Different Perspectives on Consumption, Consumer, Culture and Society

A workshop in Berlin on March 26 & 27, 2010

Organised by Per Østergaard, Kai-Uwe Hellmann, Dominik Schrage

Content of this reader:

Location:
Technical University Berlin
Main building
Strasse des 17. Juni N° 135
Senatssaal (senate hall)

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Programme

Friday March 26

13:00	Per Østergaard: *Introduction* Kai-Uwe Hellmann: *Organisation*
13:15	Dominik Schrage: *Historicising the „consumption replaces production" thesis*
13:45	Panel 1: *The 2x2 Matrix of Consumer Research* Matthias Bode, James Fitchett, Pauline Maclaran, Per Østergaard
15:00	Coffee break
15:30	Panel 2: *Critical Perspectives on Marketing* Søren Askegaard/Dannie Kjellgaard, Alan Bradshaw, Marius Lüdicke, Detlev Zwick
17:00	Coffee break
17:30	Panel 3: *Consumption and Society* Kai-Uwe Hellmann, Michael Jäckel, Manfred Prisching
19:00	End of the workshop
20:00	Dinner at the Thai restaurant Dao, Kantstraße 133, 10625 Berlin, 493037591414, www.dao-restaurant.de/ (at your own payment)

Saturday, March 27

9:30	Pekka Sulkunen: *The Consumer Society and its Critics*
10:30	Coffee break
11:00	Panel 4: *Beauty, Materiality and the Orientalization of Brands* Benoît Heilbrunn, Olga Kravets, Erik Sloth
12:30	Lunch
13:30	Panel 5: *The Future of Consumer Research* Adam Arvidsson, A. Fuat Firat/Johanna Moisander, Diego Rinallo
13:30	Coffee Break
15:00	Final discussion
16:00	End of the workshop Opportunity for dinner (for those who stay in Berlin)

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The idea of this workshop

As we wrote in the invitation for this workshop, our intention was to have a very informal workshop where the main purpose is the exchange of ideas. We didn't ask for formal paper presentations, but instead shorter presentations of your take on the topic.

We are a bit surprised when it comes to the quantity, the quality and the length of the abstracts (which mostly reached us in January), and we soon realised that we would get problems if the papers were to be presented in the way they have been announced in some of the abstracts. At least the workshop would change its character then and become something like a mini-conference without public.

So we would like to come back to our initial idea of making a workshop with the purpose of an exchange of ideas and of getting to know people from other countries and different disciplines who are working on consumption. We combined the statements that you announced in your abstracts, in ways that should bring together different perspectives on similar aspects of our common subject. Thus, five panels quite spontaneously emerged in which we hope you and your points are well hosted. We planned about 90 minutes for each panel of three to four statements, and we think the aim should be to use these statements to initiate discussions. Since we want to leave room for discussion, the statements themselves should not be longer than 10 minutes, and it is no problem if they are shorter and their arguments are partly integrated in the debate. This may seem short, but as the abstracts are known, everyone already has a general idea of each statement. You will find all the abstracts in this reader ordered by panels. Inside the panels, we decided to mention persons in alphabetical order, so that there is no fixed order of appearance inside the panels – space for negotiation.

There are only two talks outside the panel structure. We thought it would be a good idea to open both days with longer statements that address more general questions and provide the panel discussions with a common background. Dominik Schrage's aim is give a short historical introduction into the workshop concept by suggesting a distanced view on one the most common claims in consumer research, the so called "consumption replaces production thesis". Pekka Sulkunen will open up the discussions of Saturday with a lecture on *The Consumer Society and its Critics*, a subject that will be addressed in many of the panels and for which he is without any doubt a very appropriate speaker. Given the importance of this issue, we have decided to leave enough time for the discussion on this lecture, which may at the same time bring together central arguments and views of the panels on Friday.

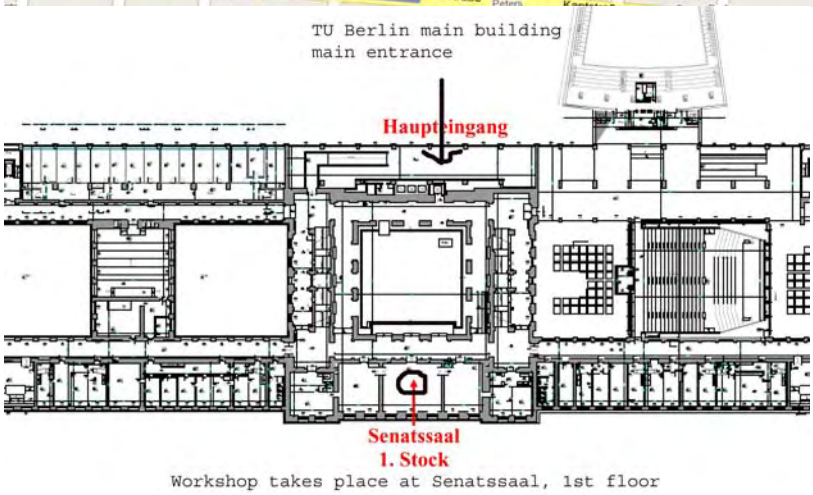
How to get there

From Berlin-Tegel Airport: (20-30 min.)
Take the bus N° X9 to Zoologischer Garten and get off at Ernst-Reuter-Platz. Serves a ticket for zones AB (2,10 €) which you can buy at the the airport bus stop (machine or driver). *Fast!*

From Berlin-Schönefeld Airport: (50-60 min.)
Try to get a regional train (RE or RB) at train station "Berlin-Schönefeld Flughafen" which is about 5 minutes walk from the terminal exit (just walk below the roof). You can take any train that goes via "Hauptbahnhof". Leave at *Zoologischer Garten* and take the Underground U2 (lower level, dir. "Ruhleben") to Ernst-Reuter-Platz (one station). Trains leave Schönefeld every 30 min., 9:25, 9:55 and so on). *Fastest way!* Ticket machines are the in airport (exit hall) and train station. You can take any S-Bahn at Schönefeld as well, but there are *interruptions* due to technical problems in the system and you have to change at Ostkreuz. If you take the S-Bahn, you can get off at Bahnhof Tiergarten (one station before Zoologischer Garten) and walk.
In both cases you have to buy a local service ticket for zones ABC (2,80 €).

From Berlin Central Station (train): (10-15 min.)
Take any S-Bahn train on platform 16 (upper level) to Tiergarten station (2 stops) and walk.
If you travel with a Deutsche Bahn train ticket this trip is included (destination "Berlin").

Mobile phone number (in case of problems): Dominik Schrage: 0049-1577-782 49 63



← The TU Berlin main building is located in Straße des 17. Juni N° 135 Go through the entrance hall, keep right and take the main stairs. At their end keep left, direction of the atrium. On the other side of the atrium is the *Senatssaal* where the workshop takes place. We'll put signs as well.

List of confirmed Participants

Number	Name, Institution	Discipline	Abstract
1.	Adam Arvidsson, University of Milan	Sociology	+
2.	Søren Askegaard, University of Southern Denmark	Consumer research	+
3.	Suzanne C. Beckmann, Copenhagen Business School	Consumer Research	
4.	Matthias Bode, University of Southern Denmark	Consumer research	+
5.	Alan Bradshaw, University of London	Consumer research	+
6.	James Fitchett, University of Leicester	Consumer research	+
7.	Benoît Heilbrunn, ESCP Europe, Paris	Consumer Research	
8.	Kai-Uwe Hellmann, TU Berlin	Sociology	+
9.	Michael Jäckel, University Trier	Sociology	+
10.	Dannie Kjeldgaard, University of Southern Denmark	Consumer research	+
11.	Olga Kravets, Bilkent University	Consumer Research	+
12.	Marius Lüdicke, University Innsbruck	Consumer research	+
13.	Pauline MacLaran, University of London	Consumer research	+
14.	Johanna Moisander, Aalto University	Consumer research	+
15.	Per Ostergaard, University of Southern Denmark	Consumer research	+
16.	Manfred Prisching, University Graz	Sociology	+
17.	Diego Rinallo, University of Bocconi	Consumer research	+
18.	Dominik Schrage, Universities Bielefeld and Dresden	Sociology	+
19.	Erik Sloth, Aarhus University	Consumer research	+
20.	Pekka Sulkunen, University of Helsinki	Sociology	+
21.	Detlev Zwick, York University	Consumer research	+

Different Perspectives on Consumption, Consumer, Culture and Society

A workshop in Berlin on March 26 & 27, 2010.

Consumption seems to be one of the most important activities for human beings throughout history. Currently consumption is related to nearly all dimensions of culture and society, ranging from identity construction, community life, environmental problems, and politics. There are many perspectives on how to theorize and study the impact consumption has on culture and society and it is the intention to bring a group of researchers together who have different perspectives on this issue. At least four dimensions are relevant in such a discussion and in a 2 x 2 matrix they are:

	Consumption	**Consumer**
Society	*Consumption Society*	*Consumer Society*
Culture	*Consumption Culture*	*Consumer Culture*

These four perspectives reveal different levels of analysis and diverse theoretical foundations. With "society" and "culture", we propose two basic concepts which stand for distinctive approaches to the context conditions of consumption. With "Consumption" and "Consumer" we propose two basic concepts which distinguish different perspectives on consumption itself: be it a more structuralist approach or an actor-oriented one, more macro or micro. Both distinctions can be combined and open (of course in a reduced manner) a field, in which a quite broad range of perspectives can be arranged. This field, that is our aim, may help to communicate different approaches by reducing complexity without too much homogeinizing.

Just to give a roughly impression what could be meant by each of these four terms: For instance "consumption society" often stands for the idea that consumption is the main pattern or framework of modern society: everything what happens within the modern society is conditioned by consumption. Here the societal consequences of consumption are the focus. In contrast "consumption culture" represents a more restricted point of view which includes the cultural specificity if consumption takes action, above all the aspect of meaning which is produced and/or distributed by consumption. The perspective of "consumer society" sees the individuals as consumers as the center of scientific attention, with special interest on their life forms and how they manage life as consumers. The term "consumer culture" finally is connected to the controversy between high culture and mass culture just to free consumer activities from the bad image it got by the critical theory and cultural critics.

It is not the intention of the workshop to reach any form of consensus regarding the level of analysis or theoretical approaches. Instead the purpose is to create a forum where these concepts can be discussed. It is also the wish that the workshop can bring together researchers from different disciplines and countries with an interest in these issues.

Our intention is to have a very informal workshop where the main purpose is the exchange of ideas. We don't want formal paper presentations, but instead shorter presentations of your take on the topic. Therefore we will ask you to submit a one page abstract on your ideas. It is not our intention to review the abstract, since all participants are invited, but to get a picture of the different perspectives to enable a better planning of the workshop. Deadline for the abstract is December 1.

The workshop will take place at the Technische Universität Berlin and is sponsored by the Consumption Studies Research Group from the University of Southern Denmark. There is no registration fee and we expect everyone to cover their own expenses for traveling, accommodation and food. The organizing committee will find a cheap hotel near TU and also affordable restaurants for lunch and dinner. We will serve coffee, tea, water and snacks free of charge during the workshop. The workshop will start at 13.00 on Friday and end Saturday afternoon at 16.00. Nevertheless, there will be a dinner in town Saturday evening for those who want to stay in Berlin until Sunday.

The numbers of participant are limited to 30 due the size of the seminar room.

Please send your abstract no later than December 1 to: poe@sam.sdu.dk

Looking forward to see you in Berlin

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Abstracts

Domink Schrage
Paper for the workshop
"Different Perspectives on Consumption, Consumer, Culture and Society"
Berlin, March 26th and 27th 2010

Historicising the "consumption replaces production" thesis

The four field scheme proposed in the invitation paper for the workshop should, in my view, be interpreted in two ways: On the one hand, it may help to identify different approaches within the field of consumer sociology and research on a very general level: diverging ideas of the objects of research ("consumer", "consumption") and different disciplinary frames of research ("society", "culture"). But, on the other hand, and besides these differences, the scheme is organised around the *common* interest in consumption phaenomena which can be taken for granted in the field, and it can therefore be used to control the often far reaching assumptions concerning the relevance of consumption phaenomena in contemporary society and culture as such. In my statement, I will try to relativise the widespread assumptions that consumption phaenomena play *the dominant* role in modern society and that they do this *only since the recent decades*, replacing a dominance of production. For that pupose, I will historicise the concepts of the four field scheme proposed for the workshop.
(1) Seen from a broader perspective on modern history and semantic change, the concept of consumption emerges as a structural equivalent of production in early modernity: The progressive vanishing of subsistence production, the successive diffusion of monetary relations over all social strata, the complex division of work and the establishement of a modern labour market do not only lead to *differenciated* forms of production, but also to a *generalised*, money-mediated form of acquisition and usage of objects (and services). This form of acquisition is, in the European languages, termed as "consumption", "consommation", "Verbrauch" etc. This semantic novelty, observable in early modernity, manifests that more and more people are involved in and experience money-mediated forms of acquisition and usage of objects – and they relativise or omit the estate-based and common norms of how to get and use things. We can trace back the emergence of this modern social structure that links production and consumption (and anonymus producers and consumers) at least to the 18th century, and we can see cultures of consumption emerge when the new margins of behaviour, opened up by the individualisation of consuming practices, are cultivated. Semantically, this becomes e.g. manifest in the controversal debates on luxury. Looking back to early modern society, we might say that a society termed modern is in a way always a "consumption society" just as much as it is a "production society" (of course there are many other aspects that are not included by these concepts and that I exclude in my argument). And we can as well interpret the propagation of the mechanism of conspicuous consumption as a dominant feature of *consumer culture* in societies that are structured by

obvious class hierarchies and in which cultural goods and practices are valuated by elites – where the cultural value of goods corresponds (or is strictly linked) with the status positions of those who can afford them and who know how to use them correctly.
(2) On this background, which is of course idealtyped and very general, we can outline the changes emerging in 20th century consumer society with a bit more distance, as we are not forced to enmesh ourselves in the alternative of calling our present society a "production society" or a "consumption society".: It is because looking back before 20th century enables us to control the fluttering forecasts of deep changes ocurring every 5 or 10 years. Seen from such a broader historical perspective, the emerging new relations of production and consumption in 20th century can be interpreted as a bundle of interdependent processes: It is not that a postfordist "consumption society" *follows* a fordist "production society", but that the interrelation of production and consuption and their impact on culture change and establish new margins of behaviour: On the one hand new margins for consuming practices, enabled by new production methods evolve. But on the other hand social stability is more and more depending on economic growth and requires that consumers grasp these consuming margins, which makes consumption a dynamic factor of social and cultural change. It comes to that traditional or morally based reservations which vast parts of the (lower) middle classes had against desire driven spending decline with an expanding consumer culture, with advertising, higher wages and ever new generations of consuming teenagers: With this, the valuation of goods becomes more and more independent of the practices and valuations of elite groups; instead, innovation circles, fashion changes and a mass based consumer culture are more and more referring to mass media, the preferences of a broad middle class public for which consumer goods are stabilising the life cycle (Riesman's standard package).
(3) Seen thus, the setting of our contemporary production/consumption structure can, arguing generally, be traced back up to the 1920s or postwar USA ("Fordism"). The diversity of consumer cultures, life style groups and even the counter culture that has emerged, from the 1960s on, as a protest against the "conformistic" consumer culture of suburbia ("Post-Fordism"), they are, from this structural point of view, ways of cultivating the behavioural margins and the contingencies of the *middle class dominated consumption society* of the 1950s. The variety of consumer cultures we experienced since the 1950s can thus be linked to a common structural framing that shows continuities, but also discontinuities compared with the consumer society established until the early 20th century. The transformations marked by the terms modernity and postmodernity can in this view be identified as changing hegemonies of mentalities or consumer cultures which grasp the structural margins of consumption in different ways and forms.

With my argument, which I will present and explain more deeply in the workshop, I would like to use the historicising perspective in order to stress the interdependency between structural ("consumption society") and agency-related ("consumer culture") concepts.

Dark Star

James Fitchett
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In Endless Orbit

The "different perspectives" matrix offers a useful and practical device through which we might want to begin to assess and discuss the status of the consumer and consumption today, as well as the predominant modes of thinking and theory that we might bring to bear upon these categories.

Observed close up each perspective is of course a complexity of diversity. The 'consumer society' is in fact many different possible and potential societies, just as 'consumer culture' is an amalgam of countless material encounters and experiences. And yet from a distance (such as the distance afforded by the matrix representation) they each appear bounded in some way as distinct. Coherent worlds each with their own atmospheres and compositions, formed slowly and systematically yet in some sense separately, through countless theoretical collisions and amalgamations. Yet as we move out yet further we might observe these four positions as representing certain orbital points, endlessly revolving around one another, at once attracting and repelling each other. While each conceptual position is held together by its own internal inertia and logic they nevertheless exert force and attraction on counter positions. At times they move closer together and may even exchange material and ideas, and at others they move further apart – establishing seemingly irreconcilable positions that are observed as being in some way incommensurable.

No matter how much (or how little) we (I) examine consumer/consumption culture/society, it remains so difficult, as researchers of consumption, to grasp and render the core or fundamental nature of the subject of study. In a sense, the four realms identified in the matrix highlight the on-going difficulty that consumer researchers have with the basic premise of their enquiry. It as if the subject was dedicated to an endless search for some kind of grand narrative, but in absence of such a theoretical artefact we are instead left with a set of choices between positions or categories – a dilemma of occupancy if you like.

Occupying Positions

Consum(er/ption) can clearly be viewed from or as an issue of agency *or* structure. That individuals do things with their consumption is well and thoroughly documented, and indeed the research community continues to account for more of these illustrations through insightful research projects. It is certainly not controversial to ascribe consumption categories to all manner of human actions and motives – to satisfy needs, to maintain and enhance social relationships, to (re)produce aspects of the self, and so on. Consumption categories are thus shown to be a kind of resource for

deployment or enactment – and this can be done successfully or not, and some have more ability and opportunity to do these kinds of things than others. And of course consumption is at the same time a matter of structuration, by which we generally mean to demonstrate that this mode, or this institution, provides a network of procedures through which the actors/agents intentions are able to be manifest.

It seems that in the main the agentic approach forever runs the risk of a kind of hopeless opportunism, that is someway the individual might be free, autonomous and self realizing through consumption. We can, should we wish to align our thoughts to this perspective view consumption as the ultimate product of democracy, and freedom. And lets face it, this is not a bad thing – possibly the best of all possible worlds. John Qulech's recent *Praise of Marketing* in HBR plays very much to this view:

> The billions of successful daily marketplace transactions are an important part of the glue that holds our society together. Good marketers offer consumers choices. Choice stimulates consumption and economic growth and facilitates personal expression. Good marketers provide consumers with information about new products and services, thereby accelerating their adoption. All these benefits are routinely overlooked as the 17 million Americans engaged in marketing, selling, and customer service routinely try to fly under the radar of social critics and go about their daily work contributing brilliantly but often unknowingly to our quality of life (Quelch 2009).

The structurally inclined perspective on the other hand more often than not ends up in a kind of nihilistic hopelessness – that for all of the supposed freedoms that consumption promotes and celebrates, the structures of society (be it class, wealth, race, gender) will inevitably curtail and conform to some kind of macro scheme. And consumption ultimately serves to reinforce and remake these categories. Marketers and neo-liberals, as well as others who find it comforting to celebrate consumption as some kind of enlightenment are more wedded to the agentic and the optimistic, whereas critics and opponents are inevitably drawn to this structural malady. In the movie *What Would Jesus Buy* (2007) for example, consumers can be viewed as being a bit mindless, deceived, blinded – basically to be happy to act against their own best interests while believing that by doing so they are acting in their own best interests. To the 'dark forces' of structure, these consumers are just fodder to an unstoppable machine that through globalisation, commercialism, profiteering, environmental destruction and power seeking will carry on regardless. A similar theme underpins the movie *Český sen* (2004) (The *Czech Dream*), in which the masses of anticipating consumers are at once mindfully and mindlessly drawn inexorably to a modern day potemkin hypermarket, and complementary conclusions could be drawn from other recent films such as *Surplus: Terrorized Into Being Consumers* (2004).Viewed in this way there can be no escape from consumption only temporary respite and (delusional) catharsis:

> "...the urge to differentiate from other consumers drives participation at Burning Man and does not release them from the grip of the market's sign game and social logics." Kozinets (2002:36)

Maybe some kind of radical negation is needed here, or at least some kind of reversal. What would a negative consumer agency look like, and perhaps more pressingly, how might an optimistic theory of consumption structure manifest itself? Even if these things were possible, it does not detract from

the validity of the observation that different realms adopt competing positions. Quite simply, film makers and social commentators breathe a different air to business school 'apologists'.

Of course theory offers a number of 'third ways' through the problem of agency and structure. Structuration theory (Giddens 1984) might show that while consumer behaviour is prefigured to a great extent these structures and rules are not fixed or nonnegotiable, but are in fact adaptable by the terms of human action. Actor Network Theory can be used to show how performativity (a kind of expression of agency albeit not necessary a human agency) is an essential requirement for any network of relations to remain stable and active. And Focualdian inspired accounts might reveal how the 'birth' of the consumer agent/subjectivity is both a necessary and inevitable consequence of a set of existent structuring discourse.

There is also a position divided by the question of the realm and scope of consumption and of the consumer. Sometimes consumer research can be read as a kind of totalising project of almost imperial proportions. In one sense there is nothing beyond the realm of consumption any more, no economy, no culture, no politics, no society, no self. This is a kind of subject-suicide – a revenge. For many of us the category of consumption is plagued by the prospect of disappearance through indifference. This is at once offered as both an empirical judgment on the state of the world, as well as an ideological judgment about the intent of consumerists. It thus falls to criticism to identify the lost realms (positions) of the world that are masked by this attempt at universality – the plight of the worker, the besieged family and community, the demise of 'genuine' political debate and legitimate institutions.

Black Hole

What is it that these sometimes competing yet always interconnected positions revolve around – other than themselves of course? And is there a position from which their relative motion and velocity could be measured. From certain postmodern perspectives the search for such a centre of gravity is a futile and anachronistic fantasy. The world, we are informed is very much *decentred*. But maybe this apparent decentring does not mean that the centre is no longer there but only that it has disappeared from view. Like many postmodern ideas this notion of decentring soon becomes a paradox. If there is no centre, no unifying form, then how can the remaining parts be understood as being anyway connected to one another? What prevents the disparate and separated realms from spinning off in their own discreet directions and end up as a multiple of localised central positions?

I would tentatively propose that the link between the consumer and consumption, and between consumer culture and consumer society (if indeed these are the correct positions to identify) is surely the object. The object, most notably in the commodity form, is the centre of gravity for all of these positions. And it is precisely because the object is so all encompassing that it has become virtually invisible.

The consumer research tradition has become almost totally pre-occupied with the subject of consumption, that is to say, the consumer, the consumer society, and the culture *of* consumption. But the fundamental questions about these ideas will always be incomplete, and will always endlessly circle around without destination.

What is it then that simultaneously obscures the object despite its essential centricity? The best reference for this question is Baudrillard who provides an essential vocabulary through which we can begin to glimpse the *transparency* of the object in consumer culture. The object is the *mirror* and as such it is difficult to see anything beyond the reflection of the subject while the object remains always obscured. Baudrillard writes:

> We have always lived of the splendour of the subject and the poverty of the object. It is the subject that makes history, it is the subject that totalizes the world...Everything comes from the object and everything returns to it... (Baudrillard 1983/1990: 111).

It may or may not be the case that "Consumption seems to be one of the most important activities for human beings throughout history" as the first line of the brief for the workshop proclaims. But how might we conceive of the importance of consumption for objects? Might we say that, in conclusion, that if human beings had not invented consumption (society and culture), and had not been subjugated as consumers then the object would have had to invent it for them.

Thinking Outside the Box: Circling Around Consumer Culture

Pauline Maclaran, Royal Holloway University of London

Whilst I agree that the proposed matrix is useful to analyse particular bodies of work within its four boxes and to help us assess their focus, I also feel that a matrix by its nature highlights separation and compartmentalisation. To me, the four elements of the matrix intertwine and impact on each in ways this matrix fails to convey and that our research often fails to acknowledge (often remaining at either the macro or micro levels without bridging the two). Accordingly, I would like to suggest that a more rounded, layered depiction may also be useful to elaborate the relationships between the four elements (i.e. consumer culture encircled by consumption culture, encircled by consumer society, encircled by consumption society):

By way of example, I will discuss examples of previous research I have done with various colleagues (Catterall, Maclaran, Stevens and Hamilton, 2008; Maclaran and Brown, 2005) to illustrate that often a focus on consumer culture (the inner circle) means that we ignore the deeply rooted structural and social hierarchies that impact on consumers' lives (the outer circle). In other words, referring back to the matrix, we fail to think outside the box of consumer culture (now perhaps even more "boxed in" by CCT). Re-interpreting a study undertaken on single mothers in poverty shows how acts, seen as empowering from an interpretivist consumer research perspective, can actually be imprisoning women more deeply in poverty when analyzed from a more macro perspective that explores the wider implications of a society structured by consumption. In a similar way, utopian meanings created by consumers in the marketplace at the consumer culture level can stifle wider political engagement and critique at the structural level, a "postmodern paralysis" encouraged by identity play at an individual level.

Certainly liberatory postmodernism shifted the focus from production to consumption, emphasizing the role of the symbolic in consumption processes, with the individual creating his or her own subjective meanings in relation to consumption acts and experiences. Now many studies show the emancipatory potential of consumption, in relation to subcultures of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander 1995); ethnicity (Peñaloza 1994); fashion discourses (Thompson and Haytho 1997); and the gay community (Kates 2000). Significantly though, the notion of rebellion is most commonly associated with, and incorporated into, the "rebel sell" of branding.

So whilst such studies have given us greater insights into consumer culture theory and individual agency through the marketplace, they ignore the wider social landscape and its structures. Moreover, the current focus on consumption and the consumer also overlooks important relationships with production that are also important for a deeper structural analysis of our contemporary consumption-driven world. As a final thought, I propose adding an outer layer to the matrix/circle that represents the forces of production. This should encompass all four elements to emphasise the continuing pervasive influence of production that now often remains hidden in our analyses.

Understanding the Present-day Behaviour and Imagination based on Consumption and the Consumer and/or Society and Culture?

Per Østergaard, University of Southern Denmark

The 2x2 matrix in the invitation for this seminar cannot explain all kinds of behaviour and the imaginary in our everyday life. Nevertheless, I think it is important to discuss the four key concepts: Consumer society, consumer culture, consumption culture and consumption society. By using these four concepts I think we can analyze and understand a big part of everyday behaviour and imagination. It is interesting and important to discuss how big a chunk of our everyday we can understand based on these four concepts, and I appreciate this debate. Despite this, I think consumption and the role as consumer is invading our present-day culture and society. When the sociological institutions are in a state of change due the general development, then consumption and its servant the consumer is slowly and discrete invading these institutions and turn them into consumption scapes and a playground for the consumer. This is now so pervasive that it makes sense to use the consumer, or consumption as a prefix, when we want to describe nearly all aspects of our everyday life. In my presentation I give some examples from my own and others research to illustrate these ideas.

Governmentality of the Prosuming Self
Søren Askegaard & Dannie Kjeldgaard

The character of contemporary consumer society is profoundly inscribed in simultaneously a romantic logic of longing (Campbell) and an increasing emotionalism (Illouz). Combined with an increasingly reflexive self project (Giddens) this double inscription has as one of its consequences a proliferation of consumption of technologies of the self. The explosion in self-help and self-actualization technologies bears witness to this development. We discuss one consumer practice included in this development, the phenomenon of personal coaching. Based on 20 interviews with consumers, producers and prosumers of coaching, we will analyze the formation of this technology of the self constitutive of a new type of market-sustained identity project through the concepts of managerialism and governmentality. This suggests a radically different consumer-market relation that goes beyond entrenched ideas in consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005) and sociology of consumption (Miles) of consumers' extending selves and constructing meaningful life experiences from market-based offerings as suggested.

You've been framed!
Alan Bradshaw, Royal Holloway University of London

The meaning of the term 'consumption' is in constant state of evolution; classically understood as an end point in the exchange process and a polar opposite to production and at a more micro level as the acquisition, usage and disposal of goods, there is increasing recognition of a consumer society, a mediation of the political-economic by a logic of consumerism. Within the expanded frame of a consuming subject, we see significant borrowings from the idea of the political subject – hence consumption activities become understood relative to such discourses as empowerment, agency, activism, resistance, emancipation. Of course to label such practices as consumerist rather than political reminds us that there is no natural condition of the consumer, rather it is a frame. And, as Judith Butler tells us in her recent book Frames of War, the application of a frame is an act of containing and determining, an editorial embellishment of the object and as such the frame is politically saturated and bound by its own conditions of reproducibility. This realisation creates, does it not, an epistemological problem for a seminar concerned with developing the frames relating to consumerism?
Hence a number of key challenges emerge, we might ask: What are the necessary conditions for a consumer culture? Further, if it can be agreed that the transmutation of subjectivity from the political to the consumerist serves a neo-liberal logic, we must ask what are the points of convergence and departure from the scholarly project of framing consumerism and a neo-liberal ideology? More broadly, the key question then becomes what are the critical standpoints for the developing literature surrounding the experience of consumerism?

Two Questions

Author: Marius K. Luedicke
Outlet: Hellmann/Ostergaard Workshop, Berlin 2010
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In their inspiring call for contributions to a conference on consumption, consumers, society and culture, Kai-Uwe Hellmann and Per Ostergaard suggest that consumption-related social phenomena can usefully be distinguished into four distinct conceptual realms; consumption culture, consumer culture, consumption society and consumer society. The purpose of this abstract is to raise two questions concerning the underlying presumptions of this interesting conceptual matrix as grounds for discussion.

First: The scholars content, together with many other contemporary observers, that consumption has become not only an important but potentially the predominant practice through which Western societies and personal identities emerge and perpetuate. In this view, a consumer society (or consumption society, consumerist society, consumption culture, or consumer culture) is characterized by the belief that "goods [rather than origin, profession, or social status] give meaning to individuals and their roles in society" (Cross 2000, 1). In such societies, social life is "organized around the consumption of mass-produced commodities" (Lee 2000, x) to an extent that ordinary humans turn into "consumers" that define their very own being through having, i.e. the consumption of carefully selected goods and symbols. Through this lens, the twentieth century appears as "the century of the consumer society" (Lee 2000, x) or even an "All-Consuming Century" (Cross 2000).

Are our Western societies rightfully diagnosed as dominated by consumption? One central basis of this diagnosis is that the level of consumption and consumption-centered identity projects has dramatically risen since WWII. However, authors typically leave unnoted how much practices of personal self-reflection, (micro-) political activism, social networking, or physical self-enhancement practices have changed over this same time frame compared to the spread of distinctly consumerist practices? Would the rise of the therapeutic discourse that Illouz (2008) has meticulously traced not allow for theorizing the preeminent condition of our society alternatively as a "self-realization society"? Or would the unprecedented spread of the other above mentioned practices qualify our society as a citizens' society, a network society, or even a society of cyborgs (Haraway 1991) instead of a "consumer society"? Did commercialism win as an empirical phenomenon, as Cross (2000) contents, or did the academics and critics win that described and labeled the contemporary condition as consumption-centered and, in so doing, leveraged the importance of their own research fields? No doubt, scholars have collected overwhelming evidence for Cross et al's view, but can the alternative case – a Western society in which citizens do not build their identities primarily on what they consume – also be made and reliably grounded in data?

Second: The second important assumption that is required for studying a society as a "consumer society" is the existence of an empirical equivalent to what theorists label a "consumer." One interesting, but (to my knowledge) understudied question is, if and under which conditions people understand themselves emically as "consumers" and under which conditions the consumer is an ethic

term used for theorizing other individuals' beliefs and behaviors. In the above consumerist view, every individual is considered a consumer, anytime. There is no escape from the market, as Kozinets (2002) seemed to have observed (unless the subject is broke). Even people that socialize at their homes, attend a religious service, share ideas at online forums, or participate in a University seminar are theorized as consumers that are, at all times it seems, deeply immersed in their endless games of symbolic status competition. In emic terms, however, people likely turn to the consumer myth mostly, if not exclusively, to claim their status and legal rights as consumers, i.e. to complain about a faulty product, demand a replacement, or request a better service. In very few cases that I have studied – that are either those in which consumption is perceived as a negative force dominating those that have no means to participate in consumer culture; or cases in which consumers fully immerse themselves into brand communities – consumers render their consumption as defining for their identity. More often they carefully avoid being consumers (or "shopping queens", or "fashion victims", or "brand devotees") and consider their possessions merely as (ephemeral) expressions of an underlying, more profound personality. As Miller (2005, 44) confirms, "people generally think of themselves these days as subjects, living in societies, having culture(s), and employing a variety of objects whose unproblematic materiality is taken for granted." They deeply believe in the dualistic construction of subject and objects, i.e. the mythic idea that "materiality represents the merely apparent, behind which lies that which is real" (Miller 2005, 1). If Miller's point is right and people believe that materiality expresses something larger that lies behind the façade, could the phenomenon that we observe be less one of people turning into "consumers," but one of researchers overextending their conceptual apparatus? As a case in point, the difficulties of making sense of certain human activities through a consumption lens is most apparent in the ongoing "prosumption" debate. People participating in certain emerging social activities were found no longer being passive and dominated enough to fit the "buy-use-dispose off" scheme of the consumption cycle. In consequence, scholars have begun to theorize them (with an air of surprise) as "prosumers" that actively change the world of goods and meanings that they used to consume. Are these people and their activities usefully theorized as prosuming consumers, or would they potentially be better understood if theorized as non- or even anti-consumption activities by people that try not to be consumers?

Qui bono? Considering the above two questions might be useful for the workshop's interest of studying the impact of consumption on society and culture because they question the conceptual boundaries of the phenomena considered in the authors' fourfold matrix. The matrix can be read as an attempt to demystify and re-organize theoretical analyses of consumption. The above questions - if Western societies have actually become consumer societies and if their inhabitants have turned into consumers - follow the same agenda.

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Detlev Zwick

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Different Perspectives on Consumption, Consumer, Culture and Society
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Consumption as a Practice of/in Self-Formation: Neoliberal governmentality, economic rationality, and 'self-care'

As I write this abstract, I am presented, inescapably, on television, the radio, the newspaper, and any number of online sources with what amounts to a minute-by-minute account of the incoming retail numbers for so-called Black Friday (traditionally a big shopping day on the Friday after Thanksgiving, which is on the third Thursday of November) and for 'Cyber Monday', a more recent invention that extends the Thanksgiving shopping spree online and into the following week (for many this requires shopping from work). Reeling from arguably the worst economic crisis in the history of the United States, the results of two of the biggest shopping days of the year are becoming the most important news of the week. Retail numbers are to the ailing economy what the thermometer is for the feverish patient: a way to calculate and put a number to the severity of the illness; except that in the case of the economy, the higher the number the happier everyone will be. Enlisting, or to use Althusser's well-known term, interpellating the consumer (however 'shopped out'[1]) as an active agent in the historical project of restoring America's dithering economic as well as psychological, social, and cultural health is yet another example of how personal consumption is constructed as an act of social action, moral duty and active political participation (see Sassatelli, 2007). But I think what is more important to understand is that these particular moments of intensification bring to the fore a political subject that considers the market (and the economy more generally) as the organizing and regulative principle of all aspects of the state and society; a neoliberal subject that may not act against his (class) interests, as is often suggested, but whose interests are aligned with that of the market (Brown, 2006).

For many theorists in the social sciences and the cultural studies-informed camp of consumer research, consumer culture and the society of consumption have been regarded as the embodiment, long awaited, of an enlightened modernity. From this perspective, the ascendancy of consumption and the democratization of middle-class materialism beginning in the immediate post-war years, "far from being supremely alienating, […] stands for the expansion of civil society, the first moment in history when central political and commercial organs and agendas became receptive to, and part of, the broader community" (Miller, 2007, p. 3). In light of the tight entanglements of the economic and the cultural (Don Slater, 2002; D. Slater, 2002) and consumption and society, speaking of a consumption culture and a consumer society as sketched out by Hellmann, Schraege, and Østergaard seems plausible. However, while I do not wish to diminish the

[1] A term frequently used by the well-known economist Nouriel Roubini of New York University's Stern School of Business to express a situation where the vast majority of Americans is no longer able to maintain customarily high levels of consumer spending because of massive and mounting personal debt and declining incomes. Roubini maintains, therefore, that unlike less severe economic downturns in the past this recession cannot be fixed by high or even increasing levels of domestic consumption.

importance of consumption in the organization of social, economic, and cultural relations, I wish to argue that this focus on consumption misses the corresponding rise of a culture of production, in particular of the production of self-producing subjects, and a culture of *selling*, ie. of selling something to someone. It misses, thus, that the expansion of consumption goes hand in hand with an expansion of the range and spheres of market exchanges.

In my comments I want to argue that what Roberta Sassatelli and many others before her call a consumer culture (or any other of the suggested terms) needs to be considered as part of a larger transformation of an extension of the rationality of the market, the schemes of analysis it offers and the decision-making criteria it suggests (Foucault, 2008, p. 323). Within the project of Neoliberalism, a constructivist enterprise that intends to govern subjectivity through culture (Lemke, 2001), the institutionalizing of a consumer culture becomes one element of neoliberal governmentality aimed at exhorting individuals to produce themselves as autonomous, entrepreneurial, and profit-maximizing subjects, including in domains "that are not exclusively or not primarily economic: the family and the birth rate, for example, or delinquency and penal policy" (Foucault, 2008). In a consumer culture (or society) the subject is morally responsible for navigating not just the market but the entire social realm using rational choice and cost-benefit calculations grounded on market-based principles to the exclusion of all other ethical values and social interests (Hamann, 2009). In this account, the cultural myth of consumption as empowering and consumer choice as political freedom functions as a wedge to break up residual social dependencies and alternative rationalities. I will use the case of Prahalad's (2005) enormously popular and influential book *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid* as illustrative case to make the point that via the mobilization of the consumer (here in an 'emergent' consumer culture) neoliberal governmentality targets the conduct of the individual in its entirety in an attempt to shape the individual's orientations in a more entrepreneurial and self-reliant form. My account points to the need to understand consumer culture as a kind of ethical framework that encourages the individual to cultivate himself as an entrepreneur who considers everyone around him as a consumer of something. Consumer culture and a society that equates rationalities of the market with civic participation and hails the consumer subject as ethical model for citizenship, has therefore the potential, following Brown (2005, p. 43), to be deeply undemocratic:

> The model neoliberal citizen is one who strategizes for her- or himself among various social, political, and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options. A fully realized neoliberal citizenry would be the opposite of public-minded; indeed, it would barely exist as a public. The body politic ceases to be a body but is rather a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers . . .which is, of course, exactly how voters are addressed in most American campaign discourse."

Thus, I am arguing for 'bringing in' a political economy of consumption if we are to prevent our work from replicating the hegemonic 'consumption as empowerment and self-realization' simplisms of much of consumer research from the 1990s up until now, characterized by "professors earnestly spying on young people at the mall, or obsessively

staring at them in virtual communities" (Miller, 2006, p. 4). Responding to the neoliberal fantasies of empowerment and freedom through consumption does not mean to deny the possibility of emancipatory consumer politics or individual pleasure of consumption. But it means that we are conscious of the material conditions and institutional practices, and critical of the politics of subjectification, that installs an ideology of consumerism (and 'the market' more generally) at the center of contemporary notions of citizenship, political participation, and practices of freedom.

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The Talk of Consumption Society: Is there a theoretical sufficient justification doing that?

Kai-Uwe Hellmann

Looking at the debates and publications within the field of consumer research since decades, there exists a plethora of discussions which combine the four words “consumer”, “consumption”, “culture” and “society” in any possible ways, without reflecting all the time the logical consequences which are implied doing that.

So if we discuss “consumer culture”, it seems to be quite convincing that this label is focused on what makes consumer behaviour itself significant, for instance compared with the behaviour of professionals like teachers, doctors or politicians when we talk about “professional ethos”. Also the label “consumption culture” might be rather unproblematic if we understand the meaning of this label as a macro perspective of what is common for all consumers and their behaviour besides what they do beyond the field of consumption, for instance as doctors or patients, politicians or citizens, teachers or pupils, being engaged in sport clubs or as members of families.

Different to these both labels seems to me the usage of the other two labels “consumer society” and still more “consumption society” because then we’re not talking only about one possible facet of culture within modern society but identifying it itself with society as such.

Regarding the first mentioned label “consumer society” one could think about as if the whole society would be organized only around consumers and their behaviour, starting from the micro level and then aggregating and elevating the whole network of consumer related interactions to the macro level. And moreover considering the second label “consumption society” as Baudrillard it did often is understood as a paradigm shift from production to consumption as the new master plan of contemporary society dominating everything what happens at the moment in our present society.

But what are the scientific validated reasons doing that? There is no dissent that consumption has become a ubiquitous phenomenon today and that everywhere in society consumption might be practised. But there is a huge difference observing consumption everywhere and naming the contemporary society as a “consumer society” or even more a “consumption society” because that means that there is a prerogative, a dominance, a cultural hegemony by consumption upon the rest of society.

Observing this state of the art in the field of consumer research I will try to show by introducing systems theory that there are also some good arguments to say that identifying our field of research with society as such implies a cardinal mistake because of an invalid generalisation of what we’re doing in our daily research as long as we believe that there is a total congruence between consumption and society on the micro and the macro level.

Luxury and waste: Changing conceptions and distinctions

Michael Jäckel
Trier University

The discourse about luxury has always been dominated by a moral disapproval of excessive forms of consumption. This can be observed throughout history as a repeating argument against any kind of ostentation. It is mainly the quantitative level of expenditures for goods and services that stands for a misrelation of needs and satisfactions.

Anyway, the history of luxury is far from not developing its own rules: In ancient times abundance and poverty were interpreted as bad for the polity albeit braveness and wisdom opened the door to the leisure class; in medieval times as a sin or a disregard of the true aims of life and as a loss of any sense of moderation, during Renaissance asceticism and self-sufficiency were synonyms for a moral life. Hence the point of reference or benchmark for categorizing some kind of consumption as normal or ostentative changed, too. The sphere of consumption always had developed its own social practices and norms and the evaluation of these behavioral patterns changed with the economic welfare of societies. The court society was characterized by an overregulation of expectations dominating the life style of a few people in a sense of “must do” and “must have” and in a restrictive sense by excluding most people from the courtly game. The birth of a consumer society is a result of expanding more or less comfortable lives from the top to the middle including imitation and distinction as well. Even the level of comfort reflects the economic and social development and the accepted mode of consumption. When Max Weber stated that “[t]he idea of comfort characteristically limits the extent of ethically permissible expenditures” he was thinking about a conduct of life withstanding “the glitter and ostentation of feudal magnificence”. Until today these ethically permissible expenditures have not really disappeared.

Besides the many examples that can be found in pre-modern societies the 19th century discourse about luxury and waste exemplifies in a sometimes very detailed and revealing way the interrelatedness of (1) prosperity level, (2) amount of social conflict as a reflection of social stratification and the (3) focus of discourse oscillating between quality and immorality. This will first be exemplified by summing up the ideas of Rau and Roscher as political economists and the ideas of important social theorists of the 19th century like Spencer, Durkheim and Sombart as well. Additionally Veblen’s idea of a leisure class is used as another reference point for interpreting the way economic welfare was displayed during the 20th century. The sphere of luxury appears like a prime example for metamorphoses and as a good example for illustrating the rules of social dynamics in societies that cannot dispose scarcity at once and for all. Hence luxury is another affirmation for an interesting sociological observation: The fact that social systems cannot be controlled does not mean that they cannot be managed.

Manfred Prisching: The luxurious society of missed options

Empirical studies tell us that satisfaction and happiness of individuals do not increase in correlation to social product and income. A luxurious society, compared to simple societies, creates satisfaction, but beyond a certain threshold of per capita income there are only limited improvements for the level of satisfaction. Modern consumer society therefore has a low "productivity of satisfaction." This is a surprising fact if either we trust rational utilitarian theories or look at the relatively disastrous history of mankind as a comparison for security and wealth in our times. We can, of course, rely on the humble folk wisdom: Money does not buy happiness. But there are some arguments provided by modern time diagnostic studies, which can push the analysis a step further. There is a consumerist mechanism of disappointment production: the model of a "society of missed options."

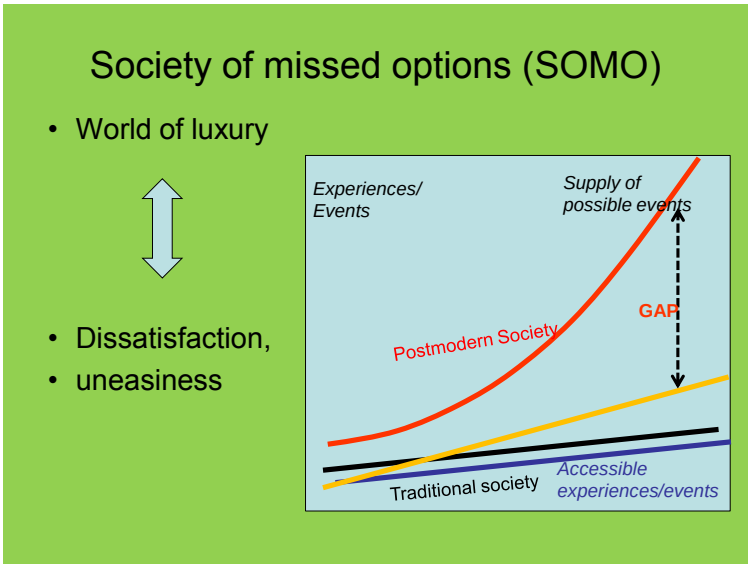
Elements of a late-modern society

- *Multi-optional society*: The society of late modernity has cancelled most arguments which have provided a sense of life in earlier societies. It considers itself to be a "world of choice." The principle of the maximization of options means that, if possible, much or even everything should be eligible or selectable by the individuals' discretion, and therefore we should get rid of any validities which cannot be circumvented or suspended. Nothing must be generally acceptable. Everything can be challenged. In this case, individuals demand that all possibilities should be increased, and the sense of life can be found in the personal exhaustion of all imaginable experiences.
- *Increase program*: The diversity of options has to be increased, but also the intensity of experiences should be boosted. The project of unlimited growth, however, is confronted with the problem of "banalification": One gets used to all achievements after a short time. Moreover, there is the "saturation problem": Even the mere maintenance of a certain stimulus-level requires an increased dosage of all experiences; but modernity promises even more, and therefore intensification, surpassing, sensation are needed.
- *Productive discontent*: Markets cannot work with satisfied people. They need to raise discontent in order to be able to satisfy it. Therefore, individuals must be trained to strive towards infinity. Any goal attained becomes a matter of course, any accomplishment must be assessed as being inadequate and requiring its surpassing. The principle of infinity generates the powerful dynamics of the system, but it also needs individuals who are accordingly disposed (and that means "dissatisfied people").
- *Disorientation*: Given the loss of all traditional virtues and values, there are no standards for "good life" in the traditional sense, and people are inclined to adapt to the promises of consumer society.

The theory of the falling rate of exhaustion

- *The increased availability of options*: Multi-optional society (or: the European market society) has been extraordinarily successful. It has created a luxurious world that is incomparable in a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. In fact, options have "exploded". For the inhabitants of the rich countries, everything seems possible, and the scale is open to the top. Further economic growth expands the repertory of consumption.
- *The stagnating utilization of options*: In simple societies, the vast majority of available options could be used. But human time and energy are limited, so the possibility of the utilization of options is limited. Even if one takes into account that there are increases in the efficiency of time usage (for example by acceleration, multiple usage, reduction of "changing times"), the rise of practicable demand is modest compared to the increasing supply.

- *Quantitative reductions*: There was a way out for the traditional usage of options; what could not be experienced in this world would be accessible later, in the afterlife or in heaven. Eternal life has always been understood as a resource compensation for sufferings, deprivations and sacrifices in lifetime. Therefore, it was also an arena for deferred consumption. The loss of the belief in eternity in the course of the European secularization process is a serious blow to this idea. All subsequent compensations, after death, will not occur, and one has to rely on lifetime to exhaust all options. Space for experiences has been severely restricted.
- *Qualitative deficits*: Advertising presents a happy, euphoric state of life. What else should it show? But it is an exaggerated, distorted and unrealistic world, enhanced by other television presentations, and people are increasingly influenced by these images (and they are experiencing this world in a more intensive manner). Therefore, the illusionary world is setting the standards for expectations. However, even under conditions of prosperity euphoric conditions are rare (and at least for biological reasons one cannot live permanently with a high adrenaline level). But the starting point renders actual experiences disappointing, and as one can only use a very few options, given the quantity and variety of supply, one cannot suppress the suspicion that one is always in the wrong place or that one has chosen the wrong option. The "real" experience is missed, it must happen anywhere.



The growing gap

The whole story results in a dilemma. The supply of options is running away from the chances to use them.

- It is the meaning of life to exhaust all options, but actually one can only experience an ever smaller percentage of available options.
- While the range of options explodes, the expectation values for the future are shrinking, partly because of the shortening of life time. Therefore, the rate of utilization of options seems to disappear completely.
- Considering the few options that could be experienced, the suspicion grows that the wrong options have been chosen - because one is very much below the expectations of sheer happiness that have been connected with these options.
- For each individual the feeling remains that he is being deceived. He passes through a life full of omissions, failures and deficits. The richer the society becomes, the more the impression is reinforced that it is a "society of missed options."

CONFERENCE ON CONSUMPTION, CONSUMER, CULTURE AND SOCIETY
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Pekka Sulkunen:

THE CONSUMER SOCIETY AND ITS CRITICS

In everyday language the term ‘consumer society’ is used with admiring as well as disparaging overtones, referring to affluence and well-being but also to waste, bad taste and useless pleasures. In theoretical social science the concept has suffered from ill fame. It has an air of ideological complacency. It depicts consumers as people with common uniform interests rather than as conflicting classes. It hints at general affluence and suggests that consumption is the most important content of life and support of group-sense, but does not account for inequalities and other determinants of social structure, notably production and the labour market. On the other hand, consumer society has been the object of moral, economic and political condemnation for giving priority to material values at the expense of spiritual, cultural, social and environmental interests. This paper reviews two critical traditions on assessing the consumer society, rationalistic or Matlhusian and romantic. It will be argued that both critical traditions articulate in their own ways the ambivalence of agency in advanced capitalist societies. The figure of the emancipated consumer is a paramount ideal image of agency

The cultural consequences of the orientalization of brands

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Globalisation is often viewed as the gradual infusion of occidental values in the whole world, brands playing a major role in this process as the ideas of mcdoldanization, dysneyisation or ikeaisation account for.

This paper will defend a counter perspective and tackle the issue of a possible orientalization of brands and brand management practices. This work is largely based on the assumption largely developed by Colin Campbell in its *Easternization of the West. A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era* (Yale Cultural Sociology, 2008) that is the civilization of the West is undergoing a revolutionary process of change, one in which features that have characterized the West for two thousand years are in the process of being marginalized, to be replaced by those more often associated with the civilizations of the East.□□ Campbell assembles a powerful range of evidence to show how "Easternization" has been building throughout the last century, especially since the 1960s. Campbell demonstrates how it was largely in the 1960s that new interpretations in theology, political thought, and science were widely adopted by a new generation of young "culture carriers".

What are the consequences of this easternization of the West for branding ideologies and practices ? This orientalization questions the occidental framework of branding based on the three main functions which organize any Indo-European societies according to the French anthropologist Dumézil (1968). Whereas occidental brands seem to lose their *sovereignty* function, and may have focussed too much on the *warrior* function (which is the essence of marketing), it may now be time to envisage the importance of the *reproduction* function. Therefore, a cultural frame will be proposed based on the seminal work of the French philosopher François Jullien. It will be showed that this orientalization of brands and brand management practices questions such occidental assumptions as “efficacy”, “teleology”, “causality”, and the “spectacularization of branding effects” in a Promethean paradigm and brings new ideas and concepts (“efficency”, “propensity”, “blandness”) which might prove fruitful to envisage the future of cultural branding.

Olga Kravets
Prepared for the workshop
"Different Perspectives on Consumption, Consumer, Culture and Society"

Consumption and Ordering: A Materiality Perspective

The call for the workshop is a nice attempt at ordering the field of consumption studies and the discussions within. This exercise is of an interest to me because in my work I am concerned with ordering processes inherent in consumption. That is, I am interested in how consumption is ordered by ideologies, structures and institutions, and itself is implicated in ordering of different kinds (socio-cultural, political-economic and phenomenological) and at different levels (societal, communal and personal).

More specifically, I am concerned with the materiality of ordering, where "materiality" is artefacts in their multiple material forms, properties & characteristics of artefacts and networks/arrangements that accomplish these artefacts (Miller ed. 2005; Spyer ed. 1998; Alaimo & Hekman, eds. 2008). Some of the questions that I tackle in my work are: How the materiality of consumption is used to deliver ideologies (e.g., particular moral and political moral sensibilities) from public into the private spheres of living, and thereby to structure daily practices and to discipline selves. How the materiality of consumption preserves certain political, cultural, moral, etc. values, ideas and ideals in the face of dramatic transformations, and thus perpetuates some social and state structures, even when they become problematic or (formally) disappear. How a business (for example, through material aspects of branding) reinforces and reproduces, at times constructs anew, architectures of social exclusion. How consumers individually and in-groups utilize material properties & characteristics of artefacts to secure ones' own place in a social hierarchy and organize others in the marketplace (consumers & companies) in line with their preferred moral-symbolic order, to the point of engaging in violence not always of a symbolic kind.

Overall, in consumption studies, the materiality of consumption (as defined above) tends to be eclipsed by the focus on meanings and signification. By interrogating the meanings of consumption artefacts and practices, consumer researchers uncovered and examined how consumption is implicated in the workings of modern society and the power dynamics, identity politics and technologies of self, etc. (see e.g., Thompson & Arnould 2005 for an overview). Still, given that signification always involves a process of objectification (material per*form*ances), I'd argue that to engage fully and productively with societal consequences of consumption and cultural specificity of consumption, we need to bring the notion of materiality into a more explicit and dynamic relationships with signification (Miller 2005; Keane 2003).

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"Beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction."
Aristotle

Escaping Beauty through moral narratives
"Post-postmodern" sense making

RESEARCH FOCUS:
This is a study of how sense making about the notion of beauty is constructed and negotiated in a group of young females between 24 and 26 years old.
From the data produced the objective is to discuss and elaborate on the concept of a post-postmodern condition, with the Brand Dove as an example of a Brand acting as a Citizen-Artist (Holt 2002).

BACKGROUND:
The concept of beauty can be characterized as a dynamic cultural concept that is permanently subjected to interpretations, ideological influences from market-mediated systems and interpretations in the context of consumption culture. In consumer research the connection between identity construction and consumption of beauty symbols and images is well-known. (Cf. Thompson and Hirschman 1995, Askegaard et. al. 2002, Hirschman and Stern 2000, Jantzen, Østergaard and Vieira 2006, Amy-Chinn, Jantzen and Østergaard 2006). This debate is also present as to how global mass-mediated consumer culture is influencing local sense making about beauty. (Rokka, Desavelle and Mikkonen 2008).
In the public media there is an ongoing debate on how the media and advertising- generated image of what beauty influences the individual - especially by shaping identity Icons for girls during adolescence.
As something relatively new, the cosmetics industry, in the form of Unilever's Dove Brand, in 2004-2005 interfered in this debate with the theme: Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty", and the message "Real women have real curves". They here question whether the ideal of beauty that the beauty industry propagates is healthy and real, and the Dove answer is no. In their advertising Dove goes against what might be called the beauty industry beauty ideology, and the campaign has taken a step further by establishing the Dove Self-Esteem Fund and a program for Aesthetics and Well-Being at the Harvard University.

Research Questions
Given my research focus I formulated 3 research questions:
1) What are the shared cultural meanings that underlie the understandings expressed about beauty and the opposite? (C.f. Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1994)

2) What kind of narrative structures is produced in the interpretation of what personal beauty and the reverse means. What distinctions, discourses and thought styles is activated and how does these influence the self-understanding of the young women? (C.f. Thompson, Hirschman, 1995).

3) How is the Dove Brand perceived as a cultural resource (C.f. Holt 2002 s. 87).
What is the young women's attitude towards a brand that is using anti commercial/anti branding themes and narratives to go to market?

I will give a short presentation of my findings at the workshop.
Kind regards
Erik Sloth
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Societing: A Manifesto for a Progressive Marketing?

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The economic and social model that we have lived with for the last two decades, is in deep crisis. Its most important component, the global financial system has run into a massive quagmire that current measures are unlikely solve. At the same time we are about to be hit by an ecological crisis without precedent. We are seeing a widening gap between the new kinds of needs and desires that are generated by a growing environmental and social consciousness, and the limited potential of the exiting model to meet such needs in any rational and sustained way. In the long run, energy systems, transport systems and food systems need to be re-built, but existing economic systems appear limited in their ability to address these problems.

Yet, marketing together with many, if not all of the managerial sciences, remains locked into a consumerist paradigm- largely erected in the 1930s to counter *that* economic crisis- with little or no future. At the most, radical academics and exponents of 'Critical Marketing' envision a progressive agenda for marketing as that of promoting 1980s-sylte identity politics. However, there is a widespread recognition, within the growing social entrepreneurship movement that business can be a progressive force for systemic transition. And there is no reason why marketing could not be reconfigured in this way as well.

Departing form the concept of societing (Cova,et al , 1993), from recent debates about peer-to-peer, social production, Open Design and Open Manufacturing, and form my own work on the Ethical Economy, this paper seeks to online an agenda for a progressive marketing practice able to face the challenges of systemic transition. It examines how marketing can contribute to furthering this goal, while at the same time realizing the kinds of market expansion that will permit continued economic growth.

RE-THINKNIG SOCIAL MARKETING

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Abstract

Social marketing, as it is theorized and practiced today, is not very useful for studying and developing intervention programs for complex social problems because it fails, to considerable degree, pay attention to the cultural and social dynamics of marketplace activity. It particularly ignores the complex relations of (discursive) power that constitute the conditions of possibility for subjectivity and agency in the markets.

In this paper, we set out to re-think social marketing in the context of social problems that involve a complex cultural and social dynamic (such as global warming and climate change).

We draw from the literature on postmodern marketing (Firat 2001a, b; Firat and Dholakia 2006; Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995; Firat and Shultz 1997; Firat and Venkatesh 1995); recent discussions on the service dominant logic of marketing (Lusch and Vargo 2006; Peñaloza and Venkatesh 2006; Vargo and Lusch 2004); and the critical pedagogy of Paolo Freire (Freire 2000, 2005) to build a service oriented framework for social marketing. We argue that this approach to social marketing is better suited for dealing with complex social problems such as the climate change.

More specifically, we first discuss how and why the current 'theory' of social marketing needs to be revised both at the level of philosophical background assumptions and at the level of theoretical constructs and conceptual tools. We argue, there is a need to rethink (redefine) the prevalent conceptualizations of value creation and market exchange in social marketing, as well as the conceptualizations of the consumer (consumer agency and subjectivity) as the target of social marketing

Then we set out to develop and elaborate on a cultural, "service centered" (Vargo and Lusch 2004)/postmodern (Firat and Dholakia 2006) approach to social marketing. In this line of thinking, social marketing is about empowering consumer-customers. It is about creating value propositions (Vargo and Lusch 2004: 3), and mobilizing intangible resources and relationships through which value, or offerings that render services, is co-created in the market. In other words, marketing is thus a *continuous learning process*. So, drawing from the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Freire 2000, 2005) our aim is to theorize (and maybe empirically elaborate on?) the nature of these learning processes that service centered marketing entails?

The intended contribution of the paper is threefold.

First, we extend the theorizing of Vargo and Lusch (Vargo and Lusch 2004) on “service dominant logic” to the domain of social marketing, and contribute to a better understanding of the practices and processes of learning through which value is created in the marketplace.

Second, we continue and draw on the early critical discussions on the societal role and consequences of marketing, which revolved around social marketing in the early 70s (Dawson 1971; Kelley 1971; Lazer and Kelley 1973). More specifically, we thus advance the research and discussion on *the ethical dimensions and societal role of marketing* (i.e. the critical/societal approach to social marketing), which is based on a premise that social marketing is not only a managerial technique or function. It rather refers to “the study of markets and marketing activities within a total social system” (Lazer and Kelley 1973: 4).

Third, we also continue and draw on the work of some contemporary scholars who have recently called for the broadening of the perspective of social marketing. It needs to “encompass not just individual behavior but also the social and physical determinants of that behavior…[T]his broadening still involves behavior change, but among those who make policy and legislative decision on behalf of groups, corporations, governments, as well as individual citizens.” (Hastings and Donovan 2002)

In sum, our paper develops or works toward a “new” theoretical approach to social marketing and illustrates how it can help us to gain a better understanding of the social and cultural complexity of social problems and human behavior. We want to develop an approach to social marketing that accounts for the cultural complexity of social problems and pro-social consumer behavior, particularly for the different cultural processes and practices through which the conditions of possibility for agency and subjectivity as a “pro-social consumer” are constituted in the market.

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Consumers or people? Some introspective notes

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I have a strong ambivalence towards the term consumer.

On the one hand, the term has use value. When I describe myself as a consumer researcher, people understand what I'm talking about. The term provides a basis for professional identification and is institutionalized in a variety of associations, conferences, publications, courses, intra-departmental groups, etc. In my personal and professional identity project, I decided to be a consumer researcher – and one interested in the social and cultural aspects of consumption – because I desired the academic legitimacy to study relevant issues without immediate concern for narrowly defined managerial implications. In a sense, then, being a consumer researcher has provided me with a subject position I can inhabit very comfortably. I can be an intellectual and carry out research of broad social relevance without being stigmatized for doing so by unsympathetic colleagues.

On the other hand, I often resist the term consumer and I am sometimes apologetic when I have to use it. In my courses, I feel the need to tell my students that "consumers" is marketing jargon for people or individuals. In my recent research projects on the consumption of spiritual experiences, my informants are often surprised that a professor from a recognized business academic institution is interested in such a subject. More importantly, they do not often like the idea of their practices being referred to as "spiritual consumption" or "consumption of spiritual experiences". What they do, in their emic perspective, is something completely different from, and irreducible to, consumption. Paradoxically, they are keener to accept ideas of "marketing of spiritual practices", which while not without inherent tensions (i.e., sacred and profane do not mix well together), refer to a body of knowledge of recognizable pragmatic utility (provided that excessive and obsessive profit maximization is taken out from the picture).

I am therefore finding myself caught in an epistemologically difficult position. I am part of the sort of disciplinary colonialism that put consumer researchers to redefine social and cultural phenomena as consumption. And at the same time those same phenomena that we can interpret from our etic standpoint as consumption are not consumption in the eyes of the ~~consumers~~ people that adopt them.