Striphas, Ted. *The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control.* New York: Columbia UP, 2009. xii, 272 pp. Cloth $27.50. Paper $18.95.

   In the preface to the 2010 paperback edition of *The Late Age of Print*, Ted Striphas offers some of the most productive observations of the entire book. Responding to the proliferation of electronic reading devices like the Kindle, Nook, and iPad in the two years since his book was originally published, Striphas returns to the question of whether we ought be concerned about the death of the print book, or "p-book." He notes that print books are "time-binding" communications technologies because their longevity helps ensure the continuity of ideas and customs over time. Shorter-lived communications technologies such as newsprint and radio, on the other hand, are "space-binding," facilitating "the extension of messages across space" (xi). The danger in too great an emphasis on time-binding print books is insularity and the triumph of tradition over innovation. The danger in too great an emphasis on space-binding e-books is a lack of tradition that prompts neurotic attempts at social control. Striphas calls for "a suitable balance," resisting an over-romanticization of print books (and their centralizing tendencies) and cautioning against an over-reliance upon decentralizing technologies such as the Kindle.
   To warn against the dangers should either time-binding or space-binding technologies corner the market on the distribution of knowledge, Striphas presents cautionary tales regarding blind adherence to either pole. Books, he notes, have been marshaled into a "system of privilege" that "confer[s] disproportionate amounts of credibility, prestige, and influence" on particular classes (xii). E-books may help "mitigate the lingering effects of printed books' centuries-long monopoly of knowledge" through cheaper and wider distribution patterns less linked to institutions like universities and libraries; they therefore "provide a viable alternative for people who might otherwise retreat from the world of letters" (xv). Furthermore, mistakes distributed digitally are more easily corrected than are those in print books, whose gravitas and authority are sometimes unwarranted.
   But e-books are fragile. Because their content does not migrate from one platform to another, long-term access to electronic content may depend upon corporations whose longevity is not assured. The content of e-books can be deleted (or altered) remotely and at will by corporations without transparent or democratic processes, as has occurred in at least one instance of disputed publishing rights. The Apple corporation has applied more "stringent…vetting" (which is to say, censorship) in its publication decisions than print publishers and in some cases acts as the "exclusive seller of a given edition." E-publishing gives this computer company the powers of an "influential and indeed fickle cultural gatekeeper" (xviii). Striphas points to the "growing power" of intellectual property rights holders "to make information appear and disappear whenever they see fit--often for a fee" (23). Here he touches on another key contribution of his book, about which I will say more below: mapping an alarming shift from consumer society to a society of controlled consumption.
   Striphas is interested in how books became "ubiquitous and mundane social artifacts in and of our time," how they helped make consumer culture in the twentieth century (4). For example, he describes how Edward Bernays, a public relations specialist for the book industry in the 1930s, promoted the display of books as symbols of civilization and respectability and "persuaded architects, contractors, and decorators to put up shelves" that would prompt people to buy more books (27). In the process, Bernays convinced the middle class that the accumulation of mass-produced goods was necessary for the acquisition of social and economic capital.

Striphas outlines the ways in which the industrial objects of books were transformed into "sacred products" critical to class formation. Proximity to and comfort with books collapsed leisure and labor for a professionalizing class practicing the newly marketable skills of reading, sorting, and processing information. Striphas observes that although the book industry is sometimes viewed as transcending base economic considerations, it in fact "pioneer[ed] the rationalization and standardization of mass-production techniques" and hourly wage labor. He points to the ways that the implementation of the bar code on books furthered the rationalization and standardization of consumer-product distribution, enabling the rise of Amazon.com and other internet sellers.

Striphas examines the "intermediation" of the book industry with retail and internet businesses; the film, television, and music industries; corporate management systems; and legal structures. The result is a wide-ranging array of chapter topics from e-books, big-box stores, bar codes, and Amazon.com to the phenomena of Oprah's Book Club and Harry Potter. While this varied and comprehensive cultural studies approach is most welcome, the birds-eye view leaves something to be desired for reception studies scholars accustomed to a fine-tuned ear for readers' and audiences' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Though Striphas promises glimpses of "some of the most prosaic activities characteristic of book culture today," from browsing in bookstores to discussing a novel with a book club and creating a spinoff, his shoppers, readers, and writers are never central stage (5). He says he wants to "provide a more detailed picture of the ways in which people use books," but what he does extremely well is to provide a picture of the ways in which *corporations* use books--how rights holders facilitate or restrict the circulation of books. Striphas's sources (book industry trade journals, news media, memoirs and other accounts of the book industry, legislation, court cases) rarely allow him directly to voice the interests or concerns of those whose interests he advocates: Oprah readers, *Harry Potter* pirates, big-box customers, and Amazon.com warehouse workers forced into lock-step, sped-up production. Scholars interested in readers' embrace of the pedagogical function of Oprah's Book Club, for example, will want the more textured analysis of Cecilia Konchar Farr's *Reading Oprah* (2005).

The most compelling and chilling point made repeatedly in Striphas's book involves the ways in which book culture fuels an emergent shift away from consumer culture into what Henri Lefebvre calls a "society of controlled consumption" (5). Especially in his conclusion, Striphas sketches out how "emergent techniques of control" seek to manage the ways that people use books (18). A society of controlled consumption undermines longstanding tenets of consumer capitalism: the desirability of consumers' accumulation of goods, the complete transfer of ownership from sellers to buyers, and the ability of buyers to make use of purchased goods with little or no interference from sellers. If bookshelves are iconic of the middle class relationship to books in the twentieth century, e-books represent a shift from consumers' private ownership to the potential for shorter-term licensing of content. The book industry's desire to limit the freewheeling circulation of books dates to this earlier period of consumer culture, when publicists attempted to label as "book sneaks" those who borrowed from libraries or acquired second-hand copies. But the questions of whether, for how long, or under what conditions a consumer owns the content of a purchased book have intensified with the shift to digital-rights management schemes that "compel users to cede . . . much of their ability to circulate, dispose of, and reproduce whatever titles they've purchased" to rights holders determined "to lock that content down" in ways impractical for controlling print materials (42-3).

The chapter on the Harry Potter franchise perhaps most illuminates this trend toward controlled consumption of books, analyzing as it does the false sense of scarcity generated by

Potter's rights holders and their tight security and control measures, which include opaque packaging, GPS tracking of delivery trucks, and legal threats against premature distribution. Particularly fascinating is the ways in which certain consumers actively cooperated with these efforts to control availability out of a desire not to "ruin" the reading experience for others.

Scholars continue to debate the extent to which deliberative consumer choices in a consumer society constitute real political agency. Certainly reception studies scholars have sympathized with the notion that consumers are able to use products in ways unanticipated by the dominant economic order. But any "modicum of agency" permitted by consumer activism is threatened by the emergent order of controlled consumption, Striphas suggests; the conditions that enable cultural politics are undermined by the transformation of consumers from subjects into objects to be manipulated. The infrastructure of book culture--that is, the cybernetic system of management and regulation--has tilted toward satisfying industry's "desire . . . to police the disposition of consumer goods more rigorously" than ever (179). Striphas contends that the deepening of control is not a given but "a major point of contestation in the late age of print" (185). His book shows us what we are up against in terms of the systems of management and control of production, distribution, and consumption promulgated by the book industry. Going forward, Striphas's work can be complemented by reception studies' more on-the-ground approach for understanding the roles of readers and book buyers as this contest for control plays out.

Emily Satterwhite
Virginia Tech University