Consumer Neoliberalization

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Western society has continually pushed forth a consumer culture that attempts to normalize the consumption of goods. This normalization occurs through the rapidity of changing trends and advertisements that are put forth by corporations and companies. During the Cold War, western nation-states promoted the consumer-subject as the ideal way of life. In order to properly succeed in life and flourish within the neoliberal economy, consumer goods needed to continually be bought and sold. The purchasing of these goods leads to the normalization and subjectification of the individual. The neoliberal-subject, in today's society, has only witnessed an increase in the amount of control that western notions of consumerism has on them.

Returning to the Cold War, the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) heavily critiqued the consumer lifestyle of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). While West Germany spent a lot of time promoting the consumer-subject through advertisements, the GDR criticized Western Germany by proclaiming that this way of life was merely a farce. The GDR made it very clear that in order to thrive in a socialist, communistic society, community should be at the core of what it means to exist, not consumer goods and culture. However, given that capitalism was claimed to be victorious, the process of neoliberalization has taken place in many of the countries of the former Soviet Union and further east. This form of control has continually extended its reach and exploited various countries across the world.

Today, many countries control the subject through the use of advertisements and other mediums that put forth the idealized notion of what it not only means to live, but how individuals should look, exist, and perform. While these notions are heavily corporatized and driven by financial gain by those on the top, what occurs is the creation of subjects through the promotion of western goods and ways of life. Eastern cultures have seen an increase in the amount of corporations and companies that are purely western being imposed upon their culture. The use of
advertisements, the essential display of how the neoliberal subject lives, is a method whereby the West has the ability to control the subject through the promotion of goods.

The consumer culture of the twenty-first century has completely taken control of our bodies. Through the promotion of consumer goods, the neoliberal economy commands of the subject to be possessed, their identities to be controlled, and their actions mitigated. The trends it claims to be “in” are supposedly going to fix us. It paints the picture that who we are is not ideal and that in order to improve our self-image, we must consume objects and remedies that will make us into the perfect person. This is achieved by claiming that certain clothes make a person look ugly, our bodies are disproportionate, our hair is in places unwanted, etc. The neoliberal economy has cultivated a culture industry that works for the benefit of the corporations, while simultaneously subjectifying the individual.

This is extremely problematic. Western society for years has continually exploited the cultures and individuals within not only Eastern Germany, but the entire Eastern hemisphere. The constant colonialism through corporate, consumeristic means has lead to the neoliberalization of cultures and societies around the world. The West has become the leading figure in determining what is “sexy” and appropriate for society to consume. This is heavily driven by economic gain in part by the numerous corporations and industries that are heavily westernized in their ways of thinking. In order to put an end to the ongoing neoliberalization of the subject, the chains that the consumer industry has bound to the subject must be broken.