

Democracy of goods
in contemporary
consumer culture
media essay



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The term democracy was defined as " equal access to consumer products and by depicting the everyday functioning of that democracy with regard to one product at a time, these tableaux offered Americans an inviting vision of their society as an incontestable equality"

According to Onufrijchuk in Leiss et al 1997: 50 " the course of the 20th century has seen a dramatic and sustained rise in the real income and purchasing power of the average person in western societies, where most people have access to a huge and constantly changing array of goods" this may rely on the fact why Marchand argued the fact that the 20th century allowed for equal access to goods because individuals for example the working class individual in society were continually earning more, and what better way to spend the extra money they have than to buy products that the upper class would usually use, thus, they can then believe that they are having shared experience with the upper class's taste, whereas the upper class are getting furious because they have to continually look for ways in other to differentiate themselves from the other classes. Bourdieu in Gronow (1997: 11) argued that " the taste of the ruling class is always the legitimate taste of a society, but in his own opinion, this legitimate taste is not genuine good taste: in fact there could be no possible genuine good taste. He went on to argue that " legitimate taste pretends to be the universally valid and disinterested good taste, whereas in reality it is nothing more than the taste of one particular class, the ruling class. The term Trigg 2001 calls trickle down, leap-frog and trickle down. Taste would be considered later on in the essay in relation to democracy of goods.

This could be said as to why Marchand suggested that the early 20th century advertising offered access to goods and a vision of society of 'incontestable'. Schudson 1986: 180-181 illustrates better as he argued that " there was a new sense of scarcity of time, accelerated by the increasingly large array of choices available to people. There was more choice, or a sense of more choice, in part because the newspapers, movies, and radio bought to people a strong sense of other social worlds, and other possibilities. The advances in mass production methods made goods and luxuries unheard of a generation before potentially available to a large number of people. In the supermarket there were more product categories, and within these more brands to choose from". The different media outlets made people think or feel that they had many choices and that they could experience the world of the upper class just by buying certain products to make them blend in to the crowd of the upper class. With the increase of mass production of products, it made it possible for the working class to have the shared experience and for the fact that there was an increase in mass product, goods were produced cheaper. Hence, Marchand 1985: 218 arguing that there were " no discrepancies in wealth could prevent the humblest citizen, provided they chose their purchases wisely, from retiring to setting in which they could contemplate their essential equality, through possession of an identical product"..... GIVE AN EXAMPLE LATER

This can be said to be what is happening in our current contemporary society " The advertising parables offered comfortable rather than distasteful truths. They usually sought to persuade more through insinuation than confrontation, and sought unthinking assent rather than active thought or

new insight. They encouraged readers to assimilate the product into their present lives ... in order to force them to a decision to live " by a different logic." Marchand 1985: 207. Advertising products makes the audience feel like they need to purchase certain products and that if they do not acquire the products, they cannot be satisfied in their lives, Marchand 1985: 207. " The parables of advertising promised reads no insurmountable limitations and offered a reality easily within the reach of their hearts desires" ... " provide any one with the ultimate satisfaction" (ibid: 218) GIVE AN EXAMPLE LATER)

According to Marchand 1985: 217-218 Democracy of goods is " the wonders of modern mass production and distribution enabled every person to enjoy the society's most significant pleasure, convenience, or benefit. The definition of the particular benefit fluctuated ... the cumulative effect of the constant reminders that " any woman can" and every home can afford" was to publicize an image of American society in which concentrated wealth at the top of a hierarchy of social classes restricted no family's opportunity to acquire the most significant products".

Daniel Boorstin in Schudson 1986: 181 stated that " there was democratization of good. Products that once held some kind of uniqueness to them by being available only at certain times of the year or only certain parts of the country were increasing available all year-round and throughout the country, thanks to ... other technological and other social developments. Not only the means of production but the modes of became a 'continuous process'"

Boorstin argued that products became democratized in three ways. Firstly, they became more standard as they come to be produced for the mass audience. They are easier to handle, easier to "do it yourself" without great skill on the part of the user; both a mediocre cook and a great cook make equally good cakes from a cake mix ... standard products and standard situations for shopping make it easier for the unskilled consumer to avoid embarrassment and to become equal to the adept consumer. Secondly, "products become not only more standard but milder and easier to use. They become convenient ... Convenience is an attribute that has much to do the social uses and social meaning of a product as with its engineering. The more convenient a good, the more it is equally available for the use of men and women, adults and children ..." Thirdly, there is democratization when goods are consumed in increasingly public ways.

"To liberate from society', we ought and must was not for Marcuse a problem. What the problem - the problem specific to society which 'delivers the goods' - was that for liberation there was no 'mass basis'... few people wished to be liberated, even fewer were willing to act on that wish, and virtually no one was quite sure in what way the 'liberation from society' might differ from the state they were already in" Bauman 2000: 16

"One such issue was the possibility that what feels like freedom is not in fact freedom at all; that people may be satisfied with their lot even though that lot were far from being 'objectively' satisfactory; that, living in slavery, they feel free and so experience no urge to liberate themselves, thus forsaking or forfeiting the chance of being genuinely free" Bauman 2000: 17

" is liberation a blessing, or a curse? A curse disguised as blessing, a blessing feared as curse? Bauman 2000: 18. " other popular addresses for similar complaints have been the 'embourgeoisement' of the underdog (the substitution of 'having' for 'being', and 'being' for 'acting', as the uppermost values) ..." Bauman 2000: 19. However Gronow 1997: 9 argued that " taste was an ideal means on making social distinctions. Any parvenu who tried to act as a gentleman could always be put in his proper place by letting him know - through small gestures - that even though he thinks he is acquainted with the right etiquette, he still does not master the requirements of good taste". This can us be used as a criticism in relation to democracy of good in the sense that even though there was mass production of goods, the working class were not accepted even though they tried fitting in, into the upper class. Thus it can be argued that the democracy of goods created an illusion of democracy, as it made working class individuals

Boorstin 1993 and others have suggested that mass consumption created 'democracy of goods'. Schudson's account is somewhat different. Yes, goods became more uniformly available, more standardized, more convenient, and more likely to be consumed in public ways. Yet, although the goods displayed in a department store are in theory available to everyone, in practice they are available only ot those with the resources to make the purchase. Schudson's analysis reminds us that the displays of mass consumption creates a democratization of desire and envy (1984 pp 181, 151)

" Advertising reached its modern form around 1900 ... rather than simply describing products technical virtues, ads increasingly addressed consumers
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deeper concerns. Instead of extolling the cleaning powder of a particular soap, for example, the new ads emphasized the social embarrassment of body odor or the sex appeal of the skin" (Fischer 2010: 65)

The parable of the democracy of goods always remained implicit in its negative counterpart. It assured readers that they could be as healthy, as charming, as free from social offense as the very 'nicest' (richest) people, simply by using a product that any one could afford (219)

The parable emphasized the affordability of the product to families of modest income while attempting to maintain a 'class' image of the products the preferred choice of their social better (221)

The most attractive aspect of the parable to advertisers was that it preached the coming of an equalizing democracy without sacrificing those fascinating contrast of social condition that had long been the touchstone of high drama (221)

They dressed up Americans wealthy as dazzling aristocrats, and then reassured readers that they could easily enjoy an essential equality with such elites in the things that really mattered GIVE AN EXAMPLE CHERYL COLE ADVERTISEMENT (she worked her way up, the general working class public could identify with her background and where she has come from. Thus suggesting that if they work really hard they could get to where they want be and be what they want in society