

CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR VOLUME 20

CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

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INTRODUCTION – CONSUMER CULTURE FAIRY TALES

Domen Bajde, Dannie Kjeldgaard and Russell W. Belk

This volume presents a selection of competitive papers submitted to the 13th Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) Conference held in Odense, Denmark, June 28 to July 1. This year's conference witnessed a very strong set of submissions. Despite being persistently interrupted by quothful ravens, we managed to select a dozen papers to feature in this volume. Given the conference's thematic emphasis on storytelling we aimed to select chapters that would tell stories that open our eyes and minds to new ideas, theories, and contexts.

The papers selected for this volume are presented along three narrative lines that were prevalent during the conference, and which to some extent also reflect the tradition of CCT inspired research in Odense. The first thematic part, *Objects and Their Doings*, reflects a research theme in CCT and elsewhere, that has developed over the last decade or so, namely, research on materiality and object agency informed by the traditions such as Actor-network theory, assemblage theory, and post-humanist perspectives.

We open this part with a chapter on ritual doings. Borraz investigates a romantic ritual in which material objects and sites (i.e., locks, bridges, and railings) play a central role. His study of love-lock pilgrimage unravels how love becomes enacted as a sacred and enduring reality through variable, yet patterned and loosely scripted assemblages of mythology, materiality, and performance. The second chapter in this part by Walther, investigates erotic consumption cycles as co-constituted by subjects and objects, exploring the agency of objects upon the consumption subject and vice versa. Furthermore, Walther explores how erotic products change meaning and agency through the consumption cycle through repurposing and personification. This is followed by Syrjälä and Norrgrann's chapter, which investigates the distribution and fluctuation of agency across the multiple actants that enact the home. Rather than providing a (yet another) demonstration of the agency of objects, the authors investigate the ways in which

agency is shared among human and non-human entities (i.e., objects and pets), and the manner in which the power of these actants oscillates. While the final chapter of the part, authored by Abdelrahman, Banister, and Hampson, does not explicitly focus on object agency and power, it does touch upon the power, and the vulnerability, of objects. Namely, the authors stress that the power, and the “need,” of historic objects to compel people to care for them, are greater than previously recognized. Their study of vintage traders explains why and how people become guardians of historic objects that are not their family heirlooms. The chapter, thereby, nicely complements the previous two chapters in this part by unpacking the human commitment and work required for (social) preservation of objects.

The second theme reflects a well-established research domain in CCT: *Glocalization*. This rather broad umbrella contains both interests in consumer acculturation theory, markets with emergent consumer cultures, and West–rest interactions at the intersection of global flows and local contexts.

The first chapter in this part by Zouaoui and Smaoui is a classic glocalization theme, the cultural appropriation of globalizing Western forms of consumer culture. In this case, how the concept of cool is given meaning in a Tunisian context. Here “cool” is associated with, for example, lightness, fun, and humor, as opposed to the Western conceptions of cool as being about, for example, creativity and individuality. The second chapter by Pradhan, Cocker, and Hogg, reflects another glocalization classic namely ethnic identification in a migrant context. Exploring middle-class Hindu second-generation British Indian women’s use of various cultural resources for ethnic identification, the authors use a Bourdieusian lens to show that ethnic identification is also a matter of accumulation of capital and power vis-à-vis other ethnic groups and the white majority group. The last chapter by Mwangi, Cocker, and Piacentini sets the scene for the later part on market constitution. Drawing on social representation theory and the notion of cognitive polyphasia, the chapter explores delegitimation practices of illicit alcohol in a Kenyan context. Specifically, how mixes of traditional and contemporary knowledge systems are mobilized in a cultural change process. While not decidedly positioned as a glocalization story, the chapter’s use of a context in which several knowledge systems operate and interact demonstrates the benefit of empirical studies in contexts less studied in our field for new theorization.

The third part, *Constituting Markets*, reflects an interest in the CCT tradition in looking at markets and their subjects and objects from what might loosely be labeled a social constructivist approach. That is, an interest in how market constellations and relations come into being and the cultural outcomes of market(ing) activities.

The first chapter in this part, written by Schwarzkopf investigates a curious example of market (knowledge) construction. Namely, it investigates the hybrid, socio-technical assemblage of market-research test towns, and the subsequent work of purification and fetishizing through which a nationally “representative” town and the “average” consumer come into existence. Whereas, Schwarzkopf’s study invites CCT researchers to explore market testing as a

cultural, socio-technical performance, the second chapter in this part invites us to consider performances through which market relationships and arrangements become humanized. Ottelewski, Gollnhofer, and Schouten outline how in the context of alternative elderly care systems consumers move beyond transactional relationships, engage in shared consumption experiences, and reinforce social bonds through giving. These strategies of humanization enable the elderly and their caretakers to build extended family relationships within a market system. The chapter by Gurova explores how a prolific contemporary political theme, namely patriotism, is articulated and perpetuated by consumer cultural intermediaries in Russia. Using a governmentality perspective, Gurova demonstrates how fashion designers' interpretation of patriotism is generative of and manifest in a number of more specific patriotic themes. The final chapter on constituting markets by Galalae, Emontspool, and Omidvar explores how contemporary consumer culture festivals as examples of retail spaces are generative of field-specific forms of cultural capital. Engagement with marketplace cultures through a range of practices, such as food festivals, is hence constitutive of new and emergent fields of power and statuses through producer-consumer interaction and hence generative of new market dynamics.

Finally, the volume concludes with a chapter by Brown who takes a critical look at the quality of storytelling in the CCT tradition, and pointedly questions the ease with which we (dare to) claim kinship with great storytellers of past. Should we persist in this act of self-delusion, then let us at least replace Andersen with Poe, a poet our "adolescent, self-harm-prone subdiscipline that's struggling to find itself and make its way in the world" can learn so much from. The paper also won the Per Østergaard award for the most philosophically inspiring paper, an honor befitting Brown's punchy, testy, and jesty performance.

Looking at the chosen dozen, we propose that the chapters are not only diverse in their choice of theoretical approaches and research contexts, but also in terms of engaging with dialogues in disciplines adjacent to the CCT field. As attested by several special sessions and roundtables at the 2018 CCT conference that directly engaged with anthropological, sociological, markets studies, and other research communities, openness and diversity are the best recipe to keep CCT relevant and fun. Finally, as attested by unnamed chapters in this volume, and this introduction in particular, most of us have indeed a long way to go, as far as good storytelling and poetic expression goes.