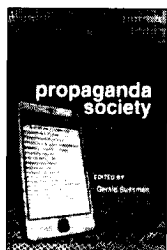


performance of the self-hating artist that makes him all the more acceptable by the art world he claims to disdain. (p. 222)

Beaty's interweaving of these themes into a theory of the "comics world" is indeed an important and significant contribution to not only understanding the transformation of comics from a lowbrow, marginalized and degraded cultural form to their increasing prominence as art objects, but also provides critical insights into the ways that institutions and cultural forms evolve to accommodate one another, and the role that distribution networks and audiences play in establishing cultural value. It is quite clear that *Comics versus Art* is a book that was a long time in the coming: an exhaustive, sophisticated, definitive, and in all likelihood, seminal work that is at once accessible to fans of comics and highly insightful and illuminating for academics in a variety of fields including Communication Studies, Cultural Studies, English, and Art History.

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The Propaganda Society: Promotional Culture and Politics in Global Context. Edited by Gerald Sussman. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2011. 332 pp. ISBN 9781433109966.

At the beginning of *The Propaganda Society*, Gerald Sussman states that, as a concept, propaganda "refers to highly organized doctrinal texts communicated throughout the sound and visual media in the service of state and corporate interests" (p. 1). This assertion sets the tone for the rest of the text. Propaganda is not something exotic or necessarily foreign—it is not the sole property of the former Soviet system of government or the Third Reich—rather it is something we are exposed to on a daily basis whether we recognize it or not. The exposure of the reliance of our own system of social organization on propaganda as an organizing and stabilizing mechanism is a crucial element in contemporary Cultural and Media Studies. With that in mind, this book attempts to outline the different ways in which propaganda mechanisms permeate contemporary Western culture.

Sussman's edited text presents current examples of propaganda and their relationship with contemporary Western culture. Media, public culture, global hegemony, and the functioning of the state make up the primary sections of the book, while Neoliberalism emerges as a unifying thread, discussed predominantly through Chomsky and Hermann's propaganda model. The amount of quantitative evidence presented in each case is impressive and, though there is a clear ideological bias on the part of the authors, they illustrate their points convincingly.

Though the anti-capitalist perspective might not technically qualify as a genre, this book reads like many similar texts dedicated to outlining the horrors of neoliberalism. The proposed methods of rectifying the inequities outlined are comparable to those espoused by Chomsky, Naomi Klein, and other left-leaning critics currently work-

ing in academic and journalistic circles. In a way, the book works as a supplement to those previous arguments, updating them and adding a much-needed analysis of the 2008/2009 financial collapse to larger narratives of globalization and neoliberal governmental politics.

The stated purpose of the book is the exposure of propaganda's role in the neoliberal approach to governance. By segmenting the text into the four categories—"Propaganda in the Media," "Propaganda in Public Culture," "Propaganda For Global Hegemony," and "Propaganda and the State"—Sussman attempts to illustrate the ubiquity of propaganda so as to underline neoliberalism's fundamental dependency on it. Each chapter offers a cross-section of how it is that propagandistic systems soak into the fibers of cultural systems and naturalize messages, intents, and perspectives. Sussman leaves no doubt as to how things like a corporation's legal status as a person or the absolute necessity of bailing out failing banks and insurance companies come to be accepted without argument.

All of this is, of course, important to discuss. It is certainly timely considering the current status of the global economy and the very real threat of economic collapse for large sections of Europe. The logical question once this realization is made, however, is what would be the best way to go about investigating the problem—this is where the lingering questions related to *The Propaganda Society* kick in. In the end, it is difficult to shake the impression that, apart from some useful quantitative data that can be added to the existing accounts on the subject, there is not really much new ground being broken here. The text rehashes established linkages between media systems and governing bodies and points out the mechanisms that allow those two entities to serve one another. Most of these linkages have been explored already by other scholars, and the exploration of "Cause Marketing as Commercial Propaganda" (Chapter 8), or "Social Networks as Colossal Marketing Machines" (Chapter 5), to name but two examples, do not really add any new information to the debate.

Though the chapters included in this text are, for the most part, well-researched and well-written, the arguments made and the information offered as evidence are familiar and would benefit from more abstract engagement. The reader is left wishing that there were more theoretical input—that there were some philosophical approach that was not reducible to, "capitalism is bad, propaganda is generally bad, and the two working together are eroding our political and social systems." A more substantial usage of critical theory would offer more than the predictable siren-call at the end of the text to restrain the government's involvement with the financial and commercial systems and a plea for the elevation of labor.

Overall, the text appears to follow a perspective of cause-and-effect. The use of historical information is intended to demonstrate the ways in which propaganda filters through our media and governmental apparatuses and, to a limited extent, through our social interactions as well. The vast majority of the claims made are demonstrably true along this line of reasoning, but the lack of real theoretical investigation leaves the "why" of the matter unresolved. Granted, the approach behind the text is clearly one more aligned with exposure rather than deep analysis,

and a deeper theoretical approach might have taken away from the overall weight of the quantitative data presented.

The clear intent of this text is one of advocacy. In truth, it would work beautifully as a mechanism for opening undergraduate student's eyes to the pervasiveness of propaganda in Western culture. The clarity of presentation along with the contemporary examples and perspectives would speak to an uninitiated (and perhaps initially disinterested) audience in a compelling way. The breadth of case studies, as well, would allow for a greater cross-section of students to find an argument they find personally compelling and would catapult them into more intense study of the subject matter.

The Propaganda Society works as an introduction to the contemporary study of propaganda. Those who are searching for a deeper theoretical investigation into how something like propaganda works in Western culture, or how it functions as a component of media culture in general, will not find what they are looking for here. Those who are looking for a substantive text that might open the minds of new entrants to critical and cultural theory, however, will find a powerful teaching tool.

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Cross-Media Ownership and Democratic Practice in Canada: Content Sharing and the Impact of New Media. By Walter C. Soderlund, Colette Brin, Lydia Miljan, and Kai Hildebrandt. Edmonton, AB: The University of Alberta Press, 2012. 146 pp. ISBN 9780888646057.

It is possible to get almost to the end of *Cross-Media Ownership and Democratic Practice in Canada: Content Sharing and the Impact of New Media* without noticing that there is very little in this book about the effects of big media on democracy. Partly, this appears to be the result of a reluctance on the part of the authors to directly engage with concerns about big media, the news, and democracy—all of which date back to Walter Lippmann (1889) and have travelled more or less intact and unaddressed from print and broadcast to the Internet. Mostly, however, the book leaves the impression of a group of researchers blindsided by events, unable to start over, and unwilling to let go of or reinterpret their research.

There is no question that Soderlund, Brin, Mlijan, and Hildebrandt are victims of time overtaking their subject matter. This book is the result of a 2007 content analysis of select areas of the Canadian media, matched up with a range of interviews with “politicians, policy analysts, regulators, Canadian journalists and labour leaders, as well as journalism professors in Canada and the United States” (p. 79). The goal: to offer a “comprehensive view of the status of Canadian media in the age of cross-ownership” (p. 79). That would be a tall order at the best of times. However, as the authors say in the opening lines of their preface, the difficulty in examining the impact of convergence on mass media through content analysis is “that the subject has a nasty way of shifting ground very quickly.” “Nasty” is a mild adjective for the storm surge that overturned this boatload of data.