4. Strategies

4.5 Sociology of cultural consumption

by Jacinto M. Porro Gutiérrez

Consumption is a social phenomenon whose importance lies on its symbolic and significant character and on its instrument for expressing and building identity. Consumption, differentiation, and social distinction. Cultural consumption: fragmentation, identity, and individualisation. Cultural consumption, eclecticism, and omnivorousness.

. . . .

1. Consumption as a social phenomenon

Consumption is a permanent and fixed condition of life, as well as an inalienable aspect of it. It is not linked to the period or history as it is an essential function for the biological survival that human beings share with the rest of living beings. However, consumption transcends the limits of the physical survival; it goes beyond the quest of survival, overcoming the idea of a set of activities aimed at meeting our needs.

In contemporary societies, consumption is a daily practice and activity in which we are immersed most part of the day and of our existence: it has become an essential part of our social activity. Unquestionably, consumption should be addressed as a social phenomenon and a way of social relationship, intrinsically linked to the ways of social production and reproduction of the advanced modernity. As a result, it is not only an individual attribute but mainly a practice of social nature.

Also, consumption is the recipient of many economic, temporary, and emotional resources, and it aims not only to meet needs but to interact with others. It is therefore a social activity taking time and energy and contains our dreams of need and desire satisfaction (Bauman, 2005:43).

In sum, consumption should be confronted as a transcendent and multidimensional social phenomenon whose presence and influence on our contemporary societies is so relevant that reaches the creation and structure of our individual and collective identities and that influences and makes up the relational ways of expression (Alonso, 2005:30).

As Bauman said, consumption has become so important in our contemporary societies that it can be considered that, beyond consumption activities and the fundamental aspects related to them (such as production, warehousing, distribution, or the elimination of consumption objects), we have moved from a consumption phenomenon to *consumerism*, meaning a new change with respect to previous societies. As Bauman explained by quoting Campbell (2004), *consumerism* takes place when consumption is the central axis of the life of most people, something like the purpose of their existence, so our capacity to want, to desire and to yearn, and particularly the capacity to feel such emotions frequently and repeatedly is the basis of all the economy of human relations (Bauman 2007:43-44).

2. How we face the consumption phenomenon from sociology

Social transformations leading to modernity and the phenomena related to such transformations have been studied by sociology. Consumption is among those phenomena, it is a characteristic of modernity that survives and is more and more complex in contemporary societies, thus becoming an object of interest of the sociological work because of its origins, its consequences, and the central place acquired in modern societies and western capitalists.

Regarding the consumption study, sociology has been a discipline that, being showed as a traditional approach of the consumption study (constructing it as a strictly economic phenomenon), was very old-fashioned due to its reductionism and the limited validity to explain such a big and complex social phenomenon as consumption is.

The economic approach explained consumption mainly from considering the priority of the rational choice of individuals to consume goods and objects, and it looks for the utmost usefulness in a context with limited resources forcing to define a priority order in the consumption of goods to obtain the maximum satisfaction (García, 2009: 22). Sociology is not aimed at suggesting that economic factors are not important, but the utilitarian dimension only deals with an aspect of the consumption phenomenon whose complexity repeatedly requires to study social and cultural aspects. In this sense, the economic dimension of consumption cannot hide the importance of social and cultural dimensions, as well as their influence on the various ways of consumption. The sociological work has been mainly focused on one of the consumption dimensions, the symbolic dimension, and L.E. Alonso concluded by saying that the main goal of a sociology of real consumptionhas always been the study of buying and use practices of goods as social facts, that is, as a collective production, facts outside individuals but included in their actions, without forgetting their economic functions or the context of commercial exchange in which they are produced (Alonso, 2005:2).

The classic sociological perspective of consumption study identifies consumption as the relevant social practice and process of the expression and construction of identity and of the ways of social relation of individuals, so it is focused on studying its symbolic and significant character (López de Ayala, 2004: 161). From sociology, consumption is consequently thought to be tackled as a social process implying cultural symbols and signs, and not as a simple economic and utilitarian process. We insist that the importance of economic factors is not forgotten or minimised, but we are mainly interested in the social and cultural aspects of consumption from sociology, because, among other issues, and this is fundamental, consumption depends more on wanting than on needing (Bocock, 1993: 13-14).

3. Approach to consumption as a social phenomenon*

Consumption, differentiation and social distinction

The most important antecedents of the sociology of consumption, as another sociological speciality, are found in the work of authors who lived and analysed the social reality in a context of very important changes which

led to what we know as modern society, the period between the 19th and 20th centuries. Figures as T. Veblen and G. Simmel belonged to this period of very important and radical social changes and transformations. With their research works, they promoted the perspective which considers consumption as a differentiation practice and strategy of social groups and their positions in the social scale. Both authors stressed the capacity of using objects to distinguish their owners in modern and urban societies, where traditional links of communities and little villages disappeared. For this reason, the image built by objects is important to distinguish and identify social groups and categories.

We also find the figure of M. Weber between the 19th and the 20th century and his definition of status groups and economic classes as distinct areas of social stratification. Weber's work is another fundamental pillar to approach the research and the theorising on consumption of goods, considering it as an instrument in the service of the social distinction. In this sense, the consumption and acquisition of goods and objects constitute the bases of the ways of living or of distinctive lifestyles conferring prestige of social groups, particularly of those in the highest social positions. As a result, consumption is grasped as the practice or the set of practices in the service of the distinction of lifestyles related to social groups.

Society of consumption and determinism of consumers. From needing to desiring

The development of modern, industrial, and capitalist society led to the so-called society of consumption, which emerged in the second half of the 20th century. It is an industrial society characterised by the Fordist industrial production model: this model is capable to produce objects in a massive, standardised and routine way, as well as in an affordable way for large layers of society. This is also a context where a unified and depersonalised culture of consumption is created; it is supported by the use of publicity, sale campaigns, the consumer credit, and many other techniques of the production of demand in which the productive technology implied a mass production and consumption was normalised and standardised, thus creating a new structure of massive consumption (Alonso, 2005: 11). This context is dominated by a society of abundance in which the basic needs are guaranteed for most population and the new needs are being continuously created through publicity and mass media showing, offering, and proposing new goods of consumption, thus causing a continuous expense among consumers.

In the mid-20th century, the Fordist production system achieved that industrial workers from the beginning of the century, who had almost a subsistence consumption, took actively part in a new society of middle classes through consumption. A society where a cultural and consumption homogenisation is produced as the result of the productive capability of the Fordist system to produce large series of standardised products, which are focused on big markets.

The American critical sociology and the Frankfurt School denounce how this type of society manipulates needs by creating guidelines and consumption habits and imposing a consumption culture subjected to the logic of the production process and of the market. Consequently, the sociological perspective insists on consideringand analysing the importance of a social phenomenon such as consumption, obstructed and imposed by the offer and not by the demand, thus replacing the need with the desire as the basis of consumption and finishingwith the sovereignty of consumers.

Consumption, social practice, differentiation, and distinction

In the second half of the 20th century, the most prolific and influential theoretical and research trend in the studies on consumption and society of consumption is that from the structuralism, with very important figures as Jean Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu. Both sponsored a sociology of consumption marked by the structure analysis, which is focused on consumption as a social and cultural phenomenon characterising the advanced industrial societies.

From structuralism, the existence of hidden structures explaining the social action is considered so that every social phenomenon, like consumption, can be understood and explained as a system of signs through which people express and communicate meanings reflected in clothing, objects, gestures, etc. Structuralists defined consumption as a social practice from which individuals express and communicate with each other, but also indicated the potentiality of a means in the service of alignment, integration, and specially, for the symbolic domination of masses.

For Baudrillard, the consumption of signs replaced the need in modern societies, in societies of consumption. The logic of the objects of consumption is not based on the functional logic in which objects have a practical usefulness meeting some alleged individual needs, but the logic addressing such phenomenon in modern societies is the logic of the sign value, the logic of the difference.

Bourdieu also stressed the symbolic dimension of consumption and its role in the creation and reproduction of social hierarchies. Consumption exists and crystallises as the reflect of a specific social, historical, economic, and culture reality. Consumption is presented through the "habitus", which is understood as a social position turned into a practice, and reflectively, a practice turned into a social position which expresses and is useful to know and explain the situation and perception of actors regarding their position in the social system (Alonso, 2007, 14-15). This position reflects and is the reflection of tastes and the difference of tastes. The habitus includes mental and cognitive structures through which people use, perceive, understand, appreciate, and evaluate the social world, directly influencing their practices and how they perceive and evaluate them.

The habitus is the result of the course of the collective history and is acquired as the result of social positions occupied by individuals. It therefore varies depending on the nature of the position, or positions, occupied by a person. So, those occupying the same position in a social world usually have similar habitus. The habitus is the result of the structures of the environment, of the material conditions of existence and class. It is a set of dispositions to act, to feel, to think, and to perceive, socially acquired in relation to the social positions occupied in the social system (structured structures). It is in turn a social producer, the principle which organises all agents' appraisals and performances contributing to made up the environment, thus determining and guiding agents' practices according to such scheme (structuring structures). (García, 2001: 26-27). As a result, the habitus is a "structuring structure" which structures the social world and is a "structure structured" by the social world.

For Bourdie, consumption practices are strongly influenced by the objective social class to which an individual belongs, where a system of dispositions is configured (the habitus) and generates a set of conditionings in relation to the guidelines of development of tastes, which are modelled by the social class of origin. The reference consumption frameworks would be three in total: structural (social class), symbolic (lifestyle), and finally, the habitus. The differences in tastes and respective lifestyles associated would therefore be the result

of social inequalities, so the existence of different styles and tastes and their hierarchical structuring would be the result of distinction strategies operating based on a logic of domination. In this sense, a relation between social relations and cultural consumption is established, so various social actors would have a limited spectrum of hobbies and preferences strongly restricted by their class origins (Fernández y Heikkilä, 2011: 586).

Bourdieu, like that proposed by Veblen, linked identity groups to the prestige provided by some tastes or "habitus" legitimised as superior and related to the economic power, as far as such "habitus" or tastes are based on the possibility of being able to choose, to consume, transcending the desire to meet the practical needs determined by economic limitations. But when goods and consumption practices are deployed as distinctive signs by social groups occupying the highest social positions of the social hierarchy, groups occupying lower status in the quest of social recognition appropriate such goods and consumption practices, so the former abandon them and adopt new ones. In this regard, the dynamics of fashion is based on the capacity of "superior classes" to find and to impose new goods and ways of appropriating them to be socially distinguished from the remaining classes, whereas lower classes imitate the consumption practices socially legitimised in a strategy of mobility and social promotion (López de Ayala, 2004, 171-172).

Postmodern society and consumption as reason: fragmentation, individualisation, and identity

The society of consumption was the paradigm of modern society, developed and advanced until the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, but the model of unifying society, of standardised consumption and of security finished in the last quarter of the century. Fordism is replaced by postfordism, resulting in a change the organisation of the production of objects and in a disorganisation of the ways of production and consumption, characteristics of the 20th century. The society of consumption as a model predominating the taste of the middle class, similar products, mass production, the limited rotation and the long commercial duration of products, with a limited aesthetic and symbolic renovation of products, disappeared. Mass consumption and mass culture were replaced by a context of lower integration characterised by new lifestyles and consumption. In the last decades of the 20th century, the homogenisation was replaced by the fragmentation of middle-class society. Now each group, class or class fraction has a different "habitus" and a different structure of taste, objectified in specific consumption practices acting at the same time as an expression and a claim of a position in the hierarchy of the social space. We are facing a new type of society, the postmodern society, characterised by cultural relativism, among other factors.

The concept of postmodernism or postmodernisation is generally associated with a period of greater emphasis on culture as an element configuring the human action. Consumption is dissociated from its usage value. Symbols which have no reference with reality are consumed. Social differences are now maintained in the order of the symbolic, having no referent in reality. Consumption is now useful to create an awareness of identity actively. Social classes do not work anymore as sources of identity, they have no capacity to act as a source of identity and of a community organisation, and consumption stands out as a basis of the consumptionof the ego. Individuals build their identity through the consumption of objects which will be useful as instruments to create, to establish, and to maintain the idea of themselves as well as their image. The objects of consumption will constitute the expression of their values, beliefs and ideas related to such distinctive lifestyle with which they are identified and try to reach. Consequently, identities do not come from birth, socialstructure or class but they are actively chosen, being fluid and changing (López de Ayala, 2004, 174-175). Whereas the society of mass consumption had to create, to motivate and to promote to consume,

consumption has become the reason of existence in the era of postmodern society (Alonso, 2007, 17-19).

4. The dilemma structure-action/individual-society in the analysis of consumption

The complexity of social reality has determined that social studies show, in their historical trajectory, the dialectics between two main perspectives or approaches: structure and action. From the approach of structure, social aspects are an objectified reality, outside individuals, built and constituted, which determines their action and behaviours. This theoretical position is clearly represented by structuralism. To the contrary, from the approach of action, social reality is in a continuing production process by individual actors, and its most direct expression is found in the methodological individualism.

The individualistic approach or perspective recognises and stresses the centrality of actors in the social action and identifies the action of human beings as the central unit of social life. The paradigmatic framework of this perspective is the methodological individualism from which it is said that all social phenomena can be explained, in principle, in terms of actions, properties, and relations of and among individuals. From the methodological individualism, certain preferences and desires are related to individuals. Such preferences and desires arise from the analysis of the situation carried out, which influences the rules of behaviour, understanding in any case that individuals rationally behave both in their actions and behaviours (Francisco, 2001).

The methodological individualism is a perspective clearly influenced by the theory of rational choice for which any social phenomenon can be explained as the added product of rational actions of individuals looking for maximising their benefit. The assumption of the theory of rational choice is an individual who acts pursuing his/her interest and is rationally able to choose the means he/she thinks are appropriate to achieve the goals. Individuals therefore take decisions according to their beliefs and preferences which are, or should be, logically consistent.

The methodological individualism finds the most systematic and extensive application field in the micro-economic theories of the demand of consumers' rational behaviour as well as their sovereignty in the general economic system. This perspective made possible the study of subjective relations between human beings, individually considered, and the study of objects as satisfiers of a need (consuming people). Consumption would be explained as the consumers' action, as the result of added individual behaviours of consumption which, following the principle of rationality, understand that consumption goods and objects are chosen as such by their capacity as instruments to achieve the highest satisfaction. From the approach of the methodological individualism, consumers show, through their actions and behaviours, purpose and preferences in the pursuit of goals and objectives which are coherent with the hierarchy of preferences of the actor.

The approach of the methodological individualism fights for the disappearance of social relations in the studies of consumption. Groups do not have their own behaviours but are the sum of individual behaviours, thereby representing society as a conglomeration of sovereign individuals not subjected to any social relation (Alonso, 2005: 3-4). In this sense, the methodological individualism is questioned because it does not recognise that

social reality has properties which are not reducible to individual properties; such properties are not very interesting as it considers that society is more than the sum of parts (Raventós, 2003) and, at the same time, is accused of forgetting the emotional and normative dimension of rationality, the importance of the sociocultural context for the deliberation and the decision making for action, and the lack of changes and trajectories of the preferences of the actor in its analysis (García, 2013).

Unlike the methodological individualism, the structural perspective tends to deny the importance of the individual action in the explanation of social aspects. It excludes conscious and intentional actions of human beings and only admits, as scientifically relevant, a concept of structural causality which is no mechanical, intentional or functional (Ritzer, 2002). From this perspective, the rational consumer is replaced by the consumer which is subjected to structural factors. The consumer is shown as a dominated being whose behaviour reflects social structures and powers. In the context of the society of consumption, the structuralism fights for considering the constitution of a unified and depersonalised culture of consumption which is deployed and promoted by the use of publicity, sale campaigns, consumer credit, and other many techniques of the production of demand which will finish with the sovereignty of the consumer. The offer, supported by mass media and publicity, therefore determines the structure of the demand and of society itself. As a result, the centrality of the society of mass consumption is effective with the structuralism, as well as the mass culture as the culture of consumers, who are denied their capacity to act, without an initiative, and are dominated by structural factors.

This idea of society and of consumption culture, as well as its overwhelming potential to manipulative individuals, was criticised from some structuralist positions demanding an explanation of consumption as a behaviour and actions aimed at strengthening or stressing the links between the individual and the social group. We therefore face an integrating perspective in the analysis of consumption which focuses its interest on the power of mass media and publicity in the determination of the styles of consumption, dominated by the offer of the industrial production through mass media. At the same time, it stresses the symbolic value of consumption and its character of "container" and issuer of messages in the construction of the individual and group identity. A perspective from which an image of the consumer turned into actor is built: the actor consumes and spends to be linked to the reference group, to the status or social class (García, 2013; Alonso, 2005, 16-17).

Links and conflicts between structure and action and between recognition of the existence of the social as an objectified reality, outside individuals, which determines the action, and individuals' behaviours began to be pursued, as well as the role of individual actors in the production of the social reality. One of the important figures of this perspective was P. Bourdieu who stated that he was placed in the "constructivist structuralism" (Ballester, 2004: 79). From Bourdieu's perspective, social agents are not simply robots carrying out rules according to mechanical laws, but neither move by a rational calculation in their action: nor puppets faithful to structures, nor their owners.

Bourdieu is interested in practices which he considered as the product of the dialectical relation between action and structure. Practices are not objectively determined or are the product of free will; they are influenced by structures, objective structures, which are independent of agents' consciousness and will, and are capable to govern and to impose practices or their representations. In the scope of consumption, Bourdieu analysed the relations between the objective and subjective aspects influencing the social fact of consumption, dealing with this task through the joint of three key concepts (field, habitus, and capital) which were used to

develope a theory to overcome the classic dualism ([Ariño](#), 2003). Regarding this aspect, Bourdieu said: "Action is not a response that can be fully explained by reference to the triggering stimulus; and it has as its principle a system of dispositions, what I call the *habitus*, which is the product of all biographical experience (so that, just as no two individual histories are identical so no two individual *habitus* are identical, although there are classes of experiences and therefore classes of *habitus* - the *habitus* of classes)." (2000:75).

The habitus includes mental and cognitive structures through which people use, perceive, understand, appreciate, and evaluate the social world, directly influencing their practices and how they perceive and evaluate them. The habitus is the result of the course of the group history and is acquired as the result of the social positions occupied by individuals. It therefore varies depending on the nature of the position or positions occupied in the social system. Consequently, those occupying the same position in a social world usually have similar habitus.

5. Complexity, variability, tolerance, and eclecticism in the cultural consumption

Cultural consumption practices in the service of the identity of class and status

Culture is "a complex whole" and this complexity is manifested in the various ways of defining it. One of the first definitions of culture is found in the work by Tylor, "Primitive Culture" (1871). Tylor said that "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Kahn, 1975). We could agree about this definition, but also about the fact that we do not all understand the same when we talk about culture. Anyway, the concept of culture refers to how human beings think, live, feel, and behave as social beings. Culture therefore includes rules, beliefs, values, symbols and meaning, but it can also be addressed as a set of practices allowing peopleto organise social life, to give sense to the world and to their personal existence ([Ariño](#), 2009).

As a set of practices, consumption practices, cultural consumption has been studied by using both the quantitative methodology and surveys on cultural habits and practices as main tools. Data analysis of these surveys have different approaches. The most classical approach, such as the individualistic approach, starts from the assumption of the existence of a certain autonomy and sovereignty of consumers who are capable to create their cultural tastes from the universalisation of the access to culture within a context, such as that of advanced postmodern societies, of the overall offer of consumption products, and of complexity and fragmentation of lifestyles. The structuralist approach defends that tastes, cultural practices and consumptionsare directly related to the system of social stratification based on social classes and status. Considering the evident fact that contemporary societies have changed as the result of the significant processes of social transformation worldwide and recognising both the importance of structures and the fact that cultural consumption is stratified, it is explained that this consumption, as differential consumption, is conditioned not only by incomes, but also by the educational level and the status. Consequently, there is an obvious stratification in cultural consumptions, practices, tastes, and habits, but it is not only due to the position occupied in the system of social classes (Ariño, 2009; Herrera-Usagre, 2011).

This position contributes to the reappearance of the concept Weberian status as a key concept in the analysis of cultural consumption. The status is more interesting and valuable to explain the social stratification together with social classes. For M. Weber, social stratification is the result of a struggle for the limited resources of society. This struggle is mainly based on economic resources so that classes are stratified according to both their relationship with production means and the capacity for acquiring goods. However, there is also a parallel struggle for social prestige arising from the consumption of goods, among other issues. As a result, individuals not only belong to social classes, but also to status groups which are stratified according to the consumption of goods. In this sense, the higher the consumption of goods, the higher the lifestyle, honour and social prestige. Whereas social classes are the result of the unequal distribution of economic recompense, social status is the result of the unequal distribution and access to social prestige. So, the social stratification based on status shows the existence of a social hierarchy of social positions of superiority, equality, and inferiority which are perceived, and sometimes accepted, and reflected in various lifestyles. These hierarchical positions and lifestyles are in turn useful to build or strengthen the personal identity. Cultural consumption is therefore an emblem and an instrument in the service of the distinction and maintenance of status (Ariño, 2009).

Variety, omnivorousness, and eclecticism in cultural consumption against mass consumption*

If the structuralist approach defends that tastes, cultural practices and consumptions are directly related to the system of social stratification based on social classes and status, several empirical research studies have later showed that, beyond class and status, there is a plurality of factors in cultural consumption, such as gender, age or territory, representing contemporary societies as complex social realities where preferences or tastes are more open, multiple and even changing and unstable (Sassatelli, 2012, 142).

The confirmation of an opening, diversity, and instability in consumption practices has led to another approach in the analysis of the sociology of consumption which is a critique of the classic approach of the Bourdieu's sociology of consumption: the omnivorous approach (Ariño, 2007). Cultural omnivorousness, which is more focused than others on cultural consumption, states that tastes are not determined by different social classes or status, but the main difference is in the offer and in the capacity to choose products of cultural consumption among a more and more varied and extensive offer (Alonso, 2007; Ariño, 2009; Herrera-Usagre, 2011; Sassatelli, 2012).

The precursor study of this approach was developed by Wilensky, who stated that those social groups with high educational levels did not have aversion to what we know as "mass culture"; to the contrary, they consumed products and objects related to it (Herrera-Usagre, 2011:144-145). However, the most influential work on new research studies concerning cultural consumption has been that by Robert Peterson about cultural omnivorousness. Peterson explained that there is a part of the population in western countriespreferring a greater spectrum of culture forms than in previous periods, thus reflecting an increase of social tolerance towards other cultural forms and tastes.

Peterson's work allowed him to create four categories about omnivorousness, which were based on two axes: the distinction between high culture and popular culture, and the breadth of tastes. Firstly, high culture or refined univores (highbrow univores) made up of social groups of high and middle-high classes characterised by having tastes related to elitist and dominant cultural values, creators of social distinction and associated

with what is known as high culture. Secondly, we find the category made up of high culture and refined omnivores (*highbrow omnivores*), called authentic "omnivores": those belonging to middle and high classes showing extensive tastes, from high culture to interest in certain elements of popular culture. Thirdly, the category of univores of popular culture (*lowbrow univores*) or authentic "univores", who have few hobbies and their taste is socially considered as the essence of the so-called "bad taste". Lastly, he described the category of omnivore consumers of popular culture (*lowbrow omnivores*): this would be a "new" category of consumers showing a breadth of tastes, although most consumed cultural objects belong to the so-called popular culture, with few signs of consumption of objects related to high culture.

Why cultural omnivorousness now? Because we are in a new scene where cultural tastes of elites and social groups of a higher social status are not characterised by an elitist consumption anymore, showing more open and more eclectic preferences and a greater tolerance in the mix of practices (Ariño, 2009). The social context of omnivorousness is politically, ideologically, and culturally a more open and tolerant society, as well as cosmopolitan. A society in which social groups in general have increased their educational level, and particularly those in a higher social status.

The theory of cultural omnivorousness includes an analysis stressing that social classes cannot be the explanatory and decisive factor of taste and cultural consumption. Social position, as Bourdieu argued, is not the way of dominant acquisition of cultural taste. Also, cultural consumption and cultural capital are not determinant or the accurate reflection of the processes of differentiation and social distinction. In this sense, one of the main contributions of Peterson's research studies is to introduce more complexity in the analysis of tastes, so that social classes are not the only and exclusive explanatory factor. To the contrary of the idea of differentiation and hierarchy of lifestyles based on the acquisition of cultural capital stated by Bourdieu, defenders of the concept of cultural omnivorousness defend that legitimate tastes of the new dominant classes are characterised today by a wide spectrum of cultural preferences, with tastes from the most refined arts to manifestations of popular subcultures. High classes would practice very different ways of leisure, from the most massive to the most exclusive, and high-status people not just participate in high-status activities, butalso in a greater variety of types than low-status people. In this sense, their cultural capital is not only based onmonopoly, but in the variety. To the contrary, low classes are univores, that is, they have and show more limited activities, tastes and ways of leisure (Noya, 1998, 71).

In short, it is noted from omnivorous positions that there is a transformation in the scope of cultural consumption which means that the legitimate classic culture is not today in force and has been replaced by a hotchpotch of hobbies showed by individuals in their cultural practices and consumptions. The theory of cultural omnivorousness would therefore be a most acceptable approach or perspective for a society fully included in the so-called postmodernity where hierarchies would be collapsed by a greater individualisation (Fernández y Heikkilä, 2011: 599).

The theory of omnivorousness has been a little bit changed but recognising its explanatory value for the analysis of cultural consumptions of postmodern societies. The cultural opening and tolerance continue to be social values with a wide consensus in contemporary society (Ariño, 2009). Ollivier, quoted by Fernández y Heikkilä (2011), pointed out that the current dominant discourse considers diverse, hybrid, fluid, eclectic, overall and cosmopolitan aspects as positive values, against those negative, as closed, unitary, local, static and permanent aspects. In other words, cultural omnivores show the values adopted and spread by the discourse of globalisation, such as the opening towards mobility, adaptation, multiculturalism, crossbreeding, etc. in a

social, global and local context which is more heterogeneous and volatile. On the other hand, it is stressed that there are many types of omnivorousness and one of them has a profile defined by the educational capital and middle-high incomes, thus manifesting that this omnivorous and multicultural opening gives a sense of distinction, particularly in middle-high classes. In contemporary society, it is therefore false that there are no stigmatised barriers and tastes. Socio-economic inequalities keep influencing cultural consumption due to their repercussion in the possibilities to access to the generation of social and cultural capital, as well as due to their relation with the best educational levels. Cultural omnivorousness cannot therefore hide the presence and validity of cultural hierarchies. (Ariño, 2009; Fernández y Heikkilä, 2011: 599).

Other critiques, as that by Bernard Lahire, insist that the analysis of cultural consumption should be addressed both from the perspective of the breadth of offer and the choice of such consumption objects, but together with the group to which individuals belong or their reference group. In contemporary society, social mobility, the contact with heterogeneity, and the social and cultural diversity of social life ease that individuals build their differences. It is recognised that individuals behave in relation to the processes of socialisation they have been subjected to, as well as to the normative structure and system of values of the groups they belong to. Also, their capacity to build their difference and behave atypically in relation to their group or reference group is also accepted. In this sense, we should talk about the existence of a wide spectrum of individual tastes whichcan be *consonant or discordant* with respect to the social reference group. To be consonant means having a coherence in cultural preferences and practices regarding the reference group, and this group could have a socially legitimate taste (elitist, in the case of high classes) or illegitimate (popular, in the case of low classes); to be discordant implies that cultural preferences and practices of an individual differs or are atypical with respect to the social reference group. In short, heterogeneity and the social and cultural diversity of social life (characteristics of contemporary societies) are recognised. They constitute the distinctive feature of current cultural consumption, the eclecticism (Fernández y Heikkilä, 2011: 599-600).

Criticising cultural omnivorousness also indicates that this approach shows high classes as the sole classesbeing active, curious and open to new tolerant experiences. To the contrary, low classes are passive in relation to culture and are not interested in their lifestyle. Moreover, this approach shows the classes occupying the highest positions which develop a certain "eclecticism of taste" and are willing to consume and enjoy a wide spectrum of cultural products and services, whereas the rest shows a limited capacity to enjoy the offer of goods, cultural products and services, just limiting to some of them. In this sense, the theory of cultural omnivorousness could be catalogued with a certain elitism (Fernández y Heikkilä, 2011: 599-600; Herrera- Usagre, 2011:144-145).

By way of an epilogue

As pointed out, consumption is a social activity permeated with our dreams of need and desire satisfaction (Bauman, 2005:43). Its multidimensionality and complexity encompass, reach and influence the creation and structure of individual and collective identities, as well as the ways of relating with others (Alonso, 2005:30). As a result, and in relation to this exploitation in the service of culture identity, it is not possible to forget that culture is not only the expression of the common, but also the expression of difference and inequality, so it is questionable that cultural consumption is seen as a simple expression of taste and of individual choice (Ariño, 2009).

In a society full of inequalities is unquestionable that it will be reflected in all its context, including the context of cultural consumption. Social status, educational level, incorporation of new values of tolerance, opening, adaptation to changing situations in the era of globalisation and in the society of continuing risk, and individual experiences benefit the approach of omnivorousness, but benefit some people, not everyone. The social order and structure continue to be important, so those with greater possibilities of developing an eclectic taste are those occupying the highest positions in economy, society, politics, education, etc.

For Reflection

- The following works could be an introduction to the sociological study of consumption: Pablo García Ruiz, Repensar el consumo, Ed. EIUNSA, Madrid, and R. Bocock, El consumo, Talasa, Madrid, 1993.
- centrodeestudiosandaluces.es The work *Documento de trabajo Estratificación social y estilos de vida culturales*, by M. Herrera, is available in this portal. It analyses the social stratification in the consumption of cultural goods and services, as well as of other variables such as gender, age, incomes, or educational level.

. . . .

References

ALONSO, Luis E. *La era del consumo* [online]. Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, [2005]. 383 pages. ISBN 84-323- 1215-0. Available: bdh-rd.bne.es

ALONSO, Luis E. "Las nuevas culturas del consumo y la sociedad fragmentada" [online]. In: *Pensar la Publicidad*, no. 2, 2007, pp. 13-32. ISSN 1887-8598. Available: revistas.ucm.es

ARIÑO VILLARROYA, Antonio. "Música, democratización y omnivoridad" [online]. In: *Política y Sociedad*, no. 3, 2007, pp. 131-150. ISSN 1988-3129. Available: revistas.ucm.es

ARIÑO VILLARROYA, Antonio. "¿Qué está cambiando en las prácticas culturales?" [online]. In: *Jornadas "Conocer los públicos de la cultura" (Barcelona, 16-17 September 2010)*. Barcelona: Universitat, 2010. Available: www2.ub.edu

BALLESTER BRAGE, Lluís. "La metodología de las ciencias sociales en los últimos trabajos de Pierre Bourdieu". In: *Sistema: revista de ciencias sociales*, no. 182, 2004, pp. 75-104. ISSN 0210-0223.

BAUMAN, Zygmunt. *Trabajo, consumismo y nuevos pobres*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2000. ISBN 978-84-7432-750-2.

BAUMAN, Zygmunt. *Vida de consumo*. Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007. 205 pages. ISBN: 978-84-375- 0611-1.

BOCOCK, Robert. *El consumo*. Madrid: Talasa, D.L. 1995. 192 pages. ISBN 84-88119-29-1.

BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Cuestiones de Sociología*. Madrid: Istmo, 2008. 272 pages. ISBN 978-84-460-2987-8.

FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, Carlos J.; HEIKKILÄ, Riie. "El debate sobre el omnivorismo cultural: una aproximación a nuevas tendencias en sociología del consumo" [online]. In: *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, no. 3, 2011, pp. 585-606. Available: revintsociologia.revistas.csic.es

FRANCISCO DÍAZ, Andrés de. "Metodología de las ciencias sociales". In: *Temas de sociología*. Mª José Rodríguez Caamaño (coord.). Madrid: Huerga & Fierro editores, 2001. ISBN: 84-8374-278-0.

GARCÍA INDA, Andrés. "Introducción. La razón del derecho: entre hábitus y campos". In: *Poder, derecho y clases sociales*. Pierre Bourdieu (coord.). 2nd ed. Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001. ISBN 978-84-330-1495-1.

GARCÍA RUÍZ, Pablo E. "El concepto de 'reflexividad' en la sociología del consumo: algunas propuestas" [online]. In: *RES, Revista Española de Sociología*, no. 12, 2009, pp. 85-102. ISSN: 1578-2824. Available: dialnet.unirioja.es

GARCÍA RUÍZ, Pablo E. "Consumidores 'productivos': argumentos para la discusión entre acción y estructura" [online]. In: *XI Congreso Español de Sociología (Madrid, 10-12 July 2013)*. Available: www.fes-web.org

HERRERA-USAGRE, Manuel. "El consumo cultural en España: una aproximación al análisis de la estratificación social de los consumos culturales y sus dificultades metodológicas" [online]. In: *EMPIRIA. Revista de Metodología de Ciencias Sociales*, no. 22, 2011, pp. 141-172. ISSN 1139-5737. Available: bddoc.csic.es:8080

LÓPEZ DE AYALA, Mª Cruz. "El análisis sociológico del consumo: una revisión histórica de sus desarrollos teóricos" [online]. In: *Sociológica. Revista de pensamiento social*, no. 5, 2004, pp. 161-188. ISSN 1137-1234. Available: ruc.udc.es

NOYA MIRANDA, Francisco J. "Omnívoros sociables: consumo y capital relacional en España" [online]. In: *Sociológica. Revista de pensamiento social*, no. 3, 1998, pp. 69-92. ISSN 1137-1234. Available: ruc.udc.es

RITZER, George. Teoría sociológica contemporánea [online]. Mª Teresa Casado Rodríguez (trans.). 3rd ed. Madrid: McGraw-Hill, D.L. 1993. 680 pages. ISBN 84-481-0179-0. Available: www.slideshare.net

SASSATELLI, Roberta. *Consumo, cultura y sociedad*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu editores, 2012. 288 pages. ISBN 978-950-518-666-2.

TYLOR, Edward B. "La ciencia de la cultura (1871)" [online]. In: *El concepto de cultura: textos fundamentales*. J.S. Kahn (comp.). Barcelona: Anagrama, D.L. 1975, pp. 29-46. ISBN 84-339-0603-8. Available: es.scribd.com