



Modernity and Consumption

Antonio L. Rappa

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What does it mean to be a consumer in the early-21st century? How do our public choices determine identity and behaviour? Have we ironically become slaves to our own consumption preferences? While the Enlightenment theorists exposed the philosophical weaknesses of theology and the spuriousness of metaphysics, their work leaves little room for theoretical manoeuvres, and even less space for understanding consumption today. Rejecting Habermas' polemics in "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" (1991) as an incidental "moment" in the tradition of Western philosophy, Antonio L. Rappa offers an examination of modernity and consumption with a non-Marxist, modernity-Resistance-theoretical frame (mRf) that draws on the work of William E. Connolly, Gianni Vattimo, Stephen K. White, Theresa Brennan and Wendy Brown. Late modernity - the experience and consciousness of global and technological transformation today - is not about the fusion of "public and private" spaces but about the deep penetration of private space by public space to the extent that private space becomes conditional, and decrepit. The "private" has ironically become contingent on the "public". Decisions about what to consume no longer represent the conscious choices of private, interest-seeking, and wealth-maximizing individuals but are instead cultural symbols and social signs of the political markers of late modernity that are grounded in foundational fantasies accruing to the family and education, public rhetoric and personal narrative, and reconstructions of public space.

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