ON THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THEORY IN THE ANALYSIS OF CONSUMPTION

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of critical theory in the analysis of consumption in industrial societies. The ideology of consumption is examined for its impact on individual development and crisis in society. Different modes of analysis are examined for their potential in revealing the ideological nature of consumption. The conclusion suggests that only a critical perspective such as that provided by critical theory can unveil the ideology of consumption.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to develop a framework for examining the role of consumption in industrial society. To do this, several aspects of society will be briefly examined to determine their potential roles in the development of the prevailing mode of consumption. The first area to be examined is the prevailing mode of consumption, referred to here as involuntary complexity, and its possible alternative, voluntary simplicity. This will be followed by prevailing modes of thought, which will be characterized here as ideological or rational self-clarity, and their relationship to the mode of consumption. It is not the purpose to suggest that the mode of consumption causes a particular mode of thought or vice versa. The suggestion is that there is currently a relationship between them and this will be examined.

Following this, modes of analysis which might be employed in the analysis of consumption will be discussed. It is suggested here that the mode of thought which is characteristic of the mode of consumption, to a large extent, suggests the analytical requirements. The two approaches to be examined are the traditional positivist/empirical model and critical theory.

The motivation for the paper is predicated on several assumptions which should be expressed. Their are three domains in which these assumptions fall, personal, social, and ecological. The primary assumption in the personal domain is that our lives do not just happen. There are cultural forces in operation that most are not aware of or do not
understand. These forces affect our perceptions of reality and our perceptions of ourselves and, therefore, possess significant phenomenological significance.

The first contemporary articulation of the concept of voluntary simplicity was that of Gregg (1936) who described it as, "...singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within, as well as avoidance of exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of life." (p. 31) However, it is not clear from this what the concept actually entails. This is primarily because it is a relative concept. Elgin (1981) suggests this in his statement, "Given human diversity, there can be no single, 'right and true way' to live more voluntarily or simply." (p. 37) Thus the practice of voluntary simplicity will vary across cultures and time depending on the material capability in the circumstance in which one finds one's self. The essence of voluntary simplicity is however, not reflected in manifest behaviors. It is more a function of one's values and beliefs about the role of consumption in life than manifest behavior.

It is a common misconception that voluntary simplicity is a form of poverty. Nothing could be further from the truth, and it is critical to recognize the difference. As expressed by Ram Dass, "Poverty is repressive: simplicity is liberating. Poverty generates a sense of helplessness, passivity and despair; Simplicity fosters personal empowerment, creativity, and a sense of ever present opportunity." (quoted in Elgin 1981, p. 31)

Among the most eloquent expressions of the nature of voluntary simplicity are those of Thoreau (1854/1937). Throughout Walden, he expresses the individuality of simplicity and the empowerment it provides to the individual unencumbered by material superfluities. The same expressions are somewhat perennial and can be found in the writings of Aristotle and the Stoics. Aristotle's notion of the mean as virtue and too much or too little as vice is well known. In a later period, Seneca (1961) articulates the same notion in his statement, "You ask what is the proper limit of a person's wealth? First, having what is essential, and second, having what is enough." (p. 34) As can be seen, voluntary simplicity does not imply a return to a primitive state of material deprivation and
hardship. It is a contemporary response to a contemporary problem in which we find ourselves increasingly emersed.

The second mode of consumption to be examined is that of involuntary complexity which seems to be the prevailing mode of existence in most industrialized societies. Its chief characteristic is the commodified form of existence in which individuals are intimately tied to the process of consumption through their "second nature". This second nature is conditioned through the introjection of consumption values, a process through which the values of one's cultural become one's own and are accepted as having spontaneously developed independently of the culture. These values then direct behavior while individuals believe they are behaving spontaneously or as they have chosen. In effect, it is a non-reflective form of consumption which allows social forces the individual does not understand to condition this second nature against exposure to itself. This effectively militates against the liberation of individuals from their second nature. Consumption values are believed to be the individual's own and alternatives are hidden from them. As Marcuse (1964) states, "The most effective and enduring form of warfare against liberation is the implanting of material and intellectual needs that perpetuate obsolete forms of the struggle for existence." (p. 4) The consequence of the introjection of these consumption values is expressed by Kilbourne (1991) as follows: Thus it is that, while the conditioning process lies within the industrial, i.e., mass production process, the individual, through the second nature which equates consumption with the satisfaction of needs, mobilizes the forces of domination. Individual values become those of the established order and the individual definition of "needs" is based on a misguided form of hedonism which does not distinguish between true needs (autonomy and rational self-clarity) and immediate needs (the exigencies of mass production), and equates consumption with happiness. (p. 604)

Within this system of domination, critique is rendered irrational since the material achievements of the system justify it within a form of consciousness that has been ideologically manipulated. Established values of the existing social order become the values of the people who do not reflect on the genesis of those values. Within this established order, the individual becomes dependent upon and subservient to a system of
production (and consumption) which reifies itself in the commodified form of existence. As Marcuse (1964) suggests, however, spontaneous reproduction of needs does not reflect their rationality so much as the efficiency with which the technological apparatus works in maintaining the status quo.

It is the antagonism between true and immediate needs which best characterizes involuntary complexity. The immediate needs of the system of production are based in ever increasing output which requires ever increasing consumption. As the capacity of the system to satisfy real needs is exceeded, new definitions of needs must be established effectively elevating the unnecessary to the necessary. How this process takes effect is not of immediate interest here. However, Ewen (1976), Fox and Lears (1983), Sherry (1987) and Parenti (1978), among many others have examined the process thoroughly.

The conflict between real and immediate needs found within involuntary complexity is the essence of the problem which voluntary simplicity seek to redress. To deal effectively with this process it must first be understood that the status quo did not just happen. The prevailing mode of consumption equating happiness with consumption materialized out of the exigencies of mass production and was not an alternative rationally chosen by an autonomous collective. Hetrick (1989) addresses this mistaken notion. "...we have been ideologically manipulated into believing as such. It is suggested that the consumption-happiness theme (i.e., consumerism) is an ideology that has been established and reproduced by those interested in the further rationalization of capital and their corresponding corporate elite." (p. 40)

Thus we are dealing with a system that has become irrational in its rationality. While the rationalization of production and consumption has resulted in material reality which, for the first time in history, has the capacity to meet the real needs of all the members of society, consumption values seem to militate against individuals who, through the process of consumption, consume their own potential for growth. So while the production process seems rational in its efficiencies, it is irrational in its human consequences. To examine how this has happened, we turn to the role of ideology in the
maintenance of the status quo, effectively eliminating voluntary simplicity as a viable alternative consumption mode.

Modes of thought

The two basic modes of thought to be examined in this paper are ideological and rational self-clarity. Since the definitions of ideology are plentiful and varying, the version used in this discussion will be established first. The discussion will then turn to the nature of rational self-clarity and then to the relationship of each to the mode of consumption.

Ideology. The most general definition of ideology is probably that it is the study of ideas. This removes the political component of ideology which is necessary for this paper, however. The definition used here might properly be called ideology in the pejorative sense. (Geuss 1981) Geuss (1981) suggests that a particular form of consciousness is ideological if it incorporates beliefs that are false, functions in a reprehensible way, or has a tainted origin. To be even more specific, three criteria will be established to determine if a particular form of consciousness is ideological. These will be drawn from Geuss (1981), Kinlock (1981) and Mannheim (1936). These three criteria are based on epistemological and/or functional properties of a set of beliefs. They are:

1. Falsely equating the interest of a subgroup as the general interest (Kinlock 1981, pp. 6-7)
2. Beliefs that serve to mask social contradictions (Geuss 1981, pp. 15-19)
3. Beliefs that fail to take into account new realities applying to a situation (Mannheim 1936, p. 96)

An example demonstrating each of these conditions can be found in the religious restrictions on usury during the initial stages of the industrial revolution. The early Christian church maintained that the taking of interest for loans was taboo. This was consistent with a stable social order such as feudalism. But as the older order was deteriorating, the prevailing doctrine regarding usury became more and more ideological. It reflected the beliefs of the church which falsely equated its interest with that of the
population at large, in effect, forcing them to conform, not to their own interest, but to that of the church. It served to mask the social contradiction that had been materializing as feudalism gave way to capitalism, and in masking the contradiction attempted to preserve the status quo. Stable social relations which justified the prevailing attitude toward usury had disappeared and maintaining these attitudes would give the impression that the old order was still functional. Both of these factors lead to the conclusion of the third which simply says that the new reality of capitalism had replaced the older order of religious hegemony and its values were no longer congruous with the new reality. The church continued fighting against the new order seeing its power eroded by increasing secularization brought on by emerging capitalism. The ideology of usury was one of its weapons in the fight.

**Rational Self-clarity.** The competing mode of thought for ideology is rational self-clarity. Ontologically, it might be considered that there are two levels of being, the manifest and the latent. The manifest level is one in which individuals experience the lived world in day to day life. The latent level is the underlying forces within the social existence that direct the experience and are relatively unknown to the individual subject.

In the role of subject, the individual must be free to act where being free is equiprimordially being rational. The true meaning of one's existence must be allowed to materialize within the subject, in a sense, letting reality appear as it is so that subjects become transparent to themselves. Within this context it is also understood that the true nature of reality can never be known completely. (Luijpen 1960)

In order to achieve a synthesis of the manifest and the latent levels of existence, an accurate narrative of the subject's existence must be developed. (Fay 1987) Of this narrative, Fay states, it is the job of critical theory to provide a historical narrative which reveals how it is that the relevant social actors came to be what they are, namely, actors playing a role in a drama about which they are ignorant but which gives their activities the point and meanings they have, and which defines the possibility for radical change open to, and even demanded of them. (p. 71)
It is further suggested that enlightenment as to the nature of this narrative requires reflective assent as to its veracity, not manipulation or coercion. Clearly, if external manipulation were used to effect assent, then one ideology would be replaced by another. The consequence of this genuine narrative is enlightenment as to one's condition. Further, it allows the actors to reorder their existence self-consciously and intelligently. Relations masked by ideology are revealed in their true form freeing the subject to attain the potential available through a rationally ordered society.

It can be seen from this that the two modes of thought are nearly mutually exclusive. Ideology functions to preserve the status quo regardless of its historical appropriateness. Rational self-clarity serves the function of exposing ideology, effectively freeing the subject from domination through the second nature that ideology is trying to preserve. With rational self-clarity, individuals have a better understanding of their real interests, i.e., those they would pursue under ideal conditions free from cultural hegemony. With the ideological mode of thought, the individual's real interests remain hidden, veiled in a shroud of ignorance or false consciousness inured to its falseness.

The next step is to examine the relationship between the modes of thought and modes of consciousness inherent in each. Following that, methods of analysis will be examined for their appropriateness in enlightening individuals as to the nature of their existence.

**Modes of consumption and modes of thought.**

Associated with each mode of consumption is a mode of thought which characterizes it. If we examine involuntary complexity from several perspectives, its inception, its epistemology and its function, the nature of thought associated with it becomes more clear. Since it is of fairly recent origin historically, it is not difficult to establish its genetic properties, that is, the origin and development of the concept. Ewen (1976) examines the origin thoroughly and concludes that the notion of ever increasing consumption was not the product of natural progression, but was imposed from above in
according with the needs of the industrial system which used advertising as its prime method. Benton (1987) further suggests that consumers had to be taught the necessities of consumption since vestigial Protestantism with its consumption morality of frugality still existed at that time. This is further supported by Fox and Lears (1983) who refer to the new mode of consumption as therapeutic consumption.

Clearly in these instances the development of the mode of consumption referred to here as involuntary complexity did not just happen as the product of natural forces. It was imposed upon the populace with specific purposes in mind. Thus the origins of involuntary complexity are not natural or evolutionary, but were imposed by the dominant class. As suggested by Kilbourne (1987) "As a result of their considerable efforts over several decades, the owning class was able to develop a new morality, a consumption morality, out of the vestiges of a culture in transition." (p. 314)

This leads directly to the fundamental epistemological premise of involuntary complexity. This is the belief that happiness is to be achieved through consumption. (Hetrick 1989) This is predicated on the notion of therapeutic consumption described by Fox and Lears (1983) which suggests that all problems, including finding happiness, can be solved by consumption. This is delusional in character, however, since happiness in this sense requires reconciliation with the established industrial order which is based on repression and subjugation. To reconcile one's self to such an order is the essence of unfreedom and, as such, cannot lead to happiness. In this form of happiness, the particular interest, i.e., exigencies of mass production, become the true interest which can change as the exigencies of mass production change. This renders happiness completely subjective and at the whim of those who control the means of mental production. If the consumption/happiness theme were transformed to meet the true needs of individuals it would relate happiness to true freedom. Of this relationship Kilbourne (1991) states: If happiness is equated with fulfillment of potentialities, then it must be identified with freedom and not the opaque contingencies of material facticity. If this factual unfreedom becomes ontologized, then true happiness is excluded since autonomy is negated and idealized, abstract freedom replaces true freedom. Real happiness presupposes knowledge of the truth about the individual's interest and potentialities. If this knowledge is veiled or
distorted, the individual cannot judge even his own condition since all evaluation is subjective relativism. (p. 453)

Thus it appears that the epistemological principle of involuntary complexity is false. Consumption cannot in and of itself bring happiness, regardless of the number of times we are told it can. It is even possible that, as suggested by Fromm (1978), we may be moving further from true happiness as we mistakenly follow this principle.

Finally, we can look at the purpose of the major premise of involuntary complexity. If the premise is false, what purpose is served by our continued acceptance of it. Hetrick (1989) examines this question and concludes, The controlling group (i.e., those perpetuating the capitalist mode of production) can sustain the relations of domination if they can effectively entice the majority of societal members to adhere to a version of ideology that benefits the values of this elite minority." (p. 41)

This is a clear case then of presenting the interest of a particular group as the general interest and in so doing, maintaining dominance over the majority. Of this majority Horkheimer and Adorno (1944) state, "Immovably, they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them. The misplaced love of the common people for the wrong which is done them is a greater force than the cunning of authorities." (p. 134) It is a force which compels them to continue despite the fact that there is no empirical or logical basis for their belief and the possibility of a manipulated consensus is a non-idea. The belief is introjected to become a part of their second nature and critique of the status quo is rendered irrational. Thus the belief serves to support the industrial system impelled by mass production and mass consumption.

From the standpoint of the individual, the consequences of the prevailing belief are significant since it is true freedom that is at stake. Since the realm of freedom is reduced to the economic/consumption sphere, a diminution of experience through which the individual experiences growth potential materializes. With the confusion of real with immediate needs, the individual experiences ersatz growth. Kilbourne (1991) states, The individual in industrial society has, however, unwittingly subordinated self-interest to economic interests and develops the false identity between material success, as reflected in
symbolic possession, and the development of potential. This self-deception results in unfulfilled potentialities remaining unfulfilled while one continues pursuing what is misrepresented as authentic self-interest. (p. 453)

Thus involuntary complexity, while extolling consumption as freedom, systematically consumes individual potential, alienating individuals from themselves. The spontaneous reproduction of individuals in the image demanded by the exigencies of mass production is not verification of its logic as suggested by the dominant class, but merely attests to the efficiency with which the technology of domination works. The consequence of continued domination is suggested by Moustakas (1956). The worship of success, reward, and accomplishment, the striving for external symbols of gain, the attempt to sell oneself effectively, and impressively to become the expectations of others, alienates man from himself and fails to satisfy man's ineradicable striving to be himself. (p. 281)

The mode of thought bound up in involuntary complexity can best be labeled as ideological from the forgoing discussion since it meets all the criteria set forth previously. Falsely equating the interest of a subgroup (owning class) with the general interest (non-owning class) has been adequately described by Ewen (1976). In extolling consumption as the solution to all problems, the consumption/happiness theme was brought into being, not as a natural social progression, but an imposition from above. That the theme is still prevalent fails to take into account the current reality in which economic growth as the fundamental economic principle is an anachronism. Further growth is neither necessary nor ecologically sound. The world of the turn of the century is just as gone today as was the world of Protestantism preceding it.

Finally, the nature of social relations is masked by the consumption ethic of today. The antagonism between owning and non-owning classes is hidden through the process of consumption. The concept of equality could not withstand rational critique in contemporary society unless the basis of the critique is established by the status quo and is framed in its idiom. This is effectively what consumption supplies. Since the dominated class can emulate the elite class through consumption patterns, it is easy to understand how
the nature of one's existence, vis. a vis. other classes, can become distorted. However, it is not the quantity or quality of consumption that determines social relations, it is relations of power that determine equality and, within industrial cultures, there is no equality of power. The non-owning class was ideologically manipulated into accepting consumption as the standard of equality, an ersatz equality to be sure. Involuntary complexity is intimately aligned with ideology as the dominant mode of thought as can be seen from the preceding discussion.

With voluntary simplicity, the mode of thought is quite different. Since the dominant mode of consumption is assumed here to be involuntary complexity, simplicity must be chosen by its votary in response to the dominant condition. Since there is no cultural or technological apparatus extolling its virtues (quite the opposite is the case), it is necessarily the product of reflection and a choice from competing alternatives which, under involuntary complexity, should not exist. To reject the dominant cultural is an active behavior of individuals attempting to be free from their second nature and more specifically to be free from the economy in the case of voluntary simplicity. It is the closest behavior in the economic realm to what Marcuse (1969) describes as "systematic disengagement", i.e., the end of consumption ideology.

Voluntary simplicity reflects the belief that individual potential cannot be achieved through consumption per se. The role of consumption is recognized in one's life and reflects the belief that one consumes to live rather than lives to consume. From this perspective, consumption becomes enabling rather than personally immobilizing. This reflective behavior stands in opposition to the non-reflective, accepting behavior of involuntary complexity. Elgin (1981) cites many anecdotal cases demonstrating the different mode of thought exhibited by simplifiers.

The parallel between this view and rational self-clarity described by Fay (1990) is evident. The fundamental aspect of rational self-clarity is, as stated earlier, the genuine narrative of one's existence. Within this narrative, the role of consumption must be clearly
delineated. Exposure of the symbolic character of consumption as irrational when judged independently regarding its contribution to a meaningful existence is the essence of voluntary simplicity and the mode of thought characterizing it. Maslow (1954) characterized the self-actualizing individual as having a clear perception of reality, being autonomous and maintaining a clear discrimination between means and ends and, as can be seen, this parallels the image of the individual possessed of rational self-clarity deriving from the genuine narrative. A similar description could be derived from Fromm's (1978) being mode. The commonality between these views is the role consumption plays in the development of the individual character. Similar characterizations can be found in Marcel (1965) and Sartre (1956). While none of these authors addressed voluntary simplicity per se, their analyses indicate clearly their opposition to what is referred to here as involuntary complexity. In each case the contention is that such non-reflective consumption behavior becomes a defining aspect of the individual character potentially retarding individual growth when it defines the narrative of the individual's life. It might be concluded here that freeing one's self from the narrative of the status quo is the essence of liberation, the release from one's second nature.

The question which arises from this analysis of consumption is one regarding transition to new modes of thought. While the arguments for voluntary simplicity seem to some rationally compelling, to the majority they are irrational. So long as evaluation is framed in the idiom of the status quo, the prevailing mode of consumption, involuntary complexity, is the only rational mode. The success of the system so defined justifies its existence. Against the backdrop of the cornucopian flow of goods, all other modes of consumption are rendered irrational. This will remain the case so long as the narrative of one's existence is developed and framed by the status quo, i.e., the product of false consciousness. What then can be done to break the cycle through which each succeeding generation is reproduced in the image of mass production and mass consumption? This is the question to which we now turn.
Modes of analysis

Traditional modes of analysis based on the positivist/empiricist model are inadequate to the task of effecting systemic change such as that proposed here. Their biases toward the status quo are evident in the restricted nature of conclusions based on these methods. Within this tradition is found, for example, the neo-classical economic paradigm. This particular model is chosen since it relates directly to the problem at hand, but similar conclusions could be drawn from other domains as well. This utilitarian based model of consumption behavior suggests that individuals are free-standing, independent actors who seek to maximize their own self-interest (pleasure or utility). It is assumed that they are rational and instantaneous calculators who have complete information. Under these assumptions, the models indicate that the "invisible hand" will act to turn chaos into collectively rational outcomes and all will benefit. If one accepts these assumptions, the conclusions worked out in the paradigm will always favor the status quo, i.e., involuntary complexity as the "rational" form of consumption. No other conclusion is possible.

Two other factors characteristic of any mode of analysis are concerned with the choice of a "relevant" research agenda, i.e., what topics are worthy of research, and methodological considerations. With regard to voluntary simplicity, for example, so long as the neo-classical paradigm is the dominant mode, the notion of limiting consumption is not a valid pursuit since it violates the fundamental premise that more is better. With this assumption introjected in one’s consciousness, or second nature, systematically consuming less is so irrational as to be unworthy of intellectual pursuit. The concept violates the basic premises of the prevailing paradigm.

With regard to methodology, there is a fundamental flaw as well. Founded in the positivist tradition and carried into the neo-classical paradigm, manipulation of and experimentation with social phenomena has become the definition of "good" research. Little argument can be made against the use of these methods in hard sciences. However, their efficacy in social science seems to be relatively unchallenged despite a history that
could hardly be characterized as more than dismal failure. In the guise of objectivity and neutrality, the subject of social research has been neutralized. Its results are adumbrations of a shadowy reality that is still misunderstood or unknown, but calculated to within four decimal places.

Taking neo-classical economics as an example again, the notion of a unidimensional utility function ignores both the nature of reality and of humanity neither of which is one dimensional. It further systematically rejects results of previous research within the paradigm which flatly contradict its own assumptions. (Etzioni 1989) Thus, the conclusions are strictly a function of the framing of the problem and the frame is in the idiom of the status quo, i.e., empirical research under the assumptions of the neo-classical paradigm. While pretending to be unbiased observers, the true nature of the problem has been "framed" away and what is left is relatively insignificant, the product of empirical Procrusteanization. As suggested by Etzioni (1988), ignoring normative/affective factors and moral commitment in economic behavior results in a woefully inadequately analysis, and reflects a value judgment vehemently denied by neo-classical economists.

This reflects the problem of the ideological mode of thought characteristic of involuntary complexity. Within the positivist tradition, it leads to a confirmation bias in favor of the status quo. As stated by Kilbourne (1989), Both science and positivist philosophy provided abetting influence in this process. By equating truth and certainty, the abstract truth of real freedom recedes before the empirical truth of reality. Science and positivist philosophy deal most effectively with the measurable and reproducible, both characteristic of the economic dimension and neither characteristic of reason, essence and freedom. (p. 173)

This suggests that a different mode of analysis is necessary to reveal the ideological mode of thought within involuntary complexity rather than being directed by it. It is argued here that critical theory provides the beginning for such a mode of analysis.

**Critical Theory**

The use of critical theory as a mode of analysis is predicated on several assumptions. Primarily, it requires that society be suffering from structural conflict which
precipitates or perpetuates suffering for some of its members. Second, it assumes that at least part of the problem stems from false consciousness of some or all members of society. Finally, it requires that the members of society who are suffering desire an end to their suffering and are enabled, through critical theory, to abate or eliminate their suffering. The essential elements for a functional critical theory can be summarized as crisis (or imminent crises), false consciousness, enlightenment, and emancipation. (Fay 1987) If all of these elements can be found in the involuntary complexity mode of consumption, then critical theory provides a useful, and possibly the only, mode of analysis through which meaningful change can be effected.

One of the functions of a critical social science is to awaken and encourage self-inquiry as to one's nature and material existence, so it must be further assumed that an activist conception of individuals be adopted in which they are curious, reflective and willful. If this were not the case, then Kant's (1959) suggestion that individuals accept their condition uncritically and the "statutes and formulas" of the culture are accepted as givens which are obeyed uncritically and automatically, would negate all solutions.

Specifically he states,
For any individual to work himself out of a life under tutelage which has become almost his nature is very difficult. He has become fond of his state, and he is for the present really incapable of making use of his reason, for no one has ever let him try it out. Statutes and formulas, those mechanical tools of the rational employment or rather mis-employment of his natural gifts, are the fetters of an everlasting tutelage. (Kant 1959, pp. 85-6)

The similarity between this statement and the condition suggested in critical theory is evident. But the manifest function of critical theory is to enlighten individuals to their condition to engender in them rational self-clarity regarding their condition and collective autonomy that they may change their condition. Rational self-clarity was examined earlier and of collective autonomy, Fay (1987) states,
Collective autonomy involves two elements taken together: the first is the will of the members of the group to live their lives on the basis of a rationally informed self-transparency; and the second is the power to effect their will so that the lives of the members of this group express their enlightened wishes. (p. 80)
While it is fundamental to critical theory that the subjects be unhappy, it is not necessary that they be aware of their unhappiness. This condition arises because their unhappiness is a product of false consciousness and, consequently, they are not aware of the nature of their condition. Once made aware of their condition they must feel the difference their emancipation has made and be happier with their lives as a whole. Thus critical theory cannot substitute one form of domination for another, or substitute one false consciousness for another.

Critical theory is uniquely appropriate for the analysis of consumption when the dominant mode of consumption is involuntary complexity because its requirements so closely parallel the conditions under involuntary complexity. This can be seen if each of the elements of critical theory is examined in the context of involuntary complexity.

False consciousness is the first element of critical theory and is also the characteristic of involuntary complexity which demands the use of critical theory as a mode of analysis. As suggested earlier, it is false consciousness inured to its falseness which tends to negate the value of traditional modes of analysis since their conclusions will systematically support the status quo indicating no problem exists. Kuhn's (1962) evaluation of paradigm shifts in science reflects this same notion suggesting that the prevailing paradigm frames both the choice of topics and valid conclusions. Within the individual the problem is much the same. Strategies to maximize material accumulation are given considerable attention while the question of the purpose or effects of such accumulation are never asked. These are a product of Kant's "statutes and formulas" in which material accumulation is a given and not the product of rational analysis by the individual. In such cases, the conclusion will always result in increased accumulation. False consciousness has directed the analysis and the conclusions.

The second element is crisis, or imminent crisis. From the standpoint of the level of consumption in involuntary complexity with its emphasis on ever increasing levels of production and consumption, ecological crisis is imminent, if not already upon us in some
areas. Resource depletion, depletion of the ozone layer and global warming are all indirectly or directly related to the level of consumption and the conditions of production. The notion that more is better in all consumables is characteristic of involuntary complexity and is a major contributor to the impending crises. This is also related directly to false consciousness since the "givens" of the capitalist order, with its manifest technological rationality, were ideologically manipulated to the point where the idea of impending crisis is itself irrational. The prevailing notion seems to be that technology has always provided the solution for crises in the past and will continue to do so in the future. But this is also a "given" and not subjected to rational analysis any more than is consumption behavior. That the nature of our existence has been transformed within this century deters us little in assuming the old solutions are still valid. But the new world juxtaposed with old solutions is ideological and the product of false consciousness. As such, traditional modes of analysis cannot expose its falseness which is inured.

Further, as suggested by Bookchin (1990), radical change is necessary in the structure of society if ecological crises are to be averted. Under existing institutional structures the logic of domination is impenetrable. Critical reason is essential for the development of freedom but ideological manipulation perpetuates the myths of freedom as a means of maintaining repression. The notion that crises are the result of human failings, for example, has been an historical favorite of ruling elites. This masks the social contradictions within hierarchically structured societies and maintains the status quo through the development of false consciousness suggesting the problem is human and not structural. Bookchin argues that simply trying to change our consumption behavior is not sufficient. The basic hierarchical structure of society must be changed because it contains within it the logic of domination, both of humans and of nature. Both must be eliminated and this cannot be done within prevailing material and social conditions.

It is the manifest intent of critical theory to enlighten individuals about these conditions; to be a catalytic agent in the process of social/structural change. In militating
against the reification of structural deficiencies, it will expose the nature of the process to
the individuals who were systematically deceived as to its true nature. As to the nature of
this deception, Lukes (1974) states,
...is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever
degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in
such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can
imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because
they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial? (p. 24)

This suggests the prevailing false consciousness must be exposed to itself to be
freed from the structure of domination. It is not sufficient simply to change ideas however.
On the basis of enlightenment as to one’s condition, the new social conditions and behavior
must transcend the prevailing condition and be based on the newly attained self-awareness.
Understanding must remove the oppressive power of established institutions. Bookchin
(1990) suggests that the hierarchical structure must itself collapse or new self-awareness
will be meaningless as a means of change.

Because false consciousness and the illusions associated with it are inured,
resistance will be encountered from the very individuals whose freedom will be gained.
Thus it is necessary that critical theory provide an alternative in the idiom of the oppressed
which justifies itself and exposes the real meanings in prevailing material facticity. This is
the enlightenment imperative; the illusions must be stripped so the logic of the alternative is
evident. With this type of enlightenment, the potential for emancipation materializes.

Conclusion

From the standpoint of posterity, prevailing material facticity must be transcended.
The current mode of consumption based on ever expanding needs and therapeutic
consumption, as a fundamental part of that facticity, must be transcended as well. It is
suggested in this paper that a new mode of consumption is imperative if imminent
ecological crises are to be averted since one of the major contributors to that crisis is the
level and type of material consumption within industrial society. Voluntary simplicity is
proffered as a viable consumption alternative. However, this mode of consumption is
irrational when analyzed within the idiom of the status quo. This condition exists since the
analysis itself is framed within the idiom, and consequently, the traditional
positivist/empirical model is inadequate to the task of exposing false consciousness to
itself. What is called for is a different mode of analysis unconstrained by the prevailing
ideology of consumption. Critical theory is extolled here as that alternative.

Because of the nature of the consumption problem, i.e., inured false
consciousness, critical theory is uniquely appropriate as a method of analysis. Because the
problem takes the form of a socially patterned defect, none recognize it as a problem.
Systematic self-misunderstandings render alternatives insupportable when contrasted with
the cornucopian flow of goods since the flow of goods has been established as the sole
tribunal. Under this condition, and subjected to traditional analysis, alternative
consumption modes will be judged irrational. Critical theory has as its manifest function,
the exposure of false consciousness to itself by exposing the contradictions in society. And
it is the contradictions within the consumption process that need awakening within the
consuming public. It appears that critical theory is one of the few means at hand to expose
us to ourselves. As Fay (1987) states:
It is by providing an alternative which speaks to the disguised but real meaning underlying
the (illusory) self-understandings of its audience that a critical theory hopes to overcome
their resistance to a new conception of themselves and their situation that it proffers. (p. 100)

In the words of the swamp philosopher, Pogo possum, "We have met the enemy
and he is us."

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