



The advertising of things: an analysis of consumption and advertising in the socialist Czechoslovakia (1968 - 1989)

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Abstract

This research analyzes product advertisements in Czechoslovakia between 1968 and 1989 - from the event of the Prague Spring in 1968 until 1973, and then from 1985, the beginning of the Gorbachev Era, until the end of the socialist regime in 1989. We sought to understand by which means the consumption of certain products, mainly household objects, appeared in the media of a society supposedly averse to consumption itself. The social space of the advertisements is taken as central to the understanding of the ambiguities in the relationship between consumption and a socialist state. Other topics appeared to be central on the documents: the construction of a Czechoslovak and socialist domesticity; the perceptions of gender roles and the mobilization of temporality.

Key words:

Consumption, Material Culture, Czechoslovakia.

Introduction

Consumption as one of the major topics of discussion in Soviet socialism is present as problematic in important anthropological works on the matter (Verdery, 1996). This research, through the analysis of advertisements from the Czechoslovak women's magazine *Vlasta*, aims to investigate what kind of debate is covered in these market articles, starting by the notion that they permeate issues such as the relationship between the socialist state and consumption and the perception of gender the advertisements carry within them.

Results and Discussion

We cataloged the documents according to the date of their publications and in relation to the theme mobilized by them. We divided the documents into three topics: (a) materiality and technologies; (b) gender and (c) temporality and modernity.

Within the first one, we have articles that deal with technological innovations regarding the domestic environment, concentrated mainly in the category of household appliances. The most common discussion is about the role performed by the socialist State in the development and production of domestic technologies for them to be available for consumption. Advertisements seem to serve as creators of the mechanisms that build a domesticity based on these objects.

The second (b) raises the debate on the discussion of gender oppression in socialism, as observed in other works (Oates-Indruchová, 2012; Porket, 1981; Zachmann, 2002). In those articles we see the materialization of one of the solutions to the question, which would be presented with the mechanization of the domestic work. Most of the images of home appliances are accompanied by the female figure, showing an intimate relationship between them, as seen in the images below.

The latter (c) mobilizes concepts such as modernity and temporal notions in the construction of domesticity, through which the mobilization of domestic material is what allows the thinking about the 21st century.



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3

Conclusions

In conjunction with the initial objectives of this research, the advertisements showed an analytical universe that unifies debates such as the relation between consumption, gender roles and the role of the socialist State, as well as the elaboration of a socialist domesticity. Nevertheless, the mobilization of temporal concepts was surprising and equally interesting to think about the construction of the materiality together with notions of temporality.

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