

CHAPTER THREE

TOWARD MULTIPLICITY: SOCIAL UPHEAVAL AND THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHANGE

Major changes in the political infrastructure of great nations do not come easily. Particularly in America, a nation with a lasting constitution and strong founding tradition, political reformulation will likely come only during times of crisis or upheaval. It is not enough, therefore, to show that the electorate has diversified and has the potential to form into new political groupings. A multiparty system will come to fruition only if our era of social change provides the environment for systematic reform.

A transformation to a functioning multiparty system, after all, would rival any past political alteration. The nearest precedent is the Progressive era; the Progressives were unmatched in their success at political reform, implementing the ballot initiative, women's suffrage, and direct election of senators, creating several new federal departments, and enacting environmental, health, and labor policies.

The Progressive era combined religious movements, self-improvement groups, and political action in a unified program of reform, growing out of a response to industrialization in combination with massive immigration and new transportation systems that necessitated interdependence.¹ Part of the impetus for the Progressive era was the professionalization of politics and religion, along with what John Dewey called

¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 391.

"the increase in the number, variety, and cheapness of amusements [that] represents a powerful diversion from political concern."² A set of complex new political cleavages including religious revivalism, nationalism, ethnic identification, and anti-corporate zeal created the social conditions under which transformation of the political system could occur. It also coincided with an academic movement, including the development of new disciplines and a Darwinian paradigm shift in science.

According to Robert Putnam, the progressive era was "a time very like our own, brimming with promise of technological advance and unparalleled prosperity, but nostalgic for a more integrated sense of community."³ For Putnam, current social changes can be an impetus for the same kinds of progressive change:

Almost a century ago America had also just experienced a period of dramatic technological, economic, and social change that rendered obsolete a significant stock of social capital... within a few decades of the turn of the century, a quickening sense of crisis, coupled with inspired grassroots and national leadership, produced an extraordinary burst of social inventiveness and political reform.⁴

The Progressive program was not intended to create multiparty democracy but their agenda was one of institutional redesign; they were able to create the same type of electoral reform movement that will be necessary to build a multiparty system in the U.S.

Our era not only bears a remarkable resemblance to the conditions that gave rise to the Progressives, it is also a time of unique developments that could easily trump progressive levels of social change. "Humanity," according to futurist Alvin Toffler,

² John Dewey quoted in Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 378.

³ Putnam, 381.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 368.

"faces the deepest social upheaval and creative restructuring of all time."⁵ Three major categories of social transformation seem to be occurring in concert and have been recognized by a diverse set of scholars under a variety of labels. The first is globalization and the accompanying resistance to it, Thomas Friedman's *Lexus and the Olive Tree* or Benjamin Barber's *Jihad v. McWorld*. The related but distinct rise of the information age, Toffler's "Third Wave" or Francis Fukuyama's "Great Disruption," should be recognized, along with the rise of self-replicating technologies, as the second source of change. Somewhat controversially, I will label the third category of transition "postmodernism" as a heading for multiculturalism, destabilization of values, the prominence of image, and the broad shift in cultural attitudes since the 1960s.

These three categories of social change parallel those in the Progressive era but are more conducive to challenging the two-party system because each trend will likely diversify group identifications and entrench multiplicity. It is not necessary that the reader adopt my formulation of the transformation, only that one sees the gravity of the changes and the increasing pace of cultural change. As Newt Gingrich has said, "The gap between objective changes in the world at large and the stagnation of politics and government is undermining the very fabric of our political system."⁶

⁵ Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1995), 19.

⁶ Newt Gingrich, foreword to *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave*, by Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1995), 16.

Globalization

The Cold War system that defined international affairs for the last half-century has been replaced by a transient set of interdependent relationships called globalization.⁷ As Harvard Law Professor Lawrence Lessig has said, "We stand on the brink of being able to say, 'I speak as a citizen of the world'... We stand just on the cusp of a time when ordinary citizens will begin to feel the effects of the regulations of other governments."⁸ After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the democratization of lending and investing corresponded with a worldwide trend toward opening capital markets to foreign investors; these developments broke down national barriers and put every individual in a position to help shape the world economy.⁹

According to *New York Times* foreign affairs correspondent Thomas Friedman, globalization politics involves a conflict over the balance among states, between states and capital, and between individuals and states.¹⁰ Globalization is not merely a colonialist expansion of U.S. hegemony, he says, because it finds ways to include and co-opt all manner of indigenous cultures.¹¹ In this context, the Tower of Babel becomes an important modern metaphor; we are enacting the same kind of plan, designed to escape limitation and difference through complete cooperation. According to Arthur Ekirch, a parallel era of internationalization characterized the Progressive era: "The increasingly

⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), xvi.

⁸ Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 226.

⁹ Friedman, 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 357.

interdependent nature of the twentieth-century world economy, heightened by the revolution in improved means of communication and transportation, gave a novel international aspect to what had formerly been the local concerns of each country."¹²

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we seem to be reaching what social critic Francis Fukuyama calls "the end of history," or at least a global political landscape in which capitalism is the last standing ideology. As Friedman put it, "Once the three democratizations [of technology, finance, and information] came together in the 1980s and blew away all the walls, they also blew away all the major ideological alternatives to free-market capitalism."¹³ Because the system of global capital demands a basic policy framework, political choices are being reduced to brand identity with only slight policy differences.¹⁴

Politicians in either government or opposition cannot afford to speak out against global capital because of dependence and the speed of reaction; only outsiders are able to make pleas to other kinds of politics.¹⁵ For instance, the British conservatives tried to run against globalization in 1996 but eventually embraced the same basic policies as the government due to lack of alternatives.¹⁶ *Wired* writer Paulina Borsook explained the lack of elite understanding of the dominance of certain perspectives: "The Republican Right really doesn't understand that the countercultural revolution of the '60s is

¹² Arthur A. Ekirch, *Progressivism in America: A Study of the Era from Theodore Roosevelt to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 7.

¹³ Friedman, 103.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 355.

permanent... the New Left of the '60s also doesn't seem to understand that the Reagan revolution of the '80s is permanent."¹⁷

It is doubtful, also, that the left will create a true alternative ideology to globalization after socialism because the globalization backlash is split between very different types of groups.¹⁸ This trend toward the ideological dominance of capitalism coincides with a rise in the plurality of viewpoints. According to Toffler, "Instead of the much-touted 'end of ideology,' we may, in both global and domestic affairs, see a multiplicity of new ideologies spring up."¹⁹ There is, in fact, a conflict between markets and social order that has been seen by both leftists and cultural conservatives like William Bennett.²⁰ Toffler anticipates a new cleavage along the "politics of levels" between globalists, nationalists, regionalists, and localists.²¹

The globalization system was built, after all, on top of an old chaotic set of civilizations in conflict.²² As social critic Benjamin Barber has pointed out, "a world that is coming together pop culturally and commercially is a world whose discrete subnational ethnic and religious and racial parts are also far more in evidence."²³ Both Barber's

¹⁷ Paulina Borsook, *Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 263.

¹⁸ Friedman, 334.

¹⁹ Alvin Toffler, *Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth, and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 255.

²⁰ Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstruction of Social Order* (London: Profile Books, 1999), 252.

²¹ Toffler, *Powershift*, 246.

²² Friedman, xxi.

²³ Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 11.

identification of the rise of "Jihad" and Friedman's metaphor of the "Olive Tree" recognize a competing force with globalization. Friedman explains the competition:

The biggest threat today to your olive tree is likely to come from the Lexus-- from the autonomous, transnational, homogenizing, standardizing market forces and technologies that make up today's globalizing economic system. There are some things about this system that can make the Lexus so overpowering it can overrun and overwhelm every olive tree in sight--breaking down communities, steamrolling environments and crowding out traditions.²⁴

Local centers of unrest are the main threats to the globalization system. The threat to military security seems to come not from rogue states or old cold war enemies but instead from what Friedman calls "the Super-Empowered Angry Man." As an alternative to violence and unrest, according to the Dalai Lama, society must make possible the type of peaceful resistance advocated by Ghandi; humanity has an inherent need to work towards a better world in the face of globalization.²⁵ Democratic responses to globalization, however, have been hard to come by, according to Friedman: "Democracies vote about a government's policies once every two or four years... but the Electronic Herd [of global financiers] votes every minute of every hour of every day."²⁶

Hakim Bey theorizes that the crushing of communism insured that only one global system would dominate and narrowed the oppositional choices to co-option or resistance. According to Bey, "Everything that was a third possibility (neutrality, withdrawal, counter-culture, the 'Third World,' etc.) now must find itself in a new situation. There is no longer any 'second.'"²⁷ Some hold out hope, however, for

²⁴ Friedman, 34.

²⁵ The Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 28.

²⁶ Friedman, 114.

²⁷ Hakim Bey, *Millennium* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1996). Available: <<http://www.desk.nl/~suzan/picknick/millennium.html>>. Accessed 1 March 2001.

democratic deliberations about globalization. The Dalai Lama has summarized the task presented by globalization:

What began with relatively small tribal units has progressed through the foundation of city-states to nationhood and now to alliances comprising hundreds of millions of people which increasingly transcend geographical, cultural, and ethnic divisions.... There is also a clear surge toward greater consolidation along the lines of ethnicity, language, religion, and culture.... It is important that the establishment of unions comes about voluntarily and on the basis of recognition that the interests of those concerned are better served through collaboration.²⁸

Friedman agrees: "One of the biggest challenges for political theory in this globalization era is how to give citizens a sense that they can exercise their will, not only over their own governments but over at least some of the global forces shaping our lives."²⁹

The new political responses to globalization may come from a variety of angles. According to Friedman, globalization has not killed government; it has necessitated smarter and faster states that can regulate markets without choking them, using institutions along the lines of the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Federal Trade Commission in the U.S.³⁰ Globalization may also produce widespread despair as people within democracies realize that they have lost control over their lives; by buying media and producing legitimizing images, global corporations can make democracy a "spectator sport."³¹

²⁸ The Dalai Lama, 199.

²⁹ Friedman, 192.

³⁰ Ibid., 158.

³¹ Ibid., 190.

The Domestic Politics of Globalization

The Progressive movement developed from a reluctance to support imperialism and the use of military power to advance interests abroad, including debates over the World Court and the League of Nations.³² Progressivism used both sides of the globalization debate, allying at times with both nationalist and internationalist programs.³³ The Progressive movement was connected with the social democracy movement in Western Europe.³⁴

The current integrated political environment means any local action can take on global dimensions. For instance, students can fight working conditions in Asia by protesting their own collegiate apparel. In an increasingly globalized world, the Dalai Lama implores us to consider the universal implications of each action and explore our complicity in governmental injustice.³⁵ Much of the current resistance to globalization through protest has been modeled on globalization itself; it has been high-tech and coordinated but also increasingly fragmented.

Globalization is not only an important world phenomenon to which America should take note, it may be key to the domestic politics of the future. British power drove earlier eras of globalization but America dominates the new system, which was the force behind institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade

³² David A. Horowitz, *Beyond Left & Right: Insurgency and the Establishment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 19.

³³ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 21.

³⁴ Ekirch, 11.

³⁵ The Dalai Lama, 168.

Organization.³⁶ Globalization is perceived as Americanization by most of the world and part of the backlash is against the U.S. itself. As the cold war system played a decisive role in domestic politics, globalization will raise internal friction when positions become formulated and well known.³⁷ According to Friedman, "Tip O'Neill was wrong. All politics isn't local--not anymore. All politics is now global."³⁸

He believes it will eventually fundamentally alter the American party system: "Neither the Democratic Party nor the Republican Party has fully made the shift from the Cold War system to the globalization system in framing their own politics. They each behave at times as if the world is now safe for us to be both insular and mindlessly partisan on every issue."³⁹ Minority diasporas could easily become major political groupings in the realm of global politics and ethnic self-determination could become a more important issue in domestic politics.⁴⁰

With globalization, people can choose among four different political perspectives, according to Friedman, with a new cleavage dividing integrationists and separatists.⁴¹ Odd political groupings may begin to emerge. According to Barber, Muslim jihadists resemble family values proponents in their critique of modern culture and mirror rural

³⁶ Friedman, xix.

³⁷ Ibid., 7.

³⁸ Ibid., 76.

³⁹ Ibid., 436.

⁴⁰ Barber, 178.

⁴¹ Friedman, 438.

rebellion against centralized management; Americans face a domestic jihad and a fundamentalist revival on their own turf.⁴²

Environmental degradation is the quintessential example of a problem that will need to be addressed at the international level with ties to domestic politics. If citizens of every country were to use cars with the frequency of those in the U.S., for instance, the earth's resources would be exhausted in a few years.⁴³ Even Friedman, who is hardly a Green Party sympathizer, says that some major party in the developing countries will need to focus on quality of life issues and "smart growth" in order to be the center of a world movement.⁴⁴

This notion of global political networks with counterparts in American domestic politics seems central to the new era. Because only networked coalitions can play in the modern world, corporate partnerships have become a model for activist partnerships. Though the U.S. does not have supreme power over globalization, it will likely need to be at the center of coalitions to shape geopolitics.⁴⁵ It turns out that globalization is less likely to connect people in diverse communities than to create what has been called "transnational colonies of like-minded souls."⁴⁶ The shapers of global environmental, human rights, and workforce norms will likely be non-governmental organizations involved in setting standards.⁴⁷ Geographic distinctions in political relations will

⁴² Barber, 211.

⁴³ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁴ Friedman, 300.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁶ Borsook, 155.

⁴⁷ Friedman, 206.

dissolve, according to technology critic Lin Sten: "Mirroring the global spread of corporations... common interest groups will become global."⁴⁸ Using courts, Internet communications, and protests of multinational agreements, a global resistance movement to corporate dominance has already had an influence on companies such as Shell, McDonalds, and Nike.⁴⁹

Though I will separately explore the transition to the information age, the bulk of the existing literature has analyzed it in connection to technological change. The Internet, as a global distributed network, is a metaphor for the defining features of globalization, integration without central control.⁵⁰ Tradition also seems to be being replaced by an emphasis on future innovation as the legitimizing myth of power relations.⁵¹ The complaints about job losses, Ross Perot's "giant sucking sound," are also related to both jobs moving countries and automation.⁵²

In parallel, the pre-eminence of image discussed in the postmodernity section below is in part a product of globalization. American film and television dominate the world's construction of images and often take safe but supposedly liberal political stands. MTV is the assumed voice of a counterculture; multiculturalism is artificially embraced, taking the place of any real political representation in favor of communication through about a dozen global corporations.⁵³ As Barber puts it, "hard power yields to soft, while

⁴⁸ Lin Sten, *Souls, Slavery, and Survival in the Malenotech Age* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1999), 79.

⁴⁹ Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 393.

⁵⁰ Friedman, 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 333.

⁵³ Barber, 110.

ideology is transmuted into a kind of videology that works through sound bites and film clips. Videology is fuzzier and less dogmatic than traditional political ideology."⁵⁴

Corporate Control

Globalization is also a signal of a broader trend toward corporate dominance of societal decision-making. Multinational corporations currently represent more than half of the world's 100 largest economies.⁵⁵ The current level of what sociologist Charles Derber calls "corporate ascendancy" rivals even that of the gilded age, the economic environment that led to the progressive movement.⁵⁶ Corporations, which have traditionally been legal entities created by the state, have become more powerful than individuals or governments. Many critics now believe that Bill Gates is more powerful than the American president.⁵⁷

According to Derber, it is not clear that corporate and public entities can be separated: "The intertwining of corporations and government has become so extensive... that the notion of a democratic balancing act has become a dangerous illusion."⁵⁸ Debate over political institutions, he says, has become an inappropriate foundation for our politics. Corporations have already become the major targets of resistance movements, according to protest observer Naomi Klein, because they have wrested authority from politics and religion. Derber proposes an alternative notion of politics. In the context of

⁵⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁵ Mae-Wan Ho, *Genetic Engineering: Dream or Nightmare?* 2d ed. (Dublin: Gateway, 1999), 14.

⁵⁶ Charles Derber, *Corporation Nation: How Corporations are Taking Over Our Lives and What We Can Do About It* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 27.

⁵⁷ Derber, 50.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 34.

corporate power, he says, there are opportunities for stakeholders to get involved in corporate decision-making; new political institutions with interest group representatives could be could be developed to control corporations.

Corporate domination is subtler in current political relations than it has been in the past. Products are increasingly replaced by symbolic interactions that emulate lifestyle and entertainment.⁵⁹ Corporations are "political agnostics," according to Barber, but "they nonetheless borrow and warp political ideas and political terms."⁶⁰ According to Klein, it is the focus on brands that has enabled "astronomical growth in the wealth and cultural influence of multinational corporations."⁶¹ In the process, she says, we have lost any unbranded space and all alternative culture has been commodified. Barber states the problem similarly: "Capitalism once had to capture political institutions and elites in order to control politics, philosophy, and religion so that through them it could nurture an ideology conducive to its profits. Today it manufactures as among its chief and most profitable products that very ideology itself."⁶²

The Religious Component

Globalization's commodification of culture is evidenced by increasing appreciation for alternative religious heritages. Moral claims have been seen as a potential adversary to the goals of capital; but, before religion can return to a central role, it must face the trend toward fragmentation of organized worship. A return to religious

⁵⁹ Barber, 60.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 72.

⁶¹ Klein, 3.

⁶² Barber, 77.

activism in the political context would need to work through the differences among those who believe that religion should be a part of politics.⁶³ According to Fukuyama, "folk religion has been replaced by a voluntary, congregational sectarianism that depends less on hierarchical authority than on the collective beliefs of small communities."⁶⁴ New age religion is a different kind of response to standardization, as it does not seem to use old traditions as a starting point.⁶⁵

Religious perspectives are already entering the political debate through curious means. Several of the largest modern marches, the Million Man March and the Promise Keepers rally, were based on the theme of male moral responsibility; they approached the subject, however, from very different sides of the political spectrum.⁶⁶ There is even renewed interest in the Sabbath as an alternative to the modern 24-hour connected world.⁶⁷ According to Bey, anti-capitalist coalitions will increasingly rely on religious alternatives including Islam, the "Free Tibet" movement, emergent pagan spirituality, and the Orthodox church.⁶⁸ According to the Dalai Lama, this will present challenges to the state as a political actor because religious conflict stems from a state's inability to create "interreligious harmony" at the institutional level.⁶⁹

⁶³ Fukuyama, 278.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁵ Friedman, 474.

⁶⁶ Fukuyama, 273.

⁶⁷ Friedman, 421.

⁶⁸ Bey, *Millennium*.

⁶⁹ The Dalai Lama, 219.

The Information Age

We have always faced both the benefits and the increased risks associated with new technological development, but it is not well understood that the speed of advancement has increased in recent years. There is evidence that evolution is actually the process of time speeding up; technological progress, the newest means of evolution, grows exponentially.⁷⁰ Moore's Law, the principle that the speed of microprocessors can double at half the price every two years, is actually an example of the larger phenomenon of technological growth. Inventor Ray Kurzweil demonstrates that the same pattern of exponential growth predicted by Moore's Law fits the entire history of computation and scientific development.⁷¹ Radio, television, and the Internet all spread more quickly into American homes than their predecessors.⁷²

Social Consequences of Current Technology

The technological advancements of the information age have already had dramatic effects. There has been a vast increase in the amount of ideas we are each exposed to and any one of the thousands of images we see every day can have major consequences. For example, a videotape of the Rodney King beating can cause riots in a dozen cities.⁷³ Television has most-often, however, encouraged spending more time at

⁷⁰ Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 14.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷² Putnam, 217.

⁷³ Douglas Rushkoff, *Children of Chaos: Surviving the End of the World as We Know It* (London: Flamingo, HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 7.

home and less civic engagement. According to Putnam, it is the source of much of the current apathy.⁷⁴

The Internet holds the potential to revitalize social institutions because social capital is built on networks, Putnam says, but it promotes a distinct kind of networking that does not fit the old model. "The Internet," according to Fukuyama, "represents a technology with the potential to take voluntary social bonds to new and undreamed-of heights."⁷⁵ The world of the Internet is quite distinct, according to cultural observer Douglass Rushkoff: "Word of mouth and personal experience mean everything," replacing authoritative sources.⁷⁶

The Internet has and will continue to fundamentally alter politics. Though many see the Internet as a bastion of libertarianism, Larry Lessig believes commercial and governmental powers have decided their interests lie in stabilization. "It is evolving in a very particular direction: from an unregulable space to one that is highly regulable," he says.⁷⁷ The Internet world also implies the need to present a perspective in governance that is not geographically based. Without competition among potential sets of rules for online interaction, Lessig says, self-interested code writing will simply control the order of the day.⁷⁸ In the web-based society, according to the World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee, standards-setting bodies and cooperative arrangements between business and non-profit groups will become increasingly important. The only type of arrangement

⁷⁴ Putnam, 224.

⁷⁵ Fukuyama, 47.

⁷⁶ Rushkoff, 190.

⁷⁷ Lessig, 25.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 200.

that works in such a dynamic system with multiple players and little central control is cooperation and consensus building.⁷⁹

These debates are important because simple rules about technological infrastructure can have major societal effects. For instance, commercial use of the Internet's predecessor was not allowed for fifteen years; after the decision to open it to commercial traffic, the worldwide communications revolution became inevitable.⁸⁰ According to Lessig, we are still building the Internet's architecture, setting up the rules that will constrain social and legal power online; this architecture is not built by regulations or norms but by decisions written in computer code.⁸¹ Lessig asks, "If code is law, who are the lawmakers? What values are being embedded in the code?"⁸² If we fail to step up to the task of political decisions over code-writing, Lessig says, "We will treat code-based environmental disasters... as if they were produced by Gods, not by Man. We will watch as important aspects of privacy and free speech are erased by the emerging architecture of the panopticon."⁸³ The intellectual property debates over the rise of peer-to-peer file-sharing systems such as Napster, for example, involve important decisions about the future Internet architecture.

The Internet will also alter the ways that laws are made. According to California political observer Tracy Westen, online direct democracy is inevitable and our only choice is to shape it; there are two revolutions, one in technology and the other in

⁷⁹ Tim Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web: The Past, Present and Future of the World Wide Web by its Inventor* (London: Orion Business Books, 1999), 111.

⁸⁰ Borsook, 230.

⁸¹ Lessig, 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 207.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 233.

frustration with institutions, that will come together. Already, more money is spent on California initiative campaigning than on legislative campaigning. Westen presents a possible scenario for online direct democracy, saying that electronic qualification of initiatives, online voting, and instant voting on important issues, will all pass easily using the initiative process itself.⁸⁴

Future Technological Advancement

As Toffler recognized, we have entered a period of innovation that rivals any past technological revolution. In Toffler's words, we are facing "The Third Wave," a change just as important as the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution. The Second Wave, according to Toffler, was characterized by standardization, specialization, synchronization, concentration, maximization, and centralization in all industrial societies, capitalist or socialist.⁸⁵ Society is undergoing a transformation from these characteristics toward dynamic change, plurality, and interdependence.

This technological advancement has far reaching effects, Fukuyama warns: "We appear to be caught in an unpleasant circumstance: going forward seems to promise ever-increasing levels of disorder and social atomization, at the same time that our line of retreat has been cut off."⁸⁶ Even technological proponents such as Toffler believe technological growth must be met with public debate; "If free markets and democracy are

⁸⁴ Tracy Westen, "A Republic or a Democracy: Legislatures in the Electronic Future," Panel discussion at a conference entitled "Envisioning California: E-democracy, Education and Initiatives: The Future of the California Republic," State Capitol, Sacramento, 22 September 2000.

⁸⁵ Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1980), 76.

⁸⁶ Fukuyama, 137.

to survive the great and turbulent transitions to come, politics must become anticipatory and preventative," he says.⁸⁷

The recognition of the triumph of the information age puts the recent developments in technological growth in perspective. Kurzweil's "Law of Accelerating Returns" shows that we will continue to find alternative sources of computing power in time to continue doubling computing power indefinitely. In fact, the rate of exponential growth in computing power is even growing; computing will likely reach the hardware capacity of the human brain by 2020.⁸⁸ Advances in molecular and quantum computing are likely to mean that we will eventually reach a state of unlimited computing power at microscopic size.⁸⁹ Kurzweil's predictions may seem far-fetched but he previously correctly predicted the time when a computer would beat the world chess champion, when the Internet would emerge, and the time frame for speech recognition and portable computing.⁹⁰

According to Lin Sten, "In the next ten years... advances in molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligence, civilization's increasing digital orientation, and Homo sapiens' increasing reliance on automated processing and distribution have several revolutionary implications." For Sten, these include dependency, human irrelevance, and an extreme technological divide.⁹¹ It seems clear that, as Sten has put it, "The rate of technological advance in automation, artificial intelligence, robotics, computer

⁸⁷ Toffler and Toffler, 77.

⁸⁸ Kurzweil, 106.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 170.

⁹¹ Sten, xxii.

processing, communications, and molenotechnology has become so high that most people are unable to comprehend the implications of these advances in time to make relevant social decisions about them."⁹²

In April 2000, Sun Microsystems co-founder Bill Joy wrote "Why The Future Doesn't Need Us," a *Wired* article that was compared to Einstein's letter to Roosevelt acknowledging the possibility of the nuclear bomb. It signaled that even technologists are beginning to see some merit in anti-technology arguments such as those presented in the Unabomber manifesto. According to Joy, our general cultural acceptance of all technological advancement as progress is concerning in the context of the twenty-first century's self-replicating technologies: robotics, genetic engineering, and nanotechnology.⁹³ Acknowledging that as a software engineer, his "personal experience suggests we tend to overestimate our design abilities," Joy says that with "enormous computing power combined with... deep understanding in genetics, enormous transformative power is being unleashed. These combinations open up the opportunity to completely redesign the world, for better or for worse."⁹⁴

The current density of intelligence on earth is highest in the human brain but, according to Kurzweil, it probably will not stay that way: "[Brain intelligence density] is not very high--- nanotube circuitry, which has already been demonstrated, is potentially more than a trillion times higher."⁹⁵ Computers are beginning to learn from the human

⁹² Ibid., 226.

⁹³ Bill Joy, "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us," *Wired*, April 2000. Available: <<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.04/joy.html>>. Accessed 17 April 2001.

⁹⁴ Joy.

⁹⁵ Kurzweil, 259.

brain, using neural nets and self-organization.⁹⁶ According to Sten, technology will easily evolve toward states of being with which we are unfamiliar. Nanotechnology will likely allow us to build anything on the atomic level, including self-replicating robots. The technology would allow us to create any item or species, approaching god-like powers that raise ethical issues beyond comparison with current debates over cloning.⁹⁷ Because it will require only information, its power will likely be available to everyone.

The beginning of the debate over genetic engineering is a sign of the coming technological battles. According to biologist Mae-Wan Ho, "genetic engineering biotechnology is an unprecedented intimate alliance between bad science and big business, which will spell the end of humanity as we know it... the genetic-determinist mentality... takes hold of people's consciousness, making them act unquestionably to shape the world."⁹⁸ Opposition to genetic engineering has grown but many believe that biotechnology progress is inevitable. Ho claims that "the science war" over genetics parallels the theoretical debate between absolutists and relativists in academia but is far more important.⁹⁹ "The resurgence of eugenics," according to Ho, represents a new threat to minority groups along with eugenic "solutions" to homosexuality and criminality.¹⁰⁰

Genetic engineering, artificially intelligent computers, and nanotechnology together bring us closer to both divine creation and destruction. As Bill Joy put it, "We

⁹⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁹⁸ Ho, 1.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰⁰ Ho, 24.

are aggressively pursuing the promises of these new technologies within the now-unchallenged system of global capitalism and its manifold financial incentives and competitive pressures."¹⁰¹ The history of the nuclear bomb shows that once developed, these technologies will be inevitably deployed. The potential of nuclear technology is only a small example of the future potential that will come from increased technological progress.¹⁰² Dangers will come from safeguard failures, externalities, those that seek domination, revolution against domination, and terrorism.¹⁰³

With the increased computing power, virtual reality and brain-linked networks may evolve to present experiences indistinguishable from reality.¹⁰⁴ This technological development is not simply tool creation, it is a process that allows transmission of information regarding the technology itself to move from one generation to the next. Combined with computation, this may lead to what some have called a merging of the species that created the technology with the computational technology it created.¹⁰⁵ We are seeing the initial signs of a system that may eventually allow full downloading of the mind along with the potential for neural implants that will finally integrate man and machine.¹⁰⁶

The technological advancements now being investigated are reminiscent of science fiction. It is unlikely that all of the advances predicted by technologists will

¹⁰¹ Joy.

¹⁰² Kurzweil, 256.

¹⁰³ Sten, 219.

¹⁰⁴ Kurzweil, 145.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 255.

¹⁰⁶ Kurzweil, 124.

come to fruition. It is also naïve, however, to assume that only currently-existing technologies should be considered as potential sources of change for long-term political movements. Even limiting the discussion to the Internet, genetic advances, and automation would show that technological advancement has produced important social and political issues.

Because technology advances exponentially, these issues only represent the beginning of a series of new choices that society will encounter. No one could predict all of the technological developments that will come to dominate our daily lives in the new century, but the lessons of history and modern life show that the technologies are likely to raise controversies. The technological changes that bring about social change will also alter the politics of the information age. In parallel with growth in technology, there is an acceleration of political pressure and the pace of political life.¹⁰⁷ Policy outcomes can no longer be easily predicted and responsibility is transient.¹⁰⁸

The Political Implications of the Information Age

The technological revolution has helped bring about a trend toward diversity that may be part of a timeless pattern. Evolution can be defined as "a movement toward richer and deeper creative diversification and complexity," according to Theologian Jennifer Cobb.¹⁰⁹ In business, further differentiation and identification of smaller markets is the order of the day. Each worker is now usually a part of multiple project

¹⁰⁷ Toffler, *The Third Wave*, 424.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 411.

¹⁰⁹ Jennifer Cobb, *Cybergrace: The Search for God in the Digital World* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1998), 39.

teams and each business has several strategic alliances.¹¹⁰ The political system has so far been able to escape this trend but the Third Wave brings with it more varied types of political movements.¹¹¹

Technology will generally change how democracy functions. Second Wave politics made voting what Toffler calls a "reassurance ritual" that was secondary to the hierarchical representative institutions. Third Wave politics, in contrast, includes all kinds of organized interest groups and powerful individuals engaged in everyday politics.¹¹² According to Morley Winograd and Dudley Buffa, who help spearhead the Democratic Leadership Council, "The basic functions of a political party--communication and loyalty-building--could have been accomplished by one expert programmer and a few people who created the material itself."¹¹³ The information age also completely alters coalition building, according to Toffler:

These same developments also sweep into oblivion our notions about political coalitions, alliances, or united fronts. In a Second Wave society a political leader could glue together half a dozen major blocs, as Roosevelt did in 1932, and expect the resulting coalition to remain locked in position for many years. Today it is necessary to plug in hundreds, even thousands, of tiny, short-lived special interest groups, and the coalition itself will prove short-lived as well.... This demassification of political life, [reflects] all the deep trends we have discussed in technology, production, communications, and culture... On all sides, countless new constituencies, fluidly organized, demand simultaneous attention to real but narrow and unfamiliar needs.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Toffler and Toffler, 43.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 84.

¹¹² Toffler, *The Third Wave*, 92.

¹¹³ Morley Winograd and Dudley Buffa, *Taking Control: Politics in the Information Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 246.

¹¹⁴ Toffler, *The Third Wave*, 425.

According to Toffler, even this chaotic civilization still has three basic needs: community, structure, and meaning.¹¹⁵ There is no hope of return to Victorian values, according to Fukuyama, so we must seek out new kinds of values that fit the information age.¹¹⁶ Amish culture is an example of a subculture that provides a model of resistance to the inevitability of technology. Though many believe that Amish culture entails rejection of technology, in fact the Amish merely evaluate tools before allowing them to enter their civilization.¹¹⁷ For each tool, they ask whether it will affect their communities and what kind of person its users will become. Their system is not designed to go backward so much as simply to put brakes on advancement until seeing the implications.

This kind of process will be one proposal in an ongoing debate between what *Reason Magazine* editor Virginia Postrel terms "The Future and Its Enemies." Planning for stability by "reactionaries" or planning for control by "technocrats," according to Postrel, will face off against the hands-off approach envisioned by "dynamists."¹¹⁸ The future political dividing line will be between those who value "stability and control" and those who value "evolution and learning," Postrel says: "These are not the comfortable old cold War divisions of hawks and doves, egalitarians and individualists, left and right. They contain elements of those simpler classifications but they are much richer, encompassing... more aspects of the emergent, complex future."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 383.

¹¹⁶ Fukuyama, 276.

¹¹⁷ Howard Rheingold, "Look Who's Talking," *Wired*, January 1999. Available: <<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.01/amish.html>>. Accessed 17 April 2001.

¹¹⁸ Virginia Postrel, *The Future and Its Enemies: The Growing Conflict over Creativity, Enterprise, and Progress* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 7.

¹¹⁹ Postrel, xvi.

Douglass Rushkoff presents an intriguing theory for coming up with dynamist models to deal with modern life. "Looking at the world of children is not looking backwards at our own past-it's looking ahead," he says, "they are our evolutionary future."¹²⁰ For instance, the rave movement provides a synthesis of the return to tribalism and the techno-culture of the future, a "self-consciously technological" and globalist culture that aims toward group consciousness.¹²¹ Industrial music and goth culture literally celebrate the past in the context of postmodern hedonism.¹²² The goal of these behaviors seems to be "co-evolution with technology," Rushkoff says.¹²³

The emerging technocracy also has far-reaching political consequences. As Paulina Borsook has pointed out, high-tech "contains attitude, mind-set, and philosophy" but it "has tended to fly both over and under the radar of conventional politics."¹²⁴ Borsook says that "Technolibertarians matter, much as the New Left and the counterculture of the '60s mattered and continues [sic] to matter: both as extreme instantiation of a cultural shift and as a social trend with the potential for long-lived consequences."¹²⁵

In this context of technological development, the redistributive politics that have defined the industrial age may become less relevant. The political alignment between social welfare and laissez-faire economics only came to fruition after identification with

¹²⁰ Rushkoff, 2.

¹²¹ Ibid., 37.

¹²² Ibid., 71.

¹²³ Ibid., 141.

¹²⁴ Borsook, 3.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 27.

either labor or management was high; it does not continue in an era of flatter organizations.¹²⁶ Money is less maldistributed than the other main sources of power, including knowledge; future power struggles are likely to involve conflicts over information.¹²⁷

New issues are quite slow to enter the debate between the two-major parties. The old political ideologies, according to Toffler, do not seem to have developed clear perspectives on what he calls the major three issues of the future: education, information technology, and freedom of expression. Peter Drucker's prediction that "education will become the center of the knowledge society, and the school is the key institution" is already visible in modern political priorities.¹²⁸ Kurzweil predicts that there will be increasing concern about machine intelligence, technological dependence, and privacy in the near future as a result of the preeminence of technology.¹²⁹

As technology changes society, new groups will emerge to demand the kinds of policy changes that fit with their experiences. One in six American workers is already either self-employed, a temporary worker, or an independent contractor.¹³⁰ As Winograd and Buffa explain, this process has already begun: "While Democrats and Republicans wait for a return of the clarity that once marked the political divisions of the industrial

¹²⁶ Winograd and Buffa, 31.

¹²⁷ Toffler, *Powershift*, 20.

¹²⁸ Winograd and Buffa, 201.

¹²⁹ Kurzweil, 206.

¹³⁰ Postrel, 35.

age, a growing majority of Americans wait impatiently for political leadership capable of coming to grips with the age they have already entered."¹³¹

The people who work in information age occupations will grow increasingly impatient with the two-party system, Winograd and Buffa predict:

As to the knowledge worker, the notion of limiting the voters' choice to only two parties seems increasingly anachronistic. And they know, or at least they have begun to sense, that American politics will soon offer a variety of candidates and campaigns as rich and diverse as the programming options that are delivered daily on their cable TVs.¹³²

The Decline of Social Capital

Social capital is generally recognized as a necessary precondition for communication, awareness of connectedness, and achieving political goals.¹³³ From Thomas Jefferson to Alexis de Tocqueville to John Dewey, many of the prominent influences on American development focused on the need to build truly participatory organizations to sustain a democracy.¹³⁴ Cooperation is an inherent human feature and, in fact, is the best strategy in multi-player activities, as shown in the prisoner's dilemma games in psychology.¹³⁵

According to Robert Putnam, "the character of work" has changed in a way that prevents interaction and social capital.¹³⁶ We are also spending considerably less time

¹³¹ Winograd and Buffa, 7.

¹³² Ibid., 245.

¹³³ Putnam, 288.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 337.

¹³⁵ Fukuyama, 170.

¹³⁶ Putnam, 86.

with neighbors and in informal associations. The only rise in social capital comes from small self-help groups and local shared-interest groups.¹³⁷ Fukuyama disputes Putnam's claim that group memberships have decreased, believing that traditional groups have been replaced by new kinds of associations and volunteer work.¹³⁸ Fukuyama generally agrees with Putnam, however, regarding the decline of social capital. He shows that multiple social indicators of crime, family, and trust all took a severe downturn in most industrial countries starting in the mid-sixties.¹³⁹ Children born out of wedlock, divorce, and family breakdown increased worldwide around this same time.¹⁴⁰

Fukuyama presents four explanations for what he calls "the great disruption" that he says are conventional wisdom: poverty, greater wealth, the welfare state, or a broad cultural shift. He then argues that the true explanation is the change in labor brought about by the information age along with the birth control pill.¹⁴¹ The information age explanation, far from being unique, is repeated throughout the literature and seems to be the best explanation of the worldwide phenomenon. We have thus already begun to experience the implications of the technological changes discussed previously.

This breakdown of social capital has had tremendous effects on the political system. Toffler begins his latest book with this assertion: "America faces a convergence of crises unmatched since its earliest days. Its family system is in crisis, but so is its health system, its urban systems, its value system and above all, its political system,

¹³⁷ Ibid., 148.

¹³⁸ Fukuyama, 53.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 46.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 64.

which for all practical purposes has lost the confidence of the people."¹⁴² Lower voter turnout understates the true decline in American political participation as evident in decreased knowledge about and interest in political affairs.¹⁴³ According to Putnam, "Americans were roughly half as likely to work for a political party or attend a political rally or speech in the 1990s as in the 1970s."¹⁴⁴ Because of the aging population, according to Putnam, Americans will vote less and join fewer groups in the twenty-first century without a major boost in civic engagement.¹⁴⁵ African-Americans, in particular, are less likely to be active politically because they are clustered in poverty-stricken areas with little political organization.¹⁴⁶

There number of political organizations with paid staff has increased dramatically, but according to Putnam, "this trend is evidence of the professionalization and commercialization of politics in America" rather than increased interest.¹⁴⁷ The new kinds of political association like Common Cause and the National Organization for Women are based in Washington and professionally staffed with few local chapters.¹⁴⁸ Party hierarchy has declined in favor of informal, self-organization such as community organizing and interest group lobbying.

¹⁴² Toffler and Toffler, 7.

¹⁴³ Putnam, 36.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 256.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 343.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 51.

There has been a vast increase in the number of worldwide non-governmental organizations and all types of formal nonprofit groups, but they resemble modern bureaucracies in government and business.¹⁴⁹ As Putnam says,

The changing nature of civic participation in American communities over the last two decades has shifted the balance in the larger society between the articulation of grievances and the aggregation of coalitions to address those grievances. This disjunctive pattern of decline--cooperation falling more rapidly than self-expression--may well have encouraged the single-issue blare and declining civility of contemporary political discourse.¹⁵⁰

In 1959, just before the tumultuous decade of the 1960s, political scientists noted that the ratio of activists to the general population had been gradually growing over time and that the younger generation had shared identities that made movement building possible.¹⁵¹ As Putnam says, "These days 'movement-type' political actions are accepted as 'standard operating procedure' across the political spectrum."¹⁵² The social movements of the 1960s, however, were replaced by professionally staffed interest groups that have large mailing lists but little real association.¹⁵³ Protest does seem to be on the increase and the potential for mass action is definitely evident. Campus politics, as observed by Naomi Klein, have broadened in recent years from identity politics to corporate power, labor, and globalization.¹⁵⁴ The anti-globalization movement has shown its ability to mobilize at gatherings of political parties and world financial institutions.

¹⁴⁹ Fukuyama, 58.

¹⁵⁰ Putnam, 46.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵² Ibid., 165.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 155.

¹⁵⁴ Klein, xix.

Trust, however, is also a key factor in building a civil society or a movement culture. The role of norms and values changed considerably in competition with individualism. There is now widespread questioning of elected officials, scientists, priests, and teachers, coinciding with decreased trust in institutions and one another.¹⁵⁵ Division of the electorate may help build association if political group consciousness grows. Cooperation is often enhanced in the face of competition; groups will form and work together in order to compete with others.¹⁵⁶ Cooperation also requires membership boundaries and repetition of working relations.¹⁵⁷

Gender Roles and the Family

The family has also undergone upheaval as a result of information age changes in gender roles. Nuclear families are not natural but socially constructed, according to Fukuyama: "The family bond is relatively fragile, based on an exchange of the woman's fertility for the man's resources... Today many people have come to think of marriage as a kind of public celebration of a sexual and emotional union."¹⁵⁸ This has had a substantial effect on social change, Fukuyama says:

The most dramatic shifts in social norms that constitute the Great Disruption concern those related to reproduction, the family, and relations between the sexes. The sexual revolution and the rise of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s touched virtually everyone in the Western part of the developed world and introduced massive changes not just in households but in offices, factories, neighborhoods, voluntary associations, education, even the military.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Fukuyama, 48.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 174.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 214.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 101.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 36.

Leftists justifiably call Fukuyama's conception of the women's movement "sexist" but his argument that maintaining the family is a societal choice is actually evidence of the inevitability of new kinds of families and further disruption of sex roles. According to Fukuyama, the sexual revolution has primarily benefited men and hurt children. As a result, there is the potential for several internal fights within feminism, for example between difference feminists who believe the unique characteristics of women should be enhanced and those in favor of assimilation. It is possible that women's movements could rise to challenge technological growth or present alternative conceptions of growth that account for different kinds of values.

Far from an independent change, Fukuyama shows that changes in gender roles were part of the broader shift to the information age: "These value changes were stimulated by important technological and economic developments related to the end of the industrial era that alone can explain their timing."¹⁶⁰ New technological advances could have different kinds of effects on sex roles. For instance, biotechnology could potentially free women from pregnancy.¹⁶¹ Technology could serve as either liberation or further enslavement for women and gendered views will be an important part of the ongoing discussion.

Postmodernity

Fukuyama explores the possibility that a broad cultural attitude shift may explain modern social disruptions. He believes that American values have changed dramatically

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 129.

since the 1960s, though he concludes that it is an effect rather than a cause of social change. This attitude shift involves changes in norms and is signaled by the rise of multiculturalism and a shift in popular culture. Since the primary effect is the institutionalization of diversity, it has tremendous political implications. As Pat Buchanan put it in his 1992 Republican convention speech, "There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself."¹⁶²

An Academic Movement

The attitude shift that Buchanan abhors parallels the development of postmodern philosophy in academia, which attempts to explain and justify the changing norms. As Fukuyama explained,

Attempts to ground values in nature or in God were doomed to be exposed as willful acts on the part of the creators of those values. Nietzsche's aphorism, "There are no facts, only interpretations," became the watchword for later generations of relativists under the banner of deconstruction and postmodernism.¹⁶³

In a variety of disciplines, scholars have advanced the concept of "postmodernity" as an attempt to explain the current socio-cultural condition.

There is currently a struggle between scientists and other disciplines such as cultural studies and sociology over the enlightenment heritage and the idea of progress.¹⁶⁴ Postmodernism is seen as a response to modernity, the age of reason grounded in the

¹⁶² Pat Buchanan, "Republican Convention Speech," Houston, 17 August 1992. Available: <<http://crabgrasschronicles.tripod.com/buchanan92.htm>>. Accessed 17 April 2001.

¹⁶³ Fukuyama, 73.

¹⁶⁴ Ziauddin Sardar, *Thomas Kuhn and the Science Wars*, Postmodern Encounters (New York: Totem Books, 2000), 4.

Enlightenment. Stephen Toulman identified four movements of the modern era: from the oral to written, the particular to universal, the local to general, and the timely to timeless. Reason was to be purified by decontextualization in order to develop consensus for universal claims. Postmodernity is defined by the acceptance of pluralism, variety, and ambivalence; it has led to a social condition based on the characteristics modernity tried to eliminate. Multi-racial western societies and feminist movements have cast doubt on any attempt at consensus. There is a sense that metanarratives have been lost in the context of what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls a "radically pluralistic culture."¹⁶⁵

Even those who are concerned by this phenomenon view it as an important social development. Former Vice President Spiro Agnew noticed the trend as early as 1970:

Live is visceral rather than intellectual and the most visceral are those who characterize themselves as intellectuals. Truth is to them revealed rather than logically proved and the principle infatuations of today revolve around the social sciences, those subjects that can accommodate any opinion... A spirit of national masochism prevails encouraged by an effete core of impudent snobs.¹⁶⁶

Just as the transformation from agriculture to industrialization introduced new academic disciplines including sociology,¹⁶⁷ the current transition is creating new subjects and increasing inter-disciplinary studies. At the same time, quantum mechanics and relativity within science point toward the kind of postmodernism evident in many of the social

¹⁶⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Irvine, CA: The Critical Theory Institute, 1979). Available: <http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism/postmodernism/lyotard_text.htm>. Accessed 17 April 2001.

¹⁶⁶ Spiro Agnew, "Address on the Vietnam War Protests," Houston, 12 May 1970. Available: <http://www.historychannel.com/speeches/ra_archive/speech_4.ram>. Accessed 17 April 2001.

¹⁶⁷ Fukuyama, 9.

sciences.¹⁶⁸ As for philosophy, postmodernists have reduced Plato's kings to self-reifying reflections of their place in the world.

Fukuyama connects the academic trends toward postmodernism with the "psychologization of contemporary life" and the cultural relativism of Franz Boas and Margaret Mead.¹⁶⁹ In its modern conception, cultural relativism has morphed into the kind of postmodernism advanced by Richard Rorty. Rorty says the modernists tried to create moral order for a "supercommunity" that one was required to identify with. For Rorty, the only possible moral rules are those that overlap with those of members of a community we identify with for social and political purposes. We can rely on historical anecdote, the shared stories that give us status as social beings in a community, and abandon what he calls the "metanarrative sideshow."¹⁷⁰ This view is roughly consistent with the communitarian school of analytic philosophy, though it does not claim to be postmodern.

Even science has not escaped the modernity debate. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* set off a war in the scientific community; he argued that science "often suppresses fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments.... What was once revolutionary itself settles down to become the new orthodoxy."¹⁷¹ The nuclear age of unparalleled power and risk was ushered in by a new dominant scientific notion to replace the enlightenment's Newtonian

¹⁶⁸ Sardar, 7.

¹⁶⁹ Fukuyama, 74.

¹⁷⁰ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 105-154.

¹⁷¹ Thomas Kuhn quoted in Ziauddin Sardar, *Thomas Kuhn and the Science Wars*, Postmodern Encounters (New York: Totem Books, 2000), 27.

physics; Einstein's theory of relativity has shown that processes, not particles, are the basic unit of the universe. Postmodernity is signaled within science by the subjectification of rational discovery, exemplified by the "uncertainty principle" which shows that observation changes the nature of what is observed.¹⁷² "Post-normal science," according to Ziauddin Sardar, "becomes a dialogue among all the stakeholders in a problem, from scientists themselves to social scientists, journalists, activists, and housewives, regardless of their formal qualifications."¹⁷³

Changing Norms

The effects of Postmodernism extend into the broader society primarily as a change in norms. Politics can seek to shape cultural norms but cultural changes are too strong to shift through state action, Fukuyama says; some norms are spontaneously, rather than hierarchically, generated.¹⁷⁴ The increase in the value of diversity is postmodernism's main contribution, according to Fukuyama: "Belief in the relativity of values is today imbibed in every schoolchild and has taken deep roots in American society. . . . Instead of being asked to tolerate diversity, we are today enjoined to celebrate it."

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard describes what he calls "the condition of knowledge in the developed world." Postmodernism requires a "war on totality," he concludes, to be replaced by an "activation of differences" to bear "witness to the

¹⁷² Rushkoff, 20.

¹⁷³ Sardar, 64.

¹⁷⁴ Fukuyama, 153.

unrepresented."¹⁷⁵ The status of knowledge has changed in a hyperreal media world that has confused image and reality, he says, for images have gained preeminence in the "society of the spectacle."¹⁷⁶ According to Lyotard, advanced advertising, the development of the culture industry, and the preeminence of commodity fetishism in modern capitalism have altered our understanding of how societal values are produced.

For Lyotard, the only possible responses to the postmodern society are subversion from within the libidinal economy or "abstract testimony to difference in the postmodern world."¹⁷⁷ No other goal is necessary; these approaches are justified in and of themselves as political acts. We can reflect on the "horizon of multiplicity," according to Lyotard, instead of the "social totality" that we used to rely on.¹⁷⁸ In trying to construct a politics of ideas and opinions with a rule of divergence, Lyotard says all would belong to many minority groups and there would be no prevailing majorities. This style of relativism, according to Agnes Heller, "has succeeded so completely that it is now in a position to be able to entrench itself."¹⁷⁹

Identity Politics

Multiculturalism is the modern incarnation of such a consensus. According to David Hollinger, there has been "a transition from species-centered to ethnos-centered

¹⁷⁵ Lyotard.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Agnes Heller, "Existentialism, Alienation, Postmodernism: Cultural Movements as Vehicles of Change in the Patterns of Everyday Life," in *Postmodern Conditions*, ed. Andrew Milner, Philip Thomson, and Chris Worth (New York: Berg Publishers, 1990), 8.

discourse in the history of the United States since World War II."¹⁸⁰ Hollinger believes that this signifies a "transformation of American intellectual life by the ethnic and religious diversification of its demographic base."¹⁸¹ The dominant current attitude among blacks in American society seems to be "plural nationalism," or the dedication to black-led decision-making processes and new structures along with the refusal to separate from the U.S.¹⁸² Jesse Jackson's campaign coordinator recognized that "nationalism is the most effective mobilizer of black people."¹⁸³

Multiculturalism has created three sets of demands on the American state, according to Hollinger: businesses have more interests abroad, the U.S. has become the "site for transnational affiliations," and nativists have demanded homogeneity of culture.¹⁸⁴ Hollinger proposes "cosmopolitanism" as a replacement for the pluralism of modern society: "Cosmopolitanism promotes multiple identities, emphasizes the dynamic and changing character of many groups and is responsive to the potential for creating new cultural combinations."¹⁸⁵ In either formulation, multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism, it seems clear that America faces permanent diversification.

Individual identity also faces a turning point in postmodernity. In social patterns, according to Lyotard, everyone is at the intersection of multiple memberships and there is

¹⁸⁰ David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 9.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁸² Warren N. Holmes, *The National Black Independent Political Party: Political Insurgency or Ideological Convergence?* *Studies in African American History and Culture*, ed. Graham Russell Hodges (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 74.

¹⁸³ Holmes, 33.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

an absence of unity in one's different positions in what he calls "language games." Lyotard says that one decides what should be and what has been in the current moment, creating ideas. This kind of perspective has had its affects on the broader society as well, according to Virginia Postrel: "People do not crave 'settled identity' but instead tend to seek novelty: we marry outside our ethnic groups; adopt foreign foods and fashions; invent new words, music, and visual art forms; develop new religious practices and beliefs."¹⁸⁶

Rorty says that moral dilemmas are caused by each person's position at the intersection of memberships in communities with different views. The self, according to Michael Walzer, is divided by allegiance to different peoples, religions, and ideas; it matches the "complexity of the social world" and our conceptions of that world are "dependent on internal reflection."¹⁸⁷ Thus, we "internalize our own dissent" not to create a new hegemonic ideology but for "pluralistic freedom."¹⁸⁸

Popular Culture

The postmodernist in art emphasizes plurality, fragmentation, and allegory. Popular culture reflects this postmodern shift. It is now filled with non-linear stories, including *Pulp Fiction* and the multiple endings to *Wayne's World*.¹⁸⁹ The proliferation of irony in popular culture, from *South Park* to *The Simpsons*, presents a way to respond

¹⁸⁶ Postrel, 127.

¹⁸⁷ Walzer.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Rushkoff, 66.

to homogenizing culture through co-option with parody.¹⁹⁰ For Lyotard, the distance between the lexis, the mode of presentation, and the logos, the content of the presentation, is said to perpetuate violence. The priority in the postmodern condition is on the presentation; it becomes the content. In this mode, politics can be achieved through art, literature, and storytelling, at least as much as institutional involvement. Bey believes we should strive for "poetic terrorism" including private subversions of dominance, lewd manifestations of morality, and powerful diversions.¹⁹¹

Comparing the implications of postmodernism to the antiwar movement and the women's movement, Paulina Borsook notes that "[Andy Warhol's] commodification of pop culture presaged much of what art and advertising and cultural sensibility would come to be about through the end of the millennium."¹⁹² According to Rushkoff, the rise in alien imagery and designer drugs is a response to the chaos of postmodern life.¹⁹³ The mosh pit, he says, is an interesting attempt to reflect chaos in a social setting.¹⁹⁴

Rushkoff says that the generation called "X" represented the first expression of discontinuity and lack of overarching theme.¹⁹⁵ The postmodernist movements occurred primarily in youth culture, according to Agnes Heller: "Three consecutive generations have appeared since the Second World War: the existentialist generation, the alienation generation and the postmodern generation.... Each wave continues the pluralization of

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 226.

¹⁹¹ Hakim Bey, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, and Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991).

¹⁹² Borsook, 99.

¹⁹³ Rushkoff, 144.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 155.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 100.

the cultural universe."¹⁹⁶ The transition to a new generation of leaders will thus likely bring postmodern ideas to the forefront of American society, even though they will not be referred to as postmodern.

Emotional understandings of human differences and social issues have come to prominence. The modern era, the Dalai Lama says, is a "state of permanent distress" based on "narrowness of vision."¹⁹⁷ The problems of the modern world are primarily based on what he calls "emotional and psychological sufferings;" our primary political need turns out to be self-expression.¹⁹⁸ Scientific advances show that emotion, not rationality, is the key factor in driving behavior.¹⁹⁹ For postmodernists, then, participation in peace and ecology movements can be appreciated because "the personal is political." The recent World Trade Organization protests in Seattle included dancing and revelry in the streets, various costumes, and radical coalitions; it could be a signal of postmodern politics to come. One policeman at a recent mass action radioed his impression: "This is not a protest. Repeat. This is not a protest. This is some kind of artistic expression."²⁰⁰

The Political Effects of Postmodernity

Postmodernism has been a broad cultural phenomenon but it has not ignored politics. Many academics believe that the state of "incredulity towards metanarratives," as Lyotard described it, has become the most important challenge to politics and social

¹⁹⁶ Heller, 4.

¹⁹⁷ The Dalai Lama, 110.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹⁹⁹ Fukuyama, 182.

theory.²⁰¹ Postmodernism's choice seems to be between the impossibility of rational politics and the democratic affirmation of differences. Though some have accused postmodernism of promoting political inactivity, indifference would not be an appropriate response to the postmodern world; apathy denies ones position in a narrative and fails to accomplish the task of multiplying and refining perspectives."²⁰²

For postmodernists, politics is not a matter of science; one should admit the subjectivity of one's opinions and feelings. The sterile debate of the past has frozen politics, constraining its forms. It is no wonder, Lyotard says, that some political observers see a non-conformist movement as apolitical. Fukuyama sees the movement as profoundly dangerous: "When this relativism extends to the political values on which the regime itself is based, then liberalism begins to undermine itself."²⁰³ The modernity debate is, thus, inherently a political one. Fukuyama's analysis of the new cultural attitudes is beyond the scope of this study. In contrast to socialism and other ideologies that might be debated, postmodernity is a fact of our world. It has altered the rules of the game for science and politics.

Postmodernism's message to policymakers is simply that the problem now facing them is information overload, a change that will increase the importance of interpretation. Within postmodernity, political movements as diverse as alternative medicine and the sexual revolution have flourished.²⁰⁴ The postmodern position comes to full fruition in a

²⁰⁰ Klein, 311.

²⁰¹ Andrew Milner, Philip Thomson, and Chris Worth, *Postmodern Conditions* (New York: Berg Publishers, 1990), x.

²⁰² Lyotard.

²⁰³ Fukuyama, 282.

²⁰⁴ Heller, 8.

challenge to modern modes of being, nation-states, and modernity's central theme, rationally realized progress. For postmodernists, then, arguments for attainment of objectives through the nation-state become less important than political action overall.

Postmodernism changes the focus from institutions to discourse, performance, and direct political acts. Local political actions, such as an anti-roads protest, may be seen as an appropriate approach even if the actions have no chance of achieving policy goals. Postmodernism both creates and argues for a kind of chaotic politics. We do not need to rely on binary distinctions, according to Lyotard, because the undecidability is merely a consequence of different models for events.

Although not generally considered a postmodernist, Toffler contends that the left-right paradigm and liberal-conservative dichotomy do not apply after the demassification of lifestyles and values. There is also, according to Toffler, a shift of power away from formal politics towards Internet-linked movements and new media.²⁰⁵ Toffler calls on institutions to "acknowledge diversity and change institutions accordingly." In an astonishing reflection of the postmodern attitude, Toffler calls for "new methods whose purpose is to reveal differences rather than to paper them over with forces or fake majorities based on exclusionary voting."²⁰⁶ He explains his purpose:

In place of a highly stratified society in which a few major blocs ally themselves to form a majority, we have a configurative society--one in which thousands of minorities, many of them temporary, swirl and form highly novel, transient patterns, seldom coalescing into a consensus on major issues.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Toffler and Toffler, 8.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 95.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 92.

In this context, the concepts of left and right have difficulty sustaining themselves. According to Fukuyama, feminist movements, gay rights movements, and the human potential and self-esteem movements all have succeeded in changing social rules and norms. Both the left and the right have pursued basic trends toward limitless liberation. The right has focused on money while the left has focused on lifestyles.²⁰⁸ Tolerance ranks as the highest social virtue in contemporary society; multiculturalism and libertarian economics have convinced the majority that, as Fukuyama put it, "There is no way of judging whether one set of moral rules is better or worse than any other."²⁰⁹

According to Lyotard, the dominant political notions privilege philosophers as advisors and intellectuals, assuming that theory is needed to advance politics. Postmodernism will not "attribute power to a model that must be respected."²¹⁰ For postmodernists, then, knowledge and power have become "two sides of the same question" because power relations create truth. In the computer age of information distribution, Lyotard says, the "question of knowledge is one of government." Technology has come to affect this truth creation exercise, he says: the "normativity of laws has been replaced by the performativity of procedures."²¹¹ This fits with the observation that governments are now more often composed of minorities of the electorate that may not be able to speak legitimately for the whole nation.

The primary political influence of postmodernism, then, will be to redefine the idea of representation. John Pocock has said that the postmodern world requires finding

²⁰⁸ Fukuyama, 13.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 16.

²¹⁰ Lyotard.

²¹¹ Ibid.

ways to express identity and associate with one another using a voice that has a real role in constructing the world.²¹² Judith Squires has even called representation in the political system "the new justice."²¹³ Even when postmodernists do argue for institutional action, then, it is often to give voices expression and not for policy action. In this view, structures function as a way of working through plural, conflicting natures. The struggle is merely for a platform from which to contest dominant views and express variety.

The trend toward smaller groups and new representatives is a key to the postmodern condition. As Fukuyama says,

People are picking and choosing their values on an individual basis, in ways that link them with smaller communities of like-minded folk. The shift to smaller-radius groups is mirrored politically in the almost universal rise of interest groups at the expense of broad-based political parties.²¹⁴

Toffler argues that we must not stifle this dissent. "We need new approaches designed for a democracy of minorities," he says, specifically calling for cumulative voting, rank order preferences, and "temporary modular parties that service changing configurations of minorities."²¹⁵

Conclusion

The rise of globalization, the information age, and postmodernity not only reveal the potential for deep social upheaval in our time, they signal a general trend toward multiplicity that is destabilizing for the two-party system. The trends are quite significant

²¹² Barber, 274.

²¹³ Lyotard.

²¹⁴ Fukuyama, 89.

²¹⁵ Toffler, *The Third Wave*, 438.

developments individually and each shows the problematic nature of current politics in the context of social change. Together, they present a picture of the almost insurmountable odds for the status quo in the modern era. As Toffler has put it,

It is impossible to be simultaneously blasted by a revolution in technology, a revolution in family life, a revolution in sexual roles, and a worldwide revolution in communications without also facing--sooner or later--a potentially explosive political revolution. All the political parties of the industrial world... are obsolete and about to be transformed.²¹⁶

While acknowledging the difficulty of mass political change, we must also note the inevitability of some kind of political alteration in the face of these trends.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 408.