Chapter IV: Mass Culture, Consumerism and Globalization

The breaking up of the boundary between high and mass culture is one of the significant features of postmodernism. With this development, the meaning of culture undergoes another transformation to include common, everyday practices. From its early association with ritual and religion, culture gradually transforms in meaning to represent certain practices of bourgeois high life in modernism. In the 20th century however, culture makes an attempt to break categorical boundaries of class and mass to associate itself with popular culture. The term popular culture itself has specific reference to a form of youth culture that developed around the 1960’s in post-war Europe. Andy Bennett suggests that the post world war II period is “crucial to our understanding of youth culture, both as an aspect of everyday life and as an object of academic study” (Bennett 8). From an academic point of view, one would look at youth culture of the post war period as part of the larger domain of popular culture, but, as an aspect of everyday life, one would associate it with consumption processes within capitalism. Bennett suggests that there is ample evidence to show that there was “a cultural relationship between youth, music and attendant forms of visual style” (8) in England, even before the war. However, “the appearance of music and style-driven youth cultures at a more widespread, and increasingly global, level began to occur only when youth became a distinct consumer group (8).

The growth of consumer culture can be linked to the emergence of “the post war youth market” which was “the direct result of a series of socio economic shifts which occurred after the Second World War” (9). Since postmodern culture is associated with consumer culture it is important to understand the socio economic
shifts that gave birth to popular culture. As Bryan Turner points out in *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, “popular culture is a site where the construction of everyday life may be examined” (Turner 5). He suggests that one should do it more as a political practice than as merely academic practice. It should be an attempt that seeks to “examine the power relations that constitute this form of everyday life and thus to reveal the configuration of interests its construction serves” (5).

It is important therefore, to examine the relation between consumer culture and popular culture in order to understand postmodernism’s links with the market. Since postmodernism generally claims that the boundary between high culture and commercial or mass culture has now collapsed, it is crucial to examine the ways in which the term popular associates itself with culture historically, to finally assume its current meaning as mass or consumer culture. The term popular has often carried various meanings; from works that are well liked by people to cheap, vulgar and inferior works. So, any attempt to define popular culture will bring into play a complex combination of the meanings of both the terms popular and culture. If we take the meaning of popular culture as the culture that is well liked or widely favoured by many people, it would then logically follow that some kind of “quantitative indexing” (Storey 7) would help determine the popularity of a cultural product. As John Storey suggests, “We could examine sales of books, sales of singles and albums. We could also examine attendance records at concerts, sporting events, festivals. We could scrutinize market research figures on audience preferences for different television programmes” (7). Despite the problems that one might encounter in fixing a standard acceptable quantum to determine something as popular, such a statistical method would imply that “any definition of popular culture must include a quantitative dimension” (7).
Another definition of popular culture suggests that it is the culture that remains out of the boundary of high culture once its boundary is drawn. Popular culture, in this definition, “is a residual category...there to accommodate cultural texts and practices which fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture” (8). This approach to popular culture puts it in an oppositional relationship with the idea of high culture. It also implicitly suggests that high culture, in its very form, is “extremely complex and difficult” and that “to be culturally worthwhile it has to be difficult. Being difficult ensures its exclusive status as high culture” (8). Those who hold such a view often try to claim that “high culture is the result of an individual act of creation” (8) whereas, popular culture is “mass-produced commercial culture” (8). Moreover, high culture, by its “formal complexity” (8), becomes an exclusive category and it ensures an exclusive audience for itself. This approach gives us the important idea that cultural distinctions often reciprocate class distinctions, for cultural taste is a ‘deeply ideological category” (8) which functions as a marker of class. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that when culture becomes a product of consumption, it is “predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences”(Bourdieu 5).

It is clear that popular culture, freed from earlier notions of a shared common culture, begins to circulate as a distinctive marker of class in the socio-economic milieu of industrial capitalism. Storey gives the example of Luciano Pavarotti’s, recording of Nessun Dorma and its extraordinary success in 1990 that took “‘Nessun Dorma’ to number one in the British charts”(Storey 9) to suggest how the commercial success of a cultural product is indeed a mark of its popularity. “On 30 July 1991, Pavarotti gave a free concert in London’s Hyde Park. A quarter of a million people were expected, but owing to heavy rain, the number who actually attended was
around 100,000” (Storey 9). His enormous popularity, according to Storey “would appear to call into question any clear division between high and popular culture” (9). Moreover, the way the event was reported in the entire British tabloid Press, especially the *Daily Mirror*, reveals “a clear attempt to define the event for popular culture” (9). In its editorial the tabloid claimed that “Pavarotti’s performance ‘wasn’t for the rich’ but ‘for the thousands who could never normally afford a night with an operatic star’.”(9)

For the first time in the history of the opera, the performance was staged in an open public space which meant that the exclusive space of the opera hall had lost its significance. Further, the comments that the event received from some die-hard opera enthusiasts revealed the class nature of its audience. Such reactions to a popular performance only revealed the fear and anxiety of cultural conservatives for whom “the old certainties of the cultural landscape suddenly seemed in doubt”. (10) It looked as if the boundary that demarcated high and low culture had disappeared so quickly that “it suddenly seemed that the cultural had been replaced by the economic revealing a division between ‘the rich’ and ‘the thousands’” (10). The term popular therefore, gained a double meaning, one suggesting that what is popular is good because it is appreciated by many and the other suggesting that the popular is always inferior. Popular culture came to be regarded as “a second best culture for those unable to understand, let alone appreciate real culture – what Matthew Arnold refers to as ‘the best that has been thought and said in the world’” (10).

There are two distinct perspectives within mass culture theory: one that suggests loss of a previously existent organic culture and the other which argues that in capitalist societies, there is no such thing like organic or folk culture against which
the “inauthenticity of mass culture” (Featherstone 83) can be measured. While the first perspective draws one into nostalgia for a lost pristine culture, the second provokes one to think seriously about the processes of mass cultural production in capitalist societies. And, as pointed out in the previous chapter, any theory of mass culture is inevitably linked to the theory of mass consumption. The mass was a term that was generally used to refer to the working classes in industrial capitalism. The cultural activities of these masses were mostly limited to leisure time activities. In the American context, these activities in large and thickly populated industrial cities were mostly influenced by the African American people. Moreover, mass culture, in addition to its meaning as culture (music, dance, literature, painting etc.) preferred and enjoyed by the masses, came to include other elements of consumer culture such as individual style and preferences. Featherstone suggests that “One’s body, clothes, speech, leisure, pastimes, eating and drinking preferences, home, car, choice of holidays, etc. are to be regarded as indicators of the individuality of taste and sense of style of the owner or consumer” (83).

This way of designating individual subjects as consumers of cultural products contrasts with the 1950’s era where it was still possible to assess cultural taste as conforming to certain fixed notions, including notions of class. In the age of mass consumption, the special focus on greater individual choice compelled the cultural producers to bring “changes in production techniques, market segmentation and consumer demand” (83). These changes not only broke all rules of fashion but replaced rules with choice. Although this initially seemed as a terrible violation of the “long-held codes of culture and life-style,” (83) especially of high society, very soon it came to be accepted as a new reality of consumer society. It implied that capitalist society was moving towards another phase where it was “without fixed status groups
in which the adoption of styles of life (manifest in choice of clothes, leisure activities, consumer goods, bodily dispositions) which are fixed to specific groups have been surpassed” (83). This apparently suggests a “movement towards a postmodern consumer culture based upon a profusion of information and proliferation of images which cannot be ultimately stabilized” (83). In effect, it implies that society is no longer capable of producing its own cultural signifiers, having surrendered its productive capacities to capitalist forces of production which manipulate consumer taste through television advertisement images.

One can observe the transition of culture from what was earlier understood as high culture of bourgeois society to popular culture of industrial society and from there, to the consumer culture of late capitalist society. Many recent studies on consumer culture have emphasized “the materialism of contemporary consumer societies” (Featherstone 84) which Featherstone believes is not entirely unproblematic. He says that from an anthropological perspective, the production, exchange and consumption of material goods “are to be understood within a cultural matrix” (85). He suggests that even within contemporary Neo-Marxism there has been a “movement away from regarding goods merely as utilities having a use value and an exchange value which can be related to some fixed system of human needs” (Featherstone 85). To understand the transformation of the commodity from something that had an original use-value to a thing that acts as a cultural signifier in the commodity-sign system in the Saussurean sense, one needs to look at Baudrillard’s theory of the commodity-sign.

Baudrillard argues that the older theory of needs which looked at needs and their fulfillment from an anthropological perspective was, in fact, a naïve tautology
that simplified consumption to “an ideological extension of classical political economy” (“Consumer Society” 47). This, in his view, is naïve because such a theory simply assumes that people produce only what they need and feel satisfied when that need is fulfilled. According to him, the logic of capitalist production has grown beyond such simplistic suppositions, and the object now has no fixed functional logic which defines its need: “In the logic of signs, as in the logic of symbols, objects are no longer tied to a function or to a defined need” (47). When objects become signs their relation to use value becomes arbitrary. Therefore, outside the field of its functional denotation, “an object becomes substitutable in a more or less unlimited fashion” (47) though within the field of its objective function this is not possible. He suggests that the consumer responds to the differentiated sign system of objects in quite different ways which implies that consumption has a social function of “exchange, communication and distribution of values within a corpus of signs” (49). Therefore, consumption is not related to pleasure alone, instead, being part of the process of material production, it serves not individual needs but functions as “one that is directly and totally collective” (49). The purpose of Baudrillard’s argument is to show that the logic of consumption creates a different collective although it appears as if it carries the logic of individual need satisfaction.

Baudrillard’s theory emphasizes the point that far from being based on the pleasure principle, consumption has a social function similar to that of language. Using the commodity-code sign system, it helps build human relations on consumer terms. The new sign system begins to dominate the scene of cultural signification once the circulation of commodities reaches a point of saturation where it permeates every aspect of daily social interaction. Therefore, in consumer society, all consumers “are mutually implicated, despite themselves, in a general system of exchange and in
the production of coded values” (49). Consumption is a system of communication, a shared value-system that establishes human relations just as kinship relations do; for Baudrillard, “consumption can be compared with the kinship system, which is not determined in the final analysis by consanguinity and filiation, by a natural given, but rather by the arbitrary regulation of classification” (50). He proposes that much in the same way as rules of marriage and kinship systems establish themselves as a social code by replacing the natural-biological relations between individuals, consumption as new social code replaces the earlier social code of commodities understood as needs. “Consumption: a sociological system of signs (the level characteristic of consumption) is substituted for a bio-functional and bio-economic system of commodities and products (the biological level of needs and subsistence)” (50).

And so, consumption is now embedded in the life of capitalist societies assuming a social function of signification by reorganizing the primary level of the system of signs “which appears to be a mode of transition from nature to culture, perhaps the specific mode of our era” (51). Although this appears like a specific transition in the history of human revolutions where a new age of consumption has replaced “the grievous and heroic age of production” (53), Baudrillard argues that this is not true for “Production and Consumption are one and the same general logical process in the expanded reproduction of the productive forces and of their control” (53). According to him, consumption begins to function as a new ideology promising pleasure and individual fulfillment using a cunning inverted logic that prophesies liberation from wants. This logic apparently freed needs from the logic of capitalist production / over production. This ideology is adopted by all equal citizens in democratic societies where consumption has become as systematic and organized as the rationalized processes of industrial capitalism.
Therefore, Baudrillard suggests that “the current indoctrination into systematic and organized consumption is the equivalent and the extension, in the twentieth century, of the great indoctrination of rural populations into industrial labour, which occurred throughout the nineteenth century” (53). Industrial capitalism effectively rationalized human relations in terms of wage-labour-capital equivalence. However, “having socialized the masses into a labor force, the industrial system had to go further in order to fulfill itself and to socialize the masses (that is to control them) into a force of consumption” (“Consumer Society” 53). The same process of rationalization that was used to transform masses into a labour force was used to organize them “into a force of consumption” (53).

This, according to Baudrillard, has resulted in a social organization based on the same principles and rules governing the social organization of labour. The difference lies only in the themes of ‘the puritan work-ethic’” (53) of early industrial capitalism and the postmodern “leisure ethic” of late-capitalism. “The themes of expenditure, pleasure and non-calculation (‘Buy now, pay later’) have replaced the puritan themes of thrift, work and patrimony” (53). Such a transition need not be taken as a human revolution because the system of capitalist production continues to reproduce itself in the same fashion. Therefore, Baudrillard suggests that this development has to be regarded only as “the substitution of a new system of values for one that has become (relatively) ineffective: an internal substitution in a system essentially unchanged” (53). In other words, change in the value system is only a minor modification within the existing capitalist practice.

How does the indoctrination of consumer ideology affect the general notion of culture? If consumption has transformed culture into an aesthetic experience called
lifestyle, it is important to analyze the concept of “aestheticization of everyday life” (Featherstone 64). Postmodern culture has always emphasized “a general stylistic promiscuity and playful mixing of codes” (64). This is the result of a general shift in perception of aesthetic experience and common or mundane experience. Further, this shift is itself a result of the changed modes of signification where the image has robbed the object of its power of signification. In Baudrillard view, the image substitutes the real in a chain of simulacra to remove the boundary between the real and the imaginary. Baudrillard attempts to show how the world of simulation has changed our perception of the real and the imaginary by drawing a distinction between representation and simulation: “Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is fundamental axiom). Conversely, simulation starts from the Utopia of this principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference” (“Simulacra and Simulations” 173).

The proliferation and intensification of images (signs) in the media, consumer culture in general, and the experience of metropolitan space broadly designate postmodern experience. With reference to art, in particular, postmodern experience can be seen as a deliberate attempt on the part of artists to break away from the institutionalized forms of high modernist art, exemplified in museum or gallery art that was partly endorsed by the academy, in the first half of the twentieth century. Historically, this effort is similar to that of the earlier avant-garde and surrealist movements. Postmodern art hinges on the effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life only to use it as a strategy to work against institutionalized forms of high modernism. This attempt of the postmodernists is a “direct challenge against the
work of art, the desire to deauratacize art, to dissemble its sacred halo and challenge its respectable position in the museum and the academy” (Featherstone 66).

Postmodern art also worked on the “assumption that art can be anywhere or anything. The detritus of mass culture, the debased consumer commodities, could be art” (66). Art as commodity and commodity as art is one of the elementary features of postmodernism. This feature leads one directly to Andy Warhol and his pop art. Warhol made his entry into the American art world in the 1960’s. This period is significant in many ways because it was “marked by rapid economic expansion resulting in part from the adoption of a Keynesian economic model in which increased consumption was thought to aid production and employment” (Cook 67). This helped the rapid expansion of consumer culture and the growth of photography and electronic media associated with it. It is therefore not surprising that Warhol makes these the subject of his art. Here, the logic of cultural production collaborates with the logic of economic practice to produce a cultural-economic hybrid. Art that can be appreciated by the masses is also that which they are eager to buy. Bourdieu presents this argument very eloquently in The Logic of Practice. “Even when they give every appearance of disinterestedness because they escape the logic of economic interest (in the narrower sense) and are oriented towards non-material stakes that are not easily quantified as in ‘pre-capitalist’ societies or in the cultural sphere of capitalist societies, practices never cease to comply with an economic logic” (Bourdieu 122).

In this sense, Warhol’s art, so easily embraced by his admirers and colleagues in the American art camp of the 1960’s, clearly proves the point that there are “symbolic interests and investments at stake” (Cook 67) in cultural practices in
Cook further observes that “Warhol and his queer compatriots in the new York gay underground carried the embodied reflexivity of patriarchal capitalism a step further, especially with regard to the relation of avant-garde (elite) culture to (common) commercial culture, neatly encapsulated in Warhol’s initial desire to call his painting ‘Commonism’ and his studio ‘The Factory’” (67). However, Warhol and his followers, in their effort to introduce a “new reflexivity” (67) in art, engaged themselves in an “excessive ‘self reflexivity’” (67) with respect to sex, gender and consumer culture. To many who were still positioned in the “comfortable enclaves” (67) of avant garde art, this appeared “distasteful” (67), and they believed that such art “was collusive with the commercialism and frivolity of fashion and advertising” (67).

Instead of focusing much on the “experimental mode of gay sexual politics” (67) that Andy Warhol’s camp deliberately tried to highlight in the American art world, it is important to turn our attention to some of the historical, cultural and economic imperatives that influenced his art.

Even a quick look at Warhol’s personal history will tell one as to how he came to understand the logic of capital as that which mediates everything, including symbolic production. He came from a working-class background; “born in 1928 of first generation immigrant parents, Warhol grew up in a deprived area of Pittsburg during a time of economic depression” (67). Entering the already commercialized art world as a “marginalized, ethnic immigrant with no social capital” (68) whatsoever, he understood that he could make an impact there only by subverting the logic of capital in the social and cultural sphere. He was sensitively aware of his own “lack of social, cultural and monetary capital” (68) and “he learned very early on to value them and entertained the game of facilitating their exchange” (69). Therefore, he was able to give a completely different perspective of consumer culture, given his deep capitalism.
understanding of “deprivation and longing” (69) in a world flooded with material objects. However, according to Cook, this was not properly understood by his critics, whose “‘middle-class’ cultural denomination” (70) prevented them from imagining anything beyond the materiality of consumer society. His art was powerfully different from theirs because it maintained a distance from parody. “What was simply material for them was for him invested with meaning emanating from intense longing, the product of social deprivation” (Cook 70). His social positioning in capitalism made his art different because, only when seen from the margins, does one see the radically different face of the culture of capitalism.

The 1960s period marks the growth of consumer culture along with a parallel increase in pop art production in Europe and America. This signifies the shift into a postmodernist cultural practice. Cook suggests that both the research works of Bourdieu and the rise of pop art which coincide with this period “reflected the new relationship of the working classes to the expansion of post-war education and consumer culture” (70). This was a period of “demographic renewal and economic reconstruction” (70) in post-war France “which coincided with French decolonization and can be read as symptomatic of the shift from imperialism to late-capitalism” (70). France’s economic renewal during this period saw an expansion and “restructuration of consumer and educational activities,” (70) aimed at absorbing large sections of working-class population into the process of consumption in the hope that this would remove social-class distinction. The French reformists hoped that “in an era of cultural ‘democratization’ and ‘homogenization’,” (70) all older class-divisions would automatically disappear. However, Cook suggests that Bourdieu’s study of education and cultural taste “demonstrated the opposite, that rather than homogenizing difference, they further entrench them” (70). Bourdieu was extremely
sceptical about the idealism of postmodern intellectuals who believed that, by recognizing pop art as genuine art, they could erase the notion of social class. He was able to remind them that ‘mere recognition’ of ‘pop art’ would not bring much change in the “social condition of the oppressed,” nor provide them access to “that which is most universal in culture”(71).

According to Cook, Warhol was able to understand the fact that cultural homogenization cannot be the same as economic equality. He understood the economic nature of the culture of capitalism much better than anyone else, having come from the margins himself. Therefore, he was able to exploit the existing forms of “symbolic, economic, cultural and social exchange most effectively” (71) to improve his own social status. Unlike the avant-gardists who continued to carry petit-bourgeois notions that symbolic exchange could not be equated with commodity-money exchange, Warhol demonstrated that cultural capital is the same as economic capital. This knowledge, in fact, helped him to gain a celebrity status, similar to that accorded to Hollywood stars. Warhol’s art serves as a prime example of the evolution of postmodern art from the avant garde. While avant garde art still acted shy, “disavowing economic capital in favour of symbolic capital” (73), postmodern art conveniently broke itself free from this “long-standing need” (73). Therefore, Cook suggests that Warhol’s art demonstrates clearly that “he saw, admitted, ruthlessly exposed, and, some would say, exploited the true nature of symbolic and economic capital’s involvement with each other”(73). In that sense, he is the first postmodern artist who openly acknowledged the commercial nature of art. Warhol was able to demonstrate in practice what Bourdieu mentioned in theory. The idea that practices in art also involve trade or exchange of things that apparently have no value, finally received approval from a pop artist like Warhol who quite brazenly quipped: “I
wanted to be an Art businessman or Business Artist because making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art…Business art. Art business. The Business Art Business.” (Warhol 92)

Art practices in late capitalism follows economic logic more faithfully than other practices. As a result, market principles begin to govern the production and distribution of art, especially by the end of the twentieth century. Postmodern art develops as commodity art and commodified art to find itself in synchrony with the logic of the market. This served a specific purpose of meeting a different kind of need: that of satisfying the highly individualistic, “quite often fetishistic, desires of individuals to possess artifacts” (Featherstone 66) that would assure them a superior identity. This fascination with “the project of turning life into art” (66) is a significant aspect of aestheticization of life, that goes back to the Bloomsbury group and further back to Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde in late nineteenth century. Postmodern theory, by bringing aesthetic questions to the fore at the turn of the century, establishes the fact that there “are clear continuities between Wilde, Moore and the Bloomsbury group and the writings of Rorty” (67).

With the aestheticization of life announced in a prominent way it is possible to find a double movement in postmodernism: one focusing on a life of aesthetic consumption and the other focusing on the need to develop artistic sub-cultures which would encourage “the pursuit of new tastes and sensations and the construction of distinctive lifestyles which has become central to consumer culture. (67). Mass consumption, aided by the image producing industry – the television, produced another sense of aestheticization of everyday life with “the rapid flow of signs and images which saturate the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society” (67).
Featherstone argues that postmodernism “confronts people with dream-images which speak to desires” (68). With a suffusion of images and the commodification of art postmodernism aims at creating a spectacle. It conforms well with the logic of bourgeois society where art functions as the ideological appellation of its social reality. Like the ideology of any autonomous art, postmodern ideology “reaffirms the rupture between praxis and aesthetics which is necessary for the reproduction of capitalist society” (Kroker and Cook 16). The commodity form assuming the form of an image in a “hyper-aesthetic mode of representation” (17) plays out a double game on consumer subjects in late capitalist societies. In one, it plays out art as commodity and effectively negates the value of capital, while in another, it plays out commodity as art and negates the value art. This is exactly the duplicity of postmodernism. It claims the status of institutional autonomy while moving beyond “ideological complicity in the reproduction of the commodity-form to constituting the foremost site of the process of estheticized recommodification which characterizes advanced capitalism” (17).

So, in the current phase of capitalism where commodity production has reached an excessive state, art becomes “the commodity-form par excellence” (18). By being itself excessive, that is, beyond the political economy of use-value, postmodern aesthetics represents a new praxis of ideology which is “central to the postmodern economy in its fully estheticized phase” (19). During its long history of struggle against the fundamental principle of exchange of capitalism, art continuously accumulated itself as an invaluable, abstract form, beyond political economy. However, today, with its ideological complicity with the general economy of commodity production, “it has become indispensable to the functioning of the excess economy” (19).
Therefore, the most crucial question is whether art liquidates the value of capital by undermining it or reinforces it by aestheticizing reality. Kroker and Cook suggest that “art does both simultaneously” (19). They propose that “Art is the highest form of capital in its fully estheticized phase; and art reinforces capital by transforming the commodity-form into a purely self-referential and excessive site of power” (19). Postmodern art, by being overtly self-referential, allows the processes of commodity production to determine its themes and forms. It’s no wonder then that, “Late capitalism in its last, artistic phase (the phase of promotional culture)…works the terrain of Lacan’s ‘sliding of the signifier’” and “thrives in the language of sexual difference, of *every kind* of difference” (20).

When cultural logic and economic logic collapse into one another and begin to share a common ideology, there is a spectacular display of art, commodity and image. They sometimes merge into one another and at other times substitute one for the other. Confident about their new-found practice, bourgeois cultural producers begin to parade and promote the commodified forms of their art (fashion, films and advertisements), without any guilt of complicity with the ideology of the market. The term ideology is itself a highly theorized term in Marxian epistemology. Though it is the “abstract, ideational representation of reality,” (“Postmodernism and the Market” 278) it cannot be entirely separated from reality itself. It is a well known fact that the ideology of the market is inseparable from the logic of economic exchange. As Jameson rightly points out in the article “Postmodernism and the Market,” “the ideology of the market is unfortunately not some supplementary, ideational or representational luxury or embellishment that can be removed from the economic problem and then sent over to some cultural or superstructural morgue” (278). It has
the supreme ability to level structure, super structure and the base just as it can create
great inequalities.

The concepts and values of market ideology promise equality and freedom to all consumers who subscribe to them. This ideology can work in two possible ways: one in which it is simply an illusion of the actual market reality, and another in which it is the true objective representation of the market. The relationship of the concepts and values to the market principle of exchange is dialectical in nature. Therefore, it follows that the market produces its own objective representation of reality. As Jameson suggests, “these concepts and values are real and objective, organically generated by the market system itself, and dialectically are indissolubly linked to it” (279). However, the concepts of equality and freedom get dissolved in the practical logic of the exchange system, just as the value of money gets dissolved in the commodity, the moment it is exchanged with it. This is why, in practice, these concepts “turn out to be unfreedom and inequality” (279). The neo-liberals do not agree with this argument since they refuse to comprehend the dialectical relationship between ideology as representation and the objective reality. Bourgeois practitioners of culture try to push a reformist agenda into the practices of economic exchange, in the hope of bringing to the market the already existing features of cultural equality and freedom in bourgeois society. This is the political ideology of postmodernism.

All ideological struggles are essentially political struggles fought to gain power and legitimacy. In that sense, the ideology of postmodernism, one can say, tries to legitimate itself through the ideology of the market. Therefore, one can relate the growth and popularity of concepts like “plurality, verisimilitude, difference, subjectivity and anti-subjectivity,” (280) so dear to the postmodernists, to the collapse
of the socialist command economy and the subsequent rise of liberal market economy. Cultural concepts being ideological, seek political legitimation. Therefore, Jameson suggests that “Thatcherism and its cultural counter-revolution were founded fully as much on the delegitimation of welfare - state or social democratic (we used to call it liberal) ideology as on the inherent structural problems of the welfare-state itself” (281). The struggle of neo-liberal thought to establish itself on free-market principles is, at the same time a struggle for “delegitimation of left discourse” (281). Around the 1960s, Western societies took a turn away from welfare-state economics and towards greater privatization. This was done in the belief that “no society can function efficiently without the market, and that planning is obviously impossible” (281). Jameson suggests that postmodernism is a continuation of the old discourse that socialism is a failed concept. In the political field of ideological battle, “it has turned out to be the sequel, continuation, and fulfillment of the old fifties ‘end of ideology’ episode” (281). Postmodernism chants the same mantra in a different voice perhaps that “socialism really has nothing to do with socialism itself any longer” (281).

Postmodern politics is thus an effort to blur the distinction between appearance and reality. The postmodernists do not distinguish between the ideology of the market and the market reality. Moreover, the market is itself the ideological representation of capitalist production just as, for example, the socialist state served as, the ideological representation of socialism under Lenin. Therefore, Jameson insists that even when we talk about ideologies, “unfortunately, we have to talk about the realities fully as much as the concepts…you have to talk about real markets just as much as about metaphysics, psychology, advertising, culture, representations, and libidinal apparatuses” (282). The market functions as though it has very little to do with any kind of political philosophy. The new left is also guided by a similar attitude
in the post cold-war era. As a result, “politics now means simply the care and feeding of the economic apparatus (in this case the market rather than the collectively owned and organized means of production)” (283).

To that extent, politics has finally come to terms with economics, willing to play second fiddle and accept the terms of the market. When all forms of representation have to ultimately depend upon the market, “on a shrinking globe and a media-suffused society” (286), artistic representation also is bound to end up in a world “without transcendence and without perspective” (286). Postmodern ideology by its excessive dependence on consumption carries with it all the characteristics of such ideology. The fetishistic forms of consumption that characterize the postmodern bring to the fore the secret relationship between proponents of postmodernism and the reality of the market. In fact, the glorification of extravagant forms of consumption and gratification, gives one the idea that “in the postmodern, indeed, it is the very idea of the market that is consumed with the most prodigious gratification.” (286)

The consumers as postmodern subjects follow the ideology of the market out of no choice. It cannot be assumed that the market offers a freedom of choice to all of them. Moreover, the market carries other ideologies that go far beyond mere consumerism. As the ideological representation of post-industrial capitalism, it acts as a totalizing force, especially in the absence of an alternative. Jameson suggests that “the concept of the market lies in its totalizing structure, as they say nowadays: that is, in its capacity to afford a model of social totality”(289). But what kind of totality can the market construct? A totality based on consumption and gratification? The market can gather people together only by promising the consumers individual satisfaction. It assures them freedom by securing freedom for itself. It is a classic case of inverted
logic where politics joins hands with economics to legitimate itself not on social terms but on the cultural logic of the market.

The advocates of free-market ideology profess that the spirit of competition inherent in human nature will take care any irregularity that may crop up when state control is removed. However, as Jameson suggests, the market is freed from the state not to ensure political or economic freedom to its citizens, on the contrary, it is done out of fear of “urban crime and civil war” (290). The state, as the representative of civil society begins to endorse the view that the market will ensure that there is no scarcity or want among its citizens. The fear and anxiety about the possibility of civil unrest in the event of scarcity, has been the motivating factor behind liberating the market throughout conservative history. For, in conservative tradition, “civil war or urban crime are themselves figures for class struggle” (290). According to Jameson, the market is not here to “encourage and perpetuate freedom (let alone freedom of a political variety) but, rather, to repress it” (290). In other words, the market functions in the belief that people are incapable of organizing themselves as collectives to achieve their own economic objectives. They look up to the market to do this thinking on their behalf. “Market ideology assures us that human beings make a mess of it when they try to control their destinies (socialism is impossible) and that we are fortunate in possessing an interpersonal mechanism – the market – which can substitute for human hubris and planning”(290).

Another important aspect of postmodernism is its complicity with the media. The media reproduces the ideology of the market in many interesting ways. Jameson argues that the method of representation of the market underwent a change in the post 1950’s era when it began to “collaborate secretly with the media” (292). And although
the two systems operated with different set of codes, they came to be identified in “such a way as to allow the libidinal energies of the one to suffuse the other, without however….producing a synthesis, a new combination” (292). Referring to the culture industry theory of Adorno and Horkheimer, Jameson argues that the media effectively uses the logic of the free-market, when it presents its cultural products freely to its consumers. It is precisely in this sense that the media share a common ground with the market. The two become “analogous not because they are like each other,” (292) but because “the ‘market’ is unlike its ‘concept’ (or Platonic idea) as the media is unlike their own concept” (292). Moreover, the two establish a closer relationship with the “gradual disappearance of the physical marketplace…and the tendential identification of the commodity with its image (or brand name or logo)” (292).

In a typically postmodern sense, another boundary is washed away when the media image (advertisement) signifies the commodity itself. The concept of the thing is now identified with the thing itself. The television, as the producer of cultural imagery, merges itself with the commercial imagery of the market to open up a new level of consumption. Aided by the technology of reproduction and communication the television is able to throw up images of products and images of images at ever hungry consumers. In effect, it becomes the latest symbol of “informational or computer technology of the third stage of capitalism” (293). Paradoxically, the technology of this stage of capitalism comes to serve as the major supporting pillar of the new level of consumption inaugurated by the television. Jameson refers to it as the “consumption of the very process of consumption itself, above and beyond its content and the immediate commercial products.” (293)
Media consumption therefore is another aspect of market ideology that functions as a new conservative rhetoric, ever ready to serve the postmodern rhetoric that free consumption – through television – has broken distinctions of social class. The argument here is that the television and high-speed digital communication technologies has changed the world so drastically that information and news is now available to many very easily. It is claimed that the expansion of the media has made possible a new kind of democratic practice that allows greater participation in a media created public sphere. As Jameson suggests, “much of the euphoria of postmodernism derives from this celebration of the very process of high-tech informatization” (293). This view helped the general ideological world view of a new market totality. The media, by circulating images, began to work like a bridge to the “fantasy-images of ‘the market in general’” (293). In effect, it contributes significantly to the economy of the commodity-sign system proposed by Baudrillard. However, in Baudrillard’s theory, commodities circulating in excess get reified as images in the minds of consumers, but in the case of media-image production, a reversal of the same process takes place. Here, the image itself gets transformed into commodity form in the minds of the consumers in a different kind of reification. All the same, these processes of multiple reification only further strengthen the ideology of the market. As Jameson points out, “it is not the commercial products of the market which in advertising become images but, rather, the very entertainment and narrative processes of commercial television, which are, in their turn, reified and turned into so many commodities” (293).

It would be useful to refer to the remarkable theorization of Guy Debord on the transformation of image as commodity, in order to establish the relation between cultural postmodernism, commodity production and the market. From there, one can
proceed further into the globalization debate. Guy Debord argues that contemporary societies saturated with images, are excessively dependant on such representation and as a consequence, they can now be designated as societies of spectacle. Here, all experience comes in the form of fragmented images, which is very different from the experience that came from actually lived practices in pre media societies. Debord suggests that “life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived is now merely represented in the distance” (Debord 6). In his view, images separated from all aspects of everyday life, “organize themselves into a unity of their own” (6) and begin to function autonomously, as though they have nothing to do with the actual processes of production. By imitating those processes of production and consumption, the images have lost contact with their own production processes, thereby developing an aura that has the “effect of hallucination” (6). Debord suggests that “The specialization of images of the world evolves into a world of autonomized images where even the deceivers are deceived. The spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the non living.” (6)

The spectacle performs the function of “unification” (6) by establishing social relations through images. Debord argues that by this process of unification, the spectacle appears like society itself and at the same time is a part of society “as a part of society, it is ostensibly the focal point of all vision and consciousness” (Debord 6). But, due to its detachment from other aspects of life and its relative functional autonomy, “it is in reality the domain of delusion and false consciousness. The unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of universal separation” (6). Nonetheless, the spectacle is able to have some sort of influence over the subjects or viewers. Moreover, since visual process is also linked to thought process, one cannot just blame mass media technologies for the visual deception they create. We need to
go beyond that to understand how the spectacle functions to create a new worldview by establishing social relations through mediated images. Therefore, Debord argues that the spectacle cannot be conceived of as “mere deception, as an effect of mass media images,” (6) but should be understood as “a worldview that has actually been materialized” (6).

In that case, the spectacle has to be understood as a phenomenon that arises in so-called media societies where the media try to unite disparate subjects through the circulation of images. But this unity can only be a “symbolic unity at the level of images” (6), and therefore, it is important to understand the essential relation between the spectacle of media images and the actual processes of social production. In fact, by appropriating many characteristics of social production, the media become another important organization involved in social production. And, like other industries in the capitalist system, the media mean business and profits. As Noam Chomsky points out in Manufacturing Consent, “the control groups of the media giants” are “brought into close relationships with the mainstream of the corporate community through boards of directors and social links” (Chomsky 8). Therefore, even though the spectacle appears as if it stands outside the real material processes of production, it dominates most of the non productive time. It is another kind of material production: it produces the image as a referent for objective reality. It also plays a double game of transforming ‘the real’ into images and vice versa. Therefore, only on close examination we come to know that it is not separate from the dominant mode of production; on the contrary, by reproducing those very processes, “It is the very heart of this real society’s unreality. In all its particular manifestations – news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment – the spectacle represents the dominant model of life” (Debord 6). It functions not just as “an ornamental decoration” (6) to the dominant
mode of production, but by being within the social practice of the dominant mode, “it serves as a total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system” (6). The media-spectacle becomes the legitimate representative of the system of production, “the spectacle is both the result and the goal of the dominant mode of production.” (6)

Through this argument, Debord is able to establish a relationship between image production and commodity production. In his view, the image assumes an immediate significance once the commodity itself begins to play a dominant role in the determination of value. The image is the inevitable representation of the fetishistic form of commodities. In the first stage of industrial capitalism when social life came to be dominated by economic production, one observed “an evident degradation of being into having – human fulfillment was no longer equated with what one was, but with what one possessed” (8). But in late capitalism where social life has been completely dominated by the accumulated excess of production, there appears to be a “general shift from having to appearing – all ‘having’ must now derive its immediate prestige and ultimate purpose from appearances” (8). It is here that the spectacle plays a crucial role in the process of production and consumption. Further, the technological advancement in image production has now made the image so independent that it stands “fascinatingly distanced” (8) from the same technological rationality that produced it. In perfectly reproducing the real, the image substitutes the unreal for the real. “When the real world is transformed into images, mere images become real beings – dynamic figments that provide the motivations for a hypnotic behavior” (8).

The system of image production colludes with the dominant forces of commodity production to produce an inverted image of social reality. It works on the
consciousness of individuals to change it for its own sake. While continuously interacting with the material world in a further exchange process of the commodity and the image, the spectacle is able to effectively mediate between the two. This mediation helps in the construction of an ideology that supersedes, by far, all previous ideologies of the world. Whereas earlier ideologies were themselves products of a history of conflicting class interests, the pseudo-consciousness (ideology) that the spectacle carries, drains the political content of social consciousness. Its monologist principle speaks back to material history, the story of its social reality in its own language. In a strange transformation, thought, which was earlier believed to be reflecting objective reality, begins to speak back reality to thought. This presents a new phenomenon in late capitalism where, as Debord suggests, “ideology has materialized itself in its own image” (55). The spectacle therefore, demonstrates for its own success, the interconnection between the material processes of objective reality and its ideological expressions. Whereas the materialization of ideology is “brought about by the concrete success of an autonomized system of economic production,” (55) the spectacle only intensifies the process by virtually identifying “social reality with an ideology that has remolded all reality in its own image”(55).

It successfully narrates the meaning of objects in terms of an ideology of commodity exchange which is a global phenomenon today. This is the fundamental ideology that has established itself as the inevitable result of surplus production. It appropriates all forms of need to suggest possible meanings of life. Robert Burbach suggests that the market-media coalition has inaugurated a new era of postmodern politics: “A postmodern political age has emerged along with the epoch of globalization. It is difficult to articulate a nexus between the two, as the changes taking place in the political realm are far more complex and tangled than the
transformations associated with the process of globalization” (Burbach 69). Nonetheless, it is possible to identify certain crucial political developments in the latter half of the 20th century that contributed to the emergence of such politics. The collapse of communism in former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the decimation of left politics and parties, and the “the related decline in importance of political ideologies” (69) are some of the “crucial political shifts” (69). These are accompanied by “the rise of protest movements centered around issues of identity, race, gender and religion” (69). This signifies the failure of traditional political parties to bring important socio-economic issues to the fore. Moreover, as major political parties became “instruments run and controlled by the elites,” (69) “the public in general” became more and more alienated from them. As a result, politics was “reduced to media campaigns and political spectacles” (69).

“Underlying the new age of postmodern politics is, first and foremost, the transformation of telecommunications and the mass media” (71). Burbach proposes that “three key innovations” (71) in mass communication technology have made this possible. One is “the development of the television…as a mass phenomena, the placing of synchronous satellites in orbit that instantly transmit media signals around the world; and, finally, the rise of the Internet and the personal computer, which make it possible to send and access information around the globe at any particular moment” (71). These innovations, according to Burbach, have not only “linked the world together,” to produce a virtual reality, they have “created an international media culture that profoundly affects politics” (71). The “technological transformations in the age of postmodern politics” is complemented by “the decline of ideology” (71). Burbach suggests that it is futile to argue that “the public is increasingly unconcerned with ideology as mass consumerism and the fetishism of the market place penetrate
every corner of the globe” (71). He suggests that it is more important to admit that “the three main political ideologies that have driven the Western world since the French revolution—liberalism, conservatism and then socialism—are in disarray or no longer functional” (71). The decline of ideology and the subsequent emergence of a global market and media are responsible for the rise of postmodern politics. It marks “the culmination or climax of a long legacy of Western political philosophies as modern political systems fail us in every major region of the world” (71). Globalization therefore, is the visible, palpable symbol of postmodernism. It symbolizes the triumph of capitalism over communism.

Globalization opens up a new domain which is not exactly as stable as imperialism was in an earlier age. It is a domain where politics, economics and culture engage with one another in a free interplay and exchange. It is rather difficult to see them functioning as separate realms when globalization, in an effort to expand the areas of consumption, tries tirelessly to push one in the name of the other. It opens an ever expanding horizon of ideas that “connect and disconnect, harmonize and contradict all at the same time” (“Notes on Globalization” 54). Fredric Jameson mentions four different positions on Globalization in an article titled “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical issue”: one, which asserts that there is no such thing as globalization, a second position which claims that there is nothing new about the present form of globalization and that it has always been there as evidenced by ancient trade routes in Africa and Asia, a third position which admits definite links between globalization and world capital markets while suggesting that the difference is only a matter of degree, and a fourth one which, in his view, “appears to be more interesting than the other three” (54). This position, according to him, “posits some new or third, multinational stage of capitalism, of which globalization is an intrinsic
feature and which we now largely tend, whether we like it or not, to associate with
that thing called postmodernity” (54).

Jameson is fully aware of an interest in cultural theorists to “at least
 provisionally” (55) separate the postmodern debate from “the matter of globalization”
(55). Therefore, he begins by clarifying the concept in terms of its ideological
structure in “a strictly non-pejorative sense” (54) and suggests that globalization “is a
communicational concept, which alternately masks and transmits cultural or economic
meanings” (55). Jameson accepts the idea that communicational networks have been
primarily responsible for introducing a greater degree of modernization in all
metropolitan centres of the world today. However, he suggests that there is a need to
go beyond communication and media theories to arrive at a proper understanding of
the concept of globalization. The media was basically engaged in the circulation of
news in the form of everyday events of significance, reaching even the remotest
corners, in the early days of the radio and the newspaper, but it is not the same today
in the age of the cybernetic revolution. The computer networks build on the already
established communicational networks, to circulate a far different image of the world
in the name of technology.

Therefore, Jameson suggests that “the communicational development today is
no longer one of ‘enlightenment,’ in all its connotations, but rather of new
technologies” (56). Globalization includes several other dimensions along with the
idea of communication. Moreover, the new technological revolution, by trying to
show itself as a different mode of communication begins to “slip insensibly in the
direction of advertisements and publicity, of postmodern marketing, and finally to the
export of TV programs, rather than the return of startling reports from remote places”
This, according to Jameson, has created a unique situation where the communicational concept which is the surface level ‘signifier’ of globalization, “has suddenly acquired a whole cultural dimension” (56). It gives one the impression that the new communicational networks established on a global scale, has a cultural signification. Jameson suggests that such an “enlargement of communicational nets has secretly been transformed into some kind of message about a new world culture” (56).

He argues that such a slippage of the “so far purely communicational concept,” (56) into the concept of culture can take another direction to land in the economic concept. If one understands the new expanding networks of communication as helping “financial transfers and investments all over the world,” (56) one will be able to relate commerce and flexible capitalism with the new communication technology. Ever since computers and their related programmes themselves became some of the hot-selling commodities exchanged among different nations, “the ostensibly communicational concept has secretly been transformed into a vision of the world market and its newfound interdependence, a global division of labor on an extraordinary scale, new electronic trade routes tirelessly plied by commerce and finance alike” (56).

Therefore, the “flows of the debate on globalization” (56) can lead us to two distinct positions: one that celebrates communicational networks for heralding a new age of cultural pluralism, and another, mainly economic, which presents a rather sordid picture of “forced integration and standardization” (57). Jameson believes that these two positions are neither entirely unrelated nor incompatible but related in a somewhat dialectical fashion “on the mode of unresolvable antinomy” (57). Further,
he argues that the two visions of globalization can be looked at as sharing “a common axis” (57) and then, one would understand that even in the cultural realm, there is “the worldwide Americanization or standardization of culture, the destruction of local differences and the massification of all the peoples on the planet” (57). An inversion of this process is carried out to pass on the “celebratory difference and multiple heterogeneities” (Jameson 58) to the economic sphere. Here, the “feverish rhetoric of the market” claims that the freedom of the market alone can assure unlimited satisfaction to individuals. It is claimed that the increased productivity and wider distributive mechanisms ensured by such freedom will liberate people from all kinds of want. This rhetoric has convinced many people across the world that the free market is the greatest liberator of humankind. They begin to see the market and capitalism as the ultimate achieved goals, “as their most fundamental human possibilities and the surest sources of freedom” (58).

The multiple structural possibilities of globalization help the concept to wind its way through many possible ideological fields, alternating between them to “remain slippery and ambiguous” (58). Economic globalization has certainly engineered a cultural globalization by “forcing contact and interpenetration” (58) on an international scale. From a market point of view, cultural globalization may mean export and import of culture, but from another angle it means “contact and interpenetration of national cultures at intensity scarcely conceivable in older slower epochs” (58).

The interpenetration of culture in globalization is mono-dimensional. The North American television, for example, brings news and entertainment programmes to Indian middle-class homes in the English language. This is an example of
penetration of an alien language and culture into a local culture. Advocates of multiculturalism however, would argue that a healthy intermixing of cultures take place through inter penetration. But, the truth is that a one-sided cultural intervention takes place where a foreign language mediates and facilitates the exchange of cultural products and commodities. One ought not to overlook the fact that the television has always aided trade and commerce and today it has become central to global economics and cultural exchange. When cultural exchange assumes all the characteristics of commodity or money exchange, culture and language get transformed to a power similar to that of capital.

Therefore, the penetration of American mass culture into local cultures across the world is seen as an exercise of power, “associated as it is with money and commodities” (59). This cultural intervention through television programmes has spelt doom for local cultural productions which are wiped out “as with local film and television production – or co-opted and transformed beyond recognition, as with local music” (59). Jameson suggests that all trade agreements that emanate from North American and European continents carry “cultural clauses” (59) precisely for this reason. The West understands the cultural resistance it faces in foreign nation-states when it tries to negotiate for more free-trade in cultural products like film, television, and music. This is particularly the case with most North American trade in developing countries. It is resisted on the count that it carries with it not only extremely ambitious “American cultural interests,” (60) but also enormous financial interests. Interpenetration has further blurred the boundary between the cultural and the economic. “The becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural, has often been identified as one of the features that characterizes what is now widely known as postmodernity” (60). Jameson demonstrates how the base and
superstructure function as one and the same where trade and cultural interests merge into one another in American capitalism.

Native cultures perceive the intervention of foreign culture through globalization as a genuine threat mainly out of fear of being wiped out. Jameson proposes that native cultures in many developing countries are intertwined with native practices and habits of everyday life even to this day. Such habits and practices form the bases of culture and language in these areas. Jameson says that “it is very easy to break up such traditional cultural systems, which extend to the way people live in their bodies and use language” (63). Jameson argues that there is no possibility of parity between cultures just as there cannot be any parity between languages. The English language with its “enormous involvement in international trade and commerce” (64) has established itself as the language of new imperialism in the same way as American culture, with its Hollywood movies, rock music and fast food joints has entered foreign national territories, riding the wave of globalization.

Globalization is equated with American cultural imperialism in many countries of the third world whose nationalisms are yet in the nascent stage. However, for some who always carried the belief that Western culture was superior to their own native cultures, globalization carries the promise of a new global culture of pluralities and calls for celebration. The contradiction between these two views is “irresolvable” (64) and Jameson believes that it is not really desirable to resolve it. On the contrary, he suggests that there is a need to “intensify their incompatibility and opposition such that we can live this particular contradiction as our own historic form of Hegel’s ‘unhappy consciousness’”(64).
According to Jameson, multinational corporations systematically transmit “a standard form of American material life, along with North American values and cultural forms” (64). They function as cultural intermediaries who systematically spread such cultural tastes and values that are largely consumerist in nature. Therefore, globalization is not entirely about machinery, buildings and commodities; it is also about cultural values that get transmitted to other nations during the process of economic exchange. People affected by globalization look at it as a phenomenon that brings in a foreign culture into their country. They perceive consumerism as a foreign value but feel a sense of helplessness when they cannot resist it. Jameson suggests that “American economic interest and American cultural influence coincide to produce the export of a way of life itself” (64). He argues that consumerism is the crux of this American way of life and mass culture. It is the main support of the economic life cycle of America which, in turn, is strengthened by the attitudes that are developed by the media and the culture industry. Globalization, therefore, is the spread of this American way of life which encourages people to engage in an endless exercise of consumption. It believes that by extending the markets as far and wide, the benefits of this way of life can be extended to all people across the globe.

However, what has happened due to globalization is something altogether different. In the former colonies, the fundamental opposition between westernization and nativism seems to have completely disappeared “in this postmodern moment of capitalism” (Jameson 65), and surprisingly, the “former traditionalism” (65) appears to be raising its head in the form of religious fundamentalism.

And so, Jameson rightly proposes that “Neo-Confucianism and Islamic and Hindu fundamentalism themselves are new, are postmodern inventions, not survivals
of ancient ways of life” (66). Further, globalization has created the illusion that the opposition between “the metropolis and the provinces,” (66) like the opposition between the “centre and the margins” (66) has disappeared. However the irony is that the margins have only increased and in many cases they have been standardized. The advocates of globalization may claim that postmodern culture celebrates difference and plurality but this is not true. Cultural difference now shows itself as economic difference. The eclectic, utopian view that a global culture that has arrived on the scene by celebrating difference can only be countered by a dialectic of economics that sees and understands globalization as a specific mode of “corporate culture on global scale” (66). Jameson argues that the “optimistic vision of our times” (66) that globalization calls for a grand celebration of plurality and cultural hybridity is a view that considers culture as a “celebratory spectacle” (66). For Postmodern optimists like Jameson who share this vision, globalization is “an immense global intercultural festival without a centre or even any longer a dominant cultural mode”. (66) One can recall here, the reference made earlier to popular culture’s relation with consumer culture. Cultural globalization therefore, is the standardization of consumer culture (the economic correlative of mass culture) on a global scale.

It is very important to understand the economic logic of globalization, in order to see the ways in which it can affect the lives of small and marginal communities. The global economic order works with novel techniques of capital accumulation and flows. This has brought tremendous change in international trade relations and has also widened the gulf between the North and the South. The growing inequality between them is seen more clearly in the last twenty years of liberalization of developing economies under the diktat of IMF and the World Bank. As Sherif Hetata points out, there has never been such a concentration of wealth and power in so few
nations and in the hands of so few people. “The countries that form the group of seven, with their 800 million inhabitants, control more technological, economic, informatics, and military power than the rest of the approximately 430 billion who live in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America” (Hetata 274).

The era of globalization has also seen the expansion of trade of multi-national companies, half of which have their head quarters in the United States, Germany, Japan and Switzerland. Moreover, the concentration of capital has a correspondence with the new technological revolution which is no longer dependant on “the intensive use of natural resources, labor, or even productive capital and more and more on the accumulation of technology based on the intensive use of knowledge” (274). The concentration of technological knowledge and its value in terms of capital have created new forms of monopoly that has only widened the gap between the rich and the poor nations of the North and South respectively. Such accumulation of what is more often referred to as knowledge capital functions with a few corollaries. As witnessed in the last two decades, there has been a drastic reduction in the use of raw material in the production sector which Hetata terms “dematerialization of production” (275). Hetata also suggests that this has resulted in “real price deterioration,” and “price deterioration is even more pronounced in recent years” (275). Some economists believe that this is one of many causes of global economic crises the world has witnessed in recent times. “Dematerialization” along with automation of the production process has effectively devalued labour in both the North and the South. This has adversely affected the economies of the countries of the south that traditionally depended more on labour and raw materials.
The next corollary is the functioning of world capital markets in the age of information revolution. Informatics and telecommunication has increased “market manipulation and speculation” (275) with rapid flows of capital in and out of national economies which has often kept markets highly volatile. Hetata suggests that “rapid movement works to the advantage of the biggest and the richest” (275). The revolution in telecommunication and informatics along with easier and speeder transport “has produced management innovations facilitating mergers of capital” (275). Mergers of huge corporations have only resulted in greater centralization of capital which, in turn, has pushed national business to the periphery, so much so that neither the state nor the local private businesses have a say any longer in their own domestic markets. “National business, state or private, is increasingly marginalized and more and more isolated from the functioning of the domestic market and the survival of the impoverished majority” (275). This is the economic fallout of globalization on the nations of the south. Weakened national economies carry weakened national cultures and polities. Therefore how can such nations resist the culture of transnational capitalism? In fact, one can find many examples of nations succumbing to the cultural onslaught of globalization, and India also is a case in point. Hetata goes on to suggest that “What the World Bank calls structural adjustment is a potential economic genocide” (276). The expansion of the world market continues in the name of globalization and international trade continues to plunder the majority of the people in the South.

Economic exploitation and injustice is bound to face resistance; therefore, multinational corporations take the help of culture to push their economic interests. “Culture can serve in different ways to help the global economy reach out all over the world and expand its markets to the most distant regions” (276). It serves as a useful
handmaiden to economic globalization by assisting in minimizing local resistance to the destructive impact of the latter. Moreover, it is easier to convince the natives in any country the importance of a consumer product when you use their language and assimilate it with their cultural experience. Consumption of branded goods and a global standardization of commodities have turned consumption into the “most sublime of all cultural experiences” (277) in the 21st century. These efforts at building a globally acceptable culture entail efforts at building acceptable forms of consumption patterns. It is a double effort aimed at creating standard global consumers everywhere in the world. Further, as pointed out earlier in the debate, culture is ideological in nature and all ideologies are constructed in the consciousness of individuals. Consumable culture must be made palatable so that consumers relish it and seek it time and again like dream fulfillment. It should be made attractive so that it becomes “addictive and hallucinatory” (277) like opium. Hetata likens the global trade of culture to that of cocaine. Cocaine has gone global these days with a worldwide network similar to that of other businesses and “uses the methods and the cover of big business, with a total trade of $ 5 billion a year, midway between oil and the arms trade” (277).

The notion of a palatable global culture is constructed with the help of the most effective means of the media. Hetata suggests that “at the disposal of global culture today are powerful means that function across the whole world: the media, which, like the economy, have made it one world, a bipolar North / South world” (277). Functioning as the sole representative of this global culture, the global media network is using every possible technique available in its armory to inculcate the appropriate taste for its consumption. To do this, it has to function like an intermediary between the dominant culture and its lesser counterpart to initiate a
process of indoctrination of the new culture. Hetata therefore argues that “children, youth, and adults are now being programmed…in the culture they imbibe mainly through the media” (277). To expand the global markets and to increase the number of feverish consumers worldwide, “culture must play a role in developing certain values, patterns of behavior, visions of what is happiness and success in the world, attitudes toward sex and love. Culture must model a global consumer”. (277)

Coming from the South, Hetata, is able to analyze and assess the impact of globalization and its ways of domination. He compares his own experience of the present with the past. Recounting part of his personal experience of globalization, he says that he was shocked when his son began to wear blue jeans and New Balance shoes and smoke Marlborough cigarettes. He was worried that his son was taking after the American Yuppies. But very soon he realized that the change that was affecting his son was now affecting him too: “At the age of seventy-one, I have taken to wearing blue jeans and Nike shoes. I listen to rock and reggae and sometimes rap. I like to go to discos…I know these things have crept into our lives through the media, through TV, films, radio, advertisements, newspapers, and even novels, music and poetry. It’s a culture and it’s reaching out, becoming global” (278).

Television, advertisements, and films are the major contributing factors in the spread of global consumer culture. A large share of global commercial television owes its existence to American multinational companies. Television propagates a new culture of images or rather a new imagination of culture. The presence of Star TV, Channel V, Sony and MTV even in many remote villages in developing countries is an indication of the global reach of American culture. One can add to this list names of American soft drink and fast food giants like Coca Cola, Pepsi, KFC and Mc.
Donald’s. This is good evidence to show the formidable presence of Uncle Sam in the developing world.

Hetata points out that the “United States produces two-thirds of all the media images in the world. The media culture of the United States is an integral part of global culture, global power, and the global economy” (279). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that economic globalization also carries within it the germ of cultural globalization. This global cultural invasion has become so pervasive that local communities in developing countries like ours are caught in a “conflict between what is desirable and what is available” (285). Cultural globalization has the tendency to homogenize heterogeneity so the claims of postmodernists that they celebrate difference and plurality are, in fact, hollow. They join the MNCs (economic globalists) and function as cultural intermediaries of a larger economic project.

Western culture visits the developing world like a phantom in a consolidated form. It appears in the form of “a liberal, capitalist, materially and sexually enticing market, of a world where comparison with our life can only force us to look up to it in reverence” (285).

In that sense, globalization can be understood as an “out-growth, or continuation, of colonialism” (Miyoshi 247). The turning point for global capitalism was the slow down and eventual collapse of the Soviet command economy in the 1980’s. Transnational corporatism became a more acceptable policy of governments in the West “under Margaret Thatcher in Britain and presidents Reagan and Bush in the United States” (254). In fact, capitalism came to be identified with transnationalism and the West began to feel that “all the earlier apologies for economic adventurism and opportunism,” were “unnecessary and irrelevant” (254).
Free market capitalism became more acceptable during this time and there were no more serious debates on “the merits and demerits of privatization” (254). On the contrary, “privatization is accepted as given, even as a fait accompli in most sectors of industrialized countries” (254). At the end of the cold war, when the world is no longer under threat of a nuclear holocaust, governments began to cut public expenditure and floated the view that their role in public policy making is minimal. This encouraged corporates to enter into areas that were so far strictly under government control. State protection for employees withered, as corporations in America began to downsize its employee strength and effected huge layoffs. Interestingly, every time a corporation cut its workforce, its stocks rose “to signal the approval of Wall street” (255). Every big American transnational corporation improved its profits through privatization. Both politicians and corporations were now convinced that “profit and production are now the universal goals” (254). They became national and international economic goals of every government across the globe.

The functional logic of big corporations overtly appropriated the functions of the state, and also sought to appropriate culture to give a commodified form to it. The idea of culture that was constructed by humanists like Matthew Arnold was more an alibi for the state itself. It was supposed to be the guardian of public morality and order. Arnold outlines the relationship between culture and the state in no uncertain terms in *Culture and Anarchy*. For him, “the very framework and exterior order of the State, whoever may administer the State, is sacred; culture is the most resolute enemy or the anarchy” (Arnold 204). Therefore Miyoshi aptly suggests that culture, in that sense, “was to serve as an agency for law and order” (Miyoshi 259). It was supposed to be the “bulwark” (259) on which the modern state was constructed. Therefore,
when the transnational corporations robbed the state of its power to legitimate in cultural matters, it undermined the socializing interest of the state. The transnational corporations used all their energies and power of capital to convert “most social and political activities into economy, and culture into a commercial program” (259). While music, dance, theatre and film are absorbed into the business of entertainment, all historical and geographical differences are treated by global economic leaders “only as a part of tourism, often packaged in museums, restaurants, and theme parks” (259). The culture of transnational corporations doesn’t spare anything from assimilation; through absorption, it removes all difference. As Miyoshi writes, “Consumerism offers a powerful allurement for homogenization.” (259). The logic of the market puts a price on everything and culture is no exception.

The mass media plays a crucial role in furthering the ideology of consumerism. It speeds up the process of consumption by bridging the gap between production and consumption. Further, it breaks down the defining boundaries of culture, entertainment and consumption by referring them to the logic of advertisement. The mass media collaborates with global capitalism to reformulate consumerism. The global network of communication assists the process of “world-wide cultural standardization, as in coca-colonization and Mc.Donaldization” (Pieterse 99). Pieterse rightly points out that globalization promotes hybridization of culture. He defines hybridization as a process in which “forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices” (101). Pieterse does not think that globalization weakens nationalism, on the contrary, migration movements in “demographic globalization can engender absentee patriotism and long-distance nationalism” (102). Though Pieterse seems to believe that globalization has a positive side as it opens up possibilities of new organizational structures, one
cannot miss the irony of how globalization reworks notions of patriotism and nationalism that can be considered as a continuously mediated system.

The reach that globalization has in sustaining hybrid constructions of identity extend further into the realm of the political economy. However, the articulation of the modes of production is different in different micro-economic zones owing to the duality of economic processes, such as “traditional/modern and feudal/capitalist sectors” (103). This suggests that hybridity in economics forces “an interpenetration of modes of production” (193). But the “uneven articulation” of different modes of production has “given rise to phenomena such as asymmetric integration” (103). As regional economies get intertwined with transnational economic practices of large corporations, they become more dependent on global capital for their sustenance. And, as Pieterse rightly points out, the theory of dependency in capitalist development can be read as “a theory of structural hybridization in which dependent capitalism is a mélange category in which the logics of capitalism and imperialism have merged” (103).

It is important to emphasize this structural transformation in global capitalism. Neo-Marxist theory recognizes the hybrid condition and the idea of multiple economic centres. The idea of a socialist command economy gives way to micro-economics, mixed economy and co-operatives. Hence, Pieterse argues that it is the recognition of hybridity that “distinguishes neo-Marxism from classical Marxism” (103). For him, hybridization is a welcome process that has been continuing for a long time, but globalization has only intensified the process to make it more visible. However, Pieterse’s thinking reflects a liberal view that looks at the market as the ultimate provider of human needs. One needs to look further and study the
functioning of the market. Only then will one see the logic that the market is able to create “supra-national territories” (103) from where information and services are accessed very easily.

The decisive power of computer and information technology has made the web-like world of transactional relations a reality. It has turned the world into a place of “distant encounters and instant connections” (Yergin and Stanislaw 219). There is no time lag in the sharing of information and knowledge. Hence, “within, outside, and across organizations and national boundaries, people are tied together, sharing information and points of view, working in virtual teams, battering goods and services, swapping bonds and currencies, exchanging chatter and banalities, and passing the time” (219). These transactions on the internet are now so widespread and irrational that they are “increasingly heedless of the nation-state,” and do not come under the purview of any “traditional structure of organizations” (219).

The global reach of the internet is “also beyond the reach of the state. While governments can promote the internet, they cannot control it” (219). It has also helped the flow of capital across global financial markets at tremendous speed. Economic activity of manufacturing and services is able to “move flexibly among countries and are networked across borders” (219). Globalization has considerably weakened the power and control of nation-states as “borders – fundamental to the exercise of national power – are eroded as markets are integrated” (220). This has narrowed the boundary between public and private as many governments today depend on private capital to implement public works. The state, in many democratic countries, is no longer the service provider of the public as it negotiates with multinational companies to invest in public projects like power and infra structure. Therefore, every country
has to pay a price for this global financial integration. They “must increasingly heed the markets vote,” (220) however harsh it may be. And sadly, though governments are democratically elected by the people who vote every five years, they have to heed the markets because “markets vote every minute” (220).

Despite the promise of development by the market, there is always “an underlying mistrust of the market” (218). This is because the market is unpredictable. It creates a sense of insecurity among the people with fear of job cuts and unemployment, stress of over work, loss of affordable health-care facilities and so on. Hence, the turn to the market brings both the promise of “higher standard of living, better services, and more choice,” and also the fear of uncertainty. These issues of economic globalization need our attention more urgently than issues of cultural heterogeneity and assimilation. It is important to understand that culture is always embedded in larger political and economic practices. If one falls prey to the idea of postmodern cultural theorists and begins to foreground culture, then he may lose sight of the more crucial economic agendas that lie hidden in global capitalist projects. Theories of cultural capitalism have a tendency to gloss over these economic aspects. To understand the logic of consumer culture it is necessary to retrieve the economic by scraping the veneer of culture. One cannot resist the globalizing tendency of capitalism in the name of culture. Cultural resistance to globalization often assumes the colour of narrow chauvinistic nationalism which is the stated agenda of the rightists.

K.N Panikkar in An Agenda for Cultural Action points out that the “current cultural invasion” (Panikkar 43) in the form of globalization has at least two “definite dimensions; hegemonization on the one hand, and instrumentality on the other” (43).
He argues that recognizing only one of them will not help one to “comprehend the whole reality” (43) of globalization. Globalization “achieves much more than cultural imperialism: it foregrounds culture as an instrument of imperialism. In other words, culture acts both as sword and mask” (43). Resisting the other culture on cultural terms will be a narrow, reactionary, and fanatical response to globalization. Therefore, resistance can be built only by highlighting economic inequalities and imbalances it creates, especially in developing countries. There can be no cultural imbalances but only differences, but economic imbalances can be quite disastrous to huge populations in the developing world.