



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

**Review Article: Unmasking
Americanization: de Grazia's Irresistible
Market Empire Advancing through
Twentieth Century Europe**

Clark, Peter and Todeva, Emanuela

BCNED

2006

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/76769/>

MPRA Paper No. 76769, posted 12 Feb 2017 11:52 UTC

Review Article: Unmasking Americanization: de Grazia's Irresistible Market Empire Advancing through Twentieth Century Europe

PETER CLARK & EMANUELA TODEVA¹

Irresistible Empire. America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe

Victoria de Grazia

Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005, 586 pp., UK£19.95,

ISBN 0-674-01672-6 hbk

Introduction

Victoria de Grazia's book is at the centre of two related debates in innovation studies. First, the array of books, articles and symposia with 'varieties of capitalism' and 'trajectories of capitalism' in their titles reveals the strong position of those who aim to revise the broad claims about globalization and homogenizing. This involves an examination of the geo-historical roles of nations and regions. Second, in the post-Cold War era there is a strong re-assessment of the extent to which Americanization through military, cultural and economic colonization created hegemony.¹ de Grazia attempts to confront both debates with her bold and rich narrative about the irresistible Americanization of European consumption from the early 1920s into the late 1980s.

De Grazia contends that in the twentieth century, America was a Market Empire with five features:

- regarded other nations as having limited sovereignty over their public space;
- exported its institutions like voluntary associations, social science and civic spirit;
- claimed the power of norm making based on its best practice;
- opined a democratic ethos; and
- apparent peacefulness.

These five American tendencies confronted European commercial and socio-political institutions. Faced by resistances, America combined statecraft with consumer sensibility to overturn the European barriers of bourgeois taste. From this encounter there emerges a dialectic of the transatlantic in which American consumption gained a global cultural hegemonic position in Europe and defeated the European way of life. American consumer-oriented capitalism, framed as market driven, is the soft power of manipulating consumer preferences—known as Americanization. American hegemony was built in the Old World. America established legitimacy by challenging Europe's war-torn, neo-colonial civilization with a non-military dominion and ever-expanding managerialism in the twentieth century. The irresistible advance of America's Market Empire in Europe during the twentieth century enabled the construction of American global hegemony.

De Grazia is preoccupied by power, but this is a different narrative to Ferguson's² examination of American military, economic and political empires.³ Her thesis about Americanization and hegemony is therefore timely, important and intriguing. It is also problematic because of a series of counter-narratives claiming that the orthodox Americanization thesis requires tighter specification and detailed revision.⁴ de Grazia faces challenges about her Americanization thesis, about the politics of consumption and about reflexivity in historical analysis.

CLARK, P. and TODEVA, E. (2006). Review Article: Unmasking Americanization: de Grazia's Irresistible Market Empire Advancing through Twentieth Century Europe, *Prometheus*, 24 (1): 101-115. [Victoria de Grazia, 2005, Irresistible Empire. America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe, Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005, 586 pp.]

Although she carefully avoids crossing arguments with many of the established critical narratives, the selection and interpretation of historical evidence is very symptomatic of how she would like to position her ideas—away from the confrontation/ exploitation arguments. There are four sections to our review. First, we review the recent theory on Americanization. Second, we set the scene by examining recent research on the politics and diffusion of international consumption at the moments in the late eighteenth century when the American market was breaking from its European legacy. We intend to show the potential role of consumption in international politics and also how the trajectory and variety of American capitalism was and remains distinctive. Third, we present de Grazia's account of Americanization. This requires and deserves careful, quite lengthy reconstruction. Finally, we consider how far the European consumer market was actually shaped by the colonizing corporations, ideologies and practices from America and whether this is a convincing explanation of American hegemony.

Americanization and International Colonizing

Clarks contends that there are multiple, albeit tightly articulated, American templates of major innovations and that these have evolved during the twentieth century. There is no single unitary American model. Amongst the multiple models there have been a limited number of dominant variants within the typical variety. These American innovations are all context-dependent and may or may not possess local efficiency. Few are likely to possess global efficiency. Moreover, American institutions and those of the receptor nations are contingently path dependent containing areas of discontinuity, plasticity and therefore finite zones of manoeuvre.⁶ Given the variations between the typical variety of American innovations coupled to the absence of clear descriptions and the inability of expert transferring mediators, hybridization is the very likely outcome. Careful scrutiny of American innovations abroad does not suggest either simple transfer or emulation. Rather there are failures and a great deal of hybridization. Appropriation by corporate actors in the host nation is rare. Moreover, European retailing, contra de Grazia, is different from America, especially in the variety. Also, there are numerous American innovations which have not travelled over the globe: American Football, and the American way of death for example. There are an increasing number of internationally successful alternatives that have emerged independently in different parts of the world during the Cold War period of American hegemony. Therefore, what is required is a framework which can act as a boundary object to prize open and clarify the Americanization thesis, and its scholarly interpretation by de Grazia.

The framework provided by Zeitlin, Herrigel and associates is robust.⁷ They examine Americanization and its limits in technology and management in post-war Europe and Japan. Their tight focus, theorizing and empirical studies significantly provide a state of the art synopsis and synthesis. They decompose the notion of Americanization into five dimensions and show that seven combinations of these have been salient. The five key dimensions can be expressed as questions:⁸

- Is Americanization a unitary or heterogeneous model?
- Are the elements in the model coupled tightly or loosely?
- Is the efficiency advantage local or global?
- Is the model universally applicable or context dependent?
- Does the model assume institutional plasticity or path dependency?

There are three positions for each dimension. Zeitlin and Herrigel demonstrate that only seven of the possible combinations are in regular use. The first five arguments all presume a *homogeneous* model of Americanization that refers to the convergence and diffusion hypotheses.

1. First, the naïve convergence model presumes that Americanization is a tightly coupled unitary model with global efficiency which is universally applicable because institutions are essentially plastic. History not only doesn't matter; there is no need to analyse the pre-existing contexts into which Americanization could be inserted. Arguably this tendency in modelling is inscribed into frameworks like the five stage model of Rostow,⁹ but Rogers'¹⁰ framework for the diffusion of innovations makes different assumptions. The naïve convergence model may be criticized but many of its predispositions are well sedimented in policy analysis.

2. Second, the mainstream catch-up and transfer theories also presume that Americanization is a tightly coupled unitary model with global efficiency that faces high institutional plasticity, but that its relevance is context dependent. Transfer is affected by the match between the resource endowment and technological congruence with the receptor nation.

3. Third, national differences are explained by assuming the unitary, tightly coupled and globally efficient American model with context dependency but facing a receptor nation with institutional lock-in and path dependency.
4. Fourth is a transfer process model based on a unitary, tightly coupled model of Americanization but with context dependency and facing mixed combinations of global/local efficiency and institutional plasticity/stickiness.
5. Fifth, the half-Americanization model presumes a unitary, globally efficient Americanization model but with loose coupling of the elements facing institutional lock-in in the receptor nation. The final two arguments presume a *heterogeneous* model of Americanization that is based on selection and evolution.
6. Sixth, presumes that the heterogeneity contains globally efficient, universally applicable techniques which should be stand-alone techniques in receptor nations. The receptor nations possess institutional arrangements varying from plastic to sticky.
7. Seventh, the preferred Zeitlin–Herrigel model presumes a heterogeneous model of Americanization with tightly coupled elements possessing only local efficiency and being context dependent in their applicability. This model rejects the polarity between plasticity and lock-in. Zeitlin–Herrigel treat the American model as a locally effective ensemble which, although tightly coupled in America, can be prized open and subjected to elective affinities with the receptor nation. Thus *hybridization* is a central feature of their analysis.

The five dimensions and seven examples provide a framework for examining de Grazia's account of Americanization. We return to this task in the fourth section. Before that we would like to establish some historical foundations for evaluation of her narrative, mainly by employing the argument put forward by Breen.¹¹

Origins of the Distinctive American Variety and Trajectory of Consumer Capitalism

The question of American identity goes back to the period between 1763 and 1775 when the 13 very diverse New World colonies, with vast cultural and economic differences between the regions, were all able to reach out across vast distances and to mobilize quickly to resist and overthrow British domination. Breen's¹² thesis is that *the colonists' experiences as consumers* in the North Atlantic commercial world gave them the ability to develop new and effective forms of social action that eventuated in revolution. The politics of material culture¹³ and the development of manners in a polite commercial society supply the crucial dynamics. The common consumer market place of the colonies provides the linking to collective politics. Breen focuses on the slow development of the shared trust brought about first by commerce and then by commercial protests like 'tea parties' and boycotts of British goods between 1763 and 1775. The 'new' commercial experience was essential to sustain a revolution over so large a territory and among so diverse a set of colonies.

In examining the role of the masses, in what was a mass movement, Breen has chosen to emphasize the important role of common economic action in the mobilization of ordinary Americans on the eve of Independence. Breen explores how colonists who came from very different ethnic and religious backgrounds managed to overcome their differences and create a common cause capable of galvanizing resistance. In a richly interdisciplinary narrative that weaves insights into a changing material culture with analysis of popular political protests, Breen shows how virtual strangers managed to communicate a sense of trust that effectively united men and women long before they had established a nation of their own. The colonists' shared experience as consumers in a new imperial economy afforded them the natural and cultural resources that they needed to develop a radical strategy of political protest—the consumer boycott.

Never before had a mass political movement organized itself around disruption of the marketplace. Communal rituals of shared sacrifice provided an effective means to educate and energize a dispersed populace. The boycott movement—the signature of American resistance—invited colonists traditionally excluded from formal political processes to voice their opinions about liberty and rights within a revolutionary marketplace, an open, raucous public forum that defined itself around subscription lists passed door-to-door, voluntary associations, street protests, destruction of imported British goods, and incendiary newspaper exchanges. Within these exchanges was born a new form of politics in which ordinary men and women—precisely the people most often overlooked in traditional accounts of revolution—experienced an exhilarating surge of empowerment.

Breen recreates the *'empire of goods'* that transformed everyday life during the mid-eighteenth century when imported manufactured items from industrialized Europe flooded into the homes of colonists—all the way from New Hampshire to Georgia. Breen's insightful study compares colonial Virginia and the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the seventeenth century. Many historians have assumed that all early settlers shared a common set of ideas ('cultural baggage'). Breen's thesis hinges around a notion of change and persistence, not only between the two colonies but among sections within each colony. He does a wonderful job explaining how the two colonies developed so differently from one another and yet eventually came together in the pursuit of an America independent of Britain.

Massachusetts' settlers were predominantly Puritan, community-oriented, and industrious; Virginia's settlers were adventurers seeking overnight wealth—largely nonreligious, fiercely individualistic, and highly competitive. While Massachusetts did not change much in the seventeenth century due to its success from the start, the culture further developed its demand for local control of all aspects of community life; Virginians lived day to day, learning nothing from past failures over its first century of existence. The colony experienced one drastic change after another, including a violent schism between the more genteel settlers in the form of Bacon's Rebellion. After a century of failures, the employment of slave labour finally allowed for the establishment of a community of sorts among planters and a virtual end to class struggle among white men. The values of the past influenced both colonial peoples in the eighteenth century, and commitments to local control and individual liberties helped bring these once-divergent peoples together under the banner of a newly created United States of America in 1776.

Breen has challenged the orthodox interpretation by both Pocock and Bailyn,¹⁴ who concentrated upon cognitions and ideology (e.g. civic humanism, republicanism) with a powerful counter-narrative. Breen contends that cognitions and ideology cannot explain diversity, process and timing. Rather the politics of consumption were vitally significant in the foundation of America more than two centuries ago. Looking back at the cases of Virginia and Massachusetts clearly the focus upon consumption is novel and important, but how can this perspective illuminate the role of America in Europe during the twentieth century? The politics of the liberal market economy that nurture trade and consumption have originated in the old continent and have spread in many countries across the world taking home in the US. Although these ideas and political attitudes can explain much about the development of the American institutional environment and way of life, it is difficult to build an argument about the transformation effect on other countries. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why de Grazia does not attempt to frame an argument about the colonizing impact of American socio-political, economic and cultural power. Instead she offers rich historical narratives on American organizational and cultural innovations and their biographies in Europe.

The Market Empire's Irresistible Advance through Europe

de Grazia presents interlinked narratives of nine profitable American driven organizational innovations and their insertion into European culture. The narrative is focused upon continental Europe, especially Germany, France and Italy. There is very slight reference to the UK. In each of the nine studies the narrative is formed around a single actor (e.g. Filene). The hegemony thesis, which almost omits attention to the role of the American military, rests upon America's repertoire of soft power to control overseas markets. These nine organizational innovations are presented in a particular order. We have placed them in a three-part longitudinal narrative of their arrival, sedimentation, layering and cumulative influence.

The three part narrative commences after the First World War with the service ethic (Rotary Clubs) and the Ford/ILO manifesto for a decent standard of living. These provide the initial layering of Americanization and prepare the consumer-scape. The second stage is set in the 1930s with four innovations: the variety chain store, big-brand goods, corporate advertising, and the Hollywood star system. Third, the post-1945 Cold War period is about the Marshall Plan, supermarkets and mass commodities. The final chapter juxtaposes the slow movement in Italy with the global expansion of McDonalds. de Grazia gives women in the collective a clear place in her narrative both with American identities and in Germany, France and Italy. The Appendix contains a bibliographic essay.

I

Two innovations are deployed to explain how the Imperialist Europeans started their American led learning to construct a fast way to peace after 1920: the service ethic and a decent standard of living.

The first mechanism is the intervention into elite formation through the Rotary Club, as the bearer of 'service ethics'. The chapter on service ethics reveals the emergence and evolution of the Rotary Club in the USA and its subsequent spread throughout the world. de Grazia explains the strategic intent of the originators of the club to build informal networks that could influence political decisions and this narrative confirms that everywhere political elites, at every level, are involved in conspiracies. The invention of the Rotary Club and its global 'enrolment' gives a powerful tool for a settled intervention into the intricate decision making milieu of local affairs, foreign governments and organized political elites.

The vignette contrasts Duluth, USA with Dresden, Germany. The second mechanism for Americanization, a *decent standard of living*, was a Ford inspired initiative to systematically compare the American standard of living in Detroit with the standards of living in certain industrial cities in Europe. Ford claimed that any differences were to be explained by productivity. The research was funded in America and enrolled the Independent Labour Organization (ILO) as the face of objective neutrality. The research investigated the detailed budgets for food and equipment in the home. There were clear differences between the US and the European nations. Ford workers were 'constantly renewing an ample stock of mass-produced home conveniences, from radios, phonographs, and electric irons to electric washing machines and vacuum cleaners' (pp. 89–90). Also, they were amply supplied with consumer credit. de Grazia contends that this was an exposure of startling differences. She depicts America as the optimistic, mass consumer culture in a proletarian consumer consciousness which has developed into populist consumerism with high wages and the filter of the democratic style of life (p. 100). Europe is depicted as the home base for a pessimistic bourgeois civilization with class based cleavages based on zero sum notions of future benefits.

De Grazia asks why there was no consumerism in Europe (pp. 110–18). Her analysis attributes this to the ways in which the socialist movement shaped working class subculture with images of asceticism and the Christian notion of poverty as the good life. Organic intellectuals in the socialist movement emphasized austerity. She observes that socialist consumerism was too politicized to fit into bourgeois regimes of consumption. They were commanding consumers. Hence political boundaries prevented the growth of consumer attitudes that can feed back into consumer goods manufacturing and business growth. Certainly her account does suggest that Europeans defined life's pleasures differently to Americans, but she suggests that this was defensiveness about the European way of life (pp. 103–10). de Grazia's narrative concludes that the American definition of a 'decent standard of living' based on the Ford/ILO survey became dominant and shaped the habitus of Europeans over the next six or so decades. Meanwhile, after 1930, Americans benefited from the extensive market polling of their desires and the notion that they had consumer sovereignty. In the narrative, the notion of standard of living is somehow framed as a socio-cultural phenomenon rather than from a political economics perspective as the marriage of monetarism and classical management.

However, by 1989, whole sections of Europe possessed a much more decent standard of living than comparable Americans. In this chapter, de Grazia observes that French sociologists (e.g. Halbwachs) were claiming that social classes were living segregated lives even when on similar incomes. This anticipates the later work of Bourdieu.¹⁵

II

Twentieth century America was the homeland of a series of organizational changes in the retail and marketing field that had a profound impact on consumerism and commodification of everyday life. The emergence of big retailing units was particularly due to regulation that 'acted like forest husbandry' (p. 145) preparing the American public for newness in the retail trades. The *variety chain store* became the leading edge of a retail guided system of capitalism based on breath-taking collection and analyses of data sets by phase of the year and events (e.g. seasons, birthdays, Thanksgiving Day) and by type of consumer. This element in market democracy produced the identity of the average consumer so central to ordering the context of retailing. Chain stores commodified the yearly moments, the traditions and family celebrations. The variety chain store revolutionized pricing and attracted a socially mixed, homogenized, clientele.

Filene, a very wealthy American merchant claiming to be the voice of world peace, said that American marketing and distribution was both selling internationalism and resolving the over production of capitalism (e.g. 1929). Filene, whose public relations adviser was Bernays, told an audience of French retailers who went to the Sorbonne, Paris in 1935 that the variety chain store was the central mechanism

in guided capitalism. This innovation in America had replaced the departmental store. So, Fordism was being reconfigured, even in 1935, by the application of engineering habitus to the co-ordination of information about distribution to a huge supply of urban shoppers. Filene opined that the future of capitalism was grounded in services, communication and the entertainment sectors.

How did the American variety chain store fare in Europe? Could this retail information driven system work in Europe? The transatlantic confrontation unfolded after 1930 by which time firms like Woolworths had entered the European context.

In Europe there was Imperial consumption anchored in the sharp, dualistic stratification of the bourgeois society into bourgeois departmental stores and corner shops for the non-bourgeois. The departmental store was the societal pinnacle which gave shape and definition to bourgeois life, emphasizing finely graded social distinctions within the bourgeoisie and their collective differentiation from the rest. The stores displayed the physical dominance inscribed within its architecture and flow systems as well as in the products on display. This reinforced the special place of women and their skills at having learnt how to shop. The staff were disciplined to recognize fine gradations between their customers.

In the interwar years the European bourgeoisie and the store owners provided opposition to the new way of the American variety chain store. This pillar of powercognition would resist the challenge of the American regime of consumption until the 1950s through local and national legislation designed to constrain the American entrants. The Americanization of the European retail and distribution system took a different path. Instead of laying the foundations of mass consumption, it re-asserted the values of style, class distinctiveness and income segregation. Even so, the new organizational form of the variety chain store was adopted and implemented in Europe to maintain the political regime of individual preferences.

The closer we come to recent times, the more we look at the American inventions as originating from a socio-political system driven by the notion of competitiveness, success, growth, free enterprise and market control. These social and political values have an imprint both on consumer preferences and business attitudes. Consumer free choice is both assumed and undermined by the invention of marketing management described by de Grazia as '*big-brand goods*'. Consumers know that their choices have been framed by the big brands and they choose to comply or not to—by purchasing the same brand. This market convention serves multiple objectives related to social status and life style.

The growth of American multinational corporations and the spread of the poster culture are the fifth radical change on the landscape of the global system, and these are discussed by de Grazia as American inventions called the growth of '*corporate advertising*'. Although her narrative remains intrinsically cultural, the concepts of the multinational corporation, corporate identity, and corporate culture have become a dominant presence both in management theory and in business practice world wide. Here we can see the American domination in a more transparent way and in its full power. The intricate relationship between corporate image, product image and market performance is all bundled under the manipulative power of advertising, promotion and now public relations. It is not accidental that many European corporations were and are using American marketing firms for their world-wide coverage, or that the discipline of marketing is entirely dominated by American conceptual frameworks and tools.

The rise of the American global film industry centres on how the *star system* enabled the extension from egalitarian culture to celebrity culture. The star system strengthens the concept of the 'American dream' in which anybody can become famous and rich, and as such justifies in a self-enforcing loop the values of consumerism, salesmanship and calculated empathy. Hollywood has played a dominant role affecting the movie industry in many parts of the world. de Grazia contends that celebrity culture has transformed the social values in Europe, especially the hi-life magazines, but her chapter reveals fragmentation of over-ground and underground cultural pockets demonstrating resilient resistance.

III

The third wave of American innovations is located in the post-World War II efforts of the European countries to rebuild their economies and social consent. By 1945, the Market Empire had defeated the European merchant civilization and fascism, and was now opposing Soviet collectivism and communist parties. The Cold War was unfolding. Three major organizational innovations propelled Americanization.

First, the narrative commences with the Marshall Plan whereby the politics of productivity successfully created the European *consumer citizen*. The Marshall Plan was 'not enlightened benefaction but the bearer of new ways of thinking about producing affluence ... the staging for a more austere scenario ... to suppress the cornucopias of populist tradition ... and inculcate the discipline to satisfy wants in an orderly sequence' (p. 338). The Plan slotted into the shift from Warfare to Welfare as epitomized by the Beveridge Report (1942) in Britain and the Italian constitution of 1948. The Plan focused upon the 'conditions that were demanded to disburse the aid' (p. 345) because western Europeans had to be persuaded to accept the politics of productivity by removing restrictive pricing practices and promoting transatlantic trade. The Plan emphasized the learning of 'best practice' from America about information guided systems and the assembly line. One European response was to produce documentary movies applying 'sober realism' to the issue of productivity (p. 348).

America faced the dilemma of masking its military occupation of Germany and did so by embedding its hegemony on 'the pumped cushion of affluence' (p. 351) using the bombardment of commodities as the real combat. From the start of the Korean War in 1950 the American procurement of military materiel and the stationing of American forces primed recovery, especially in Germany (cf. Japan). The aim of America was to use Western Europe as 'the showcase for consumer democracy' (p. 355). The Europeans had to open up their markets and renounce their colonies and the colonial way of life.

In Europe this consumer orientation began to yield new visualizations of consumers based on social science market research from American polling agencies conducting surveys in Europe. Their new images of consumers progressively blurred and obliterated the old categories of stratification (p. 363). Marketing spoke as if a mass market already existed in the 1950s. What emerged was a service oriented society constructed from the hybrid blending of American sociability with European social solidarity. de Grazia concludes that the Marshall Plan was a key platform in transforming Europe in the direction of the Market Empire. *The American shock troops were the ensemble of consultants from marketing, public relations, and market research*. It was they who played a central role in America's advance through Europe. The consumer-citizen hence emerged both out of the design and development of mass markets through macroeconomic reforms and productivity improvement, and from the active management of public opinions and market preferences.

Significantly de Grazia comments that during the 1960s Bourdieu¹⁶ began to investigate how consumption impacted class distinctions by mapping social distinctions and cultural capital in France. Pinto,¹⁷ a protégé of Bourdieu, commented that the figure of the consumer had to be conceived in relation to an ensemble of changes that are not purely of an economic order, even if, indisputably, its development is 'coterminous with the growth in quantity and diversity of consumer goods as well as access by new social groups to goods and services hitherto reserved to a narrower section of the public'.

Second, after the arrival of the shock troops in Europe came the diffusion of American invented *supermarkets*. This vignette is intended to illustrate how big-time merchandiser supermarkets leapfrogged over local groceries. The antecedents are the experience of American women who treated self-service as a time saving convenience, who were indifferent to the cutting out of service and to the requirement for them to play a key role collecting the goods and car-hopping them home. The organizational revolution in food distribution and the redesign of the food retail market with enhanced management of the value chain in food manufacturing and distribution in response to the increased urbanization after the Second World War represented truly radical innovation—called by de Grazia 'supermarketing'. It is argued that these have set global standards, yet European food retailers have become some of the largest chains world wide.

The American experience shows how supermarkets are nested into an array of related innovations: frozen food units, trolleys, display gondolas, checkout stands, cash registers and print outs. Supermarkets require cheap spaces and huge capital investments to cover the long supply chain and advertising. They also require suppliers who produce standardized goods, especially for provisions and even for fruit and vegetables. The aim is a uniform appearance. America has a long experience with the template of standardization and control of linked supply chains.¹⁸ The customer must be capable of selecting goods, calculating expenditures, transporting the goods and knowing how to prepare them.

Her narrative fondly focuses upon Italy, a nation known for its many small retail outlets. She recounts the experiences of a typical American entrepreneur in Milan circa 1957–59. Italy provided a deep contrast to

America in these features and so there were many spectacular failures (p. 387) by both the incomers and by entrepreneurial Italians. They encountered the 'pullulating world of small merchandisers' (p. 392) and political cronyism in urban government. Consequently it was difficult to attain high volumes and the customers' packages were too large for daily shopping. de Grazia maintains that her chosen exemplar 'represented the power condensed in American consumer culture both to accelerate and shape material standards in Europe' (p. 398). However, the problem for supermarkets in Europe, especially Italy, was to make their procedures part and parcel of the normal calculus of everyday life. In Italy in 1971 there was less than one-third as many as in France or West Germany. In Italy the counter forces to the supermarket were orchestrated through commerce at the local level and with a national concern about employment. The Italian housewife was very different to her American counterpart. Even so, de Grazia maintains that the template of the American supermarket 'set the pace in innovation' (p. 414).

The third revolutionary change towards global consumer democracy and American domination over global consumer culture was the re-design of the household economy and daily life with the commercialization of electrical appliances, cleaning detergents, household art, house-ware and various home equipment all bridging the gap between rural and urban family life and changing the concept of necessity and needs for all citizens—called 'a model *Mrs Consumer*'. The role of the European house is revealed (intentionally?) to remain significantly different from that in the US. There were not many Europeans that would have a television in every room of their house, and not many that have large accommodation with plenty of spare room for electrical appliances. Europeans were constrained by space and time in the face of the American way of life.

How can de Grazia close out the Market Empire thesis? There is a double twist in the tail. First, America's control culture has been a revolutionary force acting as a powerful solvent of old social ties and situating advertising as a link between production and consumption in ways not conceived by, for example, Gramsci.

However, by the 1980s the US was no longer able to monopolize and its salesmanship had been exposed as a substitute for state craft (p. 476). The Market Empire began to lose impetus to a collection of other regions. Consequently American corporations began to vacillate about whether they should link their products to America and began to present themselves (e.g. on websites) as multi-domestic. Second, de Grazia inventively speculates on what a late twenty-first century archaeology would reveal about the twentieth century. She suggests that the period 1900–15 would reveal rich artefacts. The next three decades would reveal shards of conflict. The 1960s would reveal that north central Europe was overrun by American influences. After 1985 there would be signs of a higher standard of living in Europe than in America (p. 462). Also signs of a new transatlantic dialectic with pieces from Ikea, Benetton, BMW, and many others. Italy would reveal the hedonism of a lay culture in rebellion against the Church and socialist fantasies.

The next section scrutinizes the de Grazia thesis.

Americanization, Hegemony and the European Consumer

This section raises two large issues. First there are problems with De Grazia's longitudinal model of innovation and transatlantic-international diffusion. The second issue is whether the European consumer was Americanized and whether it was the European consumer who provided the platform for American hegemony during the Cold War.

I

The implicit longitudinal model of organizational innovation and innovation-diffusion is problematic. First, the useful analysis of the Americas domestic context focuses upon the inventions and innovations associated with the retailer, civic humanism, marketing professionals and Hollywood. It is implied that these are pervasive, homogeneous and possess global efficiencies. However, the vignettes of their insertion into Europe reveal considerable resistance, slight emulation and some hybrid appropriation. Efficiencies seem to be contextually specific. More seriously, the account omits the pre-1920s European experience of the American invasion by Singer (1880s), Ford (1912) and Taylorism (1910c) as well as by manufacturers of equipment ranging from boot and shoe making to office equipment.¹⁹ We know that many European capitalists had produced a sectoral recipe knowledge which distinguished the structure and tastes of Europe from those in America. For example, in 1901, the UK cigarette giant, Imperial Group,

entered the American market to counter an American invasion. One of several outcomes was the founding of British American Tobacco. Equally, in the food, drink and confectionary sectors the concept of the flow line was appropriated into the distinctive consumer context of the UK. Later, the entry of chain variety stores from America was anticipated, specifically in the UK by Marks & Spencer and by Boots, each of which sent teams to study the American invention at an early stage. Marks & Spencer sent emissaries in 1925 and returned to the UK to dramatically alter their mode of operation, strategic direction and their use of suppliers.²⁰ These anticipations had significant consequences for American corporate entrants. de Grazia also obscures the varieties and trajectories of capitalism in Europe or world wide. Her account is therefore problematic in terms of the Zeitlin–Herrigel framework.

Second, the longitudinal perspective contains problems with temporality. Historians freely deploy such units as the decade and century, but this calendrical time does not conform to the temporalities of processes. de Grazia's book is more about the 1920s–80s with a sliver of attention to the 1990s. As readers we are left in the presentist position looking backwards. de Grazia needs to distinguish the Cold War period of the 1950s–80s from the rest of the twentieth century. It was in those decades that American influences—military, political and cultural—were at their peak and faced the slightest contestation as a discourse.

Third, there are problems of antecedents, periodization and stochastic evolution. de Grazia oversimplifies the antecedents, path dependencies and their plasticity. How is it that the politics of consumption associated with the founding of America discussed earlier become transformed into the Market Empire of the twentieth century? There is a vast literature on that transformation, some of which is cited in the bibliographic Appendix, but not woven into sketching the distinctiveness of the American trajectory of capitalism. The book fails to unpack the construction of hegemony within America after the civil war.²¹

Fourth, it would have been useful to have a clearer conceptualization of the interrelationship between innovations and the agency of particular actors. For example, which was more influential pre-1940: Hollywood or the Rotary Club? De Grazia's other studies suggest that American films and entertainment made an early impact which was later followed through by American TV and literature. The focus upon a single exemplary American actor and their agency is done unevenly and sometimes lacks conviction.

Fifth, the account of an information guided American system omits the huge impacts of American equipment suppliers from the early 1900s onward.²² These firms' notion of human relations had a sharp impact in Europe (e.g. National Cash Register).

Sixth, American failures to diffuse are not mentioned as a category *at all*. For example, Woolworths became European owned; Service Corporation International, the huge American burial firm, came in 1994 and departed in 2001; American Football appeared on European TV but now has largely disappeared; basketball is very minor. Where are the American owned variety chain stores and supermarkets? In summary, our discussion has sought to focus attention on the problems of the longitudinal model of the invention of organizational innovations and their transatlantic diffusion.

II

In what ways and to what extent was the European consumer Americanized, and if so, did this explain American hegemony during the Cold War? First, the presence of the American Market Empire was consequential for the European consumer but it was as much underwhelming as overwhelming. There is a clear difference between the politics of consumption which united colonial Americans against the British²³ and the politics of European consumption with their American cousins. Throughout much of the twentieth century European firms in all sectors gained relatively slight and often precarious footholds in the American consumer market.

That position changed somewhat in the 1980s, especially for German manufacturing. However, by comparison the American presence in Europe is more striking, especially in the film and media industries though not in global sports.²⁴ de Grazia's references to Bourdieu's²⁵ analysis of social distinction in Europe are not trivial and she might, as others have begun to do, reflexively apply the framework of distinctions to the American consumer. Moreover, because her model of innovation is insufficiently refined²⁶ the evidence of non-emulation by Europeans is overlooked. de Grazia rightly highlights the extent to which twentieth century consumerism in America became the most evident global discourse

and collection of practices. American retailing provides many examples of extraordinary innovativeness, not least in the capacity of McDonalds to stretch from San Bernadino, California around the world. Yet what is striking for someone living in Italy are the many alternatives to McDonalds and the extent to which visits to America reveal pizzas and coffee everywhere, albeit very different in taste, ingredients and texture. de Grazia leads us to believe that European retailing is very similar indeed to American retailing, but there are important differences. Also, European advertising sharply differs from its comparable American equivalents. It is in this sense that de Grazia's vignettes actually do reveal both the influence of American consumer discourse and practices whilst continually revealing differences.

It would be salutary for a scholar in European innovation to imaginatively construct a counterfactual of what European consumption would have become in the twentieth century with much less intervention from the Market Empire. Second, America did establish *sufficient* cultural hegemony in the Old World during the Cold War, but the overall hegemony was grounded in the intention and design of American military strategies and the commercial policies of State Departments. This problem set meant that Europe occupied a specific space and place in American imperialism. Europe for many Americans was their economic sphere. de Grazia's narratives are extremely rich in historical evidence that supports the view of concerted efforts by the American administration towards a global domination. There is a plausible contention that the American discourse was progressively layered and sedimented alongside and sometimes into the discourse of European knowledge regimes from the 1930s onward, especially in the Cold War. The new American hegemony is described as the world's first regime of mass consumption that spreads through the promotion of democracies of consumption and through a monopoly over trade and resources. The expansion of American Imperialism overrides local value systems and economic traditions by spreading global standards based on American values and principles. de Grazia used different labels for this form of domination—'empire of invitation', 'empire by consent', and 'empire by fun'. Yet, there is a lack of reflexivity about the issue of hegemonies. The influence of the American military as a hegemon maker is underdeveloped and there is an inadequate use of Arrighi.²⁷ Therefore de Grazia's opening definition of the Market Empire requires some amplification and this is shown in italics. The American Market Empire:

- regards other nations as having limited sovereignty over their public space *under the principle of free trade*;
- exports its institutions like voluntary associations, social science and civic spirit— *as instruments of social engineering abroad*;
- claims the power of norm making based on its best practice *and the coordination of pragmatic implementation of global standards*;
- opines a democratic ethos and *commodification of life through personalizing commodities and sociability of standards of consumption*; and
- provides apparent peacefulness *through consumer culture and commercialization of both the private and the public sphere*.

Summary

The *Irresistible Empire* is a bold, rich collection of vignettes arranged to illuminate a thesis about transatlantic innovation in the twentieth century. That is, that America contained the leading edge of innovation and invention in knowledge about distribution and consumption. de Grazia's seductively composed book lights the sky over American Imperialism. We see illuminated the stars of numerous cultural inventions that have facilitated the spread of American values to the rest of the world. de Grazia discusses socio-economic and political changes that had a revolutionary impact on the global system during the twentieth century. All the changes are associated with the American socio-economic system—either as inventions or as part of the global political strategies of the American administration. That said, more attention should be given to the problems, especially the interface with the Chandlerian thesis and recent narratives on the European corporation.²⁸ Also, it is essential to be more reflexive about America, especially its geo-political position and the remarkable specifics of American capacities to construct, commodify and utilize knowledge about strong and soft control.²⁹

Finally, it is important to distinguish between an invention, its cultural and institutional roots in American society and economy, and its possible transformation abroad. Her narratives on the process of transformation abroad are not always evidence of successful diffusion and dissemination because the structures of the European economies and cultures remain substantially different from those in America.

Unravelling de Grazia's contention makes her book even more interesting to read in the context of evolutionary paths for development towards a market democracy.

Notes and References

1. G. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century. Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times*, Verso, London, 1994; N. Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*, Penguin, Allen & Lane, London, 2004.
2. *Ibid.*
3. P. A. Clark, 'America's market polity of knowledge and Ferguson's stumbling colossus', *Prometheus*, 23, 1, 2005, pp. 83–99.
4. J. Zeitlin and G. Herrigel (eds), *Americanization and its Limits. Reworking US Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000; P. A. Clark, *Organizational Innovations*, Sage, London, 2003.
5. P. A. Clark, *Anglo-American Innovation*, De Gruyter, New York, 1987; P. A. Clark, *Organizations in Action. Competition Between Contexts*, Routledge, London, 2000; Clark, 2003, *op. cit.*
6. Clark, 2000, *op. cit.*
7. Zeitlin & Herrigel, *op. cit.*
8. *Ibid.*, Table 1-1.
9. W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1960.
10. E. M. Rogers, *The Diffusion of Innovations*, Free Press, New York, 1962.
11. T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution. How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
14. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975; B. Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew. The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 2003.
15. P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1984.
16. Bourdieu, *op. cit.*
17. L. Pinto, 'Le consommateur: agent économique et acteur politique', *La Revue Française de Sociologie*, 31, 1990, pp. 179–98.
18. See J. R. Beniger, *The Control Revolution. Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1986.
19. Clark, 1987, *op. cit.*
20. P. A. Clark and K. P. Starkey, *Organization Transitions and Innovation—Design*, Frances Pinter, London, 1988, Chapter 6.
21. Cf. Clark, 2005, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–90.
22. Cf. Beniger, *op. cit.*, pp. 426–36.
23. Breen, *op. cit.*
24. Clark, 2003, *op. cit.*
25. Bourdieu, *op. cit.*
26. See Zeitlin and Herrigel, *op. cit.*
27. Arrighi, *op. cit.*
28. R. Whittington and M. Meyer, *The European Corporation: Strategy, Structure and Social Science*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.
29. Cf. Beniger, *op. cit.*