

**Miller, Daniel. 2012. *Consumption and Its Consequences*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press. x + 205. Pb.: £15.99 / €18.30. ISBN: 9780745661087**

Studying consumption has been neglected in humanistic studies mainly because of the belief that it is simply not worthy of being taken seriously since it is a part of everyday life, mainly connected with women's work, and also because of the fact that consumption has always been considered immoral in comparison with production. This book represents a significant contribution to the anthropological analysis while turning away from the aforementioned biases and raises the basic questions: what is consumption and why do we consume? The book reveals the clear fact that the answer to this question is considerably complex, ambiguous and offers a profound way of challenging what we know about consumption. This is of fundamental importance, since consumption currently potentially represents one of the main causes for the annihilation of our planet. The author shows that consumption has a poor direct relation with the planetary environment but is strongly connected with the production and distribution of the global economic system.

Miller's theoretical point of view is that consumption is 'not just buying things', but is strongly connected with 'the way we subsequently transformed the goods that we had purchased – a much more active process' (p. 64) while noting a key finding that if you truly want to understand shopping, you need to engage with people while they shop, and you also have to get to know them in their domestic environment. Importantly, Miller examines everyday household provisioning and tries to understand how shopping is used as a technology for expression and the establishment of love within households to which he applies his main argument that goods become our expression of core relationships with people closest to us, such as relatives and friends. 'Shopping as a sacrifice is not experienced as a religious rite, but it is saturated with the devotion we associate with love' (p. 85) for those around us whom we care the most for, and it is not merely an act of duty.

Motivated by the argument that 'social relations are the primary cause of consumption' (p. 184), this book strives to resist complying with an overly simplistic understanding of the left-wing critics who believe that 'consumption is largely fostered by advertising and demand is created by commerce' while goods 'contribute to practices of status emulation, which in turn can be related back to capitalism's other consequence in fostering of class and social inequality' (p. 182). The author is mainly focused on providing us with insight into how people actually struggle to become ordinary, which is successfully portrayed in the chapter about the common wearing of blue jeans.

Miller tends to explore the question of how the cosmological ideas are manifested through the order of things, such as the celebration of Christmas, where he examines the local symbol systems based on the divisions of ethnicity, class and gender. He questions the common belief that Christmas has entirely lost its religious origins while being devoted to consumption needs and provides evidence based on his fieldwork in Britain and Trinidad that Christmas has actually been re-connected with the transcendent through the deep association with materialism 'not because it is an expression of materialism, but rather because it has been recast as a festival for the suppression of the antisocial aspects of modern materialism' (p. 61). Miller adopts a view that opposes the dominant arguments, which dismiss consumption as a loss of authentic culture from the early times.

While performing fieldwork in Trinidad, Miller discovers that Coca-Cola had to adapt to the specific concept of what it means to be a contemporary Trinidadian and questions the general opinion that US cultural imperialism causes losing cultural specificity. 'The more consumer culture grew in Trinidad, the more values and the logic of cosmology were objectified in material things rather thorough categories of people' and 'objects took over something of this burden as the idiom of objectification' (p. 51).

What genuinely attracts readers is Miller's style of providing arguments through a dialogue between three fictional characters that are constantly in dispute with each other in the first and the last chapters of the book. In this way, the author manages to include some of the most notable findings from the field of consumption studies into the text in a sophisticated and more accessible way. While he deserves praise for his tendency to write in an accessible manner, it has to be acknowledged that he does not succeed completely, as only well-educated readers will be able to follow his writing.

Mike is an environmentalist and a supporter of the green economy who would like to see consumption downsized; Chris is a sociologist, deeply concerned about welfare; and Grace is a Filipino anthropologist who strongly feels that consumption should increase because she comprehends consumption in the context of basic services, such as health and educational systems, and thinks that extra-consumption is not going to be derived from the provision of these basic services, which the world today regards as basic human rights, justice and equality. Grace also disagrees with the opinion that reduction of consumption is beneficial for people but she does feel that it is beneficial for the planet since almost everything people should give up can directly benefit the human welfare and is imperative for the reduction of poverty and inequality.

With the help of these characters, the author conveys disagreement with the premise of 'the greens' that consumption is connected to materialism and thus gives them a moral ground for condemning consumption with the intention of saving the planet. Miller agrees that by purchasing eco-products, one cannot buy in a rational and economical manner that would save money, since ethical shopping is more expensive than purchasing regular goods. The reason consumers do not buy ethically is not because they are 'hedonistic, individualistic and materialistic, but precisely the opposite', 'because they are thrifty and moral' (p. 89). More importantly, this argument questions the popular representations of consumption as wasteful, immoral and hedonistic.

Miller's book is undoubtedly a tremendously valuable contribution to establishing the understanding of consumption as one of the central interests of contemporary anthropological studies, which deserves a more comprehensive exposure. Since the majority of the chapters are a summary of Miller's previously published works in which he explains basic theoretical ideas about consumption, this engaging book will not represent any radical new findings for his regular readers; however, it is a suitable start for readers who are just getting to know him. They can find all the basic findings from his opus of published works summarized here. Furthermore, this book proposes an intriguing framework for a starting point for our engagement in understanding the most significant current problems connected with climate changes, pollution and consumption.

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