

Consumption as ethical/non-ethical activity; consumerism, moral discourses on consumption

SAN266, Week 12

question

How is consumption connected to values of Modernity?

Modernity

Consumption is related to **values of modernity** and democracy:

- Is constructed as **private** and **individual** – personal choice; consumer is an individual doing rational decisions and fulfilling his/her needs
- Consumer is citizen; consumption is an activity related to rights and responsibilities => this leads to specific ethics
- Ulrich Beck (1997): „if modernity is a democracy oriented towards producers, late modernity is a democracy oriented towards consumers“

Consumer as a citizen with rights

- Since the beginning of 20th cent. organisations fighting for the rights of consumers, increase from WWII
- Sovereignty of consumer, aim of consumption is individual satisfaction

Rights of consumers

- Right for safety
- Right for information
- Right to choose
- Right to be heard

Consumer as citizen; Consumer as a political person

- Right to intervene and have impact on capitalism
- 1. ½ 20th Cent.– USA – Main consumption narrative is related to citizenship– consumer is citizen (not client or costumer)
- National Consumer Leagues, Progressive Movement, *Ligue Sociale d'Acheteurs*, consumer cooperatives
- Endeavour to impact working conditions of worker. White lists. “Consumer has duty to act”
- Connection of consumption and production; role of gender – female societies, housewives intervening in previously male spheres.

Work in couples

Describe macdonalisation

Context

- Sassateli: globalised rationality + American cultural hegemony (McDonaldization) create space for various local residences
- Spread of inexpensive fast-food – reaction is support of local „traditional“, natural food; related to sustainable development; vegetarianism, slow-food, protests again McDon.
- Harrison: 7 external factors increasing consumption of ethical goods – 1. globalization of markets and weakening of national states, 2. growing number of transnational companies, 3. growing number of groups creating competition, 4. consequences of technological innovations for society and environment, 5. stress on consumers on the market, 6. efficiency of market competition, 7. growing importance of movements stressing social responsibility (Harrison, Newholm, Shaw, 2005. The ethical consumer)

Ethical consumption

- From consumer choice to consumer sovereignty, from right to action; Consumer is active / consumption is activity with social consequences; choice is power
- Ethical consumption: Can shopping change world or fight poverty/capitalism/materialism? – Questions of environment, redistribution and separation of production and consumption
- Not abandoning consumerism, reevaluation how to consume: ‘make a difference with every cup’ of coffee.’ Fairtrade activist Laure Waridel in *Coffee with Pleasure*

Work in couples

1.

Can shopping change world or fight poverty/capitalism/materialism?

- Discuss your opinion

2. Why do people engage in ethical consumption

Motivation for ethical consumption



- Question of motivation;
- from private economic hedonist (Sassatelli) to alternative hedonist (Soper)
- moral consumption; conspicuous consumption; Ethical consumption as a status signifier

Ethical consumption

- Negative (I do not buy something from ethical reason), positive (I buy something from ethical reason). The starting point is that we have a choice
 1. Boycott – Boycotting non-ethical goods
 2. Buycott – positive ethical purchase behavior; buying goods with ethical characteristics (green and fair)
 3. Activism – lobbying, protest events, happenings
 4. Alternative acquisition of sources - „exit“ consumer society– shoplifting, dumpster diving, gardening, Neighbourhood barter of products

Group work

1. describe what is fair trade