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Chapter 7

Erosion and Experience: Education for Democracy in a Consumer Society

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The theme of this volume, “Education, Democracy, and the Public Good,” clearly owes much to John Dewey’s description of the crucial relationship between the capacity to learn and the ability to mobilize and sustain a just social and political order. In his work, Dewey (1916) illustrated this relationship by suggesting that “democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 101), implicating our very social identities in the fostering of humane forms of coexistence—identities that are developed within the decidedly social space of educational activity. However, as critical educational scholars have noted (see, e.g., Goodman & Saltman, 2002; Molnar, 2005a; Saltman, 2000; Saltman & Gabbard, 2011; Schubert, 2009), enactments of education, democracy, and a public that bear any resemblance to Dewey’s vision are only spectral presences in contemporary American culture, alive perhaps in name only. Goodman and Saltman (2002) argue, for example, that “the promise of democracy appears to have eluded our victory” (p. 1), in the wake of political power being concentrated with the corporate elite and in light of antidemocratic ideologies and practices that are increasingly common in the United States, including “militarism, patriarchy, and hierarchical and authoritarian social relations” (Saltman & Gabbard, 2011, p. 20). Immediately following 9/11, then-President Bush declared, “We can’t let terrorists stop us from shopping,” a statement that directly conflates citizenship in the purportedly *democratic* West with the capacity to consume—a position that, as we will argue, is also developed via educational activity.

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In this chapter, we explore what citizenship means in an age that is largely defined by consumption and when education—both within and outside of schools—has become increasingly commodified and commercialized. We raise questions regarding how citizens, publics, and axiological dispositions are formed and deformed by the parasitic relationship between market ideology and educational institutions, and we discuss the tensions between reproduction and possibility in acts of resistance to these constrained spaces. We also describe how the acquisitive society has taken rise via explorations of educational and sociological literature addressing consumerism in three primary arenas: social life, education, and the individual psyche. In these spaces, we argue that the consumptive force of late capitalist social formations dismisses, undermines, and potentially colonizes the educational project of democracy. Acquisitive cultural developments in these sites foster deep identifications with consumerist ends via the curriculum of consumer culture, normalized practices of overconsumption, the growing ubiquity of consumptive ideology in schools and the corporatization of schools, and the construction of psychic structures that implore us to take up identity positions that are coterminous with the desires of the market. We conclude with our vision of the potential pedagogical interventions that can be developed despite the cultural ubiquity of problematic patterns and ideologies of consumption, based largely in the notion that Dewey's democratic utopia might not be completely lost, but rather displaced, deposited elsewhere in the cultural landscape and awaiting rediscovery.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMING: LIFE IN A “CONSUMEROCRACY”

In its most rudimentary conceptualization, *consumption* refers to “the processes by which consumer goods and services are created, bought, and used” (McCracken, 1990, p. xi), an economic formation and cultural practice that has become one of the major ways life is currently organized (Norris, 2007). However, as we will argue, beneath the ubiquity and trenchant character of consumptive practices lie deeply imbricated habits of mind, configurations of identity based in desire and lack, and psychic dreamworlds (Benjamin, 2002) that flatten social and historical space in favor of the acquisition of objects. Thus, consumption is a process—a “set of social, cultural, and economic practices” (Bertelsen, 1996, p. 90)—that, in capitalism, is undergirded by the *ideology* of consumerism. This ideology “serves to legitimate capitalism in the eyes of ordinary people” (Bertelsen, 1996, p. 90) and to alter their fundamental identity structures to align with the values and desires of the marketplace. As a premier capitalist nation, the United States, in particular, is “the most consumer-oriented society in the world” (Schor, 2004, p. 9). There are more than 46,000 shopping centers in the U.S., a two-thirds increase since 1986. House sizes in the U.S. have increased rapidly, with huge walk-in closets and four-car garages “to store record quantities of stuff” (Schor, 2004, p. 9). And we are inundated by advertising that is increasingly “pervasive, insidious, and interactive” (Molnar, Boninger, Wilkinson, & Fogarty, 2010, p. 83).

Overconsumption and consumerism have altered the environment, reshaped social and cultural relations, and redefined the political realm. Kahn (2010b) points out that the massive ecological disaster fueled by overconsumption is also directly linked with the exploitation of huge numbers of human beings across the planet, most specifically the “global destitute, poor, and working classes who cannot meaningfully partake of the consumer society’s living standard improvements” (p. 52). Consumption has also been associated with declining community involvement (Putnam, 2000) and everyday socializing among friends, neighbors, and community members (Schor, 2004). Furthermore, the ideology of consumerism has altered human relationships, so that they are “increasingly mediated by objects” (Norris, 2006a, p. 458)—consumerism turns “all things in the world into objects for human consumption” (Norris, 2005, para. 3). This move toward the commodification of human relationships has been accompanied by a decline of political engagement (Norris, 2006a, 2006b). We believe it is imperative to address consumption and consumerism, given the increasing role they play in structuring our lives, in fostering gross social and economic disparities, and in producing a psychic state of endless, potentially debilitating desire (Bocock, 1993; McLaren, 2005; Norris, 2006a, 2006b).

The Metaphor of Erosion

As a conceptual framework, we draw on the frequently used metaphor of *erosion* to discuss how public—as well as psychologically private—spaces have been fundamentally altered by the onset and persistence of contemporary consumer ideology. However, we hope to deepen and more accurately use *erosion* to understand the educational aspects of consumer society and its structural reciprocity to the current landscape of schooling. Scholars such as Egan (1983) have used the metaphor of erosion in their work on the decay of democratic possibilities in schools and the publics they simultaneously shape and serve. In these writings, the term has commonly been used as a synonym for erasure or disintegration—terms that signify the production of an absence.

Our argument, however, suggests that critical scholars should engage with the notion of erosion in a way more attuned to its geological origins and one that more accurately—from our perspective—represents the educative aspects of capitalism and consumption. To this point, we argue that erosion is not a signification of destruction; rather, it conveys a subtle, gradual transformation, one that works not to eradicate but to change the fundamental existence and behavior of its object. Erosion reshapes formations into new configurations, often cutting deep grooves on surfaces or effacing peaks into plateaus, concepts that, in their metaphoric extension, take on compelling similarities to Dewey’s (1916) notion of “bad habits” (p. 58). These habits, for Dewey, were those routines “that possess us instead of our possessing them,” and in this transferal of ownership “mark the close of [the individual’s] power to vary” (p. 58). Within the examples in this chapter, as well as within the larger example of consumer culture itself, an erosion of certain formations of mind has taken place,

one that has potentially worn the traces of consumerist drives deeply into individual psyches but has done so in a subtle manner, one that forecloses our ability to consider these shifts objectively. As such, we learn consumerism as a natural aspect of our own autonomous public and private identities.

Democracy, Education, and Acquisition

In addition to the metaphor of erosion, we draw on Dewey's notion of the democratic purpose of education, both inside and outside of schools. In 1933, Dewey presented his vision of an educational utopia (which is outlined in Dewey's newspaper article from the *New York Times*, reproduced in Schubert, 2009, pp. 11–12); this vision condemned the "acquisitive economic society" as the force preventing democratic educational environments from existing both within formal institutions such as schools and outside of them, in other everyday life contexts where we learn and grow. Dewey became concerned that "an attitude of acquisition—the capitalistic ethos, if you will—penetrates our being in ways we scarcely realize" (Schubert, 2006, p. 82). Schubert (2006) further argues that acquisitiveness as a cultural force "staunchly prevents the kind of education that Dewey proposes as most desirable" (p. 82). This attitude of acquisitiveness is closely linked to what, writing in post-depression America, Dewey (1930/1984) called the "dominant corporateness" that had become prominent in the United States (as cited in Mackey, 2009, p. 179). Indeed Dewey (1930/1984) went so far as to claim that "the need for the present age is to apprehend the fact that, for better or worse, we are living in a corporate age" (p. 64). Dewey discussed how corporations were gaining more power, which led to more mass production, "growing standardization," and "mass uniformity" (as cited in Mackey, 2009, p. 179). This corporateness also helped seed a consumerist mind-set within the general public. More recently, Perkins (2004) has used the term *corporatocracy* to describe how Western corporations have ascended to power and how they, in conjunction with big banks and governments, control schools, businesses, and media and thus are strongly influential in shaping cultural, economic, and social life. Perkins also helps us understand the connection between corporateness and consumerism, as he explains that one of the functions of this corporatocracy is to encourage an attitude and practice of consumerism: "every opportunity is taken to convince us that purchasing things is our civic duty, that pillaging the earth is good for the economy and therefore serves our higher interests" (p. ix).

Dewey saw the growing ubiquity of consumerism as a foil to democracy, his criticism of economic relationships as a driver of social relations nearing a Marxian timbre in some instances (see Schubert, 2009). Molnar's (2005a) work on school commercialism clarifies this point to some extent, as he locates Dewey as antipodal to the *education* first conceptualized by Edward Bernays, the pioneer of propaganda's use as a tool within public relations and advertising. Given the omnipresence of consumption in our lives, it seems currently impossible to understand education in its broadest articulations "without a conception of the part played by consumption"

(Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997, p. 18). In much the same way, we argue that it is difficult to understand contemporary American (and increasingly, global) culture and identity outside of the context of consumerism and commoditization.

CONSUMERISM AND THE EROSION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Daily, Swain, Huysman, and Tarrant (2010) argue that Americans live in a “consumerocracy,” a society where commercial appeals are powerful and ubiquitous and, indeed, constitute the “curriculum of our culture” (Molnar, 2005a, p. 81). Through interactions in the marketplace and in the market-permeated practices of everyday life, individuals learn how to consume and how to interact with consumer capitalism (Martens, 2005). Above all, in a consumerocracy individuals become socialized into the ideology of consumerism, through which we learn to cultivate strong connections with commodities and enter into a potentially deleterious, associative process in which “happiness and a positive self-image come from acquisition” (Stasko & Norris, 2008, p. 128; see also Jhally, 2006; Stearns, Sandlin, & Burdick, 2011). Williams (1980) posits that we do not simply buy objects, we buy “social respect, discrimination, health, beauty, success, power to control your environment” (p. 189)—in short, the qualities and lifestyles that the “magic system” of advertising articulates with particular products. These opinions complement the prescient Deweyan notions of democracy’s loss within a social space organized around acquisitive drives, as consumerism’s educational vector, in many ways, breaks down the conceptualization of a public sphere in favor of the privatized marketplace as the bedrock of civic interaction and expression. Thus, we have been taught by the public and institutional curricula that normalize consumerism to relate to the market, the shopping center, and even the heavily commercialized space of the Internet as if these were public spaces, agoras, and commons, a process that further reifies these sites within our identities as citizens.

The erosion of our notion of what shared spaces are and mean lays the framework for the habitualization and imbrication of seemingly natural consumerist desires and market values. This habitualization is best understood in the linked terms *neoliberalism* and *designer capitalism*. In terms of the former concept, Friedrich Hayek (winner of the 1974 Nobel Prize in economics and key proponent of neoliberalism) argued that the market rather than the state should provide social, medical, and educational services, because the market fostered a competitive environment where new and better services could be invented (Stromquist, 2002). However, we argue that market values are not coterminous with—and are frequently deleterious toward—the democratic ends many of these public functions were designed to manifest (Goodman & Saltman, 2002). Critics of neoliberal ideology (e.g., Giroux, 2004) claim that this competitive environment would effectively negate democratic ideals such as equality of access to services based on prohibitive profit structures, an imbalance of power that privileges the voices of the wealthy over others, and an impoverished agency and capacity for protection from and resistance toward corporate power.

If neoliberalism signals the privatization of social and public spaces, then designer capitalism, according to jagodzinski (2004), refers to the privatization of the psychic self via products whose branding exists as a subset of cultural signifiers. In designer capitalism, we pedagogically *become* Ford truck owners, Marlboro men and women, and Macs rather than PCs, and we do so in no insignificant way. Ultimately, within designer capitalism, branded products become stand-ins for who we are and what we desire—a symbolic arrangement of selfhood that is wholly produced and subsumed via consumerism (jagodzinski, 2004). In essence, marketing and branding pedagogies elicit misrecognitions of the identity formations offered by consumer products as though they might help alleviate the foundational sense of lack for a lost space of identity. This is the creation of the total customer—one who maps the offerings of the marketplace onto the fragmented subjectivity he or she experiences and, in doing so, always fails to be completely satisfied.

The Shift from Citizen to Consumer

In the late 1800s, the urbanization and industrialization of American society helped foster consumerism as a prominent American ideology, which was initially encouraged by the development of city centers and large department stores (Hoechsmann, 2010) and disseminated through newspapers and expositions such as World Fairs (see Hoechsmann, 2010; Williams, 1982; for discussions of the importance of world fairs in spreading consumerist ideology)¹ and which eventually spread through schools, textbooks, and children's literature (Spring, 2003). Consumerist ideology and the spread of mass consumer culture in the United States greatly expanded in the early 20th century and exploded by mid-century, spurred along by the further proliferation of department stores, by the continuing influence of world fairs, and especially by the rapid growth of the advertising industry that had originally developed in the late 19th century (Spring, 2003). Hoechsmann (2007) explains that the development and spread of a consumerist ideology was a gradual process, starting in the 19th century with "a trend toward the increased commodification of elements of social life" (p. 656) through, for example, the packaging and branding of basic foodstuffs such as oats (for a detailed analysis of the historical nuances in the development of consumerism, see Hoechsmann, 2007, 2010). In addition to this trend toward the commodification of everyday life, the late 19th and early 20th centuries experienced, with the help of early brand managers and advertising professionals, the development of what Goldman and Papon (1996) call the "commodity sign"—which consists of a brand name commodity combined with an image that is connected with or imbued with a particular social or cultural meaning and which boosts both the symbolic and economic value of the commodity. These trends led to a situation in which advertising "prompted desires for new products; it convinced consumers that existing products were unfashionable and, therefore, obsolete; it made brand names into playthings in personal fantasies" (Spring, 2003, p. 2). Advertising also ushered in a new consumerist version of capitalism, where the rational "economic man" model no longer held;

instead, buyers were “driven by irrational emotions associated with particular brand names and/or products” (Spring, 2003, p. 2). Above all, advertising—operating in and through schools, radio, newspapers, billboards, magazines, theme parks, department stores, and eventually movies and television—helped shift the primary identity of Americans from “citizen” to “consumer” and has been involved in educating “consumer-citizens”—people who “accept any political situation as long as there is an abundance of consumer goods” and whose goals consist of “spending, maximizing their use of credit, and consuming as much as possible” (Spring, 2003, p. 4).

The “captains of consciousness” (Ewan, 1976) of the early advertising industry sought to position the consumer marketplace as a “realm of an encompassing ‘Truth’” (p. 67) and to turn workers into consumers through what Edward Filene, an early entrepreneur and department store owner, called in 1924 the “school of freedom,” which would teach workers to desire consumer goods rather than the control of the means of production (Hoechsmann, 2007). This “school of freedom” came “to play a hegemonic role” (Hoechsmann, 2007, p. 658), however, as it began equating consumerism with patriotism. Hoechsmann (2007) explains, citing Stuart Ewan’s (1976) history of advertising,

“Within governmental and business rhetoric,” states Ewan, “consumption assumed an ideological veil of nationalism and democratic lingo.” (p. 42). The “freedom” and American “feel-good” patriotism in American popular culture associated with the use of the automobile, for example, “mom, apple-pie and Chevrolet,” speaks volumes to the success of this ideological endeavor. In fact, by adopting “the double purpose of sales and ‘civilization,’” advertisements attempted to transform “pockets of resistance” (Ewan, 1976, p. 43) within the population, which was still coming to terms with industrialization and modernization. (p. 658)

Consumerism is increasingly viewed as the way to enact “democracy” and “citizenship” (Kahn, 2010a, 2010b; McLaren, 1995; Saltman, 2000), as shopping has been positioned as a way to showcase the “American way of life” as superior to other political and economic systems (Spring, 2003). In this consumerocracy, freedom and equality take on commercial rather than democratic meanings, as the “common good” becomes regulated by corporatist ideology—by “the laws of the market, free competition, private ownership, and profitability” (Apple, 2000, p. 30)—as well as by consumerist worldviews. Political action and social activism become equated with the ability of consumers to “vote with their dollars in a free market” (McLaren, 1995, p. 88), as people are encouraged by politicians (e.g., the exhortation by George W. Bush, above) and the popular press (e.g., *Time Magazine* in 1955 posited that American economic and political prosperity depended on high levels of consumption [Grossberg, 1992]) to shop as the solution to various social, environmental, political, and economic problems (Kahn, 2010b). “Freedom” becomes equated with the opportunity to express who we are through what we buy (Kahn, 2010b; Norris, 2007). “Empowerment” and “responsibility” become viewed in “economic and consumerist terms” (Usher et al., 1997, p. 38), as the advertising industry frames what it does as a public service, “informing, educating, and empowering us for participation” in a world of consumption (Norris, 2007, p. 167).

James Kuntsler argues that one of the negative consequences of this shift from citizen to consumer is that whereas citizens have responsibilities for and obligations to their fellow citizens and communities, consumers have no such duties to their fellow consumers (as cited in DeGraff, Wann, & Naylor, 2002). To this end, Molnar (2005a) contrasts advertising's ideology of freedom with Dewey's conception of freedom, which is "expressed through the control of [manufactured] impulse[s] in the service of intelligent purposes" (p. 82) and is ideally enacted as shared social responsibility toward democratic ends. Relatedly, Bauman (2008) asserts that our responsibility as political citizens of a democratic polity is being transformed into a false responsibility for consumer identity creation—replacing political expression with a commodified counterpart. This process of transforming public responsibility and democratic engagement into private preoccupation marks a shift in the concept of citizenship (Barber, 2007).

Individualism, the Growth of the Private, and the Erosion of the Public Realm

Accompanying this shift from citizen to consumer has been a growth in individualism (Aldridge, 2003; Welton, 1995). The rise of consumerist ideology has created a society characterized by what Riesman (1961) referred to as "the lonely crowd" (see also Putnam, 2000). Molnar (2005a) explains that members of this lonely crowd "define themselves by their possessions and express their individuality by looking, smelling, and thinking like everyone else" (p. 80). Missing from this "crowd" is a sense of a "society" where people come together to collectively address social issues, which, according to Bauman (2002), is a hallmark of democratic politics. Jhally (2006) posits that advertising has helped create this individualized way of being, as it addresses only *individual* needs and desires and leaves out "those things that we have to negotiate collectively, such as poverty, healthcare, housing and the homeless, the environment, among other things" (p. 105). As Giroux (2005) states, advertising thus operates as a form of public pedagogy whose aim "is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain" (as cited in Kahn, 2010b, p. 49). Kahn (2010b) argues that this individualism bankrupts "robust ideas of political and social democracy, as personal agency, social freedom, and the obligations of citizenship are ideologically tethered to capitalist market relations and renewed profiteering" (p. 49). Thus, core understandings of both self and social commitments become indistinguishable from the needs of the market economy and of the private interests it serves—we begin to truly live *for*, rather than *in*, the social configuration of capitalism.

This focus on individualism, for example, has permeated mainstream approaches to environmentalism, including what Kahn (2010b) calls the "green consumerism" movement. In this "individualization of responsibility" (Maniates, 2002) approach, individual acts of consumer choice are promoted as solutions to what are actually larger structural problems (Kahn, 2010a, 2010b). Maniates (2002) traces this focus on individual responsibility in the United States to the 1980s when conservative

discourses promoted personal responsibility and sought to limit state power over an economy that was “characterized as innately self-regulating and efficient” (p. 52). Responsibility for solving environmental problems shifted from governmental and corporate policies “to individual consumers and their decisions in the marketplace. This shift was altogether consistent with then-President Reagan’s doctrine of personal responsibility, corporate initiative, and limited government” (p. 53). The individualization of environmental responsibility continues to be promoted in popular discourse. When responsibility for solving consumption-related problems is individualized, people have very little chance to develop a “sociological imagination” (Mills, 1959) through which they can come to “think institutionally” (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1991)—that is, to understand “institutions, the nature and exercise of political power, or ways of collectively changing the distribution of power and influence in society” (Maniates, 2002, p. 45).

This focus on individualism has also led to a growth of the private sphere and an erosion of the public realm (Aldridge, 2003; Arendt, 1958; Barber, 2007; Blokhuis, 2008; Stevenson, 2010). Hannah Arendt (1958), in close alignment to Dewey’s philosophy, argues that the *public* is a fundamental component of human life. Arendt suggests that we realize our fullest humanity only through public life, in the public realm, not through the false promise of consumerism. Klein (2000) specifically describes the explosion of branded corporate spaces that are privatizing and redefining the concept of “public space.” These branded spaces—for example, theme park malls and themed megastores such as Barnes & Noble, Nike, Virgin Records, or Bass Pro Shops—are often “aesthetically and creatively thrilling” and are “privatized public utopias” that tap into consumer emotions (Klein, 2000). But, as Klein reminds us, however much these “private branded enclaves” try to masquerade as public spaces and operate as “de facto [public] squares” (p. 183), they are not. In fact, although public town squares are “sites for community discussion, protests, and political rallies” (p. 183), within these privatized spaces, free speech is censored, dissent is squelched, and civil liberties are diminished.

Communication in a “Marketocracy”

The overwhelming prevalence of marketing and advertising further contributes to the erosion and transformation of the public sphere and the enactment of democracy through shaping and restricting possibilities for communication in various ways (Jhally, 2006). In 2005, the estimated U.S. expenditure on advertising was \$276 billion (Barber, 2007). Marketing influences all of our decisions; everything we decide, from what to buy to whom to vote for, is “with few exceptions, shaped and influenced by messages bought and paid for by those who would profit from our decision” (Molnar, 2005a, p. 81). Indeed, the advertising industry was initially created in the late 19th century as a form of “education” for the public, fostering a market for the mass-produced goods made possible through industrialization (Molnar, 2005a; Spring, 2003). Hoechsmann (2007) explains that advertisers sought to “model new identities

for people to emulate and to depoliticize any resistance to [them]" (p. 659). Bernays saw "education" through propaganda as a "legitimate form of human activity" (as cited in Molnar, 2005a, p. 76), as a progressive tool of "democratic governance and the market economy" (Molnar, 2005a, p. 77), and also as "essential to keeping the wheels of politics and commerce turning while preserving social stability" (Molnar, 2005a, p. 76).

Advertising also shapes how we speak to one another through providing us with the very language, structure, and system that we use to do so. It has played an essential role in creating what Stasko and Norris (2008) call a "marketalkracy," which they define as a "political regime that is centered around the language of marketing and of the market itself" (p. 126). Stasko and Norris identify a new kind of "literacy" that is characterized by familiarity with, knowledge of, and everyday use of corporate logos, jingles, images, and products. Additionally, the structure of advertising, with its 30-second sound bites, further constricts opportunities for public engagement by sacrificing meaning and complexity for repetition, persuasiveness, and a dronelike simplicity. Because marketing has been for most of its history a unidirectional mode of communication,² there is very little opportunity to actually talk back to it or to engage in dialogue with it.

Molnar and Reaves (2002), drawing on Dewey, posit that a system in which marketing controls discourse and equates market choice with democracy is profoundly antidemocratic because "it subverts the intellectual qualities and debases the civic relationships that make democratic life imaginable" (p. 41). In other words, advertising subverts the qualities that make an experience educative; an educative experience, for Dewey, was part of a "continuity of experiences that promote individual and community growth" (Molnar, 2005a, p. 83). Advertising, then, miseducates, in the sense that it, like all miseducative experiences,

has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experiences in the future are restricted. (Dewey, as cited in Molnar, 2005a, p. 81)

For Dewey, miseducative experiences limit further experience in part because they are disconnected and create "dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits" (Molnar, 2005a, p. 82), which makes it difficult for someone to reflect on, integrate, make sense of, and ultimately have any control over future experiences (Molnar, 2005a). Here, it is crucial to note that we are not arguing for a simple binary heuristic for evaluating the total construct of advertising. Rather, the critical point is to understand advertising as a pedagogical form that—via its close association with and ontogenetic links to consumerist desires—poses a structural threat to the concept of democratic social spaces and democratic habits of mind. In short, whereas the content of advertising messages could lead individuals to the species of educative experiences that Dewey idealized, the very structural underpinnings of advertising, especially the unerring profit motive—the marketer's *raison d'être*—serve as a foil to democratic ends.

In a marketocracy, advertisers appeal to consumers' irrationality while "freedom" is equated with the ability to enact any impulse or desire, without the mediation of what Dewey called "intelligent judgement":

It may be a loss rather than a gain to escape from the control of another person only to find one's conduct dictated by immediate whim and caprice, that is, at the mercy of impulses into whose formation intelligent judgement has not entered. A person whose conduct is controlled in this way has at most only the illusion of freedom. Actually he is directed by forces over which he has no command. (Dewey, as cited in Molnar, 2000, p. 6)

Molnar (2000) explains that the current system of advertising illustrates Dewey's argument: "In the name of freedom and individuality, advertising encourages individuals to give in to their impulses so that they may be controlled more easily by others" (p. 6). Molnar (2005a) further posits that whereas Dewey advocated for educational experiences that integrated individuals and communities, advertising fragments continuity and alienates individuals from community.

With the unerring assault and transmogrification of public spaces, the ease by which individuals accept consumerism is apparent: The images and products offered are made to appear as remedies to the same alienating effects they produce, such as the loss of social bonds, the repression of agency in one's life, and the amount of labor exacted to simply maintain one's social position. Consumerism thus conceals its destructive character and problematic implications and makes the public realm or political change seem unimportant and unnecessary. In fact, public space itself is often used to advance consumerism when viewed by marketers as a resource to be exploited via the slow churn of erosive logics. Not only is the public lost, but it is also replaced with things that advance consumerism: monstrous billboards hanging down apartment buildings, political leaders calling on people to shop, and the widespread use of schools to advance consumerism.

COMMERCIALISM AND THE EROSION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLING

Dewey argued that schooling should contribute to the promotion of democracy and the fostering of the next generation of citizens (Molnar, 2005a). Dewey (1916) envisioned this process as the movement toward a "social ideal" that was both shared and participated in by that particular social order's members, all of which is fostered and underscored via commitments to an education that "gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (p. 115). This view of the role of schooling has been forwarded throughout American history, most notably by educators in the Progressive Era; curriculum reconceptualists who viewed curriculum as a political, gendered, and raced text; and the critical pedagogy movement (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Molnar, 2005a; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). Molnar (2005a) describes Dewey's vision of schooling as a democratic force:

For Dewey, an engaged democratic community built on rational interactions was necessary for the progressive development of humankind. Schools were, in his view, laboratories of democracy in which students learned democratic habits of cooperation and public service by living them in the classroom. Moreover, Dewey argued for a pedagogy guided by rational thought and problem-solving practice through which individuals could develop to their greatest capacity and contribute most effectively to democratic civic culture. (p. 80)

The philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958), too, argued that schooling was the venue through which we “learn to balance freedom, authority, and responsibility. It is the place where we renew a public world by communicating our traditions and an understanding of the past while leaving these projects open enough to become revisable by the citizens of the future” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 281). Enacting schooling for democracy also means challenging the existing status quo and hegemonic power structures (Molnar, 2005a) and helping students understand the past and cocreating the knowledge needed to change the present and envision a more just future (Stevenson, 2010).

Progressive and radical educational scholars have for almost a century argued that this democratic goal of schooling was being undermined by curricula undergirded by a social efficiency philosophy, whose purposes were to create a stratified and compliant workforce and to reproduce class inequality and exploitative modes of production (see, e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Counts, 1932; Kliebard, 1975). Despite Dewey’s early critique of schooling as fostering a culture of acquisitiveness (Schubert, 2009), only recently have there been sustained critiques of schooling’s role in producing consumers and perpetuating consumerist ideologies. Educational scholars have begun arguing that the democratic vision of schooling outlined above is becoming increasingly difficult to enact, given the widespread commercialization of schools and the growing prevalence of market and consumerist ideologies in public school classrooms, textbooks, curricula, buildings, and even school buses (Daily et al., 2010; Stevenson, 2010). These scholars have focused on this growing commercialization; its impact on learners, learning, and education; and possible ways of resisting it. For example, Molnar (2005a) has examined consumerism and commercialism within the K–12 schooling arena, exploring specifically how schools operate as consumer marketplaces. Other educational researchers working in similar veins include Giroux (2009), Norris (2011), Boyles (2005, 2008), Saltman (2000), Trammell (2005), and Breault (2005). Still others focus on the commodification of higher education and examine how corporations increasingly have become tightly enmeshed with higher education (see, e.g., Cox, 2003; Hentschke, Lechuga, & Tierney, 2010; Johnson, Kavanaugh, & Mattson, 2003; Miller, 2005; Noble, 2001; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). In this section, we draw on this scholarship to explore school commercialism and examine some of the ways in which commercialism is eroding a democratic enactment of public education. Because of space constraints, we focus in this section primarily on the K–12 public schooling realm, as other scholars in this volume focus on higher education.

The Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) at Arizona State University and University of Colorado at Boulder has been tracking trends in

schoolhouse commercialism for more than a decade. The Center for the Study of Commercialism defines commercialism as “ubiquitous product marketing that leads to a preoccupation with individual consumption to the detriment of oneself and society” (as cited in Molnar, 2005a, p. 3). Molnar (2006) argues that school commercialism takes three basic forms: selling *to* schools (vending), selling *in* schools (advertising), and the selling *of* schools (privatization). More specifically, Molnar et al. (2009; see also Molnar, 2006) present the following categories of school commercialism: (a) corporate sponsorship of school activities or programs; (b) agreements between schools and corporations through which marketers gain exclusive rights to sell particular products or services at school or during school-related or -sponsored programs; (c) corporate-sponsored incentive programs through which students are rewarded with commercial products or services for achieving various academic goals; (d) corporate appropriation of space on school property, including the selling of naming rights and agreements allowing corporations to advertise on school buildings and school buses; (e) corporate-sponsored curriculum materials, lesson plans, and other educational materials; (f) fundraising relationships between corporations and schools or affiliated groups such as PTAs, allowing businesses to sell products in school to raise money for school activities and operations; (g) advertising to students in schools through media such as radio, television, and the Internet (e.g., *Channel One* and *Bus Radio*); and (8) privatization of schools.

Businesses have advertised or sold products in schools for more than a century (Molnar, 2005a). Even as early as the 1920s, “concern about commercial influences in schools was significant enough in the United States to merit the appointment of a National Education Association (NEA) committee to study it” (Molnar, 2005a, p. 7). In the 1920s and 1930s, educator Harold Rugg created a series of textbooks that questioned consumerism through their lessons on how to evaluate and be skeptical of advertising; these texts raised the ire of advertising executives, who saw the books as “anti-advertising propaganda” and accused him and other consumer advocates of fostering communism (Spring, 2003, p. 133). Organizations such as the Advertising Federation of America, the American Legion, and the Guardians of American Education joined together against Rugg’s books and eventually succeeded in defeating them.

There has been a marked increase in school commercialism in the past two decades, as “almost every large corporation and trade association has some type of in-school marketing program” (Molnar, 2006, p. 623). CERU research shows that commercializing activities in schools increased 473% from 1990 to 2001 and continues to grow (Molnar & Reaves, 2002). In a recent report, Molnar et al. (2009) argue that during 2008–2009, aggressive marketing to children and youth in schools continued unabated, noting in particular that advertisers are targeting a variety of school spaces such as classrooms, cafeterias, hallways, and gyms. This trend has increased since the recent credit crisis, as a deepened funding crisis leads schools to turn to the same institutions that created the crisis. In a continuation of a trend they first noted in 2007, Molnar et al. (2009) describe how marketers seek to create a “total environment” by “blurring the boundaries between editorial content and advertising

and thus thoroughly infusing childhood with marketing messages” (p. 3). Children and youth are increasingly living in this “total marketing environment” through their engagement with marketing and advertising in digital spaces such as video games, social networking sites, and cell phones. This total marketing environment has also expanded as a result of a political climate friendly to marketing, broad social acceptance of ubiquitous marketing and advertising, and the willingness of marketers “to breach boundaries that previously limited their activities” (Molnar et al., 2009, p. 3). Advertising in schools has also become increasingly interactive, meaning that school-targeted marketing seeks to engage students in activities where they directly interact with advertised brands. As one example of how interactive school-based marketing has become, Molnar et al. (2009) provide the case of ASA Entertainment’s “Xbox 360 Anti-Gravity Tour,” which was jointly sponsored by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Molnar et al. (2009) describe the campaign:

The tour took the form of a mandatory assembly at schools, with action performances by athletes and speeches against smoking, and with Xbox gaming consoles at hand for students to play. Sponsors’ logos were highly visible on and around the half-pipes set up for the event and in the YouTube video, apparently available forever. The PR campaign leading up to the event at each school was led by both Xbox and ASA; marketers worked with school administrators to excite students through posters, fliers, and announcements. Local media were also invited to the events, which were not open to the public. Eighty-five school events were scheduled for 2009. (p. 4)

School commercialism allows corporations to make direct profit through marketing and selling products to students and also to develop brand loyalty for future sales; schools are competition-free marketing zones in which advertisers can get around the “clutter” caused by the prevalence of marketing outside schools. Furthermore, advertising in schools is a way to circumvent parental protections against advertising—and then to persuade kids to advertise to their parents on behalf of those same advertisers. Thus, children and youth become unpaid corporate representatives within their own family, and use what is known within the marketing industry as the “Nag Factor” or “Pester Power” (Linn, 2004; Norris, 2011; Schor, 2004). School commercialism also gives corporations a platform from which they can “disseminate corporate ideas about topics important to their interests,” through curriculum materials or sponsorship of various programs (Molnar, 2005a, p. 44). Relatedly, school commercialism provides corporations with a voice through which to “deliver a broader ideological message promoting consumption as the primary source of well-being and happiness” (Molnar, 2005a, p. 44). Finally, companies can capitalize on the social legitimacy accorded to schools even as their funding is cut, so that corporate involvement can be construed as benevolent (Norris, 2011; Spring, 2003).

Consequences of School Commercialism

The literature on school commercialism includes “critiques of the influence of commercialism on children’s lives,” “commentaries on the media- and advertising-saturated nature of late 20th century American childhood,” and “analyses of corporate

influence on public institutions and discourse” (Molnar, 2006, p. 623). In this section, we provide an overview of some of the negative consequences of school commercialism, including the ways in which it (a) fosters market values over human values and creates consumer-mindedness among students, (b) promotes poor health habits, (c) turns curriculum and pedagogy into corporate advertising, and (d) erodes democracy as it miseducates.

First, scholars have critiqued school commercialism for *fostering market values over human values and for creating consumer-mindedness in students*. Because corporations have made such inroads into schools, students come to learn the values of marketing (that one should always be dissatisfied and that the way to relieve dissatisfaction is through buying something) and the values of consumerism (that consumption is the path to happiness)—in essence, they learn market values at the expense of human ones (Molnar, 2006; Molnar et al., 2009). Shaker (1999), reporting on research from Greenberg and Brand, explained that students who regularly watched *Channel One* were more likely to agree that “money is everything; a nice car is more important than school; designer labels make a difference; I want what I see advertised; and wealthy people are happier than the poor” (p. 2). Molnar (2005a) explains that market values are only concerned with buying and selling. They

offer no guidance on matters of justice or fairness, and cannot, therefore, represent the interests of all children. Turning children over to the market ensures that they inevitably will be treated as an expense to be reduced or a resource to be harvested. In the process, some children and their families necessarily will be considered more valuable than others. (p. 134)

However, as critics such as Riesman (1961), Packard (1957), and Jhally (2006) have argued, consumerism and consumption do not lead to happiness and fulfillment but, rather, to “alienation, loneliness, and a loss of freedom” (Molnar, 2006, p. 633).

Education scholars also highlight the vast increase in the marketing of junk foods and other foods with little to no nutritional value in schools and point to the ways in which *school commercialism contributes to poor health habits* (Linn, 2004; Molnar, 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Molnar, Garcia, Boninger, & Merrill, 2008; Nestle, 2002; Schlosser, 2001; Schor & Ford, 2007). Molnar et al. (2008) conducted the first nationwide survey on food marketing in schools and, based on their data, estimate that between 16.4 and 19.6 million elementary schoolchildren in America (of a total population of 30.1 million American elementary schoolchildren) are exposed to marketing for foods high in fat and sugar and foods of minimal nutritional value. They go on to explain how important and disturbing this finding is, given that young children are being exposed to such nutritionally poor foods exactly at the ages where they are “developing personal preferences, buying habits, and eating habits” (p. 506). Molnar (2003, 2004) also specifically focuses on how public schools in poor urban areas are hit hardest because they are most in need of funding and thus most likely to look to corporate agreements to fill funding gaps. He goes on to point out that “health problems in young people, which may be exacerbated by some commercial

activities in schools, are particularly acute in poor and ethnic minority group communities” (Molnar, 2003, p. 371; see also Molnar, 2005a, 2005b; Schor, 2004).

Molnar (2003, 2004) suggests that corporate marketing programs often undermine or are in direct contradiction to the health and nutrition messages that schools are teaching through their health and physical education programs. In addition to physical health problems, Molnar (2005a), drawing on Schor’s (2004) work, also contends that school commercialism is linked to an increase in materialism among children and youth, which some research in turn links to harmful outcomes such as “increased smoking, drinking, and illegal drug use; a series of mental health disorders, including personality disorders and poorer achievement in school and in activities outside of school; and antisocial behaviors, including carrying weapons, skipping school, and vandalism” (Molnar, 2005a, p. 9). Furthermore, Molnar, Koski, and Boninger (2010) point to a number of psychological harms that some research has associated with increased exposure to advertising and commercialism.

School commercialism also has *negative impacts on curriculum and pedagogy* and may have problematic implications for curricular content and teachers’ and administrators’ pedagogical freedom. Molnar (2006) emphasizes how school commercialism has the potential to bias and distort curricular lessons. In an earlier work he explains,

A teacher who hands out “supplemental” instructional materials that market candy, personal care products, sport shoes, or soft drinks is manipulating children for the benefit of a special interest and undermining the integrity of the curriculum . . . Commercialism thus places schools in the position of ignoring their academic responsibilities and aligns them with corporations that in turn influence the content, tone, and tenor of what is taught. (Molnar, 2005a, p. 10)

Giroux (2005) argues that with the omnipresence of school commercialism, students become “subject to the whims and practices of marketers whose agenda has nothing to do with critical learning and a great deal to do with restructuring civic life in the image of market culture” (p. 151). For example, if corporations are providing computers, software, buildings, curriculum materials, and other products and services at schools, teachers might be less likely to engage in critiques of those corporations. When teachers use corporate-sponsored materials, students are also harmed when such “learning” activities teach them “to be uncritical and loyal consumers of particular branded products, or teach them, without reflection, to adopt points of view favorable to corporate sponsors” (Molnar, Koski, & Boninger, 2010, p. 74). Finally, as marketing and advertising make further inroads into schools, children and youth become fluent in the “literacy of consumption” (Norris, 2007, p. 168), a hegemonic form of literacy that only simulates learning. Although students are fluent in this language of the market, they are much more limited in their ability to “talk back” to or critique corporate power (Stasko & Norris, 2008).

Much of the educational scholarship on commercialism in public schools also focuses more broadly on how *school commercialism erodes democracy and miseducates*,

extending beyond the aforementioned classroom practices and into the actual functions and purposes of education itself. Molnar and Reaves (2002) argue that their more than a decade's worth of analyses of school commercialism underscore a disturbing reality: that "the ideals of John Dewey have been eclipsed by the propaganda techniques of Ivy Ledbetter Lee and Edward Bernays" (p. 37). Several contemporary theorists and educational scholars suggest that there is a profound tension between the commercial objectives and the democratic ideals of education. Political philosopher Michael Sandel (2004) argues that

the commercialization of the classroom highlights the tension between unbounded markets and civic ideals. The purpose of public education is not to provide basic training for a consumer society, but to cultivate citizens capable of thinking critically about the consumer society they inhabit. Infusing the classroom with consumerism is at odds with this civic purpose. (para. 13)

Giroux (2000) also stresses the distinction between the commercial and civic aims of education: "students become subject to the whims and practices of marketers whose agenda has nothing to do with critical learning and a great deal to do with restructuring civic life in the image of market culture" (p. 173). Clearly, these articulations of schooling divest themselves from the Deweyan ideals of democratic engagement as an act of beneficence for the total social sphere, and recast schools as site where private profit—rather than public development—serves as the engine for curricular, instructional, and institutional decision making.

The philosopher of education Kerry Burch (2000) argues that most schools today are "not producing critically reflective democratic citizens; they are far more engaged in the mass production of idiocy" (p. 197). He goes on to state that he uses the term *idiocy* purposively to make a clear distinction between public and private spaces and dispositions. He explains that "the ancient Greek etymology of *idios* refers to a 'purely private person,' one who could participate in the polis as a citizen, but did not" (p. 197). As privatized, corporate spaces, schools are less able to conceive of students as active citizens and more likely to position them as "passive consumers-to-be-sold" (Molnar, 2005a, p. 45). Rather than positioning students as citizens, school commercialism "serves up students as a market for advertisers, which ultimately encourages students to identify their locus of power primarily in their role as consumers" (Norris, 2007, p. 167). Commercial activities in schools provide students with experiences that serve the interests of corporate sponsors rather than students; school commercialism is therefore inherently miseducative because it promotes "unreflective consumption" rather than critical thinking and because it addresses students as consumers and appeals to their desires and impulses rather than fostering within students thoughtfulness and community-mindedness (Molnar, Koski, & Boninger, 2010, p. 5). Furthermore, school commercialism undermines public education's role as a civic institution seeking to promote civil society and encourage learners to participate fully in their communities (Molnar, 2005a).

SHIFTING LANDSCAPES OF THE PSYCHE: IDENTITY AND CONSUMERISM

Perhaps one of the most vexing aspects of the proliferation of privatized, consumerist interests into public institutions and the “educational imaginary” (Barone & Lash, 2006) has been the way in which this incursion has been sanctioned, even welcomed, by citizens, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the processes of education. The naturalization of consumerism throughout American cultural and civic life has created porousness in the boundary between public and private interests, one that is under constant erosion by the increasing virulence of commercialism, as well as the onset of neoliberal ideology and designer capitalism. Whereas many researchers and writers have taken up these elements of contemporary consumer society as structurally dominating forces, we feel it is equally crucial to understand the complicated ways they are inculcated, both formally and informally, into the everyday lives, practices, and psychic landscapes of American citizens.

From the perspective of consumerism as a psychic structure, inquiry into the relationships between education and consumption must take into account the ways in which individuals construct their civic identities in relation to consumerist drives, a process that privileges neither individual agency nor structural dominance but rather casts structure and agency into a complex negotiation with one another, one that is enacted throughout cultural life. Thus, to better explore how the dominant discourse of consumerism and consumer desire works as an intersubjective pedagogy, we suggest that enhanced empirical work needs to be conducted on the ways in which this discourse operates in terms of identity formation and regulation. To this end, educational theorists such as Jagodzinski (2004) and Bracher (1993) have appropriated psychoanalytic constructs as a means for understanding identity and desire at the cultural level and for examining how the processes and ramifications of identity formation are colonized by market ideology.

Identity, Lack, and Consumerism

Drawing from the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan (1981), both Jagodzinski (2004) and Bracher (1993) suggest that grasping the dominance of designer capitalism and its consumptive drive—despite its many deleterious effects—requires an understanding of the psychoanalytic concept of *lack*, the psychic sense of absence that emerges when one rejects individualistic desire to exist in the social world. Within psychoanalysis, the fundamental submission of one’s personal desires for the sake of engaging in social life and language creates a sense of loss, of alienation from the now-repressed elements of one’s own identity. Thus, for both Freud (1961) and Lacan (1981), the phenomenon of social being is always already characterized by a repression of who we are and what we *really* want. From the viewpoint of psychoanalytic theories of culture, this lack, then, becomes the point of mobilization for the machinations of advertising, consumerism, and capital. As Jagodzinski (2004) notes, “marketing strategy always determines youth’s desires first, and then develops the advertising campaign

and product that fills their ‘lack’” (p. 154), a concept that was not lost on the founders of the advertising and public relations industries. However, the primacy of lack as a feature of identity ensures that these advertisements and products conscript individuals into a seemingly inexhaustible pattern of consumptive behavior that might easily be construed as symptomatic³ (Hoechsmann, 2007). Thus, consumerism acts as an erosive educational force within psychic, psychologically private spaces as well, constitutive of Deweyan “bad habits” of mind (Dewey, 1916), ones that, when engaged in the repetitive, potentially neurotic fashion described by psychoanalytic thought, become part of how individuals understand, communicate, and perform identity itself.

Usher et al. (1997) take up a similar line of critique in arguing that consumption is connected with a variety of everyday *social practices*—including lifestyle practices, confessional practices, and critical practices—all of which involve *learning*. Of particular interest here are *lifestyle practices* and *confessional practices*, because they are both focused on processes of identity formation. *Lifestyle practices* involve expressive modes of learning, are focused on the creation and re-creation of identity, and involve “the self-referential concern with style and image” (Usher et al., p. 18). The authors explain that this ongoing re-creation of identity, with its concern with aestheticization, creates the need for “a learning stance towards life as a means of self-expression and autonomy” (p. 18). This form of learning is grounded in postmodern conceptions of consumption as a means by which people differentiate themselves from others, align themselves with particular groups, and express individuality (Featherstone, 1991). Therefore, given their emphasis on “novelty, fashion, taste, and style,” lifestyle practices are practices “of a consumption which is potentially unending, since as desire can never be satisfied, there is always the need for new experiences and new learning” (p. 18). As Norris (2011) notes, “the latent promise of the signifier is perpetually unconsummated” (p. 119). That is, because the fulfillment promised by consumption is *always* unconsummated, we “mourn what is incomplete yet cannot come to pass” (p. 139). Individuals use *confessional practices* to help them understand themselves; these practices take the *self* as the object of study and involve self-reflection and introspection. Within confessional practices, what is consumed is the *self*, as individuals engaging in confessional practices assume that “there is deep hidden meaning buried ‘inside’ which, once discovered, opens the door to happiness, psychic stability and personal empowerment” (p. 19). Like lifestyle practices, confessional practices are never complete—“there is a constant need to change in order to adapt a changing self and a changing environment” (p. 19); thus, confessional practices also necessitate engaging in lifelong learning. However, as described above, diverging sharply from the aforementioned Deweyan accounts of learning, these pedagogies of consumption lead to the development of the radically individualistic social landscape of designer capitalism—a space that is inimical to Dewey’s notion of democratic life.

Common Origins: Consumerism and Psychoanalysis

The connection we draw between psychoanalysis and consumerism has historical roots in the advent of advertising and public relations. In 1928, Bernays, Sigmund

Freud's nephew and an informal student of his theoretical contributions, wrote *Propaganda*, a treatise on his approach to maintaining his vision of a democratic social order. In this text he writes,

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. (p. 37)

Bernays did not see these hidden forces as problematic but rather as beneficent means by which to control a public in which he had little faith. Freud's (and later, Lacan's) views on lack and desire also characterized Bernays's writing and approach to developing propaganda as a social engine. He writes that "men are very largely actuated by motives which they conceal from themselves, is as true of mass as of individual psychology" (Bernays, 1928, p. 75) and suggested that the skilled propagandist should think, in many ways, like a psychoanalyst—reading through the surface manifestations and articulations of desire to develop strategies targeting the obscured forces that guide behavior. However, the end result of implanting a psychic fiction that wholly comprises consumerist economic significations, as Bernays's work would aim to do, is a perversion of the psychoanalytic method and the therapeutic end of divorcing individuals of symptomatic, repetitive patterns of harmful behavior.

Molnar (2005a) has noted that Bernays's worldview has readily trumped Dewey's in the historical and current cultural milieu. Yet, within the psychodynamics of the processes of consumerism and capitalism, Deweyan notions still have some life, although perverted by the ends of privatization and market ideology. The onset of designer capitalism and of the forms of consumption detailed by Usher et al. (1997) in some ways parallel Dewey's (1916) concept of *plasticity* as an educational outcome. Plasticity, for Dewey, involved "the pliable elasticity by which some persons take on the color of their surroundings while retaining their own bent" (pp. 52–53), or personal style. For Dewey, this notion was an expression of the ways in which humans use cumulative experience as a means of interacting symbiotically with their environments. Via the logical ends of Bernays's (1928) fundamental ideals for propaganda, however, designer capitalism has developed its own seemingly predictive means by which to mimic plasticity via the expression of consumptive identity. We are offered an array of products, via database-driven shopping websites and programs such as Amazon.com or iTunes, as well as the so-called semantic structure of Web 3.0, that *know* what we like, that reflect back to us a vision of our personal style wholly determined by product trend data. In these facile experiences, we are offered the chance to locate ourselves directly within the significations of consumerism and, in doing so, to allow our identity to be formulated for us under the unerring drive of neoliberal consumerism. These moments cannot, at least for Dewey, be anything more than the inculcation of bad habits and miseducative experience. The signifiers presented to us

as material to fill our voids and make us whole may shift, but the core identity they produce is decidedly fixed.

Cultural Pathologies of Capitalism

Within modern psychoanalytic theorizing, these pedagogies of advertising and identity translate into problematic social orders rigidly structured around commodification. According to Barcan (1999), “consumer culture already provides arguably the most potent and tenable forms of myth, narrative and desire available in contemporary secular societies” (p. 37). Using Freud’s Greek archetypes, jagodzinski (2004) extends this criticism by naming the advent of late capitalism/neoliberalism as the “return of Kronos,” the lord of consumptive, murderous pleasure, signifying the erasure of a symbolic order arranged around law by and for acquiescence to the impoverished forms of enjoyment associated with consumptive indulgence. From this antidemocratic disposition, “a permissive society emerges where the expectation to fulfill one’s passions is wedded to the machinery of productive capitalist desire of consumerist fantasies” (jagodzinski, 2004, p. 80). In yet another perversion of Dewey, then, perhaps contemporary schools *do* prepare individuals for life in the contemporary life world of consumerism—for citizenship in a social sphere that has become almost wholly characterized by acquisitiveness.

FINDING THE TRACES OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT: CRITICAL PRACTICES AGAINST CONSUMERISM

In this concluding section, we posit the idea that Dewey’s democratic utopia might not have entirely disappeared but, perhaps, is displaced, deposited in spaces and resistant practices both within schools and elsewhere in the cultural landscape. We forward this idea through presenting critical pedagogical interventions that are either currently being enacted or that have the potential to be, that are seeking to create the kind of “energetic civil society” through creative cultural production that Stevenson (2010) argues is so critical to the enactment of a vibrant democracy. We begin with a discussion of what active citizenship for democracy might look like, focusing on scholarship that has examined various sites of informal education and public pedagogy (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010) that seek to combat the ideology of consumerism. We then turn to a discussion of how teachers, administrators, and students are resisting consumerism in schools.

Several scholars (Kahn, 2010a, 2010b; Maniates, 2002; Usher et al., 1997; Welton, 1995) argue that an important part of citizenship is the ability and willingness to connect individual actions to larger structural issues and collective action and private matters to public issues. Furthermore, in a democracy, citizens would also ask whether their institutions foster an ethos that supports public life, encourage communicative action and democratic forms of deliberation, support the process of political learning through which we learn to confront and challenge power inequalities, and help individuals realize their cognitive, moral, technical, and aesthetic potential

(Welton, 1995) and, if not, would work toward making these goals a reality. Etzioni (2009) also argues that in a democracy we need to cultivate a culture that encourages “human flourishing” (p. 2) outside of consumption and argues that this can occur through both communitarian and transcendental pursuits. Finally, a democracy must foster a form of cultural citizenship that seeks to “develop democratic public spaces while simultaneously promoting a sense of lived connection with a number of complex and overlapping communities in time and space” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 288).

Educational researchers have explored the critical work toward active citizenship that is happening through various social movements focused on resisting consumerism and consumption, including groups working toward labor rights and opposing global sweatshops, fighting against globalization, advocating for fair trade, and fighting against the ecological destruction that accompanies massive overconsumption (Collins, 1995; Klein, 2000; Welton, 1995). These various movements seek to arrest the further disintegration of the commons (Illich, 1983), which is an idea that “draws attention to those constantly threatened, yet still non-commodified customs, practical activities, and generative locations in our everyday lives which are so essential to our well-being” (Collins, 1995, p. 80). These movements also problematize the “citizen–consumer” connection by teaching learners “to understand themselves as citizens in a participatory democracy first, working together to change broader policy and larger social institutions, and as consumers second” (Maniates, 2002, p. 47). Furthermore, these groups “attempt to transform various elements of the social order surrounding consumption and marketing” (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004, p. 691).

Within these movements, critical resistance takes place not only by working against *material* products and processes of oppression tied to capitalist production and consumption but also by working in the *symbolic* realm, using techniques of “ludic subversion and the creation and manipulation of seductive images” (Usher et al., 1997, p. 20). For instance, Sandlin (2010; see also Sandlin & Milam, 2008) has explored the resistance tactic of “culture jamming”⁴ used by social activist groups such as Adbusters and Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping as a form of critical public pedagogy. Similarly, Walter (2007) examined activists such as Mr. Floatie and Save Our Surf, who use symbolic tactics similar to culture jamming in order to raise public awareness about “corporate ideological hegemony” (p. 613), particularly with regard to ecological issues. Others grounded in more materialist, Marxist perspectives have highlighted how activist groups such as the Piqueteros of Argentina—a group of female factory workers who use strikes, sit-ins, and factory takeovers to communicate collective resistance to the oppressive productive processes that are so tied to consumer capitalism—enact “pedagogies of defiance” that tie the symbolic or cultural performances to politics and action in order “to change, to unlearn domination, and to transform social relations” (Jaramillo, 2010; see also Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2010). Regardless whether these critical practices focus more on material (Jaramillo, 2010; Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2010) or symbolic (Darts & Tavin, 2010) realms, they necessitate critical learning and a stance of reflexivity about self and society.

A growing number of critical educational researchers, teachers, administrators, and parents have also begun to explore how schools and other formal educational institutions are not simply sites where commercialism is invading but are also spaces of contestation (Norris, 2011; Reynolds, 2004; Sandlin & McLaren, 2010). They seek to understand what it might mean to *resist* consumerism and overconsumption—to explore work that challenges what Reynolds (2004, p. 32) calls the “brand-name corporate order.” In its annual report of trends in school commercialism for 2009–2010, Molnar, Boninger, Wilkinson, Fogarty, and Geary (2010) at the CERU trace many forms of school commercialism and some larger efforts to restrict it. For example, the Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood continues to pursue political and legal avenues and mobilizes parents to restrict school commercialism. In Canada, the Ontario Institute for School Commercialism Studies has held professional workshops on school commercialism for teachers and administrators and is currently engaged in resisting the installation of TV screens in dozens of Toronto High Schools. Blokhuis (2008), in a critique specifically targeting *Channel One*, calls for administrators to uphold an “anticommercial principle” so that students can be exposed to non-commercial visions of what “constitutes a good life” and so that commercial messages will not receive a tacit endorsement by the school (p. 344). Recently, parent groups and medical professionals have played major roles in addressing school commercialism. For example, candy and soft drink vendors in various areas within the United States have recently been subject to regulations within school campuses after pressure from parent and medical groups (Molnar, 2005a). McGregor (1999, 2005) has begun to focus on how consumer educators within school contexts can create a more critical practice of consumer education that focuses less on the naturalization of consumption and helping people to better navigate that world and more on questioning consumer capitalism. These educators and scholars advocate a consumer education that embraces sustainability education, critical pedagogy, critical citizenship, critical consumer education, and critical consumer empowerment education (Benn, 2004; McGregor & Bourbonniere, 2002). Other scholars writing from within curriculum studies and art education focus on classrooms where educators are encouraging students to question commercial culture through learning about and enacting critical pedagogies such as culture jamming (Barcan, 1999; Darts, 2004; Sweeney & Feld, 1999; Tavin, 2001, 2003).

Some educational scholars critique how education against commercialism within schools often individualizes responsibility (Maniates, 2002)—similar to the growing environmentalist movement discussed above. That is, what passes for “consumer education” in schools often focuses on how issues of overconsumption and environmental degradation can be solved through individual consumer choice. From this perspective, education is a critical component: “smart consumers will make choices, it is thought, with the larger public good in mind. Accordingly, this dominant response emphasizes (like the [Dr. Seuss character] Lorax himself) the need to speak politely, and individually, armed only with facts” (Maniates, 2002, p. 45). Kahn (2010b) also critiques “sustainability education” for its individualized focus, which “leave[s] robust

structural critique and learning how to organize collective opposition to capitalist social relations off the agenda" (p. 54) and for merely "training people for membership in the green economy" (p. 53). Critical education scholars, instead, call for a more critical, collective perspective to anticommercialism work. Farahmandpur (2010), for example, calls for a critical pedagogy against consumerism that prepares students for a "critical consumer literacy" that "deepens the roots of democracy by encouraging students to actively participate in public discourses and debates over social, economic, and political issues that affect everyday life in their own and neighboring communities" (p. 66). And Kahn (2010a) calls for a "critical media literacy" that can help students use and develop technologies "that will enhance political mobilization and cultural participation" (p. 74). Kahn (2010a) further explains that the same technologies that could help destroy both democracy and life as we know it:

that often transform meaningful politics into media spectacles concerned only with a battle of images and which turn spectators into cultural zombies, could also be used to help invigorate critical debate and participation within the public sphere . . . and augment the struggle against ecologically catastrophic political orders. (Kahn, 2010a, p. 74)

This is precisely the kind of work that is being taken up by a growing network of educators and researchers who are enacting and studying critical media literacy, whose intent is to encourage critical analysis of media, especially as it is tied to consumerism; to provide various tools to deconstruct advertising and other media; and to "speak back" to consumerism through producing "media themselves in order to be active participants in a democratic society" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 3). This work is being carried out by educational foundations such as the Media Education Foundation in the United States and the Association for Media Literacy in Canada and by scholars such as Jhally (2006), Kellner and Share (2007), and Macedo and Steinberg (2007).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we highlighted the increasing drive of commercialism, which shapes the educational messages of advertising and marketing, transforms schoolchildren into captive audiences for consumer products (Molnar, 2005a), remakes public spheres into market-laden spaces (McLaren, 2005), and appropriates our own desirous energies for the manufacturing of profit (Jagodzinski, 2004). Addressing public schools, Giroux (2000) argues that "when public education becomes a venue for making a profit, delivering a product, or constructing consuming subjects, education reneges on its responsibility for creating a democracy of citizens by shifting its focus to producing a democracy of consumers" (p. 73). This reinforces students' role as consumers, spectators, and passive citizens and sets into motion intersubjective relations that are antithetical to the needs of democracy and to human growth and development (Dewey, 1916). As consumerism becomes more deeply imbricated and interbraided within society, within schools, and within our sense of subjectivity, it also becomes increasingly difficult to address, let alone resist. However, we are heartened by the work of the

critical educators and scholars cited above and are (albeit guardedly) optimistic that, to return to our opening metaphor of erosion, this critical work might unearth and regain the traces of democracy that have been worn down and deposited elsewhere in the cultural landscape. This critical work must continue if we hope to develop a citizenry that can exercise the critical skills necessary to critique consumerism, to engage meaningfully with their own relationships to consumption and capitalism, and to cultivate a vibrant public sphere for civic engagement.

NOTES

¹In Europe in the 19th century, consumerism was spread through large department stores such as the Paris Bon Marché (see Bocock, 1993), World Fairs (see Williams, 1982) and crowded urban shopping arcades such as those in Paris (see Benjamin, 2002, on flâneurs, *flânerie*, and the Paris arcades).

²Though it might seem that the Internet and “Web 2.0” initiate a shift from a unidirectional relationship with advertising into a multidimensional, democratic, and polyvocal form of communication, we would argue that there are still many ways in which digital communication remains unidirectional. Behind such utopian claims lie equally effective strategies to promote increasing consumerism; the Internet is an increasingly commercialized environment and intensely promotes proconsumption messages. Instead, it would be more accurate to say that the Internet harnesses the public through user-generated content, viral marketing, and so on to more effectively promote consumerism through more decentralized strategies. The media theorist Catherine Burwell (2010) criticizes the claim that digitalization is equivalent to democratization, arguing that it is instead the “commodification of participation” (p. 386), through the use of free labor and appropriation of user content to promote consumerism. She argues, “Idealized narratives of connectivity, collaboration, and empowerment did not adequately capture the tensions I noted between youth and corporate media” (p. 383), and instead emphasizes that “accepting the need for a politics of digital participation means being attentive to the ways in which power, contestation, and hierarchy inscribe participatory technologies and processes” (p. 385). Perhaps this is akin to Foucault’s analysis: Power functions far more effectively when it is internalized, decentralized and multinodal. Just because we produce advertising, provide “content” for YouTube commercials, comment on corporate Facebook sites, and so on, it does not follow that marketing and advertising are no longer unidirectional—however much marketers would like to celebrate this trend as the democratization of advertising. Advertising Age recently celebrated “You” as the ad agency of the year, because now consumers are doing the labor of marketers (for free), through producing content to advertise to other consumers. Studies show that consumers are far better at marketing to each other than are marketers. In their annual analysis of trends in school commercialism, Molnar, Boninger, Wilkinson, Fogarty, and Geary (2010) note,

Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg cited a study that found that people who receive product recommendations from their friends are 400% more likely to buy that product, and that compared with products not recommended by friends, friend-recommended products are associated with 68% better product recognition and 200% greater memory of brand messaging. (p. 8)

³Žižek (1989) has written a long explication of the psychoanalytic symptom as owing as much to the Marxian tradition of commodity fetishism as it does to Freudian constructs.

⁴Toronto-based culture jammer Carly Stasko provides a helpful description of culture jamming:

First, it means to improvise, to play off the environment, to play with what’s already there, to create in a spontaneous and improvisational way, the same way jazz musicians might jam. Second, it means to stop

something from working, to “jam the gears,” to stop the machinery of consumerism and mass media from grinding us down. Culture jamming is a creative way to engage and respond to the messages of the mass media, and to become an active participant in our culture . . . It’s about creating a dialogue where there isn’t one. It’s against passive and mindless consumption, and instead becoming active producers in the kinds of messages and images that we’re surrounded with every day. Its goal is empowerment, engagement, and dialogue not just consumption and consumerism. (Quoted in Norris, 2011, p. 161)

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