

Book Review

– *Delirious Consumption: Aesthetics and Consumer Capitalism in Mexico and Brazil*, by Sergio Delgado Moya. University of Texas, 2017.

Consumer culture is like the matrix: “[it] is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes.” Therefore, we should keep analyzing how it works and how we have historically reacted to it, beyond the more apologetic or dismissive traditional approaches. Sergio Delgado Moya’s *Delirious Consumption: Aesthetics and Consumer Capitalism in Mexico and Brazil* does just that with some of the most important Latin American artists and poets –David Siqueiros, the Brazilian concrete poets, Octavio Paz and Lygia Clark– of the post WWII period, a moment of expansion and consolidation of consumption in the region. Delgado Moya’s objective is to examine the conditions of art and literary production in consumer societies. He focuses in four concepts –distraction, fascination, replication, and homemaking– which for him can allow us to reinterpret the functions of art and language in consumer culture. Centering each chapter in one of those concepts and using it as a tool to examine the work of one of his subjects, he argues that the selected artists and writers used signs and materials produced by a consumer society to resist it. Their artistic productions make the consumer a productive force. The underlying theoretical framework is a rethinking of how a riposte takes the form of replication; that is, how replication can be more than passive mimicking.

In chapter 1, Delgado Moya analyzes the figure of David Siqueiros, one of the three great Mexican muralists. The author examines a tension he identifies in Siqueiros’ work between a radical politics commitment and the use of signs and strategies from advertising. The author calls for a redefinition of what he labels “politicized oppositional art” because Siqueiros theorized about, and used, billboards as models for his own work. Siqueiros’ reflection centered on how passersby look distractingly at billboards but still get the message, which prompts Delgado Moya to argue, following Walter Benjamin and others, that *distraction* could work as a way of resisting consumer culture’s interpellation.

Chapter 2 deals with the Brazilian concrete poets. The author's objectives here are to understand "how language functions under conditions of market capitalism," and showing how these writers pushed the boundaries of advertising by adopting it as a model for a sensorial, materialistic kind of poetry. The Brazilian concrete poets' approach to artistic production – what Delgado Moya calls "mimetic appropriation" – produced an ambiguous relation between them and consumer culture (some of them went to work for advertising agencies). The author rejects a reading of concrete poetry as a claudication to consumer culture, while trying to rethink *fascination* as a way to grapple with it.

In chapter 3, Delgado Moya goes back to Mexico and examines Paz' poems which more closely resemble concrete poetry. Through those poems, Paz sought to slow down the reading process, which for him was ceding to the fast pace of life in consumer culture. Focusing on Paz' more experimental poems – like *Blanco* and *Discos Visuales*– Delgado Moya tries to posit the concept of *réplica* as a resistance stance against consumer culture.

Finally, in chapter 4, the author explores the work of Lygia Clark and how it redefined the notion of *homemaking*. His objective is to understand the place of home in consumer culture. Clark developed what she called "relational objects" with which she sought to push her clients into "intensive experiences of perception", almost going back to the prelinguistic play of toddlers. For Delgado Moya, Clark pushed the material and sensorial aspects of language by placing it at the service of the subject instead of capitalism.

As a historian interested in modernity and consumer culture, I would point out two things as lacking in Delgado Moya's analysis. First, he conceives consumption as both power and resistance –and I agree–, against a tendency he identified in previous consumption studies that conceived it as passive. However, I think his approach could have benefitted much from taking a closer look at some of the historiography on consumption in the United States of America; to works such as *Sold American*, by Charles McGovern, which shows how socially marginalized groups blandished consumption as an element in claiming citizenship, or *Buying Power*, by Lawrence Glickman, who studies how consumer's groups have organized throughout USA history and have used their purchasing power as a tool in their fights. Second, he does not provide a straightforward definition of modernity, only of *modernismo*, the literary movement. But consumer culture is intrinsically link to modernity. I think Marshall Berman's definition of modernity as a complex, paradoxical, and even contradictory process would have served well to Delgado Moya's effort of a re-reading of those artists and poets. The absence of a definition of that "promising and betraying process" hinders the impact of his text in a wider discussion about modernity in Latin America.

Besides, said absence prevented him in exploring ambivalence as a key element of our responses to modernity and consumer culture. He defines ambivalence as "primitive undifferentiation," imbuing it with a negative

connotation, and, moreover, with the possibility and even desirability of overcoming it. However, Fred Davis' understanding of ambivalence (in his *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*) as constitutive of the subject, and its function as one of fashion's drives could be useful here since the logic of fashion closely resembles the logic of consumer society, therefore, becoming a fitting concept to understand our contradictory responses to consumer culture. Nevertheless, Delgado Moya's text is a well-researched and beautifully written book. His reading of the sources, many of them under-used before, shows a deep understanding of how language works and his theoretical framework weaves creatively European and Latin American insights about art and consumer society. Scholars in the Latin American, Mexican, and Brazilian studies fields have in Delgado Moya's text a possible model and a generative source for future research.

Antonio Hernández Matos, Universidad de Puerto Rico
antonio.hernandezmatos@upr.edu