

Critical Theory, Commodities and the Consumer Society

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Many twentieth century Marxists have paid close attention to the way in which culture reproduces and legitimates advanced capitalism. Marx's concepts of the commodity, reification, fetishism, and alienation have been used to analyse a wide range of cultural phenomena by thinkers such as Lukács, Gramsci, Sartre, Lefebvre, and the Frankfurt School. At the same time, these and other theorists have attempted to describe the changes in the social processes, mode of production, and forms of social reproduction in advanced capitalism. With the stabilisation of monopoly capitalism after World War II, various European and American Marxists saw the emergence of the **consumer society** as the distinct form of contemporary capitalism. In this social formation, culture, as Fredric Jameson (1981, p139) has argued "far from being an occasional matter of the reading of a monthly good book or a trip to the drive in" is "the very element of consumer society itself; no society has ever been saturated with signs and messages like this one". This phenomenon of the increased role of image and spectacle in reproducing and legitimating advanced capitalism derives from the fact that they are part of the social processes of production and distribution (Debord 1970), as well as creating consumer demand that will reproduce the consumer society (Fromm 1955; Marcuse 1964). More and more contemporary experience is mediated by cultural representation. Not only does advertising use image and spectacle to sell commodities, but contemporary capitalism channels desire through a variety of forms of mass culture (Ewen and Ewen 1982) — the media, fashion, toys and games, packaged leisure activities and the architecture, shopping malls, department stores, billboards etc, that constitute the very facade of advanced capitalism. Not only do the media shape our vision of the contemporary world, determining what most people can or cannot see and hear (Kellner 1982), but our very images of our own body, our own selves, our own personal self-worth (or lack of it) is mediated by the omnipresent images of mass culture (Featherstone 1982).

In this paper, I shall outline the origins of the neo-Marxist theory and critique of the consumer society in the Frankfurt School, examine developments of their positions in contemporary Marxist theories of the consumer society, and then sketch out my own perspectives. Since I recently published a paper highlighting the Frankfurt School's theory of mass culture and communications, its impact on subsequent theories and research, and its problems and deficiencies which require new critical theories of culture and communication (Kellner 1982), I shall centre my analysis in this paper on a discussion of critical theories of the commodity and consumption with only tangential references to mass culture and communications.

Critical Theory and the Consumer Society

The members of the Institute for Social Research observed first hand the beginnings of the consumer society when they arrived in America as exiles from Nazi Germany in the mid 1930's. The Brave New World America shocked their refined European sensibilities and they responded with passionate denunciation of the new forms of advanced capitalism (Kellner 1982). Following Lukács (1971), they applied Marx's theory of the commodity, reification and fetishism to a wide variety of phenomena (Adorno 1932, 1941). Although they perceived the penetration of the commodity form into all sectors of life, they believe that political economy by itself could not provide an adequate comprehension of modern capitalism (Held 1980, pp 77-79). Instead they saw that mass culture, advertising, bureaucracy and the mechanisation of labour and increased social administration were providing new forms of social control (Horkheimer 1941; Marcuse

1941; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972). At the centre of new forms and strategies of capitalist integration was the manipulation of leisure by the entertainment industries which substituted the "manipulated pleasures" of film, radio, sports, bestsellers, and shopping for both social-communal activities and individual cultivation of autonomy and personality (Horkheimer 1941; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972).

During World War II, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* where they argued that instrumental reason and reification were becoming extensive in modern industrial societies (capitalist and socialist) and that under the pressures of the administered society, the "individual" was rapidly disappearing (Fromm 1941; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Horkheimer 1941 and 1974). At the centre of this process stood the productions of the cultural industries which used image and spectacle to manipulate people into social conformity and into behaving in ways functional for the reproduction of capitalism (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Kellner 1982).

Herbert Marcuse developed this broadside polemic in *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and, especially, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Marcuse claimed that in advanced industrial society "mass production and mass distribution claim the entire individual" (Marcuse 1964, p10). Marcuse was one of the first neo-Marxists to develop a theory of the consumer society and to analyse in detail the role of commodities and consumption in reproducing advanced capitalism and in integrating individuals into it (1). In a key passage he writes:

The productive apparatus and the goods and services which it produces 'sell' or impose the social system as a whole. The means of mass transportation and communication, the commodities of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. And as these beneficial products become available to more individuals in more social classes, the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity; it becomes a way of life ...and as a good way of life, it militates against qualitative change (Marcuse 1964, pp 11-12).

Marcuse claims that in advanced capitalism, commodities and consumption have transformed the very personality—structure—the values, needs and behaviour of individuals — in a way that binds "one-dimensional man" to the social order which produces these needs:

The people recognise themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties an individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced (Marcuse 1964, p 9).

In Marcuse's view, the most striking feature of advanced industrial society is its ability to contain all social change and to integrate all potential agents of change into one smoothly running, comfortable and satisfying system of domination. This "one-dimensional society" is made possible by "new forms of social control" which plant needs and help create a consciousness that accepts and conforms to the system, thus systematically suffocating the need for liberation and radical social change. He believes that, "the most effective and enduring form of warfare against liberation is the implanting of material and intellectual needs that perpetuate obsolete forms of the struggles for existence" (Marcuse 1964, p 4).

Although Marx argued that capitalism created a world in its own image and analysed the commodity-form and commodity-fetishism, he did not see the extent to which the commodity and consumption would integrate the individuals — especially the working class — into the capitalist social order. Despite anticipations of Marcuse's analyses of false needs, advertising, ideology and culture as modes of capitalist hegemony, Marx, in his political analyses, always discounted the possibility of the identification of the working class with capitalist society and refused to allow its structural integration. Marx began his analysis at the point of production and did not believe that consumption would compensate for alienated labor, exploitation and working-class oppression (2).

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Marcuse claims that certain consumer and conformist needs provide the basis for the integration of the working class in advanced capitalism. Although human needs have always been preconditioned by the prevailing institutions and interests, Marcuse argues that it is crucial to distinguish between true needs that are essential to human survival and well being, and false needs that are "superimposed upon the individual by particular societal interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice" (Marcuse 1964, p 5). False needs are for Marcuse artificial and heteronomous: imposed upon the individual from outside by manipulative vested interests. For example, consumer needs for money, possessions, property and security are repressive to the extent that they perpetuate conformity and alienated labor; although these needs and their satisfaction provide momentary pleasure, they perpetuate a system whose continuation impedes the fulfillment of individual and social needs and potentials.

Marcuse concludes that in advanced industrial society the needs which support and expand the consumer society have become individual needs to buy, possess and consume, powerful factors of stabilisation: counterrevolution built into the instinctual structure, as he puts it in *An Essay of Liberation* (Marcuse 1969, p1). Moreover, he argues that these false needs are shared by all groups and classes of society, indicating an assimilation and integration of potential oppositional forces within the prevailing establishment of needs and satisfactions: "If the worker and his boss enjoy the same television programme and visit the same resort places, if the typist is as attractively made up as the daughter of her employer, if the Negro owns a Cadillac, if they all read the same newspaper, then this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to which the needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are shared by the underlying population" Marcuse (1964, p 8).

Marcuse's critique of the consumer society and false needs is global and his indictment is damning. He claims that the system's widely championed individualism is a **pseudo-individualism**: prefabricated, synthesised and administered by the advertising agencies, corporations and media manipulators. Further, the individual's freedom is a **pseudo-freedom** that fails to see that bondage to the system is the price of its being able to "choose" to buy a new car and live a consumer life-style. Although one-dimensional man conceives of itself as free, Marcuse believes this "freedom" and "choice" is illusory because the people have been preconditioned to make their choices within a pre-determined universe that circumscribes their range of choices to the choice between Ford or General Motors, Wheaties or Cheerios, Tweedledum or Tweedledumber:

Thus economic freedom would mean freedom from the economy — from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living. Political freedom would mean liberation of the individuals from politics over which they have no effective control. Similarly, intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, abolition of 'public opinion' together with its makers (Marcuse 1964, p 4).

Marcuse urges liberation from the alienated freedoms which serve as an ideological veil for bondage and domination. He claims that the system's much lauded economic, political, and social freedom, formerly a source of social progress, lose their progressive function and become subtle instruments of domination which serve to keep the individuals in bondage to the system that they strengthen and perpetuate. For example, "economic freedom" to sell one's labor power in order to compete on the labor market submits the individual to the slavery of an irrational economic system; "political freedom" to vote for generally indistinguishable representatives of the same system is but a delusive ratification of a non-democratic political system; "intellectual freedom" is ineffectual when the media either coopt and defuse, or distort and suppress ideas, and when the image makers construct the public opinion that is hostile and immune against oppositional thought and action. Marcuse concludes that genuine freedom and well-being depends on liberation from the entire system of one-dimensional needs and satisfactions (Kellner 1983).

The Consumer Society: Historical and Critical Studies

Marcuse's critique of the consumer society had a strong impact on the thinking and politics of the new left (Kellner 1983). In the aftermath of *One-Dimensional Man*, a variety of studies appeared which traced the historical process through which the consumer society developed and which described in more detail than Marcuse forms of contemporary consumer culture. Stuart Ewen in *Captains of Consciousness* (1976) described the role of advertising and mass production in constituting the consumer society and criticised in detail "the political ideology of consumption." Ewen analysed as well the changing modes of the family and how advertising and industrialisation transformed patriarchy, the role of women and children, and encouraged new forms of sexuality. For Ewen, this was primarily a negative process which increased conformity and the decline of individuality, community, social rebellion and the oppositional status of the working class. In Ewen's concluding section he describes consumer culture as "exclusionary and racist," "monochromatic and standardised," producing "passivity" and "spectatorship" (Ewen 1976, pp 212-214). He concludes:

More than pervasive, the injection of corporate bonding into the interstices of existence was altering and attempting to safely standardise the common perception of daily life. While heralding a world of unprecedented freedom and opportunity, corporations (in concert with the state apparatus) were generating a mode of existence which was increasingly regimented and authoritarian. If consumer culture was a parody of the popular desire for self-determination and meaningful community, its innards revealed the growing standardisation of the social terrain and corporate domination over what was to be consumed and experienced (Ewen 1976, pp 214-215).

In *Channels of Desire* (1982) Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen examine the role of consumerism in the shaping of American consciousness and provide telling examples and historical studies of the role of "mass images" in the production of an Americanised society. The book provides striking analyses of how images shaped a vision of America that drew immigrants to the promised land, Americanised newly arrived would-be Americans, and produced a powerful social cement and unifying force that helped create the consumer society. For instance, drawing on one of the many oral histories used in the book, the Ewens tell how pictures on cotton bales produced a utopian vision of America in the mind of a young Czech working girl and how labels on American products produced an image for her of America as a land of abundance. The young woman thus saw "the consumer products of America as magical objects"; the brand names and images became "channels for her desires, emblems of a world denied, embodiments of wishes unfulfilled". Eventually, she emigrated to America and could participate in the commodity paradise simply through purchasing and using these products. Thus, "the proliferation of mass images provided an introduction to a new way of life promised by industrial America" (Ewen & Ewen 1982, pp 45-47).

Some of the Ewens', most interesting studies are of the prehistory of the consumer society in the transition of the sphere of circulation and exchange from a political economy of peddlers and general stores in mid-nineteenth century America to mail order houses and department stores as the vehicles and sites of consumption. Drawing on historical studies, they discuss the merchandising innovations of Sears-Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, Rural Free Delivery and department stores to provide an insight into how "a consumer was born" and how mass images and the "magic of the marketplace" would make possible "consumerism as a way of life.

The Studies of "fashion and democracy" are perhaps the richest and most fascinating part of their work. The Ewens (1982, p116) provide a history of fashion showing how changes in fashion were connected with developments of technology, ideology and, crucially, the consumer society. They conceptualise fashion as

a piece in the political discourse of consent, and of revolution. It is a keystone in the shifting architectures of class, sexuality, national identity. Fashion is situated within the framework of industrial development: it interacts with the rise of consumer capitalism and mass-media imagery. It is a way in which people identify themselves as individuals and collectively.

Clothing, they argue, is intimately connected with the historical vicissitudes of class and class conflict. The elaborate and sumptuous clothes of the aristocracy were a visible sign of their class power and "sumptuary law" between the twelfth and seventeenth century preserved class privilege by regulating what clothing could be worn by the working classes. The rise of the bourgeoisie challenged the class power of the aristocracy and eventually imposed new standards of dress on industrial society. Here gender played a crucial role: bourgeois men assumed a "plain style" of dress as a "cloak of morality," signifying their commitment to hard work, simple justice and bourgeois standards of decency. Bourgeois women, on the other hand, wore more luxurious and elegant clothing as a sign of their class status and social role. Their sexuality and childbearing roles were accentuated by corsets, tight body lacing around the waist, and bustles.

The Ewens use oral histories and other sources to show how the alluring siren of fashion helped channel the desires of the working class into middle class society. Moreover, their analysis of ready-made clothing helps remind us of the wage-slavery and exploitation involved in the production of taken-for-granted commodities like clothing. In a brilliant chapter, "History and Clothes Consciousness," they trace the development of contemporary fashion through the rise of suburbia and 1950's fashions contrasted with 1960's revolts and "anti-fashion" as "weapons of outrage" against standardisation and conformity — followed by attempts of the fashion industry to co-opt the 1960's revolt.

Neo-Marxist studies and critiques of consumer culture have proliferated impressively in the last few years. Feminist and structuralist studies of advertising have appeared (among others, Leymore 1975; Williamson 1978; Hall et al 1980), as have studies of food and diet, cosmetics, jogging and other attempts to manipulate the body image (Featherstone 1982; Bauman 1983). Contributors to *Tabloid* (Numbers 1-6 1980-1982) have produced studies of shopping centres, video games, and tampons, as well as popular music, advertising, film, radio, and television. Robert Goldman has written a study of the relationship between sports and the logic of commodification and consumerism (1983) and studies of contemporary American television ads (1983). More and more elements of the consumer society are being studied and are being interpreted as means of capitalist integration and hegemony. These criticisms of capitalist culture greatly enrich the Marxian theory by adding a cultural dimension to a theory overdetermined by political and economic analysis. They also contribute to increasing our understanding of the social processes of advanced capitalism and to raising critical consciousness of its manifold forms of oppression and alienation.

These studies by and large concretise with historical and empirical detail the theories of the commodity and reification in Lukács (1971) and Marcuse's theory of one-dimensional society (1964). They show the commodification of life in advanced capitalism and the ways in which capitalist forms have penetrated into the totality of everyday life. Cumulatively, this literature provides a powerful indictment of contemporary capitalism and its system of exploitation, manipulation and domination. Yet many of these studies present a flawed vision of history and picture of contemporary society. There is a tendency in critical theory and its aftermath (shared by many structuralist Marxists) to picture the development of capitalist society as a completely successful attempt on the part of corporate capitalism to dominate totally its helpless and passive victims and to constitute contemporary society completely in its own image and interests (Kellner 1978). This "capital logic" approach makes it appear as if the capitalist class has the overwhelming initiative in socio-historical development and simply imposes its imperatives, technology and system on the working classes (3). This approach down-plays the role of class conflict and overlooks the fact that the rise of the consumer society was accompanied by violent and sustained labor struggles for, in part, higher wages to buy more commodities. Fashion, advertising and the media thus serve as spurs to incite working class revolt, as well as being instruments of capitalist domination. Consequently, the needs generated by advertising and marketing may incite struggles for higher wages that are obviously not functional for capital. Many sectors of capital may not freely grant higher wages to worker's demands, and contradictions between capital and labor are then intensified. Moreover capital may generate needs that it cannot fulfil thus increasing worker resentment and propensity to revolt.

In *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972) Herbert Marcuse has argued that the rising standards of living promoted by the consumer society have created new needs and rising expectations which capitalism cannot fulfil. Marcuse suggests that this failure will create growing tensions and hostilities which may explode the system. In creating consumer needs, capitalism creates images of the good life (ease, enjoyment, luxury, sexual gratification, etc.) that appear to be within the reach of everyone. But the inability of the great majority of people to attain the standard of living and life-style daily projected as the norm in the mass media causes great frustration and discontent. There is thus the possibility, Marcuse believes, that the unfulfilled consumer needs and "rising expectations" for increased consumption may themselves generate dissatisfaction and revolts which will be intensified and potentially explosive in an era of scarcity and growing structural unemployment (4).

The growing awareness of the society's failures and dissatisfaction with its way of life is being nurtured by another kind of need developed in advanced capitalism which Marcuse (1972, pp16 ff) calls "transcending needs". He suggests that the system implants needs for freedom, individuality and happiness that it cannot fulfil. The ideologies of advanced capitalism which promote personal gratification and fulfillment are becoming, Marcuse believes, increasingly contradictory and subversive of the system itself. For, to the extent that these ideologies cannot be realised, they too promote frustration and revolt. Marcuse (1972, p 21) believes that these transcending needs can help produce the ability to see through capitalism's ideological veil and to see into its damning contradictions: "One knows one can live otherwise". He concludes that capitalism itself, the consumer society at its highest and most affluent stage, may be creating the needs which will bring about its transformation: "The centrifugal forces which appear in the emergence of transcending needs operate behind the back of the capitalist managers, and they are generated by the mode of production itself ...Capitalism has opened a new dimension, which is at one and the same time the living space of capitalism and its negation" (Marcuse 1972, pp 18-19).

An approach to the history of the consumer society that simply sees it as a successful attempt by capital to integrate the working class thus fails to see contradictions in the process of capitalist reproduction. Advertising and the production of consumer needs are certainly functional for capitalism but if it cannot deliver the goods, they may be dysfunctional as well. Similarly, we must begin attempting to see the contradictions generated within the sphere of consumption by commodity struggle in the marketplace for consumer allegiance and seeing strategies and tactics of subversion in consumer practices (de Certeau 1980, 1980b, 1981). Conceptualising the dialectics of consumption properly and politically, I shall argue in the next several sections requires new perspectives on the commodity and consumption.

New Perspectives on the Commodity and Consumption

Another flaw of previous critical theories of the consumer society shared by many other Neo-Marxist approaches — is their totalising theory of the commodity and consumption. For global critical theories of the commodity, all commodities are uniformly seductive instruments of capitalist manipulation. Capital produces needs for its commodities which it tries to implant in the consumers. The commodities are alluring sirens whose symbolic qualities and exchange-values seduce the consumer into purchase and consumption. There is both a manichaeism and puritanism in this perspective. Commodities are pictured as evil tools of class domination and a covert distinction is often made between (bad) exchange-value and (good) use-value. It also assumes a magical power on the part of capital to create unreal false needs which it is then able to manipulate in its own interest. It assumes that when individuals submit to (bad) consumerism, they are weak, malleable and deficient as human beings (or at least Marxists) — precisely the Puritan attitude toward sex and pleasure. This perspective assumes, although this is never explicitly articulated, that all consumer needs and the commodities that supply them enslave the individual into the chains of capitalist produced desire. But as Enzensberger has argued: "The attractive power of mass consumption is based not on the dictates of false needs, but on the falsification and exploitation of quite real and legitimate ones without which the parasitic process of advertising would be quite redundant. A socialist movement ought not to denounce these needs, but take them seriously, investigate them, and make them politically productive" (1974, p110).

In short, we need new theories of needs, commodities and consumption. The first step here is to break with totalising and homogenising theories which take a monolithic, puritanical view of commodities and consumption. We need a more discriminating perspective that differentiates between artificial and real needs, useless and useful commodities, and alienating and life-enhancing consumption. Marcuse's distinction between "true" and "false needs" can be applied to evaluate different types of commodities and varieties of consumption (5). "False needs," on this account, are those for commodities that do not fulfil genuine human needs and which produce expectations that the products cannot possibly fulfil. On Marcuse's (1964) account, on the other hand, the satisfactions of the consumer society are "repressive" and the needs are "false" because they bind individuals to a social order which actually restricts their freedom and possibilities for happiness, freedom, and individual fulfillment. The social order is "false" because its affluence depends on production of waste and destruction while its wealth rests on exploitation; the productivity is repressive because it forces unnecessary social labor and consumption on its victims.

Marcuse's global critique of the consumer society is compelling, yet his critique does not help us to distinguish between commodities and needs, or to determine in particular cases which needs are "false" and which satisfactions are "repressive." Yet his theory can be reconstructed to hold that needs are "false" if they are for commodities which cannot satisfy needs and rest on expectations that can be demonstrated to be false. Advertising, for instance, promises commodity solutions to problems, or associates the product with the "good life": ads for certain shampoos or mouthwashes, for instance, promise popularity and intensified sex appeal; soft drinks promise fun, youth, and community; automobile ads promise power and social prestige if one purchases their car; worthless tonics promise health and vitality; mass produced clothes promise individuality and style; and a bevy of products of dubious worth promise solutions to a variety of problems. If it can be shown that these expectations and anticipations are, for the most part, "false promises," then needs for products based on these expectations can be said to be "false needs."

Marcuse (1964, p5) characterises "true needs" as "vital needs" which "have an unqualified claim for satisfaction . . . — nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of satisfaction". He insists that individual and social needs can be evaluated by objective "standards of priority," which "refer to the optimal development of the individual, of all individuals, under the optimal utilisation of the material and intellectual resources available to man". On a social level, the goal would be maximum satisfaction of the vital needs with a rational use of resources; this could be calculated as the Government calculates the needs of its budget and allocates resources accordingly. On the individual level, "the question of what are true and false needs must be answered by the individual himself" — but the individuals must be free and autonomous to the extent that they are capable of truly discerning what their true needs are, and not merely reproducing a condition of manipulation and indoctrination. That is, only I can determine my individual needs but I must be free from the tyranny of the prevailing repressive needs to do so. The dilemma, then, is: "how can people who have been the object of effective and productive domination by themselves create the condition of freedom?" Marcuse (1964, p 6).

In order to liberate one's self from the universe of prevailing false needs, one must become conscious of one's conditioning and re-condition one's self to be able to discern one's true needs. The process of liberation aims at "the replacement of false needs by true ones, the abandonment of repressive satisfactions". But, "the distinguishing feature of advanced industrial society is its effective suffocation of those needs which demand liberation — liberation also from that which is tolerable and rewarding and comfortable — while it sustains and absolves the destructive power and repressive function of the affluent society" (Marcuse 1964, p 7). Hence liberation from false needs involves the rejection and refusal of a whole system of needs and the affirmation of other needs that contradict the established ones.

The problem with Marcuse's account is that he seems to assume that all consumer needs are false and that all commodities are tools of capitalist manipulation. Instead I propose that we carefully scrutinise the commodity world to discern which commodities are useful, which are useless; which are beneficial, which are harmful; which contribute to increasing freedom and well-being, or increase frustration and unhappiness. In this way, we can distinguish between "true" and "false" needs, and worthless and valuable commodities. Some of these distinctions

can be made on a societal level, where a socialist society, for instance, could democratically and rationally decide that 114 models of cars and 89 brands of toothpaste were unnecessary; or that certain children's games were educational, or harmless fun, whereas others were of dubious or negative worth (i.e. like video-games that programme kids for nuclear war). Other evaluations and discriminations must be made by the individual. I may, for instance, genuinely need and benefit from a new word-processor, whereas non-writers or others may find it useless, or confusing and alienating.

These remarks raise touchy issues of public consumer policy for socialism and suggest how little we really know about how people use and are affected by commodities in advanced capitalism. Here I shall address myself to the latter issue since most of us have not yet had the good fortune to involve ourselves concretely with socialist consumer policy. In evaluating commodities, needs, and uses, we have to become more sensitive to how people actually use commodities and how consumption affects people. As I alluded above, various commodities may affect different people in different ways. Indeed, we know very little about the "consumer sphinx" (Certeau, 1981), about how people use commodities, about how they invent their own consumer practices, or about how they are affected by consumer prescriptions and prescribed uses. The whole field of commodities and consumer practices is ripe (overripe) for exploration. Children and education for instance, may greatly benefit from the new personal computers now being introduced so rapidly in America, or they may be harmed. Different children may be affected in different ways from home computers. We need to attend carefully to this phenomenon and other varieties of consumption and try to distinguish carefully between types, uses and effects of various commodities.

We also need new perspectives on consumption. Critical theory tends to sharply criticise consumption itself as the dominant means of integrating individuals in advanced capitalism and denounces it as a primary constituent of "false consciousness". Erich Fromm, (1955, p131-5), for instance, writes:

The process of consumption is as alienated as the process of production . . . We are satisfied with useless possession . . . Consuming is essentially the satisfaction of artificially stimulated phantasies, a phantasy performance alienated from our concrete, real selves . . . Originally, the idea of consuming more and better things was meant to give man a happier, more satisfied life. Consumption was a means to an end, that of happiness. It now has become an aim in itself. The constant increase of needs forces us to an ever-increasing effort, it makes us dependent on these needs and on the people and institutions by whose help we attain them . . . Man today is fascinated by the possibility of buying more, better, and especially, new things. He is consumption-hungry. The act of buying and consuming has become a compulsive, irrational aim, because it is an end in itself, with little relation to the use of, or pleasure in the things bought and consumed. To buy the latest gadget, the latest model of anything that is on the market, is the dream of everybody, in comparison to which the real pleasure in use is quite secondary. Modern man, if he dared to be articulate about his concept of heaven, would describe a vision which would look like the biggest department store in the world, showing new things and gadgets, and himself having plenty of money with which to buy them. He would wander around open-mouthed in this heaven of gadgets and commodities, provided only that there were ever more and newer things to buy, and perhaps that his neighbours were just a little less privileged than he.

Fromm opposes to consumption an ideal of productivity and attacks consumption, receptivity, commodities and money throughout his writings. Leo Lowenthal (1961) also makes a sharp distinction between production and consumption in his famous discussion of "idols of production" and "idols of consumption" in popular magazine biographies which covertly contain a denunciation of consumption. It is true, however, that Fromm suggests that consumption can be life-affirming, enjoyable and useful, although he tends to imply that all consumption under capitalism is alienating. Likewise, he distinguishes between alienated and non-alienated labour and tends to describe all non-alienated activity as "productive" which he contrasts to receptive, or passive, activity. Marcuse (1955, 1958) argues that Fromm's use of the term "productive

character" and his taking "productivity" as the highest form of human activity serves to strengthen the central capitalist values of production which are the ideological pillar of the capitalist system and the traditional character trait of the earlier hero of production celebrated in bourgeois society — as well as later socialist societies!

It might be noted that Marcuse, Fromm, Lowenthal and other critical theorists are not the only ones who regularly denounce consumption. Citing Albert Hirschmann's study and his own work, William Leiss (1983) notes that a variety of thinkers of various political persuasions regularly attack consumption as debased activity. The most extreme contemporary critic of consumption and the commodity is Jean Baudrillard (1968, 1970, 1981). His critique is so outrageous that it would require a separate study to explicate fully his admittedly complex and frequently provocative position and to point out the fallacies and theoretical and political blinders in his position. Baudrillard's critique goes far beyond Marcuse and Fromm in rage and denunciation of the commodity and consumption but offers no discernible way out of the "society of consumption," and thus hopelessly collapses into one-dimensional hostility in the face of contemporary commodities and media.

The global denunciations of consumption in classical critical theory tend either to implicitly (Lowenthal) or explicitly (Fromm) assume the superiority of production over consumption. In opposition to this position, I would propose a distinction between **consumption** as the use and enjoyment of commodities opposed to **consumerism** as a way of life dedicated almost totally to the possession and use of consumer goods. Consumerism as a way of life falls prey much more obviously to "commodity fetishism" than in Marx's (1976) ambiguous theory discussed in Leiss (1976, pp xvi-xix). Consumer addicts do "find their soul" in the purchase, consumption and use of commodities and are integrated into capitalist society through commodities and consumption. But does everyone in all consumer activities alienate themselves from their selves, fall prey to false consciousness and false needs, and engage in alienated activity? Are all who engage in consumption dehumanised "happy consumers" and "one-dimensional" men and women?

The problem with critical theory is that it illicitly extends its rational and justified critique of aspects of the consumer society and fetishised consumerism to consumption per se in a global, totalising critique. However, investigations of types of consumption will reveal, I am sure, a wide variety of uses of commodities, attitudes towards them, and individualised consumer practices. Many individuals will be quite inventive and creative in their consumer activities and grow and develop as human beings through consumption. Individuals can use commodities for ends unforeseen by the corporate managers and captains of consciousness. Consumption can be a rational and life-enhancing activity that increases one's human powers and fulfills genuine human needs. Only this perspective on the commodity and consumption, I believe, can explain the power of commodities and importance of consumption in contemporary society. Rather than denouncing this activity, we must try to understand it and to discriminate between alienated, fetishised and dehumanising consumerism, as opposed to creative and life-enhancing consumption.

Moreover, we should question the whole dichotomy between production and consumption which is a reified product of capitalism and not an anthropological constant, or universal distinction. That is, we should "deconstruct" the opposition "consumption-production" which usually covertly implies that production is a superior, distinctly human, and beneficial activity, whereas consumption is supposedly debased, dehumanising and inferior. In fact, as many neo-Marxists point out, **both** production and consumption tend to be alienated under capitalism, but the solution to this historical disaster is not to elevate one side of the dyad over the other. Instead we must discover how to create a social order and way of life in which there is no radical opposition between production and consumption, and activity in both spheres is liberated from alienating features. To move beyond this historical stage, we need, I believe, new perspectives on the commodities, needs and consumption which contemporary critical theory should try to provide if it wishes to be relevant to the great transformation beginning to take place that is producing a new social order where, among other things, the rigid dichotomy between production and consumption may well be overcome.

William Leiss has addressed himself to some of these issues in various publications, including "Icons of the Marketplace", published in this journal, where he suggests that we attempt "to sort

out the multifaceted dimensions of the consumption process" (1983, p 00). He uses Hirschman's distinctions between consumer durables and non-durables, and durables in continuous use, sporadic use, and occasional use, to discriminate between types of commodities. Leiss also presents an elaborate "modified content analysis procedure" to analyse advertisements and distinguishes between "three major phases in twentieth century advertising" correlated to "major transformations in the consumption process" (1983, p 00). Although I find Leiss' work very interesting — and have probably been influenced by his work on commodities and needs — I am disturbed that his discriminations between types of commodities and content-analysis procedures for advertising does not yield a more critical and evaluative practice, and I fear that he is blunting the sharp edge of the radical critique of needs and commodities put forth by Marcuse. Surely we need good theories and discriminating descriptive accounts before we can make intelligent judgements, but we need as well to provide critiques of something as central to the maintenance, reproduction and development of capitalism as commodities and consumerism. Thus the new perspectives that I propose would at once attempt to develop more detailed descriptive accounts which discriminate between types of commodities and consumer activities, and would develop theories of the commodity and consumption which are critical and evaluative.

Toward a Critical Theory of Commodity and Consumer Practices

In this section, I want to suggest some provisional guidelines and criteria for evaluating commodities, needs, and consumer activities. These proposals are tentative and open to debate and revision, but I want to generate discussion that will lead to the development of new perspectives on the commodity and consumption, so will risk some provisional remarks here, limiting myself to developing a critical theory of the commodity and consumer practice.

First of all, I would propose that we can begin developing critiques of commodities and consumption using a form of "immanent critique" that accepts the logic of consumerism and evaluates commodities according to their **value** defined in terms of price, quality, and use. This is the approach, I take it, of the "consumer movement" which wants to educate us to rational consumption and make us good consumers. One might raise one's eyebrow a bit in view of a self-professed Marxist urging these criteria to help develop a critical theory of the commodity, but I believe that a consequent application of "immanent critique" can be quite subversive. Following this logic, I would advocate that we rarely buy products produced by the big corporations that engage in national advertising for the following reasons:

- a) They are produced by corporations primarily interested in maximising profit who are more concerned with the bottom line than the product itself (i.e. corporate capital systematically puts exchange-value over use-value). Consequently, the corporation is often more concerned with packaging, marketing and advertising than with the quality of the product itself, or with whether anyone really needs it. In addition, many consumer "durables" are not really very durable because they are subject to planned obsolescence so that the consumer will be forced to buy new products.
- b) One inevitably pays far more than its worth for products of big corporations for one is subsidising (1) excessive advertising, packaging and marketing costs; (2) the whole corporate apparatus of management and administration; and (3) is supporting and paying for in many cases a conglomerate and multi-national structure. We should not buy products advertised on television because the extremely costly advertising expenses are passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices, and, secondly, if one really needed and wanted the products advertised on television one would purchase them without needing to be cajoled and manipulated by TV advertising.
- c) Most television advertising is for products where there is a multitude of product choices and that the products advertised are almost always more expensive than competing brands or products and are usually inferior in certain ways that can be clearly specified. TV ads are more symbolic and rhetorical than informative. Thus clearly one is purchasing symbolic, indeed imaginary, values when one buys products advertised on television and if one is interested in real value (i.e. terms of price, product, and use) then one should desist from buying those products produced by giant multinational corporations, especially the ones offered on television (6).



(c) A further reason to avoid purchasing the products of the corporate giants is because their products are often poorly produced since workers in these corporations are often exploited, alienated, and not especially committed to quality production. This is increasingly the case in an era of rising unemployment and layoffs (in 1982 one out of four American workers will lose their jobs, be temporarily laid off, or take another job). Worker unhappiness is particularly crucial in assessing products of industries like the automobile industry. Arthur Hailey writes in his novel *Wheels* (a point confirmed by numerous other sources) that cars produced on Mondays and Fridays tended to have problems because absenteeism is always extremely high these days and the assembly line is thus understaffed, or staffed by more inexperienced workers. In addition, the workers are usually "burned out" by Friday and not ready to adjust to the rigors of the line on Monday. Thus buying a new American automobile is equivalent to crap shooting or Russian roulette.

For these reasons when there is a choice, it is better to buy generic products, products from smaller corporations, or products locally produced and sold by cooperatives (which works for food, clothing, and a lot of craft goods). One should always purchase a used automobile from a trusted friend or with the aid of a trusted mechanic. Occasionally, one is forced to buy something from a corporate conglomerate but in general one can easily devise strategies to make one quite independent of corporate capital while fulfilling basic consumer needs and enjoying a wealth of commodities. But more radical critical perspectives on commodities and their use can be developed that go beyond the logic of consumerism.

Secondly, commodities and consumer activities can be more sharply criticised for their harmful impact on human health and the environment. Various health groups and movements have raised awareness of the harmful impact on the human body of a variety of chemicals and substances in food, and of the dangers of eating junk food or other non-nutritious foods. Labor is becoming increasingly aware of the dangers to workers of producing various chemicals and substances whose production, or use in production, causes industrial diseases. Environmentalists have been pointing out that certain synthetic industrial substances are non-biodegradable, or are dangerous pollutants (Commoner 1971). The near epidemic of cancer and other industrial and environmental related diseases has made it mandatory to become aware of the impact of certain commodities on health and the environment (one out of four people in America today get cancer; one out of five die of it). Governments (sometimes) try to regulate the worst excesses of capitalist production and frequently document a variety of abuses of different types of commodity production and products.

Marxists should pay more attention to these issues, take environmental and consumer politics more seriously, and more sharply politicise these issues by showing how the capitalist mode of production as such is responsible for a variety of these threats to human well-being and the environment. That is, Marxists today should not, as they have often tended to do in the past, see these health and environmental issues as superfluous to the struggle for socialism, or irrelevant to the task of party-building. Health and environmental struggles threaten capital at its life-line and should be aimed at its most vulnerable parts and intensified and radicalised.

On the other hand, initiatives of consumer, environment or health movements may be absorbed and used by the capitalist state or the consumer industries themselves. These movements tend to rationalise and strengthen the capitalist system by forcing correction of its worst abuses. They also further technocracy and instrumental domination by making people dependent on "experts" who defines their consumer or health needs. Building on Foucault's work, Bauman (1983) for example argues that consumer movements, jogging, health foods, etc provide more disciplined workers and consumers. Moreover, excessive emphasis on consumption and health may increase narcissism and individualism driving individuals to be more absorbed in their own bodies and consumer practices.

Nonetheless, with these problems in sight, risks must be taken and the left should try to take more seriously consumer, health, environmental and other new social movements. Critical theory can contribute critical perspectives on the commodity and consumption, as well as insights into how the production of needs and consumer practices provides crucial mechanisms through which the consumer society reproduces itself. As argued, the need to explore in more detail commodities, consumption and advertising in order to understand their power and allure, and to

discriminate between commodities and consumer practices, requires sustained analysis which will help us in turn to distinguish between "true" and "false" needs.

Making this distinction is logically dependent on our theory of the commodity and consumer practices. If a commodity, after critical scrutiny, reveals itself to be life-enhancing, truly useful, well-constructed, and fairly priced, then a need for it can be said to be a "true need." If the commodity fails to offer the satisfactions promised, if it is not beneficial, life-enhancing, and useful but is rather needless, poorly constructed or overpriced, then a need for it can be said to be a "false need." Note that the distinction between true and false needs proposed here rests on empirical grounds. Experience and careful critical scrutiny can determine whether needs are true or false on both an individual and a societal level. This is, I take it, one of the dominant challenges to a socialist society which must determine what the society really needs. Therefore, I would submit that the concept of "false needs," rather than being an idealist and obscure concept which is impossible to specify — as so many of Marcuse's critics and even friends have argued — is an important concept of materialist-revolutionary practice in both the critique of capitalism and transition to socialism.

This neo-Marcusean perspective on commodities and needs raises the problem of how individuals or groups can decide which commodities or consumer practices are life-enhancing, useful and beneficial, and which are not. (I am putting aside for a moment, the question of who decides but will shortly turn to this issue also). Marcuse himself argued in *One-Dimensional Man* that one must derive criteria in order to evaluate any social phenomena and that critical analysis of phenomena like commodities and consumer practice involve value-judgements. Marcuse (1964, pp x-xi) himself offers two:

1. the judgement that human life is worth living, or rather can be and ought to be made worth living. This judgement underlies all intellectual effort; it is the a priori of social theory, and its rejection (which is perfectly logical) rejects theory itself;
2. the judgement that, in a given society, specific possibilities exist for the amelioration of human life and specific ways and means of realising these possibilities. Critical analysis has to demonstrate the objective validity of these judgements, and the demonstration has to proceed on empirical grounds. The established society has available an ascertainable quantity and quality of intellectual and material resources. How can these resources be used for the optimal development and satisfaction of individual needs and faculties with a minimum of toil and misery?

Later in *One-Dimensional Man*, building on Whitehead, Marcuse proposes a "new idea of reason" expressed "in Whitehead's proposition: 'The function of Reason is to promote the art of life.' In view of this end, Reason is the 'direction of the attack on the environment' which derives from the threefold urge: (1) to live, (2) to live well, (3) to live better" (Marcuse 1964, p 228). Evaluation of commodities and consumption — and everything else — is thus dependent on one's values and conception of the Good Life. Critical theory has never shied away from making normative judgements on capitalist society and part of its attack on positivism and academic social science is that the pretence of value-free "objectivity" serves the existing society by eschewing the practice of evaluation and critique. But critical theory has rarely (with the exception of Erich Fromm and to some extent Marcuse) spelled out in much detail the values, normative standards and conception of the Good Life by virtue of which it condemns capitalism. Moreover, Marcuse's irritations with the "philosopher king" argument (see, for example, Marcuse 1964) has created the suspicion that critical theory wants its own theorists to make normative decisions and legislate the Good Society and Good Life, thus eliciting critiques of its supposed elitism and utopianism.

Reacting against this tendency in critical theory, Habermas has been proposing sustained public discussion about needs, ends and public policy (see Habermas 1975, 1980, 1982; Forester 1982). His argument that we must revitalise the public sphere and engage in debate about crucial social and political issues is relevant to the topic at hand. Following Habermas, critical theory can help promote public debate on needs, commodities and consumer practices so as to aim for democratic consensus on these issues. Such debate could be connected to discourse on values and the good life, and could help raise public consciousness on consumption and consumer politics both in advanced capitalism and in "actually existing socialist" societies.

Finally, after having criticised certain commodities, corporations, need and consumer practices, critical theory can then move from partial critiques to critiques of the consumer society and advanced capitalism as a whole. That is, after having carried out specific critiques of aspects of the consumer society, critical theory can then move on to providing more global critiques of the consumer society itself arguing, for example, that the consumer society is predicated on the assumption that the marketplace alone dictates what is to be produced and consumed. This irrational allocation of resources and goods and production of needs has been a historical disaster which has resulted in overproduction, injustice and inequalities and a system which rests on false priorities (i.e. profits over people, exchange value over use-value, etc).

One can likewise move from critiques of specific advertising and consumer practices to global critiques of advertising on the grounds that the industry is parasitical, duplicitous, and serves no real social needs or purposes. In fact, many valuable non-Marxist critiques of advertising exist that can be used by critical theory to condemn advertising and the consumer society (Wright 1979; Goffman 1976; Key 1972, 1976, 1981; Lasch 1978; Preston 1977; Rosenbaum 1979; Schrank 1977). Jules Henry, for instance, has produced a moral and epistemological critique of advertising in an underrated and neglected book, *Culture Against Man*, published in 1963, just before *One-Dimensional Man*. Henry (1963, p 47) argues in a brilliant essay "Advertising as a Philosophical System" that American advertising contains a "new kind of truth": "pecuniary pseudo-truth — which may be defined as a false statement made as if it were true, but not intended to be believed. No proof is offered for a pecuniary pseudo-truth, and no one looks for it. Its proof is that it sells merchandise; if it does not, it is false". Henry analyses in detail its "para-poetic hyperbole," "pecuniary logic," and the underlying "pecuniary philosophy." Through a detailed examination of American advertising Henry condemns the system in its totality, sharply criticising the consumer society's theories of human nature, logic, epistemology, and concept of truth.

I am suggesting that in terms of the *tactics* of critical theory, it may be more effective to carry out critiques of the consumer society by beginning with particular commodities, advertisements, corporate or consumer practices, and then move on to more global critiques. Often the more totalising critiques of "commodity fetishism" or the consumer society simply preach to the converted and have little efficacy in creating critical perspectives on capitalism. Indeed, puritanical denunciation of commodities and consumption is politically useless and self-defeating. The target of a critical theory of the consumer society should thus not be commodities and consumption per se but the capitalist mode of production which produces the consumer society.

Critical theory should recognise the heterogeneity and multiplicity of the field of commodities and consumption and see it like the workplace, the home, the stage, the media and all domains of advanced capitalist society — as a *contested terrain*. Critical theory must also give up the concept of a one-dimensional society, controlled in its entirety by a monolithic capitalist class, in order to conceptualise the contradictions and conflicts that permeate contemporary capitalism. Critical theories of the consumer society tend to conceive of the production and consumption of commodities as the social cement that integrates individuals into the consumer society and often fail to see that, for instance, constantly increasing production of commodities and the drive toward ever-increasing consumption may be functional or dysfunctional for capital as a whole, or various sectors of capital. Part of the problem of the current crisis of American capitalism is the classical problem of over-production. In almost every sector of American industry, over-production has caused large stock piles of commodities that forced industry to cut back production and lay off workers. Industry voluntarily tried to impose excessive consumption on the public which was either unwilling or unable to engage in the orgies of consumerism desired by American industry.

The capitalist market and sphere of consumption is thus a contested terrain: people may resist capital's entreaties for increased consumption, or may demand higher wages to make this possible which capital may not want to, or may not be able to, grant. Commodities and firms compete for consumer allegiance and consumers frequently reject and negate products or models. Investments in new sectors of industry, such as electronics or computers, may destabilise older industrial sectors (7). Closing down American plants in order to produce

cheaper products in Third World countries may reduce consumer demand through the resulting unemployment and may elicit new political demands to control corporate investment and movement. Contradictions between countries struggling for world trade may destabilise particular capitalist societies, and even the world system as a whole. Critical theory needs to investigate the ramifications of these contradictions and conflicts between different sectors of capital and must abandon the monolithic model of "one-dimensional society" which fails to grasp the vulnerabilities of advanced capitalism. Critical theory needs to see how these crises and conflicts are played out in the media (Kellner 1979; 1982) and conceptualise the media and consumption as providing both stabilising and destabilising functions for contemporary capitalism that provides both obstacles to and possibilities for social change.

Critical Theory and Consumer Politics

Critical theory has provided powerful global critiques of the consumer society but has not, I believe, provided useful perspectives on the commodity and consumption which will help in the vast process of total social reconstruction that is the task of the present age. To become politically relevant, critical theory should recall the important observation made by Enzenberger (1974, p11) that the media and commodities "do not owe their irresistible power to any sleight-of-hand but to the elemental power of deep social needs which come through even in the present depraved form of these media". Crucial is his admonition that "A socialist movement ought not to denounce these needs, but take them seriously, investigate them, and make them politically productive".

Unfortunately, critical theory has not yet undertaken a serious investigation of consumer needs and practices that both explains the attractions and power of the commodity and how consumer politics might evolve in resistance to the consumerism promoted by contemporary capitalism. In order to carry through these tasks, critical theorists should take seriously consumer politics and consider participation in new social movements, like the consumer, health, environmental movements. Involvement in these movements might help critical theorists to develop their theories of advanced capitalism in dialogue with the perspectives on capitalism and social change put forth in these movements. However, critical theory should not operate under the illusion that it contains the truth about capitalism which it can then provide to the new social movements. As the young Marx (1978, p14-15) wrote:

Up to now the philosophers had the solution of all riddles lying in their lectern, and the stupid uninitiated world had only to open its jaws to let the roast partridges of absolute science fly into its mouth . . . we shall confront the world not as doctrinaires with a new principle: 'Here is the truth, bow down before it!' We develop new principles to the world out of its own principles. We do not say to the world: 'Stop fighting; your struggle is of no account. We want to shout the true slogan at you.' We only show the world what it is fighting for, and consciousness is something that the world must acquire, like it or not.

Critical theory should learn from these new social movements, participate in their struggles and debates, and then elaborate new critical perspectives on capitalism and the new society slowly and painfully emerging from the ruins of the Age of Capital. Critical theory might also gain new perspectives on commodities and consumption from study of the politics of consumption in existing socialist societies. A trip to Cuba in Fall 1982, just before writing this article, suggested to me that the global denunciation of the commodity and consumption in classical critical theory does not contribute to the development of emancipatory perspectives on the transition to socialism. Although the Cubans are very proud of their achievements in providing education, health care, social services, culture and political participation to their people, they are not happy about the low level of consumption and frequent shortages of consumer goods and long lines at stores which have desired goods. Underdevelopment of the sphere of consumption was imposed upon them, they claim, by the unequal development produced by centuries of colonialism and the relative underdevelopment of sectors of their society, as well as by the American blockade. The Cubans say that they were forced to make choices concerning social priorities that put non-essential consumer goods relatively low on the list. And they complain that the continued American blockade, the fluctuations of the world sugar market, attacks on their economy and



society by the CIA and right-wing Cuban exiles, etc. have forced underdevelopment in commodity production and consumption upon them.

Although there is certainly no desire in Cuba to model a consumer society on advanced capitalism, there is certainly no hostility toward commodities and consumption. This position tends to be the stance of alienated intellectuals rather than socialist militants. Instead the Cubans, and other socialist societies, see commodities and consumption as integral parts of a socialist society where people's basic needs will actually be fulfilled for the first time in history. Producing this type of society requires precisely the discriminating approach to the commodity and consumption proposed here. New critical theories of consumption can begin as "anticipatory prefigurations" of a new society, as each of us begins more consciously and socially to develop consumer practices aimed at the elimination of all commodities and consumer activities that are not genuinely useful, beneficial and life-enhancing.

Notes

1. Henri Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947-1962, three volumes) touches on, in a Marxian framework, some of the Marcusean themes of a consumer society, but it is not until his book *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1971) that Lefebvre calls contemporary capitalism "the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption." Another critique of the consumer society from a critical theory standpoint is found in the work of Erich Fromm (1955), whose theories offer interesting similarities and differences from Marcuse's theory (see Kellner 1983). I discuss Fromm's theory later in this paper. In their work *Monopoly Capital* (1966) Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy propose Marxist theories of advertising, consumption and mass culture as crucial components of the capitalist system. See the critique of their formulations on these topics by Dallas Smythe (1977) and the analysis of the similarities between the theories of capitalist integration in Marcuse's critical theory and Baran and Sweezy by Harry Cleaver (1979).
2. The seminal ideas of Marcuse's theory are found in the Early Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (1975) — not just in the celebrated critique of alienated labor, but also in those striking passages where Marx discusses the role of commodities, needs, and money. Marcuse's analysis was also deeply influenced by Lukács' analysis of the commodity and reification in *History and Class Consciousness* (Kellner 1983).
3. "Capital logic" theories are associated with the work of Roman Rosdolsky, Paul Mattick, Harry Braverman and others who posit the logic of capital as the prime mover in the development and history of capitalist societies. See the discussion and criticisms of capital logic theories in Aronowitz (1979). Capital logic theories and critical theory both picture the development of advanced capitalism in terms of the exigencies of capital accumulation and downplay elements of class struggle and working class, or popular, initiative as social forces which help constitute contemporary society. Against the capital logic approach to history a school of history focusing on working class struggles and resistance has originated in the work of EP Thompson, Herbert Gutman and others.
4. A special supplement, "The Debt Economy," in *Business Week* (Oct. 12, 1974) states that: "It is inevitable that the U.S. economy will grow more slowly than it has . . . Some people will obviously have to do with less . . . Yet it will be a hard pill for many Americans to swallow — the idea of doing with less so that big business can have more . . . Nothing that this nation, or any other nation, has done in modern history compares in difficulty with the selling job that must now be done to make people accept the new reality." A contradiction emerges here between business imperatives to accumulate more capital for themselves and to impose new scarcity on the working population and the constant barrage of advertising that exhorts the population to Buy, Buy, Buy! This is a dangerous situation for the capitalist class in that many political theorists have argued that "rising expectations" which are not met lead to struggles for radical change. See Daniel Bell (1960, pp 31ff) and Marcuse (1972, pp 16ff).
5. Marcuse's concept of false needs and distinction between true and false needs has caused much controversy. Enzensberger (1974, pp110ff) has argued that consumer needs express genuine needs for pleasure and gratification but in a "depraved form" and distorted fashion under capitalism. Marcuse's student William Leiss (1976, 1978, 1979, 1982) has been carrying

through a sustained polemic against the concept of false needs. Although Leiss is correct to argue that the concepts of "commodity fetishism" and "false needs" are usually imprecise, I believe that the concepts can be reconstructed and made more precise. Some of Leiss's own work accomplishes this task, I believe, and I am trying here to concretise and clarify these terms which I think are still valuable weapons in the critical theory armoury.

6. I would argue that anyone who wants to be totally free from capitalist manipulation should avoid buying corporate, advertised products, for if depth-psychology and theories of subliminal seduction have any basis in fact, then any of us could be subject to manipulation and buy products because we have been subliminally manipulated by ads. Thus if one wants to avoid this type of manipulation personally, one should desist from buying anything that is advertised by corporations who use subliminal seduction (see Keys, 1972, 1976, and 1981 for the theory and documentation).

7. I am currently doing research into the restructuring of capital, the labor process, and everyday life through the electronic and computer revolutions and in forthcoming studies will carry out critical evaluations of the new computer and electronic technologies along the lines suggested in this paper, as well as analysing their impact on the dynamics and development of advanced capitalism. For pioneering studies of this field, from a Marxist viewpoint, see CSE micro-electronics group (1980); Mosco (1982); and Schiller (1981). If critical theory wants to continue to be relevant to the vicissitudes of advanced capitalism, it must explore the impact of the new technologies on consciousness and society.'

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