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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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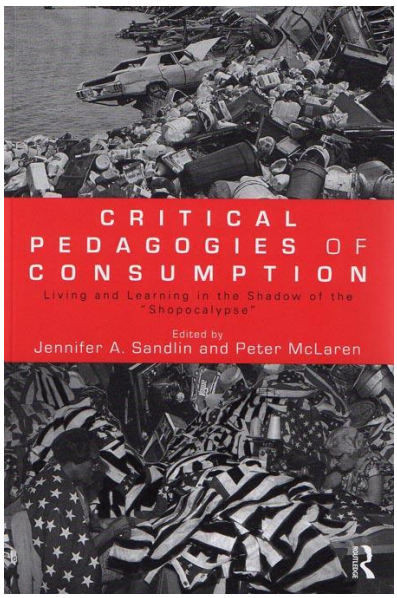

Before delving into my review let me situate myself, which will clarify my review on this book. First of all, I am a democratic socialist rooted in the critical theory tradition, and as such I consider myself a critical pedagogue. I tend to associate myself with the part of critical theory that believes normative analysis should center any critical investigation (Fraser, 1997; Habermas, 1987; Honneth, 2007). In this regard, my review of this book reflects my opinion about the current state of critical pedagogy and its relationship, or lack thereof, to normative theory. Much, but not all, of the work within critical pedagogy is only focused on descriptive analysis, or critique; thus, there tends to be an assumption that critique alone leads to human emancipation.

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Although critical theorists have moved beyond the old Marxist notions of 'false consciousness' and have added interesting theoretical discussions to issues of culture and power, overall there has been a lack of normative rigor within critical pedagogy. The problem with this theoretical move is that no critical theory can be considered "critical" without a sound normative foundation; and conversely no normative theory can be sound without relying upon descriptive analysis. This means that *all* critical theories must rest upon two pillars: a sound *descriptive analysis* and a robust and justifiable *perspective analysis*. This book tends to rely almost completely on descriptive analysis, which means it too lacks a sound normative foundation with which to critique consumerism.

Jennifer Sandlin

Because I have strong opinions on the state of critical pedagogy beyond this book, to provide a fair review I will separate my review into two parts: Part One will review the book based upon the merits of the book alone; and Part Two will review the book in relationship to normative theory.

Part I

Beginning with the merits of the book alone, there are a cluster of vital questions any critical pedagogy of consumerism should address, including:

- What is the relationship between pedagogy and consumerism?'
- Who is being educated by consumer practices, and for what reasons?
- What are the sites through which consumerist practices are being reproduced?
- What is being reproduced?
- Why should we be concerned about consumer capitalism?

Peter McLaren

Overall, the book highlights some of these issues but falls short in clearly and theoretically addressing many of these questions, especially the last one. The book, however, does have some interesting chapters. Jane Kenway's and Elizabeth

Bullen's (2009) piece Consuming Skin is a wonderful essay on the commodification of women's skin. The authors explain how capitalism has co-opted the struggles of the women's movement to create what they call a "post-feminist consumer culture," in which "'postfeminists' enjoy the fruits of feminism but reject feminist solidarity" (p. 158). In this "postfeminist" culture women are positioned in contradictory roles in relationship to their skin. On one end consumer society has created perfect skin as the norm and imperfect skin as the "abject"—the thing that distributes "identity, system, order." On the other end "the regime of skin is a free lifestyle choice for enlightened women and regarded as an opportunity for creating a new, better, more attractive self who will have more opportunities for success" (p. 166).

Lydia Marten's essay Creating the Ethical Parent-Consumer Subject is a very interesting ethnographic study in which she looks at *The Baby Show*, a U.K. consumer show targeted specifically at new parents, to illustrate how the market acts as a pedagogical device to create ethical consumer parents. Marten's study explains how markets are mixing commercial culture (advisements, branding, etc.) with non-commercial culture (parenting, ethical responsibilities, etc.) which are "changing the dispositions of consumers" (p. 190) by tying good parenting to being a good consumer.
Gustavo E. Fischman's and Eric Haas's essay Framing Higher Education is an insightful discussion in which they use op-ed pieces to illustrate how popular opinion frames educational discourse primarily as a commodity for capital reproduction. The essay explains how media discourse around education typically frames the value of higher education within the context of "educational entrepreneurism" and "redemptive consumerism" (p. 108).

The late Joe Kincheloe's essay Consuming the All-American Corporate Burger and Henry Giroux's essay Turning America into a Toy Story are articles that have appeared elsewhere, and extend their critique of the relationship between corporate media, childhood, and public pedagogies. Both of these essays draw attention to the pervasive ways in which corporate advertisement is constantly repositioning

itself within the global economy, in order to link childhood with consumer practices. For those familiar with the works of Joe Kincheloe and Henry Giroux, these essays do not add much to the debate, but are interesting pieces for those unfamiliar with them.

In addition, for those already familiar with Joel Spring's (2003) work on the historical relationship between consumerism and education or with Alex Molnar's (2005) work on the commodification of education, their chapters aren't anything new. However, for those unfamiliar with their work these chapters are worth reading and are a good introduction to their larger body of work—which is also worth reading.

First of all among the shortcomings, this book failed to tap into the larger body of literature within the anti-consumerist movement, particularly the works of Juliet Schor (2010), Arjun Appadurai (1988), and Tim Kassar (2002). This body of literature doesn't capture the entirety of the anti-consumerist movement; however it is linked with a social movement around anti-consumerist practices. Connecting critical pedagogies of consumerism to the anti-consumerist movement is a necessary aspect of critical pedagogy (Anyon, 2005), because it provides individuals with information on ways to challenge capital, thus moving beyond 'critique' alone. This shortcoming was especially pronounced when Henry Giroux ends the book by critiquing "liberal responses" and argues that we should "call into question existing structural changes of corporate power in order to make the democratization of media culture center to any reform movement." However, when "counterhegemonic" practices were discussed, they were typically focused on the individual level, like ad buster, artist teaching against consumerism, etc. The irony in overlooking this literature is that most authors within this edited volume considered consumer capitalism as a structural problem; however none of the chapters systemically addressed alternatives to consumer capitalism—which is what the anti-consumerist literature addresses. In other words, if consumer capitalism is a structural problem, then the book would have benefited

greatly in addressing structural alternatives to capitalism, rather than focusing on the individual level or critique alone. Secondly, the book failed to discuss the relationship between consumerism and race. None of the chapters talked about the ways in which markets are embedded within racial economies, and how certain consumer practices within or around education reproduce racial problems (Apple, 2001).

The subject matter of this book is of the outmost importance for a critical agenda. In an age when consumerism acts as a dominant cultural practice—within and outside of our schools—it is essential to investigate seriously and theoretically its impacts on human flourishing. In this regard, the focus and intent of this book is completely admirable. However, outside of a handful of chapters the book failed to engage in the pressing questions mentioned above. Although the book touched on some of the key issues around consumerism, a sustained and developed theoretical argument was severely lacking in many of these chapters.

Part II

In critiquing this book in relationship to the state of critical pedagogy, it is important to situate it within the current social and educational climate. Firstly, the left has seemed to either consider "the third way"—i.e. Bush, Clinton, Obama—as the best option and/or has failed to really envision the end of capitalism (Callinicos, 2000). Consequently socialist theory, especially within education, is seriously under-theorized, especially from a normative perspective. Much of what passes as leftist theorizing within education is either too rhetorical or has taken the "post turn" too far, taking for granted that postmodernism is the logic of late-capitalism (Jameson, 1991). This is not to say that the "post turn" has not contributed immensely to our understanding of our social reality; but much of what constitutes the "post turn" within education has underplayed the importance of normative theory (Dews, 2007; Eagleton, 2004a). This has resulted in a failure to seriously and normatively theorize about a world beyond capitalism

(Cohen, 2008; Cunningham, 1987, 1994; A. Levine, 1988; P. Levine, 2007).

Normative theory is essential to critical pedagogy because it provides us with the lenses by which we can judge the moral worth of particular practices, including capitalism. Fundamentally normative theory is concerned with the question: "how ought we to act?" In which the "ought" means what is morally justifiable (Eagleton, 2004b; Lukes, 2008). Although critical pedagogue tends to be skeptical toward telling people "what people ought to do?" no justifiable critique of capitalism can be rallied without answering this question. If critical pedagogy is going to claim to educate towards "justice," "human emancipation," etc. it must theoretically answers questions of ethics and morality. Answering these questions is necessary in order to move a "critical pedagogy of consumerism" beyond a mere descriptive analysis of consumerism.

However to the credit of this book, much of what counts as normative theory, especially within education, is far removed from the pressing questions of critical pedagogues. This is partly due to the fact that philosophers engaging in normative theory tend to focus on uncritical questions and have failed to open up "the black box" of schooling and normatively address curriculum issues (Apple, 1995). This leads many in the critical tradition to be skeptical of normative theory. However, normative theorists' failure to address pressing critical questions should not result in the benign form of relativism or crypto-normativity running throughout critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy must always keep in mind Gramsci's advice about using the tools of philosophy for progressive causes (Gramsci, 1971).

The fact of the matter is that particular forms of consumerist practices are wrong, period! However, to justify the explicit statement "period!" critical pedagogy would benefit greatly by engaging with normative theory, which is lacking within this book and critical pedagogy at large. Many of the claims made within this book and the ideological differences—especially between the Marxist and Postmodern positions—can be better addressed if more attention were

given to the normative value of a deep socialist democracy. In other words, following Fredric Jameson (1991), if this book were to interpret postmodernism as the cultural logic of late-capitalism and then normatively explain the demerits of consumer capitalism, the question "why should we be concerned with consumer capitalism in the first place?" could have been better addressed.

The lack of normative analysis is not only a problem with this book, it is an epidemic in education at large. Yet and still critical pedagogy, over other traditions, inherently relies on normative claims. In order to avoid these pitfalls, critical pedagogues would benefit greatly by making their normative standpoint explicit as well as philosophically sound. Thus, my larger critique of critical pedagogy is really a call to critical scholars to take the "normative turn" seriously (Ray & Sayer, 1999). By integrating prescriptive and descriptive analysis into a larger critique of domination, critical pedagogy would be in a better position to argue for an education suitable to human emancipation via human flourishing (Wright, 2010). The lack of normative theory in this book should not be viewed as a complete denunciation of the book itself—some of the chapters are worth reading—but because it lacked a normative aspect the book falls short of its potential.

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