I. Social Construction of Consumerism

A. Consumerism: the “ism” that won the century, not communism, fascism, or capitalism.

1. consumer psychology

a. social construction of psychology that organizes life around buying. “I buy therefore I am.”

b. traits

i. discontent “I am not okay, I need something . . .”

ii. confuses reality and illusion: desires become “needs”

iii. anxiety

c. “self-worth”

i. positional goods

ii. “you are what you own”

2. depends upon the social construction of a world of illusion, a “pseudo-reality”

a. “world” is eternal cornucopia of commodities

b. best of all possible worlds

i. freedom

ii. personal fulfillment

c. no other world desirable

3. depends on keeping contradictions invisible

B. Consumerism and social control

1. deflects person from social role as citizen

2. lessens class conflict

3. individual’s primary role as consumer

4. “false consciousness”

C. 1920s Birth of Consumerism

1. Urbanization

2. National Markets

3. “Public”

4. Industrialization

a. Fordism

b. mass production of consumer goods

c. requires: mass production of consumers

D. “Gospel of Mass Consumption”

1. higher wages

2. new lifestyle

a. middle class

b. “modern” vs “old fashion”, “consumer” vs “consumption”

c. consuming new consumer goods: 40% of companies producing consumer goods

d. popular culture and celebrities

3. installment

4. advertising

a. assumptions

i. original assumptions

ii. appeal to unconscious.

iii. “art of making people want things” and “this thing will make you happy.”

iv. proof: “World’s greatest adventure in advertising.”

b. early techniques

i. products tied to images of newly emerging middle class life style

ii. creating a product

attractive wrapper or package

name brand

slogan

c. means

i. magazines and catalogues

ii. department store window displays

iii. radio (“technology that conquered living space”)

iv. film: Horatio Alger stories

E. 1950s American Dream as consumer utopia.

1. American Dream

a. nuclear family

b. suburbs

c. consumerism

2. Social construction of the American dream

a. government

i. suburbs

FHA and VA loans

super highways

ii. infrastructure

iii. education

iv. vocational training

v. propaganda

b. corporations

i. loans and insurance

ii. shopping centers

iii. middle class jobs

iv. credit cards

v. advertising

vi. New City Lines

F. Television and the American Dream

1. advertising

a. dream machine

b. directed at middle class

i. women

ii. children

c. new techniques

i. little substance/entertaining

ii. visually attractive

iii. association of values

Marlboro

automobile

2. entertainment

a. domestic sitcoms

b. “Joneses”

G. Present: Saturation of cultural space

1. every where

a. 1/6th of US GNP

b. $500 billion

2. TV, Radio, magazines, newspapers

a. 1/3 of TV time and radio

b. 2/3rd newspapers

c. 1/2 to 2/3rds magazines

3. movies

a. advertisements

b. product placement

4. novels

5. sports events

a. stadiums, bowl games

b. scoreboards

c. announcements

d. stock car racing

6. public transportation

7. billboards

8. schools

a. Pepsi day

b. hallways

c. book covers 25 million Nike, Gatorade, Calvin

Klein

d. educational supplements

e. Channel One

i. 8 million teenagers

ii. $200,000 per minute, 1992 $115 million

f. Mail 3x in last 15 years

9. internet

H. Consumer Psychology

1. 61% always look forward to buying something

2. "wish list"

a. exotic vacation

b. larger and better house

c. second house

d. new luxury car or SUV

e. swimming pools

f. bbqs

3. 27% dream about what they want

4. wants become “needs”

a. “new Joneses”

b. television

c. $150,000 per year (5%)

I. Globalization of consumerism