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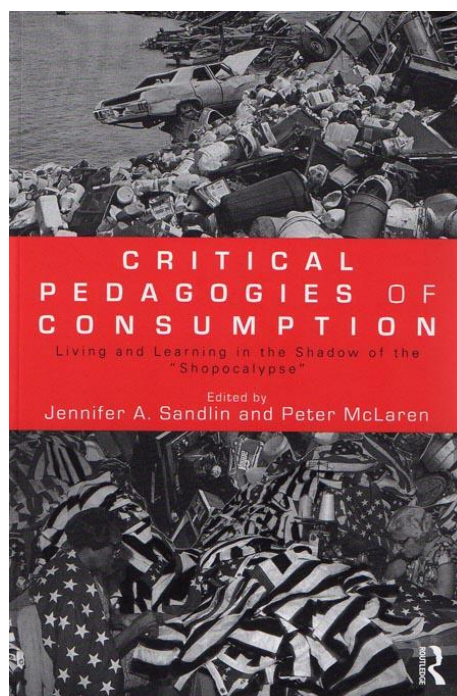
Sandlin, Jennifer A. & McLaren, Peter. (Eds.) (2010) *Critical Pedagogies of Consumption: Living and Learning in the Shadow of the "Shopocalypse."* NY: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis.

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Reviewed by Samuel Day Fassbinder

This is an edited anthology with a number of different critical perspectives (Sandlin and McLaren have distinctly different ones!) upon the idea of “pedagogy” as applied to various “consumption” practices. Some terminological explanation needs to be said about all this. “Pedagogy” indicates a reflection upon teaching and learning, a theory as well as a practice; “critical,” here, seems to indicate a criticism of the social world. But the key term for this anthology is “consumption,” as a basic element of human behavior in modern society.

In reading such an anthology, then, one does well to carve out its subject according to different disciplinary perspectives, observing different ways in which acts of consumption can be observed as



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phenomena. In the literature on consumption (considered generally), I see consumption observed in five different ways:

- 1) Consumption as a phenomenon of political economy. The role of consumption in the cycle of commodities is defined in Chapter 4 of volume 1 of Marx's *Capital*: Consumption (for the working class) is prefaced by the movement M-C, the purchase of commodities with money. Marx thus explains that consumption is the "final goal" of the circulation of commodities, the end result of the movement C-M-C which describes the working class's sale of its labor to purchase commodities. For the capitalist, however, commodities are merely a means to money: "The capitalist knows that all commodities, however tattered they may look, or however badly they may smell, are in faith and in truth money" (p. 256). Thus for the capitalist consumption is merely something to keep her "in the game" of commodities-trade.

For Marx the relationship to commodities was the basis of the fundamental relationship of capitalist class society. The working class is snared in commodity culture, in the production and consumption of commodities and in the circuit C-M-C, exchanging a commodity (labor-power) for money to buy more commodities. The owning class commands the circuit M-C-M, leveraging a set of commodities (which together comprise capital) in order to make more money from money. This, as Marx titles his Chapter 4 of Volume 1 of *Capital*, is the "general formula for capital."

The Marxists in this edited volume, Peter McLaren (Chapter 1) and Ramin Farahmandpur (Chapter 5) take off from this (largely unspoken) background understanding to pursue what McLaren calls "socialist education," education "in the service of altering historical modes of production" (p. 14), in bringing fundamental change to capitalist class society.

- 2) Consumption is a psychological phenomenon. One can see this analyzed globally in texts such as Max

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Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which depicts a universe in which the old pre-modern religious and cultural appeals to human desire have been appropriated by the entertainment business (and amplified through technology) for the purpose of captivating the public through movies, news, sports, and other forms of spectacle. "The culture industry as a whole has molded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product," Horkheimer and Adorno argued on p. 127. Robin Usher's "Consuming Learning," Chapter 3 of this anthology, takes a psychological approach as such. The essays in the last portion of this essay, Chapters 17 through 22, also partake in consumption as a psychological phenomenon, as they (for the most part) describe aesthetic attempts to break the psychological spell of consumer life.

- 3) Consumption as a communicative phenomenon. The ur-text for this way of looking at consumption was Leiss, Kline, and Jhally's (1986) *Social Communication In Advertising*, in which advertising is depicted as a force for the presentation of "lifestyles" to the consuming public. This understanding of consumption grants more power to individual subjectivity than does the psychology of consumption: for the authors of the most recent (2006) and greatly expanded edition of *Social Communication in Advertising*, advertising becomes the material for the consumer's active critique of "lifestyles" as they are presented to her. This is also the domain of "postmodern" understandings of consumption, as mentioned in Sandlin and McLaren's introduction. Ideological concepts of consumption, as one can see in Joel Spring's essay "Schooling For Consumption" (chapter 6) and of the consumer, Fischman and Haas's "Framing Higher Education (chapter 9) fall into this communicative category. Spring's essay offers readers a short history of consumer ideologies as presented in schools: Fischman and Haas critique newspaper coverage of news related to colleges.
- 4) Consumption as a fundamental necessity. This is usually phrased in terms of "standard of living." As David

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Greenwood put it on p. 195 (in Chapter 16) of the anthology:

For many, myself included, consumption is the backbone of the desire to attain and hold onto a good life and meet one's and one's family's needs for safety, security, and a wide assortment of privileges and luxuries.

Thus (if we were to return to the "political economy" perspective for a bit) consumption is the consolation prize for participation in the workforce, as well as being that which capital must promote if it is to continue its accumulation.

- 5) Consumption as an ecological phenomenon. Richard Kahn's essay (Chapter 4) of the anthology reflects upon this dimension, and upon the ideological mirage our society has constructed so as to keep us from seeing this dimension of consumerism. In discussions of the ecological crisis it is, on the other hand, sometimes suggested that we are "consuming" the world to death. This is described either in terms of the proliferation of garbage, pollution, and other waste products, or in terms of the disappearance of natural resources, and has been quantified in terms of the "ecological footprint" of Wackernagel and Rees's short book *Our Ecological Footprint*.

Much of what the essays in *Critical Pedagogies of Consumption* do is to illuminate these various perspectives upon consumption. In reading these perspectives, I think it's important to regard edited anthologies, critically, as being more like encyclopedias or phone books than volumes written by individual or group authors. The analogy extends as follows: an encyclopedia or phone book is useful to a great variety of different audiences. But one would probably not read such a book all the way through. An edited volume, especially one with a great number of different authors as this one has, might be said to function in much the same way – different audiences will be interested in these different perspectives upon consumerism in different ways.

That having been said, I will now try to grant the reader of this review a critical table of contents, suggesting where different audiences for this book might read the essays of their choosing.

The first set of essays in this anthology focuses on critiques of the capitalist system. Sandlin and McLaren's introduction suggests ways in which we learn about consumption, both in and out of institutional schooling. Hoechsmann's essay "Rootlessness, Reenchantment, and Educating Desire: A Brief History of the Pedagogy of Consumption" is a history of consumption practices themselves. Robin Usher's "Consuming Learning" is about the psychological aspect of consumption as it intersects with social identity formation. Richard Kahn's "Producing Crisis: Green Consumerism as an Ecopedagogical Issue" details the extent to which green consumerism interrupts the development of critical understandings of how industrial life affects ecosystems. Ramin Farahmandpur's "Teaching Against Consumer Capitalism in the Age of Commercialization and Corporatization of Public Education" takes a Marxist approach, suggesting in the context of a discussion of education and consumerism that the socialist ideal is far from being dead because capitalism is a predatory system.

The second set of essays in this anthology is titled "Schooling the Consumer Citizen." It starts off with Joel Spring's "Schooling the Consumer Citizen," a history of schooling for consumption. Alex Molnar et al.'s "Schools Inundated in a Marketing-Saturated World" details through examples how schools typically intersect with corporate marketing campaigns aimed at children. Matthew Mars' "Exploring the Privatized Dimension of Entrepreneurship Education and Its Link to the Emergence of the College Student Entrepreneur" is an essay about the privatization of the college experience in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century America. Gustavo Fischman and Eric Hass's "Framing Higher Education: Nostalgia, Entrepreneurship, Consumerism, and Redemption" suggests three (ideological) models by which college is typically understood: Academic Nostalgia, Educational Entrepreneurship, and Redemptive Consumerism. Sue L. T. McGregor's "Politicizing

Consumer Education” takes a look at actual programs of consumer education. I was surprised to read that such things existed.

The third set of essays in this anthology is subtitled “Consumption, Popular Culture, Everyday Life, and the Education of Desire.” These essays shade between discussions of the communicative and the psychological dimensions of consumerism (as I’ve mentioned above). Joe Kincheloe’s essay “Consuming the All-American Corporate Burger” discusses McDonalds as a colonial institution, Shirley Steinberg’s “Barbie: The Bitch Can Buy Anything” is about the omnivorous consumerism associated with the commercial culture of Barbie dolls, Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen’s critical feminist essay “Consuming Skin” is about a commercial culture which stages the ideal of women with smooth, feminine skin. Anne Marie Todds “Happy Cows and Passionate Beefscapes” scrutinizes meat and dairy advertisements for images of naturalness. Lydia Martens’ “Creating the Ethical Parent-Consumer Subject” looks at new parents as pedagogical subjects in consumer culture and Greenwood’s essay on “Chocolate, Place and a Pedagogy of Consumer Privilege” is a complex meditation upon the miseducation accumulated in the typical American consumer learning process.

Part four, the last part of this edited volume, is a sort of “solutions” portion, titled: “Unlearning Consumerism through Critical Pedagogies of Consumption.” There is a good deal of artistic presentation in the educational practices suggested here, combining art and political education. Clover and Shaw’s “Re-Imagining Consumption” is about arts-based environmental adult education. Brookfield’s “Using Cultural Production to Undermine Consumption” is about the political and artistic practices of Paul Robeson, the famous Shakespearean actor. Valerie Scatamburlo-D’Annibale’s “Beyond The Culture Jam” is a critical look at “culture jamming,” the sort of parodic and informative postmodern critique that one sees in magazines such as Adbusters. David Darts and Kevin Tavin’s “Global Capitalism and Strategic Visual Pedagogy” is a discussion of artistic critiques of capitalism.

This anthology rounds out with a somewhat summary essay by Henry Giroux critiquing Disney culture (“Turning America Into A Toy Store”), and a discussion by Nicholas Lampert (“United We Consume?”) about artists who create art out of garbage.

There are many insights in this book, and their importance is likely to be understood differently by each reader. Let me detail just three which particularly appealed to me. Richard Kahn’s piece on “Producing Crisis: Green Consumerism” suggests (p. 53) that “green consumerism often occludes the ‘treadmill of production’ of which it is a part.” In this process, as technology develops and as business compete for market share, more and more technology is applied to productive processes in order to save on labor costs. Thus the system as a whole remains inimical to environmentalists’ goals, and “green consumerism” will not move anyone forward on the learning curve in that regard.

Gustavo Fischman and Eric Haas’s “Framing Higher Education” suggests that there is a fundamental contradiction in the commodification of the university which “undermine(s) its original intent of expanded access (to universities) by yoking social-justice ends to market-based means” (115). The authors’ example is compelling: universities seek “diversity” in their student bodies not to overcome injustice, but rather to enrich the university experience, and thus it is regarded as “fair to treat blacks and bassoonists as equivalent based on how an institution wants to package the diversity element of its educational rigor” (p. 116).

Darlene E. Clover and Katie Shaw’s “Re-Imagining Consumption” details an environmental education project in Toronto, Canada, in which an artistic publicity campaign instigated a political conflict with an elected official who were sending “recyclables” to trash dumps rather than recycling them. The elected official, Clover and Shaw tell us, was “voted out of office shortly thereafter.” (p. 209).

Overall, then, this is a good book to have if you are especially interested in the issues it discusses. Its essays offer fresh perspectives upon the multifaceted world of consumerism as it has developed from capitalist history.

About the Reviewer

Samuel Day Fassbinder, PhD, received his BA in Literature from UCSC, his MA in English from Sonoma State University, and his PhD from The Ohio State University. Fassbinder has taught Instructional Communication at Cal State LA and developed courses in argumentation and critical cultural communication. He currently works with the Pomona College Natural Farm and teaches English in online courses through DeVry University.



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