

Consumption as a ritual;
Consumption and rituals

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Mary Douglas, Byron Isherwood. 1979. World of goods.

“But what is meaning? It flows and drifts; it is hard to grasp. Meaning tacked to one set of clues transforms itself. One person gets one pattern and another a quite different one from the same events; seen a year later they take a different aspect again. The main problem of social life is to pin down meanings so that they stay still for a little time.”

Mary Douglas, Byron Isherwood. 1979. World of goods.

- Consumption and demand as social practices, consumption as ritual (wedding, Sunday lunch)
- commodities: nonverbal medium for human communication, they have meaning
- Meanings are not socially arbitrary, they reflect existing social order; classification are crucial for reproduction of order
- **Information approach** to consumption – commodities make instable and invisible social categories visible through rituals of consumption

Mary Douglas, Byron Isherwood. 1979. World of goods.

- „Rituals are conventions that **set up visible public definitions.**“
- „**consumption is a system of reciprocal rituals** which entail expenditures for appropriate marking of the occasion, or of the guests and hosts, or the community at large.“
- „**Goods**, in this perspective, are **ritual adjuncts; consumption is a ritual process** whose primary function is to make sense of the inchoate flux of events.“

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

- Consumption as a ritual praxis
- Consumption as destruction, reversal of production – not only in industrial capitalism – TBC, *Fame of Gawa* by Nancy Munn, philosopher Bataille
- **Shopping and sacrifice – same structure**
- Both shopping as ritual and sacrifice separate production and consumption
- Sacrifice – before consumption of produce in archaic religions – idealized segment of produce is given to Gods to cancel possible negative influence

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

sacrifice:

- separation of food consumed by gods from food consumed by people (transcendental transformation)
- creates relationship with god/s (creation of social order and relationships)

shopping:

- transformation of spending to saving (transcendental transformation)
- creates relationship with other people (creation of social order and relationships)

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

Stages of shopping:

1. Idea of excess in discourse (not in praxis), excess related to violent destruction— spending woman
2. Praxis negating discourse – ritual of shopping – the aim is transcendence – shopping is saving, household is centre
3. Creation of relationship with other subjects. Shopping as an expression of love and other relations.

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

- Shopping and sacrifice have same structure
- Sacrifice and shopping aim to create desiring subjects – god who wants a sacrifice, the person/family who wants bought goods
- There is also continuity in development from sacrifice as devotional practice focusing on God/s to shopping devotional practice focusing on humans (loved ones) – transformation of the object of devotional practice
- As a consequence of secularization the relationship with god is superceded by romantic love. Commodities are means for creation of complex relations in capitalism, inalienability of both objects and subjects

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

- “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.”
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