military relations engendered by the ASY program avail themselves of political economic analysis on both a macro- and micro level.

Concerning the former, and taking a systemic “Schillerian” (Maxwell, 2007) approach to analysis, it can be understood that the ASY program is involved in the marcoeconomic process of *military demand management*. Smythe, in his original audience commodity essay, writes that:

the prime purpose of the mass media complex is to produce people in audiences who work at learning the theory and practice of consumership for civilian goods and who support (*with taxes and votes*) the military demand management system. (p. 20) [emphasis mine]

This systemic approach to analyzing the ASY program is congruent with Smythe's argument that within the context of a Military-Civilian-Industrial complex, "the prime mover (institutionally speaking) is the creation and management of a *nonmarket demand* for military goods which is linked to the creation and management of a market demand for goods in the civilian markets" (Smythe, 1986, p. 66) [emphasis mine]. It is not difficult on this account to identify this underlying logic within the ASY program: the production of audiences "supporting the troops" appears as a paradigmatic case of "producing people in audiences who...support (with taxes and votes) the military demand management system".

Subsequent to the macroeconomic management of military demand, the ASY program warrants scrutiny on a microeconomic level. Following Smythe, it can be seen that the macroeconomic imperatives of the Pentagon's civil-military-industrial demand management are enacted precisely through the creation of a market for the "ASY brand" commodity, a corollary "spun-off" good for the civilian market. This creation of a commodity market for the ASY brand can, moreover, be understood first as a *process of capital accumulation*: nearly \$9 million dollars was paid to Susan Davis International for their public relations work on the program. This outsourcing of military public relations, in the first instance, appears congruent with overarching neoliberal processes of privatizing government functions.<sup>56</sup> Second, in creating a market for the ASY brand wherein revenue produced by ASY brand sales are reinvested into homefront groups whose

<sup>56</sup> Naomi Klein *The Shock Doctrine* (notably Chapters 14 & 15) provides an excellent account of the Bush Administration's efforts to "hollow out" the Pentagon through outsourcing and privatization (Klein, 2007).

labour produces an “ethical surplus” (see below) upon which the brand value is predicated and sold, the ASY program has created *a process of ideological production rooted in a process of commodity circulation*.

Taken together, both the macro- and micro-economic dimensions of the ASY program demonstrate the extent to which political economic processes of audience commodification have come to be an important aspect of, following Smythe, civil-military-industrial relations. Given the overt political nature of the processes governing the commodification of ASY audience work, combined with Smythe’s imperative to analyze the *civilian* aspects of military-industrial relations, it seems difficult to sustain an argument that the audience commodity is necessarily an “extreme reductionist view”. What a closer look at the economic processes of audience commodity production reveals is, on the contrary, a dynamic adaptable mechanism for valorizing the work of audiences into salable commodities, in this particular instance (and it is only *one* particular instance) the ASY brand.

Moreover, human agency and subjectivity is deeply implicated in the above process of audience commodification. Far from being “an extreme reductionist view”, the ASY case study demonstrates the contingency of audience work on a whole host of social and cultural phenomena that are beyond the scope of this study. One example can illustrate the point: as shown in the previous chapter, a crux of U.S. Public Diplomacy has been an effort to foster consumer over political subjectivities. This, it was argued, is consistent with a systemic analysis of U.S. imperialism rooted in the spread of capitalist social relations. Consider on this account the way in which “support the troops” appears effective as a rhetorical trope insofar as it contains only tacit political content. By shifting the discourse surrounding the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to one that highlights civilian empathy with the hardships of military service, however warranted this empathy,

the ASY program evacuates this discourse of explicit political content while preserving a tacit sense of political support for the military spending that accompanies the concept of “supporting the troops”. Indeed, it appears as if the only way to argue that the theory of the audience commodity is an “extreme reductionist view” is to ignore the complex of social, political and cultural factors that attend its production and sale.

Continuing, this line of reasoning, it is not difficult to draw overt political conclusions from the way in which the ASY audience commodity was produced and circulated. Particularly significant on this account is harmonization of the Pentagon’s domestic and foreign communication strategies. It will be recalled from the previous chapter that a key aspect of contemporary U.S. Public Diplomacy and “Strategic Communication” has been to utilize, as former U.S. Undersecretary of Defense Michael Doran states, “the power, especially in a networked age, of *messages delivered by third parties to their peers about themselves*” (p. 8). Doran continues: “a revamped public diplomacy enterprise must be tasked *with supplying local credible voices with material and resources* tailored to their specific environment (p. 7) [emphasis mine]. It is not difficult on this account to identify the ASY program as engaged in this same process of utilizing third parties to market U.S. military ideology to themselves. Indeed, the case of Colton Lockner appears as a paradigmatic case of, in Doran’s words, a “third part[y] whose efforts dovetail with those of the United States” (p. 7). This imperative to co-opt “third party marketing” is also in keeping with the U.S. military’s 2003 declassified *Information Operations Roadmap*, which states that

Clear boundaries for PSYOP should be complemented by a more proactive public affairs effort that expands to include a broader set of foreign media and audiences.

[. . .]

Content should be primarily from third parties with greater credibility to foreign audiences than U.S. officials (IO Roadmap, p. 27).



Particularly interesting here is the U.S. military's harmonization of foreign and domestic communication strategies. Though in practice never enforced, U.S. law states that propaganda intended for foreign audiences cannot be disseminated within the United States. However, as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have revived U.S. military counterinsurgency doctrine and practice, there has been considerable harmonization between the goals of foreign-, enemy-directed Psychological Operations (PSYOP), and domestic-, friend-directed Public Affairs (PA).<sup>57</sup> On this account the harmonization of PSYOP and PA appears as a function of both exporting depoliticized U.S. civilian subjectivities, as well as firmly placing domestic U.S. civilian ideology on military terrain. This harmonization can be understood as a simultaneous internalization and globalization of repression.<sup>58</sup> It seems difficult, on this account, to accuse the audience commodity theory as an "extreme reductionist view".

This study submits that the ASY program is predicated upon the appropriation of audience work. As per above, that the U.S. military understands as a key strategic interest the use of third parties marketing to themselves supports the contention that the

<sup>57</sup> On this account, see a recently leaked CIA document concerning media strategies to influence French and German popular support for the Afghanistan war ("CIA Report", <http://file.wikileaks.org/file/cia-afghanistan.pdf>).

<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Matt Armstrong (c.f. p. 55) has been an outspoken critic of the U.S. Smith-Mundt Act that bans domestic dissemination of propaganda materials intended for foreign audiences. Arguing that the "prophetic" model "hamstrings" U.S. Public Diplomacy, Armstrong advocates a "rethinking" (more likely a repealing) of the Smith Mundt Act. Interestingly, Armstrong cites non-territoriality of the internet as a justification for lifting the domestic ban:  
"The territory of the United States is not neutral territory. Instant global communications and global news means friends and relatives in the United States can and do communicate with their families and their diasporas. They also share ideas with an expanding global community facilitated by Facebook, discussion boards, and blogs as they are brought together by interests like sports and politics, and just plain Google. And yet the government is prohibited by a law from engaging these audiences using the same means of engagement and language if the audience was overseas.

For example, countering Latin American adversarial communications must not just take place in Latin America, but here in the United States. Information and engagement that happens here will be transmitted into either the target country or neighboring countries, with the possibility of getting picked up by the media, traditional or "new", along the way. The same holds true for other populations in the U.S." (Armstrong, 2008).

The idea that influence must now be propagated on a "global" level appears to support the present contention concerning the harmonization of foreign and domestic military communications strategies and the simultaneous globalization and internalization of repression.

military has discovered audience work as a tool of ideological production. In the next chapter, a closer examination of the nature of the value produced by audience work is taken up. For the present, insofar as this study contends that the ASY program managed and commodified audience work through the ASY brand, an analysis of the relationship between audience work and brand value shall be employed to explain the economic appropriation of audience work in the case of the ASY program.

As noted in the previous chapter, the U.S. Military's discovery of "branding" (*Enlisting Madison Avenue*) as a tool of population-centric counterinsurgency warfare corresponds to overall U.S. Public Diplomacy goals that seek to depoliticize civilians through the creation of consumer subjectivities. An analysis of the ASY program shows it to follow a similar logic. Moreover, recent scholarly work on branding and "immaterial labour" supports this study's contention that the creation of ASY brand value was created by the appropriation of audience labour.

Arvidsson (2005), employing Lazzarato's concept of 'ethical surplus', argues that brand value is predicated on the immaterial labour of consumers that creates a sense of community from which an economic surplus can be extracted. "Brands" writes Arvidsson, "are mechanisms that enable a direct valorization of people's ability to create trust, affect and shared meanings: their ability to create something in common" (p. 236).

Arvidsson continues:

Immaterial labour produces what Lazzarato calls an 'ethical surplus'. It produces a social relation, a shared meaning, or a sense of belonging; what Hardt and Negri have more recently called a common, that feeds into the post-Fordist production process by providing a temporary context that makes the production or the realization of value possible. Surplus value becomes (partially) based on the ability of immaterial labour to produce 'surplus community'. (p. 241)

It is not difficult on this account to understand the economic value of the ASY brand as predicated upon the 'ethical surplus' created by Homefront Groups via their material

support for U.S. service members. Indeed, the ASY program operates explicitly as a Pentagon “Community Relations” program; as an effort to foster civil-military community relations. As argued, the ASY brand appears as a strategy for extracting economic value from the sense of community created by the disparate efforts of troop-supporting Homefront Groups. Understood as such, the creation and sale of the ASY brand is the creation of “an ethical surplus – a social relation, a shared meaning, an emotional involvement that was not there before – around a brand [that] can be understood as the direct basis of its economic value” (p. 237).

Citing Douglas Holt, Arvidsson argues that “postmodern brand management’ builds not on attempts to foster and impose particular consumer practices, but rather offers brands as ‘cultural resources’, and then capitalizes on what consumers produce with those resources” (p. 237). This contention is bourn out by an analysis of the material production of the ASY brand. The production of an ASY ethical surplus required investment in branded goods that could be used as ‘cultural resources’, or in economic terms as ‘means of production’. On this account the Inspector General’s report reveals that to this end a graphic design company:

was paid more than \$118,495 by SDI for creative design services, including designing the initial ASY Web site (\$45,000), developing the ASY logo and campaign tool kits (\$42,245), project management (\$4,484), and other miscellaneous services (\$26,767)...[and that o]n April 26, 2005, Stars and Stripes filed for a registered trademark for the words “America Supports You,” and the ASY logo. (p. 40)

Similarly, Table 1 outlines ASY expenditures on the promotional materials necessary for creating the ASY brand.

**Table 1. ASY Expenditures on the ASY Brand Promotional Materials**

<u>Invoice Date</u>	<u>Item (Source)</u>	<u>Amount</u>
6/6/2005	ASY Lapel Pins (C. Forbes, Inc.)	\$ 1,519
6/6/2005	ASY Golf Shirts (Leaderpromos)	1,081
7/25/2005	ASY Lapel Pins and Appreciation Cards (C. Forbes, Inc.)	4,489
7/25/2005	ASY Magnets (Fort America)	990
7/25/2005	ASY Shirts (Leaderpromos)	124
9/21/2005	ASY Shirts (Leaderpromos)	3,098
9/21/2005	Patriotic Pins (Alamo Stamp & Engraving)	2,025
9/21/2005	Pins (Fort America)	1,000
10/12/2005	Pins (Fort America)	1,650
10/12/2005	Apparel (Leaderpromos)	550
4/4/2006	ASY Pins/T-shirts	490
5/9/2006	ASY Pins/T-shirts/Hats	12,779
6/5/2006	ASY Pins	819
9/21/2006	Freedom Walk Volunteer Shirts (Mulberry Tree)	1,755
9/21/2006	Shirts (Leaderpromos)	3,009
10/6/2006	Freedom Walk Volunteer Shirts (Mulberry Tree)	1,780
10/9/2007	Freedom Walk Volunteer/Participant T-shirts (Buxton Brown)	<u>51,750</u>
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$ 88,907*</b>

\*Slight rounding inconsistencies exist because auditor calculations included decimal places.

*Note.* Adapted from Inspector General (2008, p. 20).

In producing the logos and promotional material necessary for the sale of the ASY brand, the ASY program provided the material resources – the means of production – for American audiences to create an ‘ethical surplus’ that could be sold to corporate America.

The appropriation of this ethical surplus, moreover, is in keeping with this study’s position that a key aspect of contemporary military public relations is to foster depoliticized civilian subjectivities. “In the form of ‘brand value’”, writes Arvidsson, “the dynamics of public communicative interaction have a direct impact on the value of shares traded on financial markets. Consequently the management of public communicative action has become a central element to economic governance” (p. 236). Indeed, the way in which the Pentagon’s appropriation of Homefront Group ethical surplus was capitalized (it will be recalled through an illegal private fund) and

redistributed to Homefront Groups that support the public relations goals of the Pentagon appears as a paradigmatic case of “economic governance”.

It will also be recalled that the ASY program was actively involved in ranking Homefront Groups and giving preferential financial treatment to the groups it felt best reflected the public relations objectives of the Pentagon. Again, this appears as a form of “economic governance” wherein civilians are *politically* managed through economic incentives. On this account Arvidsson notes that:

[brand] mobility must be controlled and kept within the boundaries of the intended brand identity. This necessity to balance between innovation and conservation means that brand management contains two sets of techniques: those that aim at the selective appropriation of consumer innovation, and those that aim to make consumers’ use of branded goods serve to reproduce the forms of life that the brand embodies. (p. 244)

In using the ASY program to redirect corporate donations to preferred Homefront Groups, the Pentagon was able to ensure that the ethical surplus produced by the Homefront Groups would reproduce the “forms of life that the brand embodies”. This seems congruent with Michael Doran’s exhortation of the defense establishment to “support third parties whose efforts dovetail with those of the United States” (p. 7). Managing audience work, then, has become tool of ideological production within the United States Department of Defense.

#### **4.9. Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to build on the previous chapter’s assertion of a military audience commodity. In particular, this chapter has attempted to show the micro-processes through which a particular audience commodity (the ASY commodity) was produced. By providing citizen-workers with the “means of production”, the ASY program was able to valorize the immaterial labour of ASY supporters into a brand that could be

sold to corporate America for promotional purposes; into an “audience commodity”. Taken only as such, this analysis might appear “economistic”. However, this chapter has attempted to create as its object of study, following Smythe, the wider “civilian-military-industrial complex”. It has attempted to demonstrate the complex *political* (“default” deregulation; money laundering), *social* (public schools; kinship networks) and *cultural* (militarism; nationalism) processes that attended the economic production of this particular audience commodity. This chapter, therefore, has attempted to advance a theory of the military audience commodity by demonstrating the complex details of how the military was able to create the ASY “brand”, as well as defending the audience commodity concept as such against the charge of “extreme economic reductionism”.

As this account of commodified audience work diverges from traditional accounts of the audience commodity wherein audience work is understood as some variant of “working at watching”, the next chapter shall expand on some theoretical issues pertaining to audience work, particularly the production of value. Indeed, Chapter 4 shall serve to preempt criticism of this study’s categorization of the ASY program as representative of audience commodification. Following Bill Livant this study takes the position that through his characterization of traditional “working at watching” Smythe:

opened up the investigation of the forms of the labour of audiences produced and exchanged as commodities...[He] has concentrated his study on the *first* great form of the organization of this commodity...This form is the first, *but not the last* (p. 103) [emphasis in original].

Indeed, in a book chapter outlining the history of the audience commodity debate, Eileen Meehan emphasizes this same point: Smythe’s work on the audience commodity was intended to *start* a debate, not conclude one (Meehan, 1993, p. 395).

## **5. The Peculiar Commodity: The Role of Labour**

### **5.1. An Audience Commodity?**

It is at this point that this study must fortify its position against potential criticism, and in doing so attempt to strengthen the contention that tightening civil-military affairs are precipitated by military use of audience commodities for ideological production. Indeed, initial grounds for criticism are warranted. It is argued above that the ASY program has reified audience work in the form of the ASY “brand” which it has sold to corporate America for promotional use. It is necessary here to acknowledge that this account of the audience commodity diverges from the traditional account laid out by Smythe whereby audience work takes the form of “working at watching” in the home. For example, can the work of Colton Locker – a sole individual – really be considered part of commodified audience work? To defend this study’s position, and to clarify the theoretical underpinnings of the audience commodity concept, it shall do well to consider further criticisms lodged against the concept of the audience commodity.

Perhaps the most sophisticated criticism of the audience commodity was registered by Sut Jhally (1982) who argues that, though the audience may well be the key to understanding the internal unity of the media, there are several import issues of which the audience commodity concept must take account. For the proponent of the audience commodity Jhally poses five questions, with subsequent analyses, to the end of arguing that “the notion of audience labour in marketing and consumption cannot be

sustained within a Marxist framework” (p. 204). For the present purpose this study shall focus on the last of Jhally’s questions: “(4) is [the audience commodity] produced by value-adding labour, and (5) is it owned by specific capitalists” (p. 204)?

Answering the former of his questions, Jhally argues that the audience commodity is indeed produced by value-adding labor, but that “as in the creation of all commodities for exchange, value is added through the conscious activity of producers” (p. 206). To support this contention Jhally produces an example from the world of sports:

In 1979, when Pete Rose signed for the Philadelphia Phillies, the latter were able to guarantee his salary from television (\$800,000 a year), *after* it was found that having Rose with the team would significantly raise viewing figures. Rose signed for the Phillies because he could be used to create a new audience commodity. (p. 205-206)

This example is meant to illustrate Jhally’s contention that the labor adding value to the audience commodity is one that is carried out by *producers* of the audience commodity. This contention is in direct conflict with Smythe’s which, as Jhally notes, contends “that the audience commodity *labors productively* for capital in marketing goods to itself, and by reproducing workers’ labour power through consumption” (p. 207).

Noting that the whole discussion of audience labour revolves around the issue of productivity, Jhally enters into an analysis of the concept of audience productivity that he understands to be inimical to a Marxist analysis. The first step of his argument ascribes to Smythe a curious position regarding the use-value of the audience commodity. Paraphrasing what he understands to be the thrust of Smythe’s work, Jhally produces his version of Smythe’s argument: “if it is essential for the maintenance of the system of



monopoly capitalism it is productive”<sup>59</sup> (p. 207). Jhally continues, arguing that “clearly this is not a very Marxist position, which would stress that labour creates value which is reflected in the exchange-value of the product”<sup>60</sup> (p. 207).

This study submits that Jhally’s argument is initially predicated on begging two fundamental questions that, if contested, compromise the integrity of his critique. These begged questions concern (1) a conflation of “selling the system” with the actual selling of audiences, and (2) a dismissal of the fact that the cost of purchasing audiences (advertising) is built into commodities. These questions shall be address in turn.

On the first account, an initial criticism can be lodged against Jhally’s characterization of Smythe’s position on the productivity of audience labour as “the maintenance of the system of monopoly capitalism.” This is a rather dismissive account of what Smythe repeatedly and unambiguously refers to as *demand management*. Indeed, Jhally’s characterization of Smythe’s position would seem to suggest that Smythe understands the audience commodity to be involved in some variant of “selling the system”. On this account, however, Bill Livant, a defender of Smythe, is explicit. Addressing one of Graham Murdock’s original criticisms, Livant is careful to guard against conflating the *actual* selling of audiences and the *metaphorical* selling of a “social order”. Paraphrasing Murdock, Livant points out the conflation:

In certain "sectors"...(the Smythe sectors) [Murdock would have it that] selling audiences is their primary raison d'etre. In other "sectors"...(the non-Smythe sectors), it is not; rather, they are in the business of selling explanations of social order...selling the system. (pp. 95-96)

<sup>59</sup> Indeed, this is in keeping with Jhally’s own answer to his first question, “does the audience commodity have a use-value?” (p. 204). Though Jhally, I think correctly, argues that different consumers will have different use values, he also argues that “for corporate (image-based) advertising, use-value is connected to ideological factors concerning legitimacy” (p. 207). Jhally seems to side-step the economic function of the audience commodity, going directly for the ideological jugular, as it were.

<sup>60</sup> This formulation, too, seems open to criticism. For Marx, value as such is always produced by labour, but there is no *direct causal* relationship between value as such and use-value or exchange-value. See Harvey, 1982, Chapter 1.

Livant continues, now in his own words:

Murdock does not seem to notice that the second "selling" is a metaphor but the first is not. The first is real selling; there are particular buyers, particular sellers and a particular commodity..., a very peculiar commodity...being made and traded. This second "selling" is indeed not reducible to the first. (p. 96)

It appears that in his characterization of Smythe and Livant's position on the productivity of audience work, Jhally misrepresents the crux of their argument, namely the *actual* selling of audience work, not the "selling of the system". If, instead of following Jhally's characterization, one follows Smythe's original purpose of analyzing the production and sale of audience commodities, the theoretical ground on which the rest of Jhally's argument develops loses much of its stability.

On the second account, Jhally's contention that Smythe's position is "not a very Marxist [one], which would stress that labour creates value which is reflected in the exchange-value of the product" (p. 207) is only valid if the question of the non-productivity of high-margin consumption is begged. This is to say that Jhally's argument works only if it is assumed that audiences are not already paying for the cost of producing themselves as commodities when they purchase consumer goods from which advertising (audience commodity production and consumption) costs are taken. If this question is not begged, it can be understood that audiences *already* pay for the production of themselves as commodities, commodities from which they are moreover thoroughly alienated. That surplus value is extracted from wage labour in the form of commodities that, by exchanging *above* their value, pay for the production of audience commodities is alone enough to support the contention that audiences add value to the audience commodity. On this account a Marxist analysis is obvious. If, as Jhally contends, there is a question as to whether or not a Marxist analysis can bear upon the

productive labour of audiences, what this really concerns is whether or not audiences are, with their audience labour, *paying a second time*.

Building, then, upon what this study considers to be an extremely contingent account of Smythe's argument, Jhally's analysis advances to a consideration of the complicated relationship between production and consumption with respect to the audience commodity and its work. Again, however, Jhally advances premises that assume his conclusion:

what then happens to Smythe's suggestion that marketing and consumption are part of productive labour when viewed from the perspective of the Marxist definition of labour? It seems that for Smythe the marketing function is a purely subjective act. It is a learning of cues when making up a "mental shopping list". Audience members sit in front of a TV and learn certain actions. Surely there can be no claim that there is anything productive in this activity by itself. For the claim to have any basis it must take place with some form of real (objective) activity - spending income in consumption. It must be in this activity of consumption (subsuming self-marketing) that Smythe locates productive activity. (p. 207)

In addition to the above-mentioned premises to which he asks his reader to agree, Jhally here adds another, namely (3) "for the claim [that marketing and consumption are part of productive audience labour]<sup>61</sup> to have any basis it must take place with some form of real (objective) activity – spending income in consumption" (p. 207). Unfortunately, Jhally provides neither evidence nor theoretical argumentation for this asserted premise.

In the opinion of this study, however, this premise is not without merit. Indeed, it seems reasonable to expect that productive audience labour should have a basis in a "real (objective) activity". However, Jhally immediately limits the scope of this productive

<sup>61</sup> It is to be *inferred* that Jhally is here referring to the productive labour of watching audiences, as this is not entirely clear from his wording.

activity to spending income in consumption.<sup>62</sup> This is an important premise to note because it provides the basis for the crux of Jhally's conclusion that a Marxist critique cannot be sustained with respect to the concept of audience labour:

for consumption to be productive it would have to be shown that the consumption involved in creating the commodity labour power is *adding value* to labour power [emphasis in original]. But if the value of labour power is defined as the value of the means of subsistence of the worker and his family (the Marxist definition), then labour power would have to exchange at this value *plus* the value added by consumption. Thus labour power would have to exchange at above its value. Smythe's claim about the productivity of marketing and consumption cannot remain consistent within a Marxist framework. (p. 207)

Jhally's argument here becomes difficult to follow because the concept of "labour" loses its unity. What emerge are *two* categories of labour predicated on the idea of labour as a commodity. Jhally summates the argument nicely:

for Smythe it seems that as labour power is a commodity, that which produces it is labour. Because workers can reproduce their labour power only through consumption in the monopoly capitalist marketplace, all time becomes work time. (p. 207)

The difficulty of understanding Jhally's above conclusion is complicated by this dual concept of labour power. For the present purposes, it may do well to posit two analytically distinct categories of labour: labour<sub>II</sub> which is sold as a commodity in the familiar ways, and labour<sub>I</sub> which is used to produce labour<sub>II</sub> (necessarily if, as above, all commodities are produced by labour).<sup>63</sup> Employing this differentiation, Jhally's conclusion can be restated thusly: if labour<sub>I</sub> is truly productive, it must *add value* to

<sup>62</sup> Apart from the questionable logic of asserting that production must be consumption (for which there are admitted precedents in the debate – c.f. Jhally 1982, p. 201, fn. 14), there seems to be nothing to suggest that audience work *necessarily* takes the form of consuming commodities and only consuming commodities. Contemporary examples of "crowdsourcing", as well as Chapter 3's ASY case study, seem to undermine the claim.

<sup>63</sup> This is assuming that this formulation can escape the logical trap of an infinite regress, which would be the truly horrid answer to the question of what labour, if audience work (labour<sub>I</sub>) is a commodity, produces audience commodity work. A solution to this infinite regress can, I hope, be found below in an analysis of the audience commodity's *means of production*.

labour<sub>II</sub>. For this to be true, however, labour<sub>II</sub> would have to sell at a price higher than it is worth (labour<sub>II</sub> + labour<sub>I</sub>). Since labour does not in a Marxist analysis exchange for a price higher than it is worth, labour<sub>I</sub> is not productive labour.

This study has already raised several concerns over the premises supporting Jhally's conclusion. Here too it appears that Jhally is assuming precisely what needs to be proven; is arguing that a Marxist analysis does not apply simply by not applying one. Jhally loses sight of what is most important in the concept of the audience commodity: if all time becomes work time, labour<sub>I</sub> is no longer a non-commodified labour power that autonomously produces a commodified labour<sub>II</sub>, rather *labour<sub>I</sub> itself becomes a commodity*. Indeed, Jhally's proof – "labour power would have to exchange at [the value of the means of subsistence] *plus* the value added by consumption" – only holds true if audiences *are thought to wholly own their labour<sub>I</sub>*. If a Marxist analysis is brought to bear on this even more peculiar commodity, it can be understood that labour<sub>I</sub> does not add value to labour<sub>II</sub>. On the contrary, labour<sub>I</sub> produces value that is appropriated in the process of its commodification and (profitable) sale to advertisers.<sup>64</sup> To further elaborate this point, answering the last of Jhally's questions – "is the audience commodity owned by specific capitalists?" – can assist in clarifying these complex social relations.

To answer this question, Jhally produces an example: a Canadian television network deletes American commercials from its broadcast, inserting its own commercials in their stead. It was found that this would constitute a type of stealing – after all, the American network *produced* the audience commodity with its programming, but the

<sup>64</sup> I have employed this division between labour<sub>I</sub> and labour<sub>II</sub> in a effort to reproduce Marx's distinction between commodities produced in Department I (fixed capital, or "producers goods") and Department II (consumer goods). Indeed, Smythe tacitly suggests this distinction by equate audience commodities with "producer's goods"). See Smythe, 1981. Furthermore, it is *precisely* in the nature of fixed capital that we find *productive* consumption. Thinking of audience commodities as a kind of fixed capital makes great strides at addressing Jhally's would-be contraction between the audience commodity's simultaneous production and consumption. See Harvey, 1982, Chapter 8.

Canadian network was able to *sell* it. This, sensibly, was found to constitute a type of theft. It would follow from this example, then, that those who *produce* the audience commodity *own* the audience commodity. This is further supported by the fact that the producer of the audience commodity has the legal right to sell it. Jhally uses this right of ownership to support his contention that producers of the audience commodity are responsible for adding value to it. It is here, however, that an examination of perhaps the deepest of questions begged in Jhally's analysis must come to bear on the question of the productivity of audience labour.

This most fundamental question begged by Jhally's analysis concerns the status of property with respect to labour. It appears as a variant of what Ellen Meiksins Wood (2002) has indentified as a deeply embedded question begged by capitalist justifications of property rights. On this account, Wood's argument is particularly useful for showing how explanations of the contingent historical development of capitalism are popularly presented as "natural" developments of human nature and society. By begging a series of fundamental questions about both human beings and social order, argues Wood, popular accounts of capitalism are able to erase the very contingency on which they are founded. One such question relevant to this study is the relationship of labour to property. Citing Chapter 5 of John Locke's famous *Treatise on Government*, Wood argues that Locke's conception of property deeply informs contemporary "common sense" accounts of property rights. At first glance, Locke's theory of property appears as a precursor to Marx's labour theory of value: "'tis labour indeed that puts the difference of value on everything" (as cited in Wood, p. 110). Indeed, for Locke property is the natural of right of whoever labours to produce it. However, as Locke's argument develops, a strange corollary to this would-be labour theory of value turns it on its head. As Wood demonstrates:

it turns out that there is no direct correspondence between labour and property, because one man can appropriate the labour of another. He can acquire a right of property in something by 'mixing' with it not his own labour but the labour of someone else whom he employs. It appears that the issue for Locke has less to do with the activity of labour as such than with its profitable use.<sup>65</sup> (p. 111)

Wood argues that it is precisely this conflation of labour with the production of profit that underwrites contemporary "common sense" accounts of property rights.

It is not difficult to critique Jhally's argument for begging this same question. On this account, Jhally's premise that "as in the creation of all commodities for exchange, value is added through the conscious activity of producers" (p. 206) appears open to scrutiny. As a free-standing proposition, this assertion is not without merit – certainly, producers add value to commodities, generally in the form of fixed capital. However, it is a logical misstep to advance the argument that *only* producers add value to commodities, which seems to be Jhally's argument with respect to the question of the productivity of audience work. At any rate, the fact that producers of audience commodities also own them in a capitalist system supports the contention that the value of the audience commodity is added by producers *only if* questions of value and property are begged in favor of existing capitalist social relations.

Similarly, Jhally's argument that a Marxist analysis cannot be applied to the work performed by audiences only works, ironically, by not applying one. As mentioned, Jhally's argument that the value added by labour<sub>I</sub> (audience work) would have to be reflected in the price at which labour<sub>II</sub> (wage labour) is sold only works if it is assumed

<sup>65</sup> Wood continues to argue that this concept has become deeply ingrained in popular conceptions of property, especially in common usage. "When the financial pages of the daily newspaper speak of 'producers,'" writes Wood "they do not normally mean *workers*. In fact, they are likely to talk about conflicts, for example, between automobile 'producers' and auto workers or their unions" (p. 112). Wood emphasizes the importance of this phenomenon: "traditional ruling-classes in pre-capitalist society, passively appropriating rents from dependent peasants, would never think of themselves as 'producers'. The kind of appropriation that can be called 'productive' is distinctly capitalist" (p. 113).

that *none* of labour<sub>I</sub> is appropriated; that *all* value produced by labour<sub>I</sub> belongs to the labourer. It is precisely by denying the possibility that labour<sub>I</sub> is *appropriated* by capitalists that Jhally is able to sustain his argument. Again, this assumes what it claims to prove. Jhally's premise that labour<sub>I</sub> would have to add value to labour<sub>II</sub> only works if it is assumed that labour<sub>I</sub> is performed *by the labourer, for the labourer*. But this turns out to be nonsensical, for in what sense can labourers be thought to "buy" their own labour?<sup>66</sup> Indeed, if labour<sub>I</sub> exists to produce labour<sub>II</sub>, then it seems necessary that labour<sub>I</sub> is performed *for capital*. Furthermore, if labour<sub>I</sub> is appropriated by capital, then it follows that this labour must, contrary to Jhally's contention, exchange for *less than the value it produces*. This appears to be the meaning of Smythe's assertion that under capitalism all time is labour time. This also provides the theoretical underpinnings of a Marxist analysis of the audience commodity wherein audience *do* labour productively in the service of capital. It has been argued, then, that Jhally is mistaken in thinking that audiences do not labour in the production of surplus value that is appropriated by producers (the mass media) and sold to advertisers for a profit. The question remains, however: *in what does this appropriated surplus value consist?* It is this question that Bill Livant, in his reply to Sut Jhally, sets out to answer.

In his reply to Jhally, Livant also attempts to counter Jhally's claim that working audiences do not add value to the audience commodity. As mentioned, for this to be true it must be shown that audience work produces surplus value that is appropriated by capital. On this account Livant breaks with many of his previous assumptions about the audience commodity to posit *watching time* as the key to understanding the surplus

<sup>66</sup> This is different from a capitalist paying themselves wages. When business owners pay themselves for their work, they are paying in their capacity as a capitalist, and are being paid in their capacity as a labourer. This is quite different from the redundancy of thinking that labourers buy their own labour, for they would have nothing but their labour power with which to buy their labour power, which is clearly nonsensical.



value created by working audiences. What is interesting about Livant's new account is that it acknowledges, like Jhally, the value-adding labour of the producers of the audience commodity (i.e. entertainment-, sports-, and news-programming). Livant submits that what producers of the audience commodity produce with their "free lunch" is not an abstract, ontologically coherent "audience" that can be owned, rather they produce *surplus watching time* that is sold to advertisers. Moreover, it is in this surplus watching time that audience labour adds value to the audience commodity. Livant explains that

it is in the form of extra watching time that surplus value appears. This extra watching time I will call surplus time. This is the commodity that the media do own, that they have indeed paid for, and that they can sell to sponsors. The media do not own "audiences". They do not own abstract "time". They own the extra watching time, the surplus time. The loose talk of the trade is that "programs" are sold to audiences, and "audiences" are sold to sponsors. In fact time is bought and sold in both cases. But the important difference is between necessary and surplus watching time. (p. 213)

Though Livant's account of surplus watching time addresses Jhally's contention that audiences do not contribute to surplus value creation, he achieves this, ironically, by retreating to an overly economistic explanation of the audience commodity. In his reply to Jhally, Livant appears to have won the battle, but lost, as it were, the war. Though his explanations of the imperatives of turning "necessary watching time into surplus watching time" are backed up by compelling examples of the economics of the audience trade, it appears that in working out the economic specificities of the audience commodity Livant has lost sight of the larger problem of ideological production. It appears that the success of Jhally's argument has been to corner Livant into providing a coherent account of audience surplus labour value that succumbs to the economism for which the concept of the audience commodity is routinely criticized. It may do well, then, to break with Livant's economistic account of the audience commodity. On this account

Livant's argument that surplus value is produced by surplus watching time avails itself of several criticisms.

The first and perhaps most important criticism of the idea that surplus value is to be found in surplus watching time is that it assumes a qualitative difference between necessary watching time (programming) and surplus watching time (advertisements):

the time that can't be sold to a sponsor is...program time. This is time necessary to "produce the audience". Why can't this time be sold to a sponsor? Because this time, this part of watching-time, must be *sold to the audience*. (p. 213) [emphasis in original]

The idea that the mass media cannot sell program time to sponsors because they must sell it to audiences (that would subsequently *own* program time) can be criticized on at least two accounts. First it is simply untrue: recent technological developments of which Livant, writing in the early 1980s, could not be aware have made it possible for audiences to view programming without advertisements.<sup>67</sup> This had lead advertisers to the imperative of incorporating advertising directly into the programming in what is commonly referred to as "product placement". Similarly, advertising during sporting events is ubiquitous and does not divide neatly between "necessary" and "surplus" time. These examples show that producers of audience commodities can and do sell programming time to sponsors.<sup>68</sup>

Though this alone appears sufficient to undermine Livant's claim that value adding audience labour exists in the form of "surplus" watching time, the preceding criticism leads to a second more theoretical one: if necessary watching time is "owned"

<sup>67</sup> This includes Digital Video Recorders (TiVo), and Internet file sharing, both of which allow users to skip or edit out commercials.

<sup>68</sup> Though it is outside the scope of the present inquiry, the way in which the Pentagon Pundits (c.f. p. 1) campaign was organized is a startling example of programming time being sold to sponsors. By providing the television networks with well-respected retired military officers, the Pentagon was in effect subsidizing the cost of audience commodity production, which following Livant is equivalent to buying audiences' "necessary watching time". It is difficult to understand on this account how audiences watching this news would be performing any less work than in so-called surplus advertising time.

by audiences, what happens to the proposition that in capitalism, *all time is work time*?<sup>69</sup> With respect to this proposition, Livant's argument appears as a variant of the argument for "consumer sovereignty". Indeed, following Livant's model, how can audiences be thought to "own" the programming time that the mass media sells to them? At the very least, this ownership differs drastically from conventional accounts of the rights attending ownership. It is at this point that the real economism of Livant's analysis becomes apparent. By creating a distinction between necessary and surplus watching time, Livant posits too frictionless a leisure. As a theoretical economic exercise, Livant is successful in creating an account of the audience commodity that can explain surplus value derived from audience work. However, it appears that the parameters of his argument are too inflexible, and appear in the last analysis as economistic.

Though it is here argued that his response to Jhally is unsatisfactory, as mentioned, Livant is able to bring a modicum of balance to the debate by acknowledging the value of the work done by *both* audiences and their producers. It is perhaps Livant's final sentence – a question posed – that is most useful for the present analysis. Livant asks: "is it accidental that socially necessary labour time, which appears in *latent* form in the values of all commodities in general, appears *manifest* in the mass media as the terrain of struggle?" (p. 215). This question is particularly interesting because, unlike Smythe and Jhally who can be said to attribute productive labour to audiences and producers respectively, Livant is the first to posit as non-polar the relationship between producer and worker; to posit this relationship as a "terrain of struggle".

<sup>69</sup> It is important here not to beg the question that 'all time is work time' in order to dispute Livant's argument that programming time is sold to audiences and is therefore separate from the surplus value created by audience labour. Though there is a danger of succumbing to this rhetorical move, what follows shall attempt to dispute Livant's claim without recourse to *a priori* reasoning.

It is at this point that the relationship between audiences and producers most lends itself to a Marxist analysis. Despite the shortcomings of Livant's position, his closing question suggests a further line of inquiry into the nature of this "terrain of struggle". This study submits that this struggle is a struggle *over the means of producing audience work*. What this submission affords is an analysis of the audience commodity that can account for the roles of value-adding producer labour *and* value-adding audience labour. On this account, this study submits that *the value of the audience commodity appears constituted by working audiences whose means of production are provided by producers of the audience commodity*. To extend the analogy to material commodity production, it appears that the alienation produced by workers' loss of control over the means of producing commodities-in-general is analogous to the ideological function of alienating audiences from the means of producing and reproducing themselves. Indeed, on this account Smythe is explicit:

In Marx's period and in his analysis, the principle aspect of capitalist production has been the alienation of workers from the means of producing commodities-in-general. Today and for sometime past, the principle aspect of capitalist production has been the alienation of workers from the means of producing and reproducing themselves. (Smythe, 1981, p. 48)

It appears as if Jhally's commits an oversight in failing to distinguish between labour involved in the production of audience work (the means of production) and audience labour itself. Perhaps it is the strangeness that accompanies thinking of labour, not machines or tools, as a means of production that is responsible for this oversight.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> If Jhally's position is not simply that capital, and only capital, adds value to production, then he would appear to be arguing that the value of a commodity *x* is produced, not by the workers who operate the tools that produce *x*, but by the workers who produced the tools. Though it is possible that, as technology advances, arguments can be made that the means of production actually contribute more value to commodities than their operators, this does not seem to be Jhally's positions. This would be an argument against Marxism as such, whereas Jhally only argues that, with respect to the audience commodity, a Marxist analysis does not *apply*.

Returning to Jhally's own account of the labour that adds value to the audience commodity, it can be understood that when Pete Rose signed a contract to play baseball for the Philadelphia Phillies, his labour and the labour of those who signed him with audience commodities in mind is only labour that produces the *means* of audience work. In arguing that this is the *only* value-adding labour, Jhally conflates the means of production (fixed capital) with audience labour (variable capital). To support this contention, attention shall now be turned to the preceding case study of the ASY program.

## 5.2. Free Work and Freedom Walks

Supporting the above contention that the key to understanding the value of the audience commodity is an analysis of its labour with respect to its means of production, Raymond Williams' (1980) notes that "in twentieth-century societies...the means of communication as means of social production...have taken on a quite new significance (p. 53). Arguing that modes of communications must be understood as means of production, Raymond argues that:

we hear a man speaking with his own voice, or he 'appears as himself' on the screen. Yet what is actually being communicated, after the normal processes of editing, is a mode in which the primary physical resources have been...transformed by further intermediate labour, in which the primary communicative means have become material with which and on which another communicator works. (p. 60)

Though Williams is here primarily concerned with future prospects for autonomous control over the means of communication (as means of production), the above statement suggests a model for thinking about the appropriation of labour ("the primary physical resources" of a speaker) via ownership of the means of production ("further intermediate

labour”). Indeed, Williams’ account of “abstract appropriation” appears congruent with what Smythe calls the alienation of self-production:

whereas in the simpler and more direct modes there are readily accessible forms of truly general (universal) appropriation...it must for a long time be the case, in those processes which depend on transformations,<sup>71</sup> *that a relatively abstract appropriation is more practical*, and therefore more likely, than that more substantial appropriation – general and universal – of the detailed means of production which such systems necessarily employ. (p. 61) [emphasis mine]

This idea of “abstract appropriation” seems to approximate what this study has called the appropriation of labour. Though Williams here does not appear to be thinking about audience work as such, his concept of “abstract appropriation” precipitated by ownership over the communicative means of production appears congruent with this chapter’s contention that the key to understanding the audience commodity is the alienation of audience work from the means of its production. It is this appropriation, moreover, that appears manifest in the ASY program’s publicity of Colton Lockner (c.f. p. 80-82). Thought of as such, by purchasing advertisements in *Weekly Reader*, the ASY program was providing Lockner with a *means of production*.<sup>72</sup> Having used the means of production given to him, Lockner can be understood to have *laboured productively, without compensation*, in the service of the ASY program.

This position is in keeping with the last chapter’s analysis of the ASY brand as a means of producing an ‘ethical surplus’. Indeed, following Arvidsson, the ASY brand appears as part of a process whereby “brands work as a kind of ubiquitous means of

<sup>71</sup> “Transformations” here, as per Raymond’s previous statement, meaning the “intermediate labour, in which the primary communicative means have become material with which and on which another communicator works.”

<sup>72</sup> As part of a commodified audience of nine-year-old schoolchildren whose *work* at reading *Weekly Reader* seems difficult to deny.

production that are inserted within the socialized production process that consumers engage in” (p. 248):

by thus subsuming the productivity of the social, brand management works to ensure that the productivity of consumers becomes productive labour. To Marx, ‘subsumption’ denotes the moment in which the ‘labour process becomes the instrument of the valorization process, the self-valorization of capital’. This entails a transformation of the production process so that it is acted out on the premises of the brand. First, brands are inserted into the life-world as means of production, and consumers are encouraged to use them in their production of an ethical surplus. (p. 249)

It is at this point, however, that the present analysis of the ASY program and its working audiences is complicated by the unconventional nature of the audience work performed. Indeed, as mentioned, one of Jhally’s faulty premises consists in his narrowing of the possible field of audience work to the consumption of commodities. Though commodified audience work is usually defined as some variation of “working at watching”, Livant suggests that this by no means represents a limit to the concept’s applicability:<sup>73</sup>

Smythe has opened up the investigation of the forms of the labour of audiences produced and exchanged as commodities...[He] has concentrated his study on the *first* great form of the organization of this commodity...This form is the first, *but not the last*. (p. 103) [emphasis in original]

Similarly, Eileen Meehan (1993) has argued that the Smythe’s purpose in identifying the audience commodity was to *start a debate*, not end one. In keeping with Smythe, Livant and Meehan, this study has, in addition to demonstrating the role of the state in the functioning of the audience commodity, attempted to document novel ways in which economic value is extracted from the immaterial work performed by audiences.

<sup>73</sup> It is perhaps against Livant’s original enthusiasm for the expansiveness of the concept that his later narrowing of concept into “surplus watching time” appears so unsatisfactory. It should be noted, however, that in his later article Livant is explicitly attempting to work out the dynamics of “working at watching” so that more sophisticated accounts could be advanced.

Though it does not involve traditional “working at watching” in the home, the way in which the ASY program combined traditional advertising (logo co-branding with corporate America; buying advertisements in children’s school books) with the production of events and spectacles (the ASY Freedom Walks) is indicative of the expansion of capital appropriation and accumulation into previously uncommodified areas. Insofar as economic surpluses were extracted from work performed by unpaid audiences, it is the contention of this study that the ASY program represents a novel form of the commodification of audiences.

### **5.3. Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to reopen the audience commodity debate with respect to the role of the productivity of audience labour. This chapter began by challenging several of the assumptions on which Jhally’s criticism of the audience commodity rest. This chapter has attempted a novel contribution to this debate by differentiating between what we have called “labour<sub>I</sub>” (audience work) and “labour<sub>II</sub>” (commodity labour). Through this distinction, it can be understood that the process of audience commodity production involves the application of labour<sub>I</sub> to a means of production *not owned* by workers. In this process of audience commodity production and sale, surplus value is extracted by the owners of these means of production. In the case of “working at watching” to which Jhally and Livant attend, the means of production generally involve television programming. This chapter, however, has tried to use this renewed focus on the means of audience commodity production to argue that the ASY program’s production and sale of the ASY brand was essentially the production and sale of a means of production (fixed capital) for which the work of audiences was widely solicited. By attending to both the work of audiences *and* the means of audience



commodity production, this chapter has attempted a novel contribution to the audience commodity debate that is able to move beyond traditional conceptions of “working at watching”.

## 6. Conclusion

The goals of this study have been twofold: to demonstrate the existence of the military audience commodity, and thereby to reopen the debate on the theory of the audience commodity within Communication Studies. In the first instance, this project has been an attempt to bring a materialist perspective to what Chapter 1 has shown to be the idealist tendencies of much of the literature attending military propaganda. Following former U.S. Senator J. Fulbright's analysis of the "Pentagon Propaganda machine" this study has used the categories of state, industry and labour to expound upon the historical and contemporary precedents for using the theory of the audience commodity to analyze military propaganda. Furthermore, in showing the role that each of these categories plays for the military audience commodity, criticisms of the audience commodity were addressed in turn.

In Chapter 2 the role of the state in the production of the military audience commodity was shown to have historical precedents dating back to the Cold War. Notably, the work of Daniel Lerner, a U.S. military-funded social scientist and Communication scholar, was shown to have striking parallels to Smythe's theory of audience work. It was argued that the way in which Lerner described his concepts of "psychic mobility" and "empathy" showed them to be deeply connected to the idea that audiences *work* at their own ideological production. The chapter's further analysis of contemporary American Public Diplomacy also showed that the mass-mediated organization of "active" Arab audiences remains a central tenet of the U.S. state's propaganda arm. Through these examples, this study attempted to set a precedent for

thinking about military propaganda in terms of *audience work*. Moreover, that these mobilizations of audience work were carried out directly under the aegis of the state was shown to refute Murdock's central criticism of the theory of the audience commodity, namely its ignorance of the state.

Having shown the state's involvement in the production of militarized audience work in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 took on the task of analyzing a specific contemporary case study of the production of a military audience commodity. Insofar as the Pentagon outsourced the public relations tasks of the "America Supports You" (ASY) campaign, the role of industry in the production of this military audience commodity availed itself of scrutiny. Apart from highlighting a tightly knit relationship between the state and industry, an analysis of the ASY campaign revealed the social and cultural processes that underwrote the economic production of this audience commodity. Again, the goals of the chapter were twofold: on the one hand it served to show the specific conditions under which a military audience commodity was produced, while on the other showing the complicated social and cultural factors that revealed its production to be anything but "economistic". Concerning the former, it was argued that the labour of troop sympathizers was used to create social and cultural recognition for the "ASY" brand, which was then sold to corporate America for promotional purposes. Concerning the latter, this process was shown to be fraught with charges of fraud, illegality, and questionable ethics.

Finally, Chapter 4 entered into a theoretical debate with Sut Jhally who argued that the audience commodity theory could not be sustained within a Marxist analysis, and must, in the last instance, contradict the labour theory of value. As the labour theory of value is a crucial component of both Smythe's theory of the audience commodity and this study's project to create a materialist account of military propaganda, it was

necessary to deal with Jhally's criticisms directly. Moreover, as the case study advanced as representative of a military audience commodity in Chapter 3 diverged from traditional accounts of the audience commodity as involved in some variant of "working at watching", the analysis in Chapter 4 of the specific way in which value is created by working audiences was necessary to the purposes of *expanding upon* the theory of the audience commodity. This was achieved by attention to the specific *means of production* of audience commodity production. By showing that audience commodity production involves, like normal commodity production, both fixed capital (means of production) and variable capital (audience work), it was argued that surplus value is extracted from audience commodity production in a surprisingly mundane fashion. The major obstacle to a clear understanding of this process of production, it was argued, was the conflation of audience labour and conventional labour, with the former being involved in the production of the latter. What this analysis showed, then, was that just as crucial as the nature of audience work is the *nature of the means of production of audience work*. These conclusions were then applied to show how the ASY "brand", as a means of production, could be used to organize audience work that could then be sold in commodity form to corporate America.

Taken together these chapters outline a very provisional account of *one aspect* of the material production of military propaganda. The theory of the audience commodity is surely but *one* method for arriving at such a materialist position, however the need for such a materialist account is pressing. Insofar as military propaganda can rightly be understood to infringe upon democratic processes, it seems of the utmost social importance to curb its sway over the political process. As outlined in the introduction of this essay, however, the difficulties of establishing any normative standards for what counts as "propaganda" are difficult; there seem to be no solid ground on which to stand.

It is hoped that, by examining the economic conditions of the production of audiences in commodity form, steps can be taken to root what is otherwise a mystified and mystifying ideological process within the material realm, however provisionally.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A.

### Excerpt from Inspector General's Report

Defense a status report of past and future ASY activities or implement any of the other oversight mechanisms. As a result, the Deputy Assistant Secretary has had complete autonomy over the program. See page 1 of the report for the text of the Deputy Secretary of Defense memorandum of September 29, 2006, on the ASY program.

#### ***Attempts to Establish the Steering Committee***

According to the Deputy Assistant Secretary, the first attempt made to establish the steering committee was on February 5, 2007, more than 4 months after direction from the Deputy Secretary of Defense. The Deputy Assistant Secretary sent a memorandum to the ASD(PA) for approval that would have established the steering committee. Then on March 5, 2007, the Deputy Assistant Secretary provided responses to specific questions from the ASD(PA) about the steering committee. Initially, the Deputy Assistant Secretary provided an explanation of the purpose of the steering committee and Public Affairs coordinating official:

The purpose for the creation of the America Supports You program steering committee and PASCO [Public Affairs Coordinating Official] is to create a long-lasting DoD program that will continue to maximize and build support for our troops and their families. ASY [America Supports You] reaches across all Services and demographics and for the first time in DoD history, it provides a tool that allows us to meet needs in a timely fashion and also helps the general public find meaningful ways to express their support. Penetrating through the negative media environment is challenging but if we continue to sustain ASY and integrate it throughout DoD, we will continue to have a strong voice that communicates America Support for our military. This Steering Committee/PASCO is an important step to ongoing success.

Subsequently, the Deputy Assistant Secretary provided answers to the questions raised by the ASD(PA) regarding the decisions of the Public Affairs coordinating official and management structure of the steering committee. The Deputy Assistant Secretary responded that the steering committee was basically a system that can measure the program operations and submitted a self-nomination for the position because the ASY program was managed within her department:

1. Who decided on the PASCO?
  - a. The structure set up in the memo from Secretary England is the basic structure for how programs within DoD are run. It doesn't have to function with this type of oversight or a board but it is a good way to ensure coordination and continuity. Secretary England usually requires a system that can be measured and the Steering Committee/PASCO is one way of establishing that system. . . .
2. Who decided on the Chair?
  - a. This is your decision so you have the choice of naming anyone on your staff to be the PASCO. I put in my name because the America Supports You program is currently in my department.

*Note.* Inspector General (2008, p. 29).

**Appendix B.**

**SDI Spent \$2.6 million on Freedom Walks from 2005-2006**

	<u>FY 2005</u>	<u>FY 2006</u>	<u>FY 2007</u>	<u>Total</u>
Stars and Stripes				
Susan Davis International labor	\$183,163	\$ 259,899	-	\$ 443,062
Susan Davis International material	543,693	605,184	\$132,006	1,280,883*
Washington Headquarters Service				
Susan Davis International labor	-	-	\$232,087	\$ 232,087
Susan Davis International material	\$ 20,045	-	152,985	173,031*
Other expenses	69,162	\$ 180,590	197,993	447,745
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$816,063</b>	<b>\$1,045,673</b>	<b>\$715,071</b>	<b>\$2,576,807*</b>

\*Slight rounding inconsistencies may exist because auditor calculations included decimal places.

Note. Adapted from Inspector General (2008, p. 17).

Appendix C.

Weekly Reader Insert



Note. Adapted from Inspector General (2008, p. 8).

## Appendix D.

### ASY Corporate Supporters

America Supports You Corporate Supporters	
Anheuser-Busch	Morgan Franklin
AT&T	NASCAR
Babies "Я" Us*	Pentagon Federal Credit Union
Barnes & Noble	PGA of America
Bell Helicopter	PGA TOUR
Books-A-Million*	Qwest
Cardstore.com*	Re/Max
Checkers/Rally's	Ringling Brothers
Connect and Join	Sam's Club
DC United	San Diego Padres
eKnowledge	Toyota
Fox Sports Radio*	Tri-West
Grand Ole Opry	USAA
Hallmark Channel	USA Basketball
Indianapolis Motor Speedway	Victory Management Group (VSG)
Lowe's	Wal-Mart
Marvel	Washington Capitals
McDonalds	Washington Nationals
Microsoft	Washington Redskins
Military Channel	World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)
Mont Blanc	Y3K Grafix

\*Subsequently removed from the America Supports You Web site.

Note. Inspector General (2008, p. 83).