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*Review of Potrošačka kultura i
konzumerizam [Consumer Culture
and Consumerism], edited by Snježana
Čolić, Institute of Social Sciences
Ivo Pilar, Zagreb, 2013, pb,
ISBN 978-953-7964-00-9, 206 pages*

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Review of *Potrošačka kultura i konzumerizam*
[*Consumer Culture and Consumerism*], edited by
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Consumer Culture and Consumerism is a collection of works by nine experts in the fields of sociology of culture, consumption and postmodernism, of cultural studies and of history of consumer culture and leisure, who addressed the topics covered in the title each from their unique perspective. Starting with an editor's Preface the book is equipped with summaries in Croatian and English language and brief authors' biographies. Scientific papers included in this edition, in the opinion of its reviewers, prof. Vjeran Katunarić and prof. Vladimir Lay, represent an essential reading in the postmodern age of consumer society and culture. As for the consumption itself, the authors remind us, it is founded in deep correlation with man's identity, his sense of purpose and joy. That is why its definition surpasses simple economic/materialistic determinants of mere satisfaction of basic needs and gains deeper cultural significance.

In the article *The Contemporary Consumer Culture of Neoliberal Capitalism and Sustainability: Global Aspects* the editor and author Snježana Čolić reflects on the sustainability of consumerism, as the dominant ideology of contemporary capitalism and a way of life, and of consumer culture as its globally spreading result. Čolić explains her adamant stance that 'global consumer culture is unsustainable culture' by its insatiability that significantly surpasses the limits of human needs and is usually embellished by the political rhetoric of necessary economic growth and development. The consequences of this rhetoric have been disastrous for both humans and nature.

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Čolić correctly points out how perpetuating models of economic growth neglect the physical-biological reality that human communities depend on, which in turn results in an altered and potentially false picture of human nature and human reality. The latter picture, by use of spectacle and brilliant illusions, often conceals the fact that only the few, to the detriment of the majority, have the opportunity to enjoy the material and spiritual benefits of economic growth. In conclusion, Čolić calls for resistance and for finding alternatives to the current global system, determining raising awareness of the frightening face of consumerism and consumer culture as the starting point.

In his text titled *Basic Concepts in Sociology of Consumption* Krešimir Peračković defines key concepts and discusses socio-economical and demographical aspects of consumption in an analytically consistent manner and using relevant scientific sources. It is important to note his definition of the sociology of consumption as a sociological subdiscipline 'that both in theoretical conceptualization and in empirical research approaches consumption as a social process, consumers as a social group and market as a social relation' (43). The author's opinion that the concepts and ideas he presented not only can but also should be used while conceptualising consumption in a serious and comprehensive way is convincing. In addition, provided analytical framework presents a good starting point for a better understanding of all subsequent texts.

Equally informative is the paper by Martin Lojkić *Social Meaning, Function and Purpose of Commodities* in which the author presents an overview of the relevant historical-sociological and economic-anthropological perspectives on goods. He analyses the changes of their meanings and social functions: from the initial one that was established on satisfying the needs up to the contemporary one that ensures social status and lifestyle in a hyper-consumerist society in which man himself becomes a commodity. Commodities, their occurrence through the processes of commodification and then their contemporary meaning author deliberates using Marxist, functionalist, interactionist and postmodern theory, designating the sociological theoretical and methodological apparatus as a prerequisite for a social clarification of both their positive and negative attributes.

Like the editor, Hajrudin Hromadžić in his text *Consumerism: A Driving Force of Late Capitalist Ideology* poses questions about the sustainability of the current

economic system and about the ideology of the continuous growth that feeds it. Author reflects on 'the nature of the consumer capitalist epoch' (191), whereby the idea of a resistance to consumerism represents the starting and ending point of his work. The resistance in the form of Badiou's *event* as utopian, therefore, 'radical break with the existing reality' (79) Hromadžić calls into question by recognizing the interweaving between the articulation of the possibilities of resistance and the constant capitalist production of pseudo-events.

Following paper, the one by Igor Duda, called *With Consumerism toward Communism? Consumer Culture in Croatia 1950s-1980s*, in addition to its scientific relevance, for many who lived through that period will be a more or less sentimental return to the time of the development of the socialist consumer culture, the rapid transition from agricultural to industrial society followed by the growth of standards of living and relative prosperity. The author traces the development of Yugoslav consumer society on three levels: the furnishing i.e. the purchase of household appliances, the holidays and buying a car. Although these trends proved to be unsustainable due to the accumulation of debt, the author nevertheless justifiably recalls the achievements of the Yugoslav self-management and market socialism.

While Duda concentrated on the Yugoslav reality, in a work called *Banks: Money Retailers as Architects of Consumer Personality* Ivan Burić deals with the Croatian one by concentrating on certain aspects of the Croatian banking system. Author deems necessary a sociological analysis of bank's social activity that will be able to go beyond the established laconic definitions of banks as the institutions from hell aimed at the impoverishment of Croatian citizens. In his analysis, he reminds us of the role of banks in accelerating the money flow, in the inclusion of all social groups in the process of economic exchange and, by determining the area of consumer freedoms, in the production of consumers.

In the paper *Shopping Centre as a Representative of Consumer Society* Sanja Stanić reflects on yet another pillar of consumerism – the shopping centre, whose origin is linked to the needs of economically thriving American suburbs after World War II. The author shows how this *mean of consumption*, originally conceived as a space that will serve as the community's centre, bringing together social and economic elements,

was turned into a carefully designed manipulative cathedral of consumption that in a short time became a global consumer form.

In *Buying an Identity in Contemporary Consumer Society* author Tihana Štojs talks about trends characteristic of post-traditional societies in which personal identities are created and maintained through the acquisition of material goods and consumption. The author refers to an array of social and philosophical theories of identity in which the crisis of collectivity as well as fragmentation and incompleteness of identities at the crossroad between the real and the ideal stand out. It is precisely the difference between who we are and whoever we want to be, argues the author, that is overcome by the consumption, *noticeable* consumption, allowing social differentiation (and identification) - the class differentiation being the evident example.

The last paper, *Social Opposition to Consumerism: Anti-Consumerist or Alter-Consumerist Movements*, by Katica Stažić, offers an alternative to the gloomy existence describing social movements 'that strive to change social values and the very essence of the organization of social life' (173). The author in the dispute between anti- and alter, better known from the debate on globalization, warns of different origins and orientations of those movements, some of which quite obviously have nothing against consumerism as such. In addition, she states already mentioned concerns about the impossibility of 'real confrontation with the consumer ideology' (183) at the centre of which is a *homo consumericus*, a man whose identity, whose understanding of the existing depends on nothing else but consumption.

The texts in this book engage in mentioned topics in an intellectually critical, clear and interesting way, they have almost compendium-like character providing a multifaceted view of many of their aspects. For these reasons, the book by Snježana Čolić (ed.) is a great start for any serious study of this subject matter as well as for achieving more sober view of life in contemporary times. Also commendable is the attempt of overcoming the *art for art's sake* criticism and populist lament. All aforementioned reasons suggest that it should be warmly recommended to all.

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