

Consumption and identity,
Consumption and
relations

SAN266, Week 6, 28.3.2019

Consumption and identity

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

- The study of consumption transforms anthropology as a discipline
- Global mass consumption leads to increase in definition of culture, ideas and selves through commodities
- Gender, ethnicity, religion etc. expressed through commodities

Friedman, Jonathan (ed.). 2004. *Consumption and Identity*.

- explicit connection between self-identification and consumption. The former may be a conscious act, a statement about the relation between self and world, or it may be a taken for granted aspect of everyday life, i.e. of a pre-defined and fully socialized identity.

How we got here? What has happened to Weber's puritans? : Consumer revolution and identities

Collin Campbell.1987. The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Consumerism.

How is it possible that puritans gave rise to consumer revolution?

- Consumption was interconnected to new ethical and aesthetic orientations and created a new culture of consumption
- puritan control of emotion enabled a modern understanding of pleasure: created an ability to imagine objects and manipulate meanings

Consumer revolution and identities

- What is distinctively modern in our approach to material culture? Search for novelty connected with specific hedonism:
- „The crucial feature of the role of the modern consumer is the primary obligation to want to want under all circumstances and at all times irrespective of what goods and services are actually acquired or consumed“ (Campbell. 1983 s.282).
- Desire for new is not result of conspicuous consumption (Remember Veblen). Ethic results from Romanticism offering reasons and repertoire of consumer desires. Not outwardly salvation, but perfecting oneself and aesthetic pleasure
- New consumer is a hedonist of mind (not body) searching for imaginative, not sensual pleasure.

Consumption and identity in postmodern society

Consumption as an important sphere for creating and expressing identities in postmodern societies.

- **Bauman (Liquid Modernity):** Consumption as a means for creation of identity in postmodern society, identities are liquid – people can experiment with them, adopt and abandon them; consumption is an individualistic play with identities

Consumption and identity in postmodern society

Consumption and identity are related through **lifestyle**. Lifestyle is oriented around objects of consumption. Everyday routines of sociality:

- **Giddens:** Consumption and identity are related through **lifestyle**; Everyday routines of sociality: „lifestyle is routine acting “; routines are embedded in everyday choices and practices of fashion, food, behaviour etc.; Routines (unlike Bourdieu’s habitus) can be changed
- **Slater:** lifestyle does not correspond to traditional status differences and class differentiation, does not expect long socialization and learning. Is not stable, depends on consumer choices, cultural representations, signs and media. **Voluntary – choice** of identity; identity can be accepted and abandoned

Consumption and identity: example - gender

Jantzen, Ostergaard, Vieira: Becoming a woman to the backbone.

Lingerie consumption and experience of feminine identity

- Endeavour to control the environment through the control over the body:
- Foucault: technologies of subjectivation -> technologies for creation of self/person -> formalized sets of techniques leading individuals to correct management of their bodies
- Right things for the right occasion on the right body; lingerie enables certain feeling, experience of the body

Group Work - text

1. Summarize the argument of Woodward's text (6 sentences)
2. Answer following questions:
 - Is consumption of fashion individual/individualistic?
 - What is the role of materiality in creation of meaning of jeans for consumers?

Consumption and relationships: objectification

Daniel Miller. 1987. Material Culture and Mass Consumption

- Objects of consumption are key elements of culture – they are used in dialectic process of **objectification** and as such are means for creation of social meanings, identities and practices
- The concept is inspired by Hegel, Marx, Simmel”, Bourdieu, and Munn
- For Miller it does not make sense to analyse things on their own and social relations on their own: Culture „is always a process and is never reducible to either its object or its subject form“ p.11

Consumption and relationships: objectification

- „A theory of culture can have no independent subject, as neither individuals nor societies <subject> can be considered as its originators, since both are inseparable from culture itself <object>“

“Finally, the term objectification may be used to assert that the process of culture, which must always include self-alienation as a stage in its accomplishment, is thereby inherently contradictory.” p. 33

Mass culture as a dominant context for subject-object relation

Consumption and relationships: objectification

- Marx: focus on production; rupture between people and his/her work -> alienation; “Simmel effectively extends Marx’s concept of rupture to account for the inability of modern individuals to recognize themselves in the world of goods.”
- Miller: in industrialized societies consumption is main sphere of our contact with materiality
- “consumption as work may be defined as that which translates the object from an alienable to an inalienable condition; that is, from being a symbol of estrangement and price value to being an artefact invested with particular inseparable connotations (Miller, 1987: 190)

Miller, Daniel. 1998. *Theory of Shopping.*

- Creation of relationship with other subjects. Shopping as an expression of love and other relations.
- “Shopping is a regular act that turns expenditure into a devotional ritual that constantly reaffirms some transcendent force, and thereby becomes a primary means by which the transcendent is constituted.”
P.78

Work in groups

Prepare examples of:

- Consumption expressing position in social hierarchy (e.g. class)
- Consumption related to ethnic, gender or other group identity. You can think about social categories intersectionally
- Consumption expressing self/relation: a Unique combination of personal characteristics and preferences
- Consumption expressing/creating relation

Identity

- social/objective identity: Belonging to various social groups and identifying various socially relevant characteristics of such belonging– gender, class, ethnicity
- subjective/ego identity: Unique combination of personal characteristics and preferences, individual's understanding of where she/he belongs
- **Goffman** – differentiates between objects enabling social affirmation of categorical status (uniform of a policeman/soldier, white coat of medical staff) on the one hand and objects enabling expressivity (expressing lifestyle, preferences, taste)
- **Bauman**: Consumption as a means for creation of identity in postmodern society, identities are liquid – people can experiment with them, adopt and abandon them; consumption is an individualistic play with identities

Intersectionality

- Identity is a slippery concept, it incorporates too much; There is a problem of „groupism“ in many studies of identity: Groups are treated as homogeneous categories of people with particular and given characteristics (*e.g.* groups relating to women or ethnic groups are defined as having particular needs, predispositions and strategies). **Brubaker**
- An **intersectional approach** emphasises the importance of attending to the multiple social structures and processes that intertwine to produce specific social positions and identities
- In this way classes are always gendered and racialised and gender is always classed and racialised and so on, thereby dispelling the idea of homogeneous and essential social categories
- Crenshaw (1994), Collins (1993), Anthias & Yuval Davis 1989; Yuval Davis 1997

Consumption and self – example: Body and normality, body and its transformations

- Culture as ability to have certain physical appearance and activities.
- What is perceived as standard/aesthetic body/movement within particular cultures and what materiality/technologies enable it? High heels, walking on the desert and snow, circumcision; tattoo
- Cult of cultivations Lasch (1979) – from brushing tooth to breast implants: the body “to be escaped” and body “to be worked on”