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Abstract

As a way to challenge the fallout of more than a millennium of excessive consumption, this paper introduces the new concepts of transconsumerism and transconsumerist, as informed by Basarab Nicolescu's approach to transdisciplinarity.

Keywords: transdisciplinarity, transconsumerism, transconsumerist, wicked problems, consumerism

This paper is intended for the *Future of Consumption* theme. It is predicated on the assumption that modern day consumption is extremely unpeaceful and not sustainable (McGregor, 2010a), a reality that behoves us to find another way (see McGregor, 2014). Indeed, for over a century, consumer behaviour has become deeply entrenched in the consumerism ideology, reinforced by the emergence of a consumer culture and society. Respectively, "the role of consumption and the ideology of consumerism are key elements in modern global cultures and societies" (Hinkins, 2007, p. 44). The consumerism ideology shapes the assumptions that consumers hold about power relationships, preferred market dynamics, presumed rights and responsibilities, and how people make sense of their role as a consumer in a consumer culture and society (McGregor, 2010a). "A consumer culture... is an integrated system of learned behaviour patterns (norms, values, beliefs) pursuant to consumption behaviour in the marketplace" (McGregor, 2013a, p. 1).

Excessive twentieth and twenty-first century consumption, shaped by the tenets of a consumerism ideology, have led to the proliferation of a polycrises of damming and crippling complex wicked problems including unsustainability, climate change, unequal income distribution (growing gap between haves and have nots), exploitation of other humans, species and the earth, and violence and conflict (McGregor, 2010b, 2012). The human condition and ecological integrity are deeply shaped by global consumption patterns and ideologies.

Given the looming portent of the fall out of these wicked, consumption-induced, problems, it is incumbent upon us to rethink the approach we use to understand consumption behaviour and what we will accept as *knowledge about* this phenomenon (a stance that affects research, practice and policy). Transdisciplinarity, especially transdisciplinary consumerism (McGregor (2010s, 2013a,b), offers alternative insights into how to reframe consumption from an inclusive, relational and sustainable perspective.

Nicolescuian Transdisciplinarity

In particular, this paper suggests that Nicolescuian transdisciplinarity is especially valuable. This approach is championed by Professor Dr. Basarab Nicolescu, Paris (e.g., 1997, 2002, 2010). A transdisciplinary approach takes us beyond the long-standing disciplinary, multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge creation around consumer behaviour (McGregor, 2007, 2013b). It involves removing the boundaries among disciplines within higher education, and most especially between the academy and civil society.

The basic tenet of Nicolescuian transdisciplinarity is that the problems of the world are too

complex to be dealt with using mono, multi or interdisciplinary approaches or to ignore the valuable insights from outside the university setting. Transdisciplinarity is presented as methodology to create knowledge, which entails an *integrated combination* of (a) disciplinary work, (b) scholarship *between* (multidisciplinarity) *and among* disciplines (interdisciplinarity), and (c) knowledge generation *beyond* academic disciplines and *across* sectors external to the university, at the *interface between* the academy and civil society (de Freitas, Morin, & Nicolescu, 1994; Nicolescu, 2002). The intent is to understand the world, and do so by co-addressing the complex wicked problems now facing humanity.

Succinctly, Nicolescu (2002) has worked out three philosophical axioms for transdisciplinarity. First and foremost, there are Multiple Levels of Reality and the movement between these realities is lubricated or mediated by what he calls the Hidden Third (i.e., transdisciplinary ontology). This mediator, or hidden agent, manifests when diverse actors with divergent perspectives, yet keen interests in addressing a wicked problem, come together. While engaged in creating this new knowledge, this collection of people use inclusive logic (instead of Classical exclusive logic). Inclusive logic assumes that things that are normally seen as antagonistic or contradictory can temporarily be reconciled to create new transdisciplinary knowledge (i.e., the Logic of the Included Middle). The resultant knowledge (i.e., transdisciplinary epistemology) is characterized as very complex, emergent, embodied (owned by everyone) and cross-fertilized.

In short, people from all walks of life (Multiple Realities) enter a fecund *middle ground* (a zone of non-resistance, ripe with potential and possibilities) prepared to remain open to others' viewpoints as they use inclusive logic to temporarily reconcile contradictions, while respecting emergence, synergy and fusion, leading to the integration of ideas to form new complex, embodied, and cross-fertilized knowledge that can be used to address the complex problem.

Transconsumerism and Transconsumerist

Nicolescuian transdisciplinarity offers a powerful perspective from which to study and resolve complex, emergent human problems created by a life lived according to the tenets of the consumerism ideology. Inspired by the idea of transdisciplinary consumerism (McGregor (2010a, 2013a,b), this paper extends her line of thinking by offering two nascent concepts, transconsumerism and transconsumerist. The following text shares preliminary musings about what these concepts might entail when viewed through a transdisciplinary lens. And they are concepts (this is an argument for their consideration), rather than hypotheses. The hypothesis is whether transconsumerism and transconsumerist are really possible.

Transconsumerism

Little information is available about the concept of transconsumerism, and none is couched in Nicolescuian transdisciplinarity. To illustrate, upon lamenting the loss of places where people can “escape from, be free of, shopping,” due to the encroachment shopping mall mentality and cybermalls, Ritzer (1998) claimed we are living in a “era of ‘transconsumerism’” (p. 131). He said this term was inspired by Baudrillard’s (1990) idea of the fractal stage of the progression of symbols and images in a postmodern consumer society. Ritzer maintained that, with ubiquitous mall imagery, all negativity is eliminated (thanks to the end of differences), making way for the *illusion* of total positivity because things are similar. In aligned thinking pertaining to negativity and positivity, Brezsny (2005) used the term in a book about pronoia (the opposite of paranoia). People enjoying pronoia feel that the world around them conspires to do them good. In this context, Brezsny defined transconsumerism as “the absence of tendencies to

predicate happiness on acquiring material possessions” (p. 269). Sebastian (2009) identified transconsumerism as a new marketing trend of renting things as opposed to buying them (such as renting family and friends, or protesters and demonstrators). Allegedly, renting is a better alternative than buying and accumulating material possessions (one level of reality); hence, it is trans (beyond or in a different space than) consumerism.

To paraphrase Brenner (2008), transconsumerism pertains to *the realm beyond consumerism*. A recent, 2014 Google Scholar search using this term yielded zero results. Transconsumerism would transcend (climb beyond, even surmount) longstanding notions of consumerism. As field or domain of activity or interest (e.g., a realm), transconsumerism would *reshape* the assumptions that consumers hold about power relationships, preferred market dynamics, presumed rights and responsibilities, and how people make sense of their role as a consumer in a consumer culture and society. Nicolescuian informed transconsumerism would be a powerful challenge to the hegemony of consumerism, drawing on inclusion, sustainability, complexity, integrality, emergence, embodiment and transcendence.

Transconsumerist

A consumer is anyone who purchases, uses and disposes of consumer goods and services. *Ist* is a word-forming element meaning ‘one who does or makes.’ It is also used to indicate adherence to a certain doctrine or custom, e.g., reformist (Harper, 2014). Combined, we get the word *consumerist*. There are conflicting definitions of the term consumerist. Some define it as someone who is a proponent of consumerism while others understand it as the opposite, as a consumer advocate dedicated to protecting and promoting the welfare and rights of consumers (Random House Dictionary, 2013; Wiktionary, 2011).

In the spirit of transdisciplinarity, this paper tenders the concept of *transconsumerist*. A recent, 2014 Google Scholar search using this term also yielded zero results. In this paper, it is understood to mean criss-crossing back and forth, moving through and beyond conventional notions of what it means to be a consumerist to a new space. Interestingly, Kingwell (2012) referred to reaching the “trans-consumerist end game” by moving beyond the physical, material world. An endgame is the final stage of something with only a few pieces left in play. A transconsumerist would view society as being at the end of the long-established game of consumerism, ready to play the final cards and *end the game*. Once the final cards were played, transconsumerists would *advocate* that people from all walks of life consider the merit of embracing Nicolescuian transdisciplinarity as the methodology for creating new knowledge about how to live life on this planet, leading to emergent understandings of the world. The future of consumption may well be transdisciplinary consumerism.

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