

# Introduction

## ***Anthropology of Consumption and Consumer Society***

SAN266 Week 1

# Introductory discussion

1. What is consumption?
2. What is consumer society?
3. In what spheres of your life are you a consumer? In what spheres of your life you are not?
4. What is in your opinion specific for anthropological approaches to consumption? What do you consider to be main contribution of anthropology to the study of consumption?

# Consumption

- Daniel Miller: „acquisition, appropriation and usage of commodities“, elsewhere: „dependence on objects produced by other people“. (study Consumption and Commodities. 1995)
- James Carrier: „meaningful usage of objects people are related to“ – usage can be material or mental (meanings, ideas), relation can mean ownership or contemplation (Consumption, Enc. of Social and Cultural Anth. )
- Non-production, act of shopping/acquisition

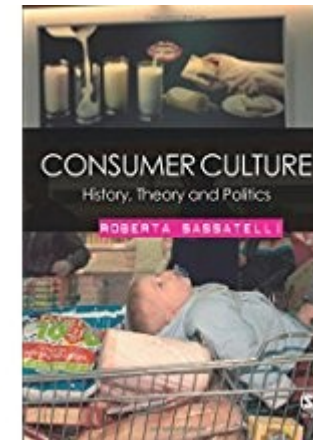
# Consumption

- material and symbolic work of appropriation of objects/commodities (objects produced for exchange, exchanged/acquired through the market)

# Consumer society and Culture

## Don Slater:

- Consumption dominated by consumption of commodities
- Commodities are crucial for both cultural and social reproduction. Market is an important means of social and cultural reproduction.
- values, activities and institutions defining Modernity: choice, individualism, market relations



# Anthropology:

## **Marshall Sahlins. 1974. *Original Affluent society***

- There is no natural desire to own goods or to own a lot.  
Against evolutionist hypothesis that free time evolves with affluence in late stages of social evolution
- **Nancy Munn. 1986. *Fame of Gawa***
- Consumption is not utilitarian/functional

## **Marilyn Strathern. 1988. *Gender of Gift*.**

- Property and production are not necessarily related

# **Douglas and Isherwood. 1978. World of Goods.**

- Informational approach to consumption
- Commodities as a system of categories
- Consumption as a nonverbal medium for human creativity, consumer goods make cultural categories visible and stable

# Pierre Bourdieu. 1979/1984.

## Distinction

- Everyday consumer choices and taste create class and reproduce established social order
- habitus
- methodology



# Daniel Miller

## **Daniel Miller. 1987. Material Culture and Mass Consumption**

- Focus on modern western society and consumption
- Consumption as creation of culture in capitalism

## **Daniel Miller (ed.). 1995. Acknowledging Consumption.**

- Research of consumption transforms anthropology as discipline
- Global mass consumption means that people define themselves and their culture through commodities

# **Benjamin S. Orlove and Henry J. Rutz**

## **The Social Economy of Consumption. 1989.**

- Consumption as important for economic anthropology
- Similar themes as economy, but in the context of social relations and structures.
- What are social and cultural determinants of offer and demand?

# 90's

- Meaning of objects, symbolic goods
- Consumption and identity – class, gender, ethnicity, subcultures
- Consumption and capitalism– origin of consumer culture and society
- To a lesser extent political economy, material conditions of consumer practices, inequality