To Find the Cost of Freedom: Theorizing and Practicing a Critical Pedagogy of Consumption

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Introduction

We, the authors of this article, represent a variety of spaces and sites of education (though let us be upfront in saying that we position ourselves as relatively privileged members of U.S. society, navigating our way through lives predicated upon a particular type of hyperconsumption that is only available to the global few). Jenny's research focuses on public pedagogy and popular culture, and the ways in which children, youth, and adults learn (and unlearn) consumerism within these public spaces of education. Richard is a vegan educator and critical theorist of society interested in advancing an ecopedagogy that can subvert the predatory culture industries and create transformative action on the relations of production that quietly gird consumerist excesses. David and Kevin share a background in contemporary art education. David's research focuses on the educative dimensions of contemporary art, emerging technologies, and social practices within the public sphere. Kevin's research focuses on art education through the lenses of visual culture, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies. We are drawn together through our interest in critical education for social and ecological justice, and particularly through our interest in fostering among learners critical resistance around issues of consumption. We struggle, in both our personal and academic lives, with understanding how we—as educators, citizens, community members, and family members—can create more democratic and sustainable spaces within our classrooms, communities, and societies when we are inundated by materialism, consumption, and economic/social/cultural oppression. In this article we draw from our own research and practice to begin considering what it might mean to create and enact a "critical pedagogy of consumption." We ask ourselves, and other educators, how do we, in the midst of hypercapitalism, enact critical education? How do we learn to act and think and feel in ways that disrupt the dominant corporate order?

Life in Legoland: Deconstructing the Plastic Building Blocks of Our Global Consumer Lives

I (Jenny) recently spent a few days at Legoland in California, much to the delight of my7-year-old son. I also enjoyed Legoland, especially its roller coasters and "Miniland USA," which features amazing sculptures crafted from Legos, depicting cities such as Las Vegas, New Orleans, and Los Angeles. I was also overwhelmed but not surprised by the commercialism of Legoland, where, of course, Lego sets and a variety of other products were for sale throughout the entire park. There are at least eight different "themed" shopping areas corresponding to the various park sections—for instance, in the "pirate" section of the park, there is a shop selling all manner of pirate-themed gear, including swords, eye-patches, t-shirts, and temporary tattoos. The consumptive craze culminates in "The BIG Shop," which is situated at the entrance/exit of the park. No visit to Legoland is complete without time spent in The BIG Shop, where crowds gather to purchase all manner of Lego products, including the typical Lego sets (Lego currently sells themed sets from product lines such as Indiana Jones, Star Wars, Space Police, Sponge Bob, and Bob the Builder, among others). That's not all, though. There are also princess costumes for sale (Disney doesn't have the monopoly on princess fantasies, after all), apparel, dress up gear, stuffed animals, key chains, ice cube trays, and too many other objects to list.

Toy and entertainment companies such as the Disney Corporation are notorious for egregiously violating human rights through sweatshop production and for destroying the environment through production on a massive scale of cheap plastic products that quickly end up in landfills. While a good toy conjures wholesome images, the reality is that today's children's wares are most often churned out of Chinese factories for the lowest cost possible, causing safety and humanitarian corners to be cut on the side of production wherever possible. Indeed, in 2007, a massive international scandal ensued when companies like Mattel, Hasbro, and Fisher Price were forced to issue recalls on millions of items because of safety concerns in their manufacture (AFL-CIO, 2007, p. 6).

Barring the occasional media spectacle, little to none of the back-story behind our children's plastic toys usually reaches an otherwise gullible, uninformed, or intentionally

mis-informed consumer class. Certainly, such information is absent in the marketing campaigns and product packaging designed to stimulate purchases. Wal-Mart, Target, and Toys "R" Us—the three companies accounting for the majority of the toys sold in the U.S. (Barbaro & Sorkin, 2006)—do not generally inform consumers of the dangers of their PVC and other forms of plastic playthings for sale. These hazards include the common inclusion of hormone disrupting Bisphenol-A and neurotoxic heavy metals like lead or cadmium in hard PVC plastic toys as well as phthalates in soft plastic varieties that have been labeled as probable carcinogens (see www.healthytoys.org).

Cognizant of such issues, the Lego Corporation was founded and continues to act on a "set of strong corporate values about ethics and responsibility" (Morsing, Midttun, & Palmas, 2007, p. 91) in its labor and manufacturing practices. Moreover, the Lego Corporation might have some legitimate claim that Legos help foster creativity in children. But even if Lego sets are relatively safe and educational, the Lego corporation—along with so many other multinational corporations with far worse safety and educational track records—is very much guilty of normalizing consumption, commodifying play and everyday life, and of fostering within children (and adults) the desire for more—the desire to consume.

The ideology of consumerism is currently one of the most dominant forces in society; we undoubtedly live in a consumer world. Sassatelli (2007), who draws from Max Weber, explains that under life conditions predicated by modern industrialism and its corresponding global markets (conditions that are gestured to by terminology such as "Global North," which we employ in this paper), to live in a consumer society means satisfying one's daily needs through capitalist modes of production and consumption. That is, individuals do not produce their own goods for their own use and to satisfy their daily needs; instead, they buy and use commodities, which are goods that are produced for exchanged and available for purchase. Furthermore, the buying and using of these goods is conceptualized in the Global North as "consumption;" and citizens are referred to as "consumers" by both themselves and by various scientific, governmental, and social institutions. In addition, individuals' everyday lives are filled with moments and practices of consumption; we enact processes of consumption in almost every aspect of our lives.

Speaking from the perspective of consumers in the Global North, Sassatelli (2007, pp. 2-3) explains:

> We wake up and 'consume' breakfast at home or in a coffee-shop, we go to work in a factory or office where we spend most of the day, taking a 'break' from 'work' only to 'consume' a sandwich as a pub, in a canteen or food outlet, we return home where a series of instruments help us complete our diverse acts of 'consumption' – from listening to a new CD we bought in the nearest shopping centre to relaxing in a hot bath with a miraculous essential oil recommended by a friend. And, if we still have any energy left, we might go out to other places of consumption (restaurants, cinemas, clubs, gyms, night clubs, etc.) where we can enjoy specific goods and services made available to us through the work of others, who will themselves consume their lot in other spaces and times.

Consumption is not simply a matter of buying and using goods, however. Sassatelli (2007) describes consumption as a complex set of social, economic, and cultural practices that are

> -interconnected with all of the most important phenomena which have come to make up contemporary Western society: the spread of the market economy, a developing globalization, the creation and recreation of national traditions, a succession of technological and media innovations, etc. (pp. 5-6)

She goes on to argue that consumption holds social, political, and cultural implications: to consume means to adopt the contested identity of a "consumer," contradictions and all.

Given the omnipresence of consumption in our lives, Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) urge educational researchers and practitioners to begin taking consumption seriously as a site of education and learning. We, in turn, call upon educators to not only consider consumption as a space of education and learning, but also to critically analyze what it might mean to *resist* a consumer society predicated on the normalization of overconsumption. This activist work exists both inside of schools and in more informal spaces of learning such as the broad and diverse social movements focused on resisting

consumerism and the economic structures which give rise to it, including groups working towards labor rights and opposing global sweatshops, fighting against globalization, advocating for fair trade, and fighting against the ecological destruction that accompanies a society beset by "affluenza" (De Graaf, Wann, Naylor, 2001). While there is a small but growing interest among scholars in the intersections of consumption and education (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Molnar, 2005; Spring, 2003), this work is only just beginning to build an understanding of the kinds of pedagogy that are intertwined with the processes of, participation in, negotiation of, and resistance to, consumption.

Our lives, thoughts, and actions have become increasingly commodified and scripted, as we are constantly socialized into an ideology of consumerism. We are dictated to by the strong "psychic architecture" (Reverend Billy, quoted in Landau, 2005) of consumer culture—we all know what to do, how to act—our actions are interpolated by the megaspectacle of commercial infotainment (Kellner, 2005) and it is hard to break out of this "known" (pre-fabricated) existence: "Consumerism has us facing one way – toward the product. We're in formation. Our gestures, our memories, and our senses are all organized toward the point of purchase" (Reverend Billy, Letter to "Noy," on webpage). The consumerist script tells us what to think and how to act, and defines for us what is acceptable. Of course, the scripts written for dominant, white, middle-class consumers in the United States are not the same as those scripts that people living in chronic poverty in inner-city or rural spaces—either within the U.S. or elsewhere in the world—are forced into following. Consumer culture is a *class culture* that can be broken down across a range of social antagonisms including race and gender, and as such there is a diversity of messages produced for differing consumer clienteles, not just a singular market logic that is universalized equally over all.

Yet, we posit that "deconstructing Legoland" is *not merely* a bourgeois white political and pedagogical project. Even if our examples within this paper are culturally specific, our larger point is to celebrate the creative and critical agency of all those who resist and interrogate the hegemony of multinational companies/industries—a structural problem in which everyone has at least a potential stake and interest. For, whether slowly or with great haste, these same multinationals are bent on enticing people everywhere to

desire, purchase, and promote their wares; and those who do not buy from them may increasingly labor for them or live within the socio-economic conditions set by the local factories that will manufacture for them. Certainly, those living in the shantytowns of Soweto, South Africa may lack a comparable investment in reproducing the social and environmental costs of corporate coffee or industrialized meat production when placed in the context of the spending power of the professional-class citizens residing in places such as New York's Upper-East Side or Beverly Hills, California. But that one can still find the world's poor wearing shirts advertising multinational product brands such as Nike, Coca-Cola, and the like speaks to our point that a critical pedagogy of consumption is ultimately internationalist in scope and maintains common targets for struggle, even if its tactical approaches or aims must be developed and interpreted situationally by the great range of communities, groups, and individuals that make their home within the global constraints of transnational capitalism.

In what follows, then, we provide descriptive examples of activist-educators that suggest foundational aspects of what a critical pedagogy of consumption might look like in both its practical and theoretical registers. These descriptions should not be considered prescriptive in nature, as if these methods were culturally or socially relevant across all manner of global economic consumer experience. In other words, we do not seek to generalize from our examples even as we uphold them as instances of emancipatory agency worthy of wide consideration. Thus, if our paper suggests the need for yet other analyses of the consumer society based on the projects, methods, or political needs of racial, gendered, class-based, or other standpoints that exist beyond our examples' scope, then we whole-heartedly agree. To begin to give voice to these other examples and begin dialogue across approaches and social sectors would exactly be to more manifestly organize the kind of critical pedagogy of consumption for which we argue here.

Learning from a Radical-Anti-Consumption-Social-Activist-as-Critical-Pedagogue

Our task as critical educators is to open pedagogical and curricular spaces where we can learn to act and think and feel in ways that push back against—that disrupt—a

limiting, oppressive, standardized, corporate order. This entails creating and enacting a critical (public) pedagogy, or what O'Malley (2006) calls a "public pedagogy of possibility"—which "dissents from and disrupts the standardization worldview itself, understanding that standardization of curriculum and assessment is but one consequence of a larger social paradigm" (p. 12). But how do we create this critical pedagogy, this critical imaginary? My (Jenny) recent research has focused on how anti-consumption social activism operates as critical public pedagogy, aiming to educate audiences about consumerism and overconsumption. I have specifically focused on Reverend Billy, an anti-consumption social activist based in New York City, who I see as a "critical consumer educator" operating in the public sphere. Reverend Billy focuses his activism against "the noxious effects of consumerism, transnational capital, and the privatization of public space and culture" (Lane, 2002, p. 60), and advocates for sustainable, grass-roots community development and social activism (Lane, 2002). In so doing, he envisions and enacts what Giddens (1991) calls "life politics," wherein he exposes the hidden labor practices and social costs behind the everyday consumer products like coffee, clothes, and toys. Reverend Billy encourages audience members to stop simply taking for granted the products we buy, and, instead, to start asking questions about how consumption and business practices are linked to unjust labor practices, cultural destruction, declining communities, and ecological devastation. I have examined Reverend Billy's pedagogical strategies to understand how and why he is trying to reach audiences. Given the nature of my data, which focuses mainly on the activities of Reverend Billy (although I do have some limited data on audience reactions), I place my attention on Reverend Billy's espoused and enacted critical pedagogy and at this point can only speculate on how audiences negotiate that pedagogy. I plan in future research to focus more on audience reactions.

I posit that Reverend Billy seeks to ignite the imagination of audience members, and in turn to help them envision different ways of interacting with consumer culture. One way Reverend Billy hopes to ignite this imagination is playing with notions of the "unknown"—that is, he (1) preaches against the "known" consumerist script; he (2) enacts a pedagogy of the unknown and *performs* the unknown, as he focuses on asking

questions and enacting "exalted acts of embarrassment" that are unsanctioned in everyday life, to (3) disturb customers long enough so that they can (4) back away from the product, away from the consumerist script, into what Reverend Billy calls "the fabulous unknown." This pedagogy of the unknown has the potential to open up the "transitional spaces" (Ellsworth, 2005) so necessary for critical, transformational learning to take place.

The notion that our lives have been commodified and scripted is a theme that appears throughout all of Reverend Billy's work, and one main focus of his critical pedagogy of consumption is to help us recognize the consumerist script that we have for so long taken for granted and lived with unconsciously. This consumerist script is the "known" that Reverend Billy is trying to expose and educate others about. For Reverend Billy, troubling the consumerist script involves preaching against the *ideology of consumerism*, the ways our *lives are mediated by products*, and the *omnipresence of consumption* in our everyday lives, which structures our thoughts and actions. In order to counteract the consumerist script, Reverend Billy enacts a "pedagogy of the unknown," which uses unexpected practices of social activism that constitute a "*political poetics*" (Sandlin & Milam, 2008) and through which he encourages audience members to become "erotic politicians." Convinced that traditional forms of protest no longer are effective, Reverend Billy enacts a new kind of activism using less predictable tactics than the social movements of ages past. This new activism involves the creative appropriation, creation, and enactment of culture, along with humor and creativity. Reverend Billy preaches in retail stores and supermalls, enacts "invisible theater" skits in retail spaces, sings songs in public spaces with his gospel choir, stops traffic to preach, and exorcises cash registers at stores such as Starbucks and Victoria's Secret. Indeed, the kinds of "political poetics" that many anti-consumption new social movements and critical public pedagogies/pedagogues are enacting include art, music, theater, humor, and creative cultural production. Ellsworth (2005) argues that the most powerful critical learning experiences arise out of pedagogies that "emphasize noncognitive, nonrepresentational processes and events such as movement, sensation, intensity, rhythm, passage, and self-augmenting change" (p. 6).

Through engaging in this political poetics, Reverend Billy hopes to enact what he calls "the Church of Exalted Embarrassment," where he encourages audience members to transgress consumerist scripts and embrace unscripted actions, which will make them feel "odd." According to Reverend Billy, there are many moments each day when we can choose to continue existing in the consumerist script or choose to go against it. He states, "so many Americans cannot act. We have entered into a consensual hypnosis right now, that cannot continue" (Ashlock, 2005, para 3). Reverend Billy also argues that he is fascinated by those moments when people decide to *reject* those scripts and move into something different. He wants people to regard those moments as "something they can walk into and think about and challenge" (Ashlock, 2005, para 3). For Reverend Billy, moving into spaces that are not colonized by consumerist scripts involves engaging in activities that push people into feeling embarrassed. Enacting unexpected forms of activism helps to "challenge our inactivity" (Ashlock, 2005, para 3) and to create feelings of being uncomfortable; comedy, performance and song help people move into what he calls "exalted embarrassment," the state of feeling "oddness" as one embraces and acts in ways that are unsanctioned in normal, scripted consumer-driven life.

Reverend Billy, through his "performance of the unknown," seeks to move audience members towards a state of disturbance: he purposely tries to cause dissonance in audience members. He also seeks to surprise people, to cause then to experience something unexpected. These interruptions push people into states where they are off-balance. In fact, this is exactly what he seeks in his activism. It is in these moments of suspension in the unknown, Reverend Billy argues, that real learning and change can take place. In fact, Reverend Billy's pedagogy embraces the notion that dissonance is a necessary condition for critical learning to take place. This dissonance is so important for learning that Reverend Billy tries to hold people in that state of unknown for as long as possible, for, as he explains,

> As soon as they can add it up it's less important to them. If that suspension takes place for 2 or 3 or 4 minutes, they're gonna take that home and they're gonna still be thinking about it a week later. (Reverend Billy, as interviewed in Sharpe, 2001).

Part of learning from the experience of dissonance is learning to exist in ambiguity, where there are no scripts determining one's life, where people are free to create rather than to just consume. Reverend Billy hopes to "disturb" audiences long enough—to force them to be suspended in the unknown long enough—to allow them to begin to envision another way of being that is less dependent on consumption. This new way of being—of embracing the unknown—entails backing away from consumption and reclaiming authenticity. Through his pedagogy of the unknown, Reverend Billy challenges audience members to reject the scripted consumerist life, and to embrace the exhilarating, terrifying, embarrassing "*unknown*."

Reverend Billy calls moving into the unknown "communicating in the present tense," and I, in turn, interpret this notion of the "present tense" as akin to Ellsworth's (2005) "learning-self-in-the-making" (p. 5). Ellsworth talks of moving away from habitual responses to known, tired, fixed, already configured spaces, binaries, pedagogies, and relationships—symbolized by "the past"—as she urges educators to create transitional spaces of learning-in-the-making, where time and space remain open and allow us to re-imagine and re-vision ourselves, our worlds, our relationships with others—a continual "present." This present is in the making, unknown, unknowable, unfixable, uncertain, and active. When our learning selves are in the present, they are "in transition and in motion," moving towards "previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the world" (p. 16). The present is a space of the unknown, ripe with possibility.

Reverend Billy acknowledges that moving into the "unknown" is difficult, as it requires consumers to shake their reliance on others to provide the answers and the entertainment. However, while it may be difficult, embracing the unknown and backing away from the product also provides a sense of freedom, as it reignites imagination and authenticity. He explains, "When you lift your hand from the product and back away from it, a bright, unclaimed space opens up. Consumers think it is a vacuum. It is really only the unknown—full of suppressed ocean life, glitterati from Bosch, DNA twists, and childhood quotes that if remembered would burn down the Disney Store" (Talen, 2003, p. xii). Entering the "unknown"—which is free from commercialized and commodified

memories, stories, and ways of acting—allows individuals to create their own stories, to enact their own dances, to sing their own songs, to get in touch with their own desires. In the following quote, an audience member describes his first encounter with Reverend Billy. In this passage, he discusses how as a result of this encounter he began to recognize the power corporations held over him and began to move towards a less predictable space, where "the world is fallen":

> He [Reverend Billy] seemed to stir an honestly ecstatic religious impulse in that small theater. The moment I remember most about that show is a bit wherein he holds a conversation with a giant billboard of the model Kate Moss. "She's looking at me," he fumes. "She wants me." He continues to flirt with the billboard and in so doing is transported back to an early adolescence romance. Suddenly, he realizes: this is my self. These are my memories. These ads are taking our memories, attaching them to products, and selling them back to us. He stops horrified. We are completely with him. This world is fallen and so are we. He leads us in a healing ritual, a visualization wherein we see a Disney tchotchke, reach for it, then resist the temptation to buy. We are given the following directive: "Remember your name." It occurred to me that day how branded I am. There is a huge chunk of my memory that is someone else's property, property that someone is right now making money off of. I think about the tattoo of Bugs Bunny on my right shoulder blade. It is trademarked, licensed to the tattoo company by AOL Time Warner. (Grote, 2002, p. 363)

Reverend Billy's work helps highlight how critical imagination is linked to focusing on the "present" and the "unknown." Through noncorporatized art, music, dance, and other noncognitive ways of being and knowing, educators can open up spaces of the unknown, spaces we can carve out beyond the grasp of commercialization and hyperstandardization. Through Reverend Billy's pedagogy, we begin to see that the unknown beyond the grasp of corporations is not the absence of something; it is a space of promise and possibility. This "unknown" is also the space that holds hope of radical social change, for it is a space where humans are finally free to be their most passionate, free, creative selves.

Don't Get Mad, Get Vegan!

A major element of Richard's research is illuminating the "epistemology of ignorance" (Mills, 2007) constructed by our consumer society in order to mask the grave social and ecological harms done by its speciesist capitalism (Kahn, Forthcoming). That one can often shop and maintain a happy consumer identity in the midst of the burgeoning mass extinction of animals and corresponding planetary ecocrisis that are now taking place is nothing short of nightmarish. Hence, work in education needs to be done from the "animal standpoint" (Donovan, 2006) in which we make critical vegan interventions into speciesist curricula and begin to produce transformative praxis on all manner of social institutions that reduce sentient animals to exploitable bodies that might profitably serve as food, clothing, and other consumer products. But such work remains beyond the consciousness of many educational institutions. While some schools have tried to incorporate a consistent vegetarian (and sometimes vegan) offering on the menu, the reality is that vegans are still treated like second-class citizens in most school cafeterias. Even when there is food provided for them to eat, the school experience is structured to reduce veganism to a personal "special dietary requirement" and not a collective political standpoint from which to mount a transformative critique of society.

Some radical teachers have begun to mount pedagogy from the animal standpoint; however, by doing so they often meet with considerable resistance from those empowered to maintain the ideological status quo of the hyperconsumption of animals. Consider the story of Dave Warwak, a 5th through 8th grade tenured art teacher in the Chicago-area Fox River Grove Middle School, who had previously exhibited at Northern Illinois University but who was suspended and then fired by his public school for teaching art from the animal standpoint. In 2006, Warwak became a vegan and decided to respond to evidence of animal cruelty by students at the school by developing (and gaining approval for) a collective art lesson in which a number of students and teachers

created and cared for their own companion animal made out of commercially-available marshmallow "Peeps" chick-shaped candy. Similar to exercises where students care for "baby" eggs, students personalized their Peeps, spoke to them, and treated them as if they were subjects of a life that were deserving of protection. At the end of the lesson, however, Warwak surprised everyone by collecting the Peeps for a diorama school art exhibit he then created in which the marshmallow chicks were represented as locked behind zoo cages, hung on the wall as trophy game heads, squashed as road kill, boiled and fried in pots and pans, and enclosed between slices of bread as sandwiches.

According to a Sept. 12, 2007 Chicago Tribune editorial, this resulted in a rebuke from the school's principal that Warwak was trying to "influence students against the school lunch program" and he was warned to stick to the curriculum. In response, Warwak replied that part of teaching art is to get students to think about life and to have them connect their creativity to the social issues they care about. He then asked for the removal of the National Dairy Council's "Got Milk?" and other promotional posters that adorned the lunch room walls, and when the school's cafeteria manager refused to take them down, Warwak and his students posted their own vegan posters satirizing the issue. He also began a more public campaign to raise consciousness about the quality of school lunches being fed at the school, which resulted in his dismissal.

While one might question the nature of Warwak's collegiality, it also seems clear that he was fired not because of his pedagogical or personal style, but because of his unwillingness to relent from using the art curriculum to explore his own school as a location in which to house the animal standpoint. By so doing, he quickly found himself immersed in a hotbed of political issues related to what could be termed the "school cafeteria-industrial complex" that lay just below the epistemological surface of the school's day-to-day code of normalcy. We might ask (as he did): Why were the Dairy Council posters in the school? What was the school's food quality? What's wrong with influencing students against the school lunch program if there is a sound educational point to be made in doing so?

In thousands of schools across the country, corporate agribusiness has run amok in the attempt to utilize public education as a place to establish the naturalization of

commercial meat and dairy as lifelong eating habits, to generate increased sales, to subsidize the food industry against decreased producer prices, and to funnel below-health standards food not fit for public sale. Warwak was correct to demand the riddance of the Dairy Council's posters; they had already been targeted for removal from approximately 105,000 public schools by the Federal Trade Commission. In May 2007, after nearly a decade of countless petitions filed against Big Dairy by the animal rights organization Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, the FTC ruled that the Dairy Council's "Milk Your Diet" ad campaign, which claimed that the regular consumption of milk promoted healthy weight loss, was scientifically misleading and false. A story in *Alternet* captures the corporate duplicity behind this overt operation to infuse milk propaganda in schools:

> The Milk Your Diet campaign . . . shipped truck-size posters of 'stache-wearing David Beckham, Carrie Underwood and New York Yankee Alex Rodriguez to 45,000 public middle and high schools and 60,000 public elementary schools last fall and conducted an online auction where students could use milk UPC codes as currency. ("It's an amazing experience," say the web promos, which were still up in May. "Did we mention you have a chance to win an iPod? And a Fender guitar? And cool clothes from Adidas and Baby Phat? All you have to do is drink milk to get it. Any size. Any flavor.")
>
> The campaign offered $1,000 America's Healthiest Student Bodies Awards to schools with the "most active" students and saluted them with what? Got Milk recognitions. (Rosenberg, 2007)

Schools across the country have utilized these dairy industry materials because it is tacitly demanded by the USDA's National School Lunch Program, the primary governmental vehicle through which food that is in over-supply is promoted and national prices thereby subsidized. In this case, schools are only reimbursed for their food expenses by the program if they promote items like milk, which it has deemed a nutritional good.

This is the same National School Lunch Program that was slammed by a March, 2008 exposé from the *Wall Street Journal*, which uncovered that:

> In reports dating back to 2003, the USDA Office of Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office cited the USDA's lunch-program administrators and inspectors for weak food-safety standards, poor safeguards against bacterial contamination, and choosing lunch-program vendors with known food-safety violations. Auditors singled out problems with controls over E. coli and salmonella contamination. (Williamson, 2008)

Worse still, the above phrase "known food-safety violations" is something of a euphemism. A prime beef vendor for the National School Lunch Program has been the meat packing company Westland/Hallmark which, via undercover footage shot by the Humane Society of the United States, was revealed to regularly slaughter "downer" cows (i.e., mortally sick animals that have been linked to Mad Cow and other fatal diseases in humans) for popular consumption. Though having repeatedly denied any illegal wrongdoing for years, the ultimate revelation of Westland/Hallmark's practices led to the nation's largest ever recall of beef (Associated Press, 2008). Unfortunately, it was suspected that the large majority of recalled meat had already been eaten—much of it by school children. Dave Warwak's art program therefore provided a form of epistemological rupture of the educational status quo in order to call attention to the role being played by this sort of food in his own school. In so doing, however, he threatened to parade the fact that the dietary norms constructed on behalf of those attending public schools (as well as in the larger society) are generally set in place by an emperor without clothes.

Paulo Freire (2000) wrote, "While the problem of humanization has always, from an axiological point of view, been humankind's central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern" (p. 43). As Warwak's story relates, however, there are significant consumerist forces at work effecting a culture of silence throughout society on vegan issues. Yet the struggle for a new paradigm of anti-speciesist/capitalist understanding is taking place today in the grassroots and beginning to march into the schools. It is true that the end of an economic system that produces "satisfaction" out of domination cannot be guaranteed but, then again, neither now can the conditions that

would allow for its unquestioned continuance.

In this way, the immediate pedagogical lesson to Warwak's students was perhaps a kind of Biblical injunction: Thou shall not transgress the hidden curriculum of food as it is prescribed from on high, which students further learned is vengefully backed by a type of bureaucratic penal system which threatens detention, suspension, and ultimately one's removal from school altogether for not upholding school dietary norms. Alternatively, the students may have learned from the larger media battle that took place during and after Warwak's firing that contemporary political resistance necessarily occurs in the media as a zone of struggle. Perhaps some of the students were able to evaluate and compare how news stories (mis)characterized events as they knew them to be true and so additionally gained a type of critical media literacy in this way. Or, finally, maybe at least a few students came to realize that due to their collective critical work—at however limited a level—material conditions *did* change in their school! Rotten and diseased meat was exposed and removed from their cafeteria kitchen; and not just from their own school but from many others as well around the nation in fact, as a coast-to-coast dialogue was raised that exposed pervasive corruption and collusion between the meat and dairy industries, government administrators charged with regulating school food, and the local schools providing the lunches in question.

Are schools now across the country going vegan as a result? Hardly. But in the unfinished history that is capitalist speciesism something new has been bequeathed by the students at Fox River Grove Middle School to other radical vegan activists that should lend hope to their own future acts of subversion. More than the liberal politics of "changing the world one plate at a time" Warwak's attempt to advance a critical pedagogy of consumption within schools challenged structures at all levels and so demonstrated for students that, while consequences for such resistant behavior may be quick and fierce, they are so in part because the transformative power available to students and teachers to effect ethical change is much more than everyday relations may otherwise suggest.

Yes (Men) We Can: Relearning the Lessons of Global Capitalism

One strand of our (David and Kevin's) recent research has focused on the pedagogical dimensions of contemporary art and social practices, including culture jamming, that deliberately extend into the public and political spheres. By fusing contemporary artistic methods with critical theory and social action, these practices utilize artistic production and creative interventions to catalyze social (ex)change and debate and inspire critical reflection and action. Such forms of public strategy are linked critically through theories of public pedagogy, relational art, and civic engagement. They can open alternative pedagogical spaces that reveal and challenge consumer-driven notions of public space and neoliberal lessons about freedom and democracy provided by global capitalism and embedded in our visual culture.

One such example of contemporary art and social practices began on a late November day in 2004. Jacques Servin, a member of the Yes Men, a group of artists and social activists who use satire, political theater and spoofs to expose government hypocrisy and corporate social injustices, appeared on the BBC World as a spokesperson for Dow Chemical and proceeded to outline the company's radically revised position on the 1984 Bhopal Disaster on the occasion of its 20th anniversary. Using the pseudonym Jude (patron saint of the impossible) Finestera (earth's end), he claimed that Dow had agreed to clean up the site and compensate those harmed in the incident. Immediately following the interview, Dow's share price fell 4.2% in 23 minutes, for a loss of $2 billion in market value. It later recovered after Dow issued a statement denouncing the compensation package and clarifying that Finestera's statements were part of a hoax.

By creating a bogus Dow Chemical website and then posing as a spokesperson for the company, Servin and his accomplices were able to enact a trope the Yes Men describe as "identity correction," an interventionist tactic in which members impersonate corporate and governmental officials in an effort to reveal the true ideology of a given organization (Darts, 2008). By artfully presenting Dow's fictional plans for compensating the victims and cleaning up the Bhopal site, the Yes Men successfully drew attention to the company's failures to meaningfully address these issues. In the process, they clearly exposed the tenuous relationship between corporate social responsibility and free market

capitalism. By appearing to be doing the right thing for the victims and people living in Bhopal, the Yes Men demonstrated that Dow would clearly be doing the wrong thing for its bottom line. The hoax thus illustrated the severe limitations of corporate social responsibility within an unregulated free market system. As Deborah Doane (2005), Director of the Corporate Responsibility (CORE) Coalition points out, "companies can't do well while also doing good" (p. 23). She explains that, counter to the rhetoric of corporate social responsibility campaigns; short-term corporate profits and long-term benefits to society are generally not compatible under the dominant free market economic system.

Set within the backdrop of global capitalism, the Yes Men's artful critique of Dow Chemical exists in stark contrast to the forceful ideological lessons about freedom and democracy provided by global capitalism and embedded in our visual culture. One of the key ideological lessons taught by global capitalism is that unregulated free markets are inseparable from democratic principles. As Carey (1997) points out, the decades long business-driven propaganda campaign to marry capitalism to democracy has been fundamental to the project of protecting corporate power *against* democracy. This linking of free market ideology to democratic ideals has served as the chief moral rationale for United States military interventionism (Mitchell, 2005) and has been integral to expanding the unregulated flow of capital and commodities across national borders. Sold directly to our desires and insecurities through spectacular images and designer products, capitalism's public pedagogy has helped maintain the neoliberal fantasy that infinite economic growth is possible within a finite system of natural resources. Conversely, it has helped obscure the stark reality that the health of our consumer culture is intimately connected to the sickness of our planet (Darts, 2008).

Such forms of public pedagogy vigorously promote a politics of privatization, thereby relegating citizenship and the public domain to the commercial confines of the free market. Giroux (2004) explains that the values, ideologies, and social relations taught by public pedagogy define global citizenship as "a private affair, a solitary act of consumption" (p. 52). Within this capitalist paradigm, citizenship is reduced to a predetermined selection of consumer choices. Acts of civic engagement are limited to

buying organic, driving a hybrid or wearing sweat-free clothing just as acts of patriotism are reduced to shopping sprees and family vacations. And while these ideological lessons are pervasive, much of their educational force lies in their apparent imperceptibility. Duncum (2002) explains that by working through everyday commercial artifacts and channels, "ideology establishes the parameters for thinking and experiencing outside of which it is difficult to think or experience, let alone to act" (p. 5). He argues that while "culture is always a site of struggle to define how life is to be lived and experienced, the struggle is often rendered invisible" (p 6).

Part of the value, then, of the Yes Men's artistic interventions is their creative ability to expose the ideological lessons of the dominant culture. Borrowing from the Situationist International (SI), the Yes Men's identity corrections utilize the concept of détournement which, roughly translated, is a "turning around," essentially the act of pulling an image or situation out of its original context to create a new and socially improved meaning. Building on Marx's (1867) theory of commodity fetishism, the SI declared in the 1960s that our real lives had been co-opted by the spectacular media events and commodity consumption of the modern world. As a response to this 'society of the spectacle,' the SI advocated 'spontaneous living' as a way of reviving the creativity of everyday life. They also worked to fight commercial culture with its own weapons. Lasn (2000), the publisher of Adbusters magazine and a leading figure within the culture jamming movement since the late 1980s, explains that détournement involves "rerouting spectacular images, environments, ambiences and events to reverse or subvert their meaning, thus reclaiming them" (p. 103). This approach is akin to Alinsky's (1989) metaphor of "mass political jujitsu," which he describes as "utilizing the power of one part of the power structure against another part…the superior strength of the Haves become their own undoing" (p. 152).

Both the SI and Alinsky have contributed to a theoretical framework that informs contemporary culture jamming, a movement that has its roots in a number of artistic, intellectual and social movements from over the last eighty years (Lasn, 2000). While the term "culture jamming" was first used in 1984 by the San Francisco audio-collage band Negativland, the concept itself dates back to the suffrage and avant-garde movements of

the early 20th century. The Dadaist, Surrealist, Situationist International, Civil Rights, Anti-War, Environmental, Human Rights, Culture Jamming and Anti-Globalization movements have all successfully employed and contributed to culture jamming ideas and techniques. As a form of artistic and sociopolitical intervention, culture jamming involves the creative appropriation and subversion of symbols, media channels and technologies to reveal and subvert dominant structures and socio-political inequities of the status quo. Through artistic interventions, hoaxes, and tactical media pranks, culture jammers direct public attention to the caesura between the fundamental values of a society (e.g. justice, democracy, civil rights, freedom) and its normative social, political, and environmental practices, with the intention of inspiring renewed debate and meaningful social transformations. Culture jammers regularly work to reveal corporate power and to subvert the ideologies of consumer-driven culture.

By producing tactical media events like the Dow Chemical hoax, the Yes Men are able to temporarily subvert the power of capitalism's public pedagogy by challenging the values, norms, and ideologies necessary for supporting the structures and imperatives of global capitalism. They are thus able to directly challenge capitalism's politics of privatization by demonstrating how citizenship need not be reduced to the act of consumption. Perhaps more importantly, such artistic interventions also offer a glimpse into an alternate reality where capitalist interests do not supersede basic human rights or environmental obligations. This enacting of a better world, even if only short-lived is an important tool for inspiring critical reflection and awakening social consciousness. As Duncombe (2007) explains, "counterideologies work best when they are not just imagined but performed" (p. 173). Such performances point toward a pedagogy of hope—one that teaches us that citizenship extends beyond the obligations of consumerism and that the world we live in can be improved outside of market forces.

For those of us invested in the project of contemporary education, socially engaged artists like the Yes Men and Reverend Billy provide valuable pedagogical models that can be translated for use in other curricular settings. Demonstrating how civic engagement combined with artistic action can reveal hidden forms of power and challenge corporate ideologies of consumption, for instance, can support important forms

of self-expression and critical interrogations of our consumer-driven culture. This can be further facilitated by teaching students to identify and re-purpose the multimodal techniques used to sell the wares and values of global capitalism, thus empowering them to engage in their own forms of public pedagogy. Ultimately, by connecting creative expression, theoretical knowledge, everyday experiences, and social critique, students may have a stronger basis for investigating the implications of global capitalism.

Researching, Creating, and Teaching Critical Pedagogies of Consumption

These various examples highlight educators, artists, and activists enacting critical pedagogies of consumption, which involve critical public engagement against hyperconsumerism and other oppressive social practices and ideologies. We urge educators to follow their lead, and to begin making more connections between consumption, education, and learning. We challenge educators to explore the consumptive aspects of the everyday educational and learning sites that we teach in or learn in, and also challenge them to explore the educational and learning aspects of various sites of consumption. These sites can be formal learning or educational sites or informal, popular culture, or media-based sites of learning (shopping malls, sporting events, leisure sites, fast food restaurants, television shows, video games, magazines, movies, etc.). We urge educators to investigate sites of hegemony as well as sites of resistance and contestation, or sites that enact both roles.

Researching these sites would help us further understand how consumption's pedagogy helps craft us into particular kinds of consumers; this work would also help us think through what a *critical* pedagogy of consumption might look like, in both formal and informal spaces of learning and education. While consumption's pedagogy typically frames consumption as the "acquisition, use, and divestment of goods and services" (Denzin, 2001, p. 325), a critical pedagogy of consumption—as seen in the examples provided, above—constructs consumption as a "site where power, ideology, gender, and social class circulate and shape one another" (Denzin, 2001, p. 325) and views consumption as "a social activity that integrates consumers into a specific social system

and commits them to a particular social vision" (Ozanne & Murray, 1995, p. 522). A critical pedagogy of consumption asks, "What kind of consumers are being created?" and "In whose interests do those constructions work?" It also investigates how consumer resistance works as a space of critically transformative learning and of critical public pedagogy.

Through the kinds of critical pedagogies of consumption that are enacted and advocated by Reverend Billy, Dave Warwak and his Fox River Grove Middle School students, and the Yes Men, learners come to investigate, problematize, and fight against the naturalization of the consumer world. These examples all demonstrate how a critical pedagogy of consumption ignites the imagination, helps learners to envision and realize new ways of being outside of the commodity's grip, and encourages learners to become active creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients. Can social change occur without individuals having the freedom to create their own memories, and the imagination to envision new ways of living? How can we foster more community-focused ways of living that are not bound by commercial interests or mind-numbing and soul-crushing hyperstandardization? How can critical pedagogies of consumption foster critical learning, and the possibility of social change? If imagination is important for social change, how can we as educators wrest our own and our students' imaginations from corporate-sponsored fantasies that advertisers and other fantasy peddlers like McDonald's and Disney are so eager to supply? How can we highlight and create moments of "unexpected activism" in order to help critical imagination and critical social change take flight?

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