

**Lewis, Justin: *Consumerism and the Limits to Imagination* (2014);  
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Infotainment and pedagogical objectives often mix well together and, increasingly, educational films rely on that combination in order to convey their intended messages. This is in clear contrast to another branch of educational films which includes *The Silent Scream* (1984) and *The Finishing Line* (1987). Such films effectively and therapeutically generate emotional reactions (including shock, angst, fear, disgust, etc.) among average viewers by making us aware of our mortality and ontology. After viewing *Consumerism and the Limits to Imagination* (2014), however, the boundaries between infotainment and therapeutic angst media become less obvious than previously perceived.

Professor Justin Lewis basically presents a popularized version of his [2013 Polity Press book](#). The film begins by outlining the core ideas of consumer capitalism: an image of an economically structured „good” life, well-being based on the accumulation of consumer goods, and perpetual and infinite economic progress. These core ideas, Lewis argues, constitute a fundamental limit of imagination which does not permit us to imagine a state where we have enough stuff; instead, we are condemned to a permanent state of wanting. The tendency towards a, somewhat, alarmist narration is evident through the use of cleverly placed video clips which make complex relationships and meanings more accessible through visualization, as well as excerpts from classic economic articles which provide scientific legitimacy. Both techniques reinforce the message, and as viewers we are essentially faced with a critique of the consumer-capitalist model. Firstly at the meta-level, the model's proposed solution to one of the most basic questions of humanity is contested; namely, by consuming more, are human beings able to achieve happiness and be healthier? By listening to arguments which are potentially familiar and relatable to many high-schoolers and undergraduates, we learn that increases in GDP and economic well-being only influence human well-being up to a certain point, past which there is no link between GDP growth and quality of life. Secondly, this film successfully conveys a normal-level critique of the neo-liberalist model of capitalism by pointing to problems that may be viewed as leading to internal inconsistencies. Examples include people having only a limited time to consume and the inability of some consumers to act in a rational manner economically speaking when making purchasing decisions. Midway through the film, a third problematical area emerges; namely, environmental damages and the relationship between the demand for infinite growth and a finite ecosystem. The main conclusion of this part, which is structured logically to link with the two previous problematical points, is that society should not preserve an economic, social, cultural and political system which is not only economically incoherent and incapable

of making people happier or healthier but also risks destroying the biological foundations of human life; however, the mass-mediatised, inherent epistemic violence of the system makes it difficult to reject.

The overall impression is that this educational film is a product of a Frankfurt School-ish perspective; this is evident in terms of its method of drawing attention to the need to reform the capitalist enterprise by attempting to make young adults cognizant of some binding axioms and influences on which a *Kulturindustrie*-produced uniform system relies. The main strengths of this production lie in its potential to encourage critical thinking and its ability to connect the viewers with an alternative culture and information industry.