

ABSTRACT:

Karl Marx (1867) employed the notion of 'commodity fetishism' in his first chapter of *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* in order to explain how in capitalist societies the exchange of commodities obfuscates the true economic nature of the relations of production. As Marx explained: "The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things" (pp. 164-5). In other words, the actual economic relations between capitalists and workers seem to assume "the fantastic form of a relation between things." (p. 165)

Subsequent social theorists applied Marx's concept of commodity fetishism not only to the economic sphere but to every sphere of human activity which obeyed the laws of commodity exchange. For example, in his *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács (1923) used Marx's theory of commodity fetishism to develop his notion of 'reification' (an abstraction which comes to acquire the properties of a 'natural' thing) so as to explain why it is so difficult for the proletariat to achieve class consciousness in a capitalist society. Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, also described how every intellectual and artistic activity is currently commodified as it is reduced to the cultural roles prescribed by the 'Cultural Industry'. Moreover, Debord (1967), in *The Society of the Spectacle*, argued that the capitalist generation of 'spectacles' transforms intersubjective relations into objectified relations among images. And, finally, in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson (1991) explained how, in our post-modern world, a form of commodified pseudo-experience generated by the mass media has become a poor (but efficient) substitute for the acquisition of any authentic experience.

Considering how every sphere of human activity has been commodified into a product that can be bought and sold in the market, it is important to examine how certain psychotherapeutic practices have the tendency to promote commodification through their intentional or unintentional indifference to the socio-cultural conditions which sustain their existence. I will also suggest ways of developing a form of psychotherapy which radically challenges the commodification of human experience through its insistence on the essential social and political nature of the psychotherapeutic encounter.

References

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4. Lukács, G. (1923). *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1971.
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