

Radical Consumption in Contemporary Culture



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The increasingly conspicuous problems of contemporary consumerism (particularly social exploitation and environmental destruction) combined with the ever-expanding niche markets of neoliberal consumer capitalism have led, in recent years, to a skein of 'alternative' consumer practices. Ethical consumption, fair trade, consumer protests, brand backlashes, green goods, boycotts and downshifting: these are all now familiar consumer activities - and in some cases, are almost mainstream. This book suggests we can understand this phenomenon as an expanding field of 'radical consumption': for this is a world in which we are increasingly encouraged to shop for change. By examining their practices, precedents and politics, this book asks: just how radical are these forms of 'radical consumption'? It argues that we need a more expansive vocabulary and to open up approaches of enquiry in order to understand the area's many contradictions, strengths and weaknesses. "Radical Consumption" therefore draws on a number of contemporary theories, terms and debates in media and cultural studies, including cosmopolitanism, reflexivity, cultural economies and ethics. By doing so, it raises a number of questions, including: Is ethical consumption merely a sop for the middle classes? Can such forms of consumption ever move beyond their niche market status to become an effective political force? Should we understand corporate social responsibility as a form of consumer-oriented greenwash? And can we really buy our way to a better, more equitable or sustainable future? "Radical Consumption" takes a multifaceted, interdisciplinary approach to examining contemporary radical consumption, analysing its possibilities and problems, mobile moralities, methods of mediation and its connections to wider cultural formations of production and politics.

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