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**CT800: Week 8 Assignments**

**3) Four Levels of Close Reading “Overpopulation is bad but Overconsumption is worse”**

First Level & Second Level

Setting: lecture, discussion whether Overpopulation was the cause of the increase in global waste or inefficiency

The disparity between rich & poor shows that 1st world country people consume higher multiple of resources than 3rd world people. Consumption of 1st world countries wouldn’t be sustainable on a grand scale.

* In other words: If everybody’s consumption on Earth was like people in the first world, the planet would be exploited way too fast.
* Example: Earth Overshoot Day
* Analogy: Biblical golden rule / Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative

The problem is that Consumerism is propagated by business and government. Both depend on the Obsolescence of goods and stimuli impulses to raise consumption

* In other words: The incentives for increased Overconsumption for various interest groups are not in sync. with ecological sustainability
* Example: Electronic Waste sent to Africa where it is burned causing health (social) and environmental (ecological) problems
* Metaphor: Don’t hate the player, hate the game

Today, various consumer goods are classified as essential items whereas they would have been called “luxuries” in the past + a false sense of Hedonism portrayed by media and society (“Shopping”)

* In other words: The standards of living have risen due to fueling the urge to “keep up with the Joneses”
* Example: Skoda's advertising slogan “The status symbol for everyone who doesn’t need a status symbol” latently plays on the unfulfilled ego of those who can’t afford a “pricy” and therefore want to show sophistication by understatement.
Or: Loreal -> “Expensive because you’re worth it”
* Analogy: Hedonic Treadmill

The problem doesn’t need to be addressed via sanctions, but efficiency gains due to increased localization of consumption and efficiency gains.

* In other words: We don’t have to sacrifice future consumption. Just the method of doing so needs to change.
* Example: Sanctions in the automobile industry don’t work to foster the change for ecologically friendly car production. Subsidizing works much better (Human nature -> Incentives)
* Metaphor: The obstacle is the way

Third Level

* Purpose: The Author wants to show that ecological damage isn’t due to Overpopulation, but due to inefficient Overconsumption.
* Point of View: David Suzuki is a Canadian environmental activist. He should therefore be informed about the superficial logical fallacies we make when talking about environmental problems
* Assumptions: Consumerism doesn’t make “happy”. The Author assumes that if we were “happy”, overconsumption wouldn’t take place. Furthermore, the author assumes that such a state could be sustainable - if even attainable.
* Implications: If we all consumed less or “more efficiently” we would be happy and the environment would be saved.
* Information: Alan Durning (Worldwatch Institute) -> Appetite for more was installed by US Government and Economy + Psychologist “Consumption doesn’t lead to happiness”
* Inferences: We would all be happier if we consumed less. Consumption itself is indoctrinated in us anyway as a means to further economic growth
* Concepts: Consumption doesn’t necessarily lead to fulfillment. Government and business both depend on increased consumption and therefore make deals in accordance with short-term needs.
* Question: Is Overconsumption caused by an installed (but wrong) need for “shopping” from government and business – and could a mindset shift solve that?

Fourth Level

* Clarity: Having gone through Third Level Reading, I’m not really sure whether the author is clear on what he actually wants to say. Although all points are individually clear, I find it hard to identify the problem Suzuki tries to identify for Overconsumption. I can’t imagine that he wants to hint at some sort of Conspiracy Theory between the Government and Businesses. That would be way too wild.
* Accuracy: It’s obvious to me that the author is cherry-picking quotes and facts to support his claims. To say that Consumption doesn’t equal “Happiness” is a truism, but it’s nowhere stated in what way material possessions are needed for happiness to occur in the first place. Neither is “Happiness” defined. Having read a lot of Research in Positive Psychology lately, I find it way too foggy that the author relies on this saying that consumerism doesn’t equal happiness. There are some happy rich people. However, I find it very good that the author gives tangible numbers about consumption relations in the third paragraph. These could be checked. However, no sources are cited.
* Precision: The author is precise enough. But this goes to show that one can fool you with heightened precision to make you think he’s accurate. The numbers and quotes give the illusion that the author knows what he’s talking about. But again, relying on a Truism (money doesn’t make you happy) is very unscientific.
* Relevance: While one could argue in what way our individual sense of fulfillment caters to our global environmental challenges in the first place, the author quotes relevant figures in the question he tries to answer. Alan Durning and Victor Lebow for Environment and Consumerism. Aristotle and Tolstoy for the human pursuit of well-being.
* Depth: This is extremely superficial. Complexities such as our economic system, the monetary system, human wellbeing theory, and human psychology (evolution, marketing) aren’t mentioned.
* Breadth: The text is not very broad in the number of perspectives included.
* Consistency: The text might be considered consistent in the realm of the author’s point of view.
* Significance: The subject is dealt with in an overly trivial manner. The author doesn’t give justice to the complexities involved in environmental problems, he doesn’t define what he means by “ecological damage”, he relies on a childish view that the problems would be solved if we were all just a little “happier” as if that would contribute to ecological preservation. Not to mention that the author gives off the impression that both the government and businesses were acting selfishly and wanted to indoctrinate us all to consume good after good. This is not something people who are really concerned with the environment on the forefront (Physicists, Engineers, Politicians) need to read in order to make progress.
* Fairness: Even though I’d say that Overpopulation isn’t a problem anyway, the author doesn’t entertain the idea that it was; even though it was mentioned by two listeners. Regardless of whether Overpopulation is a problem, the author should have given reasons for why he thinks Overpopulation isn’t the problem. Therefore, he has not dealt fairly with his opposition.

**4) Journal Entry focused on the role of close reading in my daily life**

Situation
I have a huge reading list. Before reading into anything, I look at other people’s lives how that book has influenced them, and whether it can also help me in the areas where I need most help. I know that I’m about to read some books that are rather controversial, yet can be super valuable if understood correctly and put into careful practice and not taken literally.

Response
In the past, I’ve fallen prey to various approaches to life which are very narrowed down to one specific way of looking at things. This has sometimes caused me psychological turmoil and emotional trouble. With the books that I’m about to read, I’ll be very mindful of the implications I draw from them on my life. I’ll see what I can integrate and what not.

Analysis
Having studied a little bit about Neuroscience and especially the importance of context in any situation evaluated in the Prefrontal Cortex – I’m sure that it’s extremely important what one thinks and whether that is dysfunctional or not.
While it’s up for debate what “dysfunctional” means, one can’t negate that depression is often associated with some wonky worldview that just doesn’t add up – that is dysfunctional and unsustainable. Humans are extremely complex and solely by the fact that our brain takes up the most energy in our system, we should be humble when it comes to our thoughts. One should be mindful of his or her thoughts and look for any pathologic tendencies as it’s likely that we eventually act out what we think sooner or later.

Implications
I have already read some pages of the book “How to Read a Book” but I’ve stopped reading it because I didn’t know what to do with it at that time. I might pick it up again.
Also, I should always read a short summary of a book before fully reading it to figure out whether it’s worth my time and whether it’s worth the content. Shortform or Blinkist might help with that.