



CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY AND ASSEMBLAGE THEORY: INTERLOCUTIONS AND PROPOSAL OF A RESEARCH AGENDA¹

CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY E ASSEMBLAGE THEORY: INTERLOCUÇÕES E PROPOSTA DE UMA AGENDA DE PESQUISA

TEORÍA DE LA CULTURA DE CONSUMO Y TEORÍA DEL ENSAMBLAJE: INTERLOCUCIONES Y PROPUESTA DE UNA AGENDA DE INVESTIGACIÓN

ABSTRACT

Objective: to discuss a proposal for a relationship between Assemblage Theory and Consumer Culture Theory, highlighting possible issues for composing an agenda for researchers of both theories, based on their intersections.

Design / methodology / approach: the article discusses the relevant elements of each of the theoretical perspectives, advances in the discussion of points of intersection and, finally, presents a research agenda with emerging issues.

Results: there were many opportunities to establish a conversation between the two perspectives, considering the research in Consumer Affairs, especially in the Brazilian context, since the country has cultural and diversified wealth, with regard to historical and social issues, economic and demographic. The Assemblage Theory is, as evidenced, an effective option to substantiate research related to Consumer Culture Theory, as it is suitable for investigating consumers and their cultural relations.

Originality: the paper sheds light on points of intersection between the two theories in order to point out new understandings of phenomena on consumption, which its heterogeneous elements can remain united without necessarily forming a coherent whole, showing that, before understanding the phenomena cultural as gestalts or holistic organizations, a contingent analysis of the alignments established by the different elements, recursively shaped, that affect their relationships must be considered.

Keywords: Agencement. Assemblage theory. Consumer culture theory (CCT). Consumption. Culture.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: discutir uma proposta de relação entre *Assemblage Theory* e *Consumer Culture Theory*, evidenciando possíveis questões para composição de uma agenda para os pesquisadores de ambas as teorias, a partir de suas interseções.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: o artigo discute os elementos relevantes de cada uma das perspectivas teóricas, avança na discussão dos pontos de interseção e, por fim, apresenta uma agenda de pesquisa com questões emergentes.

Resultados: evidenciaram-se muitas oportunidades de se estabelecer uma conversação entre as duas perspectivas, considerando-se as pesquisas em Consumo, especialmente no contexto brasileiro, uma vez que o país apresenta riqueza cultural e diversificada, no que tange a questões históricas, sociais, econômicas e demográficas. A *Assemblage Theory* constitui-se, conforme evidenciado, numa opção efetiva para fundamentação das pesquisas ligadas à *Consumer Culture Theory*, por ser adequada para investigação do consumidor e suas relações culturais.

Originalidade: o artigo joga luz sobre pontos de interseção entre as duas teorias com o objetivo de apontar novos entendimentos de fenômenos sobre o consumo, os quais seus elementos heterogêneos podem permanecer unidos sem necessariamente formar um todo coerente, evidenciando que, antes de entender os fenômenos culturais como *gestalts* ou organizações holísticas, deve-se considerar uma análise contingencial dos alinhamentos estabelecidos pelos diferentes elementos, moldados recursivamente, que afetam suas relações.

Palavras-chave: Agencemen. *Assemblage theory*. *Consumer culture theory* (CCT). Consumo. Cultura.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: discutir una propuesta de relación entre la *Assemblage Theory* y la Teoría de la Cultura del Consumidor, destacando posibles temas para componer una agenda para los investigadores de ambas teorías, a partir de sus intersecciones.

Diseño / metodología / enfoque: el artículo discute los elementos relevantes de cada una de las perspectivas teóricas, avanza en la discusión de los puntos de intersección y, finalmente, presenta una agenda de investigación con temas emergentes.

Resultados: hubo muchas oportunidades para establecer una conversación entre las dos perspectivas, considerando la investigación en Asuntos del Consumidor, especialmente en el contexto brasileño, ya que el país tiene una riqueza cultural y diversificada, en lo que respecta a temas históricos y sociales, económicos y demográficos. La Teoría del Ensamblaje es, como se evidencia, una opción efectiva para sustentar investigaciones relacionadas con la Teoría de la Cultura del Consumidor, ya que es apta para investigar a los consumidores y sus relaciones culturales.

Originalidad: el artículo arroja luz sobre puntos de intersección entre las dos teorías con el fin de señalar nuevas comprensiones de los fenómenos de consumo, que sus elementos heterogêneos pueden permanecer unidos sin necesariamente formar un todo coherente, demostrando que, antes de entender los fenómenos culturales como *gestalts* u organizaciones holísticas, se debe considerar un análisis contingente de las alineaciones que establecen los diferentes elementos, conformados recursivamente, que inciden en sus relaciones.

Palabras clave: Agenciamiento. *Assemblage theory*. Teoría de la cultura del consumidor (CCT). Consumo. Cultura.



INTRODUCTION

Considering the daily life of the human being with its intrinsic aspects, consumption has appeared since the beginning of its existence, implying one of the most important phenomena of contemporary societies (McCracken, 2003). Thus, analyzing modern life, the relationships between products and people, with their individual, collective, and cultural characteristics, imply individual and group consumption behavior based on the symbols and images reflected by the products (Pinto & Zampier, 2013). In this context, Arnould and Thompson defined the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) as a grouping of theoretical perspectives to address the dynamic relationships driven by the intersection between consumer actions, markets, and cultural meanings (Casotti & Suarez, 2016). By focusing on constantly generating and modifying the symbolic meanings of consumption, sometimes present in brands and advertisements, sometimes instituted by the very use of material goods, the CCT builds the expressions of its personal and social particularities. In this way, the exploration of issues such as the relationship between cultural and social contexts, possibilities for interaction between consumers and companies, and the construction, modification, and distribution of the various meanings of consumption begins (Arnould & Thompson, 2007; Gaião, Souza, & Leon, 2012).

In order to reinforce the dynamic nature of the relationships established between consumers, markets, and cultural meanings, an ontological perspective emerges, centered on the understanding of the elements and actors present in dynamic arrangements. This theory, known as Assemblage, was initially proposed by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and has been updated when considering the discussions of the relations between parts and the whole by Manuel DeLanda (DeLanda, 2006a; Casotti & Suarez, 2016). DeLanda's approach suggests that the identity of a part is closely related to the impact it causes on other integral parts of the whole in which it is inserted. If a part separates from the whole, its identity will also transform with the relationship's breakup (DeLanda, 2006b). For Assemblage, the unity of an organic whole is constructed before the emergence of

the parts, thereby subordinating the parts to an organization, principle, or spirit. Units may develop, but always keep everything the same (Nail, 2017).

In this sense, gaps are evident in the field of consumption studies on the correlated perspectives between Assemblage Theory and CCT. Considering that consumer culture theories concern the construction of experiences, meanings, and actions, it appears that they are not concerned with determining action as a causal force but summarily as a succession of systems of values, feelings, and thoughts established in the interpretation of social life (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Assemblage, in turn, presupposes that heterogeneous elements can remain united without necessarily forming a coherent whole, showing that, before understanding cultural phenomena as *gestalts* or holistic organizations, one must consider a contingency analysis of the alignments established by the different elements, recursively shaped, which affect their relationships (Casotti & Suarez, 2016). How CCT analyzes how particular manifestations of consumer culture can be constituted, maintained, transformed, and shaped by broader historical forces, such as cultural narratives, myths, and ideologies, as well as specific socioeconomic circumstances (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), could be corroborated by the Assemblage Theory, which has a particular interest in investigating the forces of social organization, capable of promoting arrangements and distinguishing what would be legitimate from what would be a deviation (Casotti & Suarez, 2016).

Thus, these perceived gaps in the culture and consumption literature, supported by the minimization found in the discussion of the existing association between the concepts of Assemblage Theory and CCT and how they can converse from their related perspectives, triggered the questions that motivated the construction of this essay: Which aspects of the Assemblage Theory could corroborate the assumptions of the CCT in the context of studies on consumption? What issues could be highlighted for a research agenda based on the relationship between Assemblage Theory and CCT? Would the perspectives arising from the Assemblage Theory in the discussion



of consumption, proposed by the CCT, bring a consistent debate to marketing researchers through the production of insights from their interlocutions?

Based on the questions raised and the prominence of highlighting an existing relationship between these two complex theories, an interest arose in the elaboration of this essay, whose objectives are: To discuss a proposal of a relationship between Assemblage Theory and CCT, highlighting possible questions for the composition of an agenda for researchers of both theories, based on their intersections. This research agenda advances in various emerging themes such as family relationships, entertainment, the environment, consumer communities, brands and advertising, market dynamics, events, regionalization, and general aspects. We emphasize that this essay does not consider research proposals outside the scope of intersection between theories since it intends to focus on the possible relationships and congruences between the themes. In addition, we highlight significant points of convergence for the basis of discussions, which are still incipient in Brazil about the premises impacted by the theories considered.

The present essay is structured as follows: The first section presents the central concepts in the literature on culture and consumption to subsidize the second section, which deals with the definition and possibilities of CCT. The third section, in turn, is devoted to presenting the Assemblage Theory and its implications within the studies proposed by the social sciences. The following two sections, based on the existing gaps between the intersectional relationships about the theories, bring to light some contributions and research perspectives involving issues related to the interlocution between Assemblage Theory and CCT, suggesting methods and techniques for this purpose. In the last section, some general reflections are presented.

CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION

The etymology of the word consumption refers to the Latin *consumere*, which means to use everything, to exhaust and destroy. However, in searching for a meaning closer to

the reality consolidated by marketing, one can consider its meaning coming from the English language: consummation, which corresponds to adding. Although emerging from an ambiguous process, sometimes designated as manipulation or experience, at other times, as purchase and exhaustion, consumption can still be characterized as elusive since it is only possible to enter the cognitive universe of its existence by classifying it as superfluous, ostentatious or even conspicuous (Barbosa & Campbell, 2006). According to Joaquim, Andrade, Resende, and Pinto (2019), these etymological divergences led to decades of approaches with negative connotations, with consumption being, in a way, disowned by scholars who disregarded its importance in the social context.

From the premises raised, consumption has its recognition engendered by the mediation of relationships and processes arising from the characteristics intertwined by modern society, to the extent that it is considered that the act of consuming a particular product implies the (re) creation of its meanings, imbued with a symbolic nature. Identities would then be constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed based on the relationships established with consumer goods, that is, the cars we drive, the clothes we wear, the music we listen to, or the food we eat (Graeber et al., 2011; Retondar, 2007; Hall, 2011). The expansion of interest in issues encompassing consumption is considerable since some approaches and paradigms still need to be effectively researched and discussed, in theory and practice. In addition, consumption, by strengthening itself from productive forces (sociology), utility maximization (economics), or the acquisition process (business studies), qualifies as a term capable of permeating the relationship constituted between society and individuals, whether as a form of social classification and communication systems, whether in identity-forming processes, ritual builders or seekers of existentially complex and complete experiences (Pinto, Freitas, Resende, & Joaquim, 2015).

Baudrillard (2007) regards consumption as a systematic activity of manipulating meanings based on expressiveness and not on its functional aspects, considering, for example, a commodity as its meaning. In this way, the circulation,



purchase, sale, and appropriation of goods and objects or differentiated signs constitute, in the current conjuncture, the language itself and the specific code through which the whole society can communicate. Still, in this line of thought, the consumer society considers objects as “symbol objects” effectively consumed for their symbolic value to the detriment of their utilitarian value (Gaião, Souza, & Leão, 2012; Baudrillard, 2007). The signs then become the images that develop a direct relationship with the so-called consumer culture (Slater, 2002), and consumer goods are now considered the visible part of the culture, from which the individuals may become meaningfully involved with each other and also with the society to which they belong (Douglas & Isherwood, 2009).

From what has been exposed so far, the influence of symbolic and experiential aspects is the starting point for understanding studies on consumption. The assumptions that permeate consumption have been based on the maximization of economic utility or the process considered by the relations between society and the individual, in the forms of social classification and communication systems, in the processes of identity formation, in the processes of rituals and in actions triggered by shopping communities, based on the search for existential experiences (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Vera & Gosling, 2020). That said, a significant limitation in approaches to consumption is the cultural meaning acquired by consumer goods. What is observed is a disregard for the fact that this meaning is in constant transit, naturally flowing between its various locations in the social world while being aided by the collective and individual efforts of different actors, such as designers, producers, advertisers, and consumers. The traditional trajectory adopted by this movement translated its cultural meaning from the absorption of a culturally constituted world and transferred it to a consumer good. This way, the meaning is absorbed from the object and transferred to an individual consumer (McCracken, 2007).

Bourdieu (2000) considers that culture can also transmit, through consumption, the meanings inherent to goods and brands, such as compliments, prejudices, punishments, prohibitions, and associations. This creates

a social context for individuals so that the culture defines the meanings referring to that particular society. The meanings can be divided into two distinct concepts: cultural categories and principles (McCracken, 2007). However, consumption should not be understood only as material utilities’ use-values but primarily as signs of consumption. When interacting with other individuals in society, consumers express their emotions and desires through consumption and share their feelings and expectations, thus building what is known as consumer culture (Baudrillard, 2007; Rocha & Pereira, 2009). For Kozinets (2001), consumer culture can be considered as a particular system interconnected by commercially produced images, texts, and objects used by particular groups – with the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities, and meanings – to create a collective sense of environment and to guide the experiences and lives of its members.

In short, culture and consumption have a historically unprecedented relationship, which has also made it possible to consider that consumption, in contemporary society, produces meanings and identities, regardless of the acquisition of a product (McCracken, 2003). Consumer culture goes beyond the simple purchase of products and services to satisfy needs, having come to encompass the consumption of values and images by the consumer (Baudrillard, 2007).

CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

The end of the 1970s is marked by the discussion about discovering new perspectives for consumer research. In the context of this discussion, supported by the interpretivism paradigm (Souza, Gaião, Silva, & Leão, 2013), the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) originates as an initiative of the Consumer Behavior Odyssey’s consumer research. The trigger for this concern for novelties in the field of consumer studies occurred in the early 1980s, following the trip of a group of researchers from the United States to conduct a multisite ethnographic field study. One of the objectives emphasized by this movement was to propose the development of studies capable of crossing the lines of positivist works,



which predominated until that moment. The idea arising from the project was characterized by the development of an eclectic and multidisciplinary study focused on the behavior and experience of the consumer and not the buyer, thus moving away from positivism, marked by the use of experiments, surveys, and statistics. This work sparked interest in consumer research, emphasizing the cultural and social complexities of consumption (Belk, 2014; Joy & Li, 2012; Vera, Gosling, & Shigaki, 2019).

The CCT corresponds to a family of theoretical perspectives that deal with the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the market, and cultural meanings and is, therefore, not a general, unified theory. The CCT conceptualizes culture as a factory of experience, meaning, and action so that it can be treated as a tradition of interdisciplinary research that has leveraged knowledge about consumer culture in all its heterogeneous manifestations. Furthermore, it has generated empirically based constructs and theoretical innovations relevant to broader consistency across the foundations of social science disciplines, public policy arenas, and managerial sectors (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). According to Pinto et al. (2015), the last decades of consumer research have generated a stream of research interested in analyzing sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption. More than seeing culture as a homogeneous system of collectively shared meanings, the CCT explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of groups and cultural manifestations in the various current socio-historical formations.

Considering the studies by Arnould (2006), in the CCT, consumers are understood as producers of identity projects that proceed using the symbolic and material resources offered by the market. Complementing this author, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) state that it has been central to the Consumer Culture Theory the representation of the consumer as a subject who seeks a reflective and empowered identity, making his/her way through the infinity of opportunities provided by the market and, often, reflecting both consciously and critically on the market mediated by messages that surround it. Consumer culture is thus a central construct,

conceived as a social arrangement in which the relationships between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful forms of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould, 2006).

The CCT is organized based on a series of theoretical questions related to the relationship between the individual and collective identity of consumers: The culture created and embodied in the lived world of consumers, processes, and structures of lived experiences, and the nature and dynamism of the sociological categories through which this dynamic of consumer culture is influenced. CCT researchers, through exploratory and qualitative research efforts, have challenged the models of the cognitive psychology tradition. When considering the resulting aspects of marketing, they seek to consider the context and embrace the complexity rather than admitting these factors as secondary (Pinto et al., 2015). Considering the anthropological perspective, Pinto and Lara (2011) argue that consumption is centralized in a sphere where men and objects acquire meaning and produce meanings and social distinctions, making objects sufficient to bring out the presence or absence of identities, worldviews, or lifestyles. Consumers construct and absorb these meanings in specific situations and social relationships (Pinto & Zambier, 2013).

The studies incorporated under the aegis of the CCT are based on specific consumption contexts, contributing to the construction and development of knowledge in consumer research. The predominance of studies of a qualitative nature, suitable for accessing subjective questions marked by research objects that would be difficult to understand through surveys, experiments, or modeling (Souza et al., 2013), stands out. In this sense, it is noteworthy that, even with the predominance of qualitative studies, the CCT does not define this characteristic as mandatory in its studies; it corroborates the division between qualitative and quantitative methods (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The main theoretical issues addressed by the CCT encompass four structures of interests: (a) market cultures, marked by sociocultural dynamics impregnated in brand communities, with the market as a mediator of social relationships



and social relationships; (b) consumer identity projects, based on identity games, involving body image and self-presentation, considering the experiential dimensions of consumption; (c) socio-historical patterns of consumption, considering the formation of consumption by class, ethnicity, gender, and other usual and social characteristics; (d) mass media market ideologies and consumer interpretive strategies concerning material, discursive representations and consumerist images in the market (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Morais & Quintão, 2016; Vera, Gosling, & Shigaki, 2019).

Finally, it appears that the contextualized discussions in CCT have achieved visibility in critical international journals in the field of marketing, such as the *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Culture, Markets, and Consumption*, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing* and *Journal of Advertising* (Vera & Gosling, 2020). Thus, it is evident that the CCT's research tradition is centered on consumption contexts to obtain new constructs and theoretical insights, aiming to encourage the investigation of contextual, symbolic, and experiential aspects of consumption that are awakened from a consumption cycle, including acquisition, consumption and possession, and the disposition processes and analysis of these phenomena from a micro, meso and macro theoretical perspective (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Vera & Gosling, 2020).

In addition to publications in different journals, initiatives regarding the quest to present the state-of-the-art of CCT in books have been undertaken both in the international context (Keller, Halkier, Wilska & Truninger, 2017; Sherry & Ficher, 2017; Arnould & Thompson, 2018) as in Brazil (Pinto & Batinga, 2018; Pinto & Joaquim, 2021).

ASSEMBLAGE THEORY

Considering the perspective of the CCT, a theoretical contribution that should be highlighted, integrating the dynamic nature of the relationships between consumers, market, and cultural meanings, is the Assemblage Theory.

It is an ontological perspective that focuses on understanding the elements, attributes, and actors in dynamic arrangements (Casotti & Suarez, 2016). Assemblages are systems characterized by various human and non-human components that interact with each other in different places and under different conditions to negotiate and influence the arrangements that connect them (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Delanda, 2006a).

Assemblage is a concept that dates back to the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, having been adapted for social sciences by Manuel DeLanda. It is a way of ordering heterogeneous entities to work together for a specific time (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Müller, 2015). Deleuze defines assemblage as a multiplicity composed of many heterogeneous terms that establish links and relationships between them in all ages, genders, and reigns from different natures. In this way, the single unit of the set is established by its co-functioning; that is, it is configured as a symbiosis. It is not affiliations that matter, but all alliances and leagues; they are not successions but contagions (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). The English term assemblage is the translation of the original French *agencement*, consisting of several heterogeneous parts linked together to form a whole – constituting a relational assemblage. The definition of the French word *agencement* does not simply involve heterogeneous composition but involves the construction of an active process that presents a specific type of arrangement (Nail, 2017).

Based on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conception of assemblage, DeLanda (2006a), as one of the critical interpreters of the concept, critically theorized the multiplicity of agency thinking to explore the complexity of society. From then on, the assemblage was adopted in different academic disciplines with different possibilities of articulations as theoretical and methodological references to explore socio-spatial complexities (Kamalipour & Peimani, 2015). Thus, the Assemblage Theory considers the multiplicity of heterogeneous objects whose unity comes exclusively from working together. In several fields of investigation, assemblage denotes networks of hybrid, constantly changing, and heterogeneous things in which no factor



of causality or outcome is invoked beyond the relationships established within and between these networks. In addition, assemblages are coherent with heterogeneous entities, such as physical objects, events, signs, ideas, and statements, and can interact with or affect the other components within an assemblage. In DeLanda's ontology (2006a), an individual, a population, friendship networks, interpersonal networks, organizations and actions, inter-organizational networks, cities, and territorial states are all conceptualized as assemblages at different spatial scales (Hill, Canniford, & Mol, 2014; Weijo, Martin, & Arnould, 2018; Wezemael, 2008).

The concept of assemblage makes it difficult to describe the possibilities of applications and innovations generated so far. Still, several authors from fields as diverse as philosophy (DeLanda, 2006a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), anthropology (Rabinow, 2003), sociology (Callon, 1986; Phillips, 2006), and cultural geography (Dewsbury, 2011) have managed to establish a conceptual line about such a theory. The ideas incorporated by the authors use the concept of assemblage to understand the unpredictability and contingency of events in order to describe action, knowledge, and power as emerging effects of networks of things, exploring, above all, the roles of material culture, as a prerequisite for determining how new cultural forms emerge (Hill, Canniford, & Mol, 2014). Despite the variant perspectives of the authors mentioned above, what unites ideas of assemblages, actors-networks, and figurations is the conception of the world constituted of more or less temporary amalgams of heterogeneous material and semiotic elements, among which capacities and actions emerge, not as properties of individual elements, but through the relationships established between them. Advancing the concern with the meaning associated with linguistic and interpretive turns, in addition to problems of rigidity versus change associated with structuralism, the authors converge on the idea that assemblage offers a range of tools to think about the social world formed from continuous interactions between different types of objects and situations at various scales of life (Canniford & Bajde, 2015).

A key benefit of the Assemblage Theory is the provision of specific tools and vocabularies that recognize and explain how different types of phenomena are related. In doing so, the theory allows for constructing descriptions in which materials (tangible things) and semiotic elements (expressions of various kinds) become interconnected and shape each other. This way, an expanded research look is added to the existing concern with heterogeneity since, in addition to linguistic conditions, narratives, possibilities for change, and agency approaches, it also considers how material things can play active roles in the formulation and reformulation of worlds (DeLanda, 2006a; Latour, 2005). In other words, objects and technologies are not simple "passive vessels" to which humans can delegate tasks or assign meaning. Instead, objects can act to stabilize and organize society through their obstinacy (Latour, 1999). Thus, an assemblage is a multiplicity, neither a part nor a whole. Suppose the elements of a set are defined only by their external relations. In that case, it is possible, too, that they can be added, subtracted, and recombined with each other ad infinitum, without ever creating or destroying an organic unity (Nail, 2017).

According to Canniford and Shankar (2013), Assemblage Theory has similarities with semiotic readings of culture in which the meanings of words and texts depend on their relationships with other texts. However, in the case of Assemblage Theory, this logic is extended beyond textual association towards "material semiotics," which defines the meanings and uses of any consumption resource as the effect generated continuously by the networks of relationships in which they are located. Furthermore, in semiotic theories, meanings are attributed as relational effects of the totality of signs in their system; in Assemblage Theory, meanings, uses, and encounters of nature emerge in the process of a totality of multiple elements, emphasizing the fluid nature of socio-material collectivities, capable of allowing contingent relationships between components and continuous revision of assemblage (Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Latour, 2005; Epp & Velagelati, 2014).

In experiential consumption, interaction is necessary for the consumer experience to occur,



so its current definitions see it as a holistic view and multidimensional response that requires interaction. DeLanda's approach to Assemblage Theory emphasizes the processes that give rise to ongoing interactions between heterogeneous parts. The part-whole interaction is a consequence of the externality of relationships, in which a part can exist by itself and as part of a larger whole, establishing the expressive roles these parts play in the interaction. Thus, assemblages can be characterized by enduring states defined by properties that are inevitably real, existing in the here and now (Hoffman & Novak, 2016; Delanda, 2006b; Rogers, 2018).

RELATED PERSPECTIVES AND PROPOSED RESEARCH AGENDA

From the above, there are relations between the field delimited by the CCT and that defined by the Assemblage Theory. Considering, therefore, the epistemological issues arising from the interlocution between CCT, Assemblage, and their reverberations, a challenge arises for research in the context of studies on consumption and its nuances, paying attention to the importance of efforts that favor individual understanding and social analysis of the phenomena that populate the intersection between the two theories. The CCT does not envision culture as a homogeneous system, affected by its collectively shared meanings or marked by convergent and reductive lifestyles and values incorporated by the members of a specific society. On the contrary, it seeks to explore the heterogeneity of the distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of cultural groupings that stand out and overlap, cohabiting within the broader socio-historical context of globalization and market capitalism (Casotti & Suarez, 2016). Thus, a first point of dialogue establishes that the Assemblage Theory brings to the CCT the premise that when studying actions of a social nature, individuals should not be dissociated from those with whom they interact. Both belong to arrangements resulting from their skills and responsibilities (Arnould & Thompson, 2015).

Considering the relationship between the theories, a second highlight suggests understanding the perspectives associated with

consumer culture based on the assumptions incorporated with consumption practices, the market, and representations. While CCT presents its concerns focused on social meanings, socio-historical influences, and social dynamics capable of shaping consumer experiences impacted by the context of their everyday actions, Assemblage Theory has been at the forefront of a paradigm shift that sees the space and agency as a result of the association of humans and non-humans to form increasingly diverse and heterogeneous sets. As explained by Müller (2015), this change of thought can offer ways to rethink the relationships between power, politics, and space, to understand the relationship between the parts and the whole more procedurally, benefiting from the exploration of links with other social theories. In addition, a more sustained involvement with language and power processes, and relationships observed in the essence of consumer culture, can be defended, making it possible to establish a connection between the human and the goods they acquired, thus forming the consumer's identity—individual or social group. The fields of study evidenced by such discussions thus depart from the criticism of interpretations based on purely economic theories, such as those based on neoclassical functionalism. Such theories translate consumption only to an individual sphere, which considers people as only rational beings, and their purchase choices are necessarily linked to the usefulness of the goods in question. Therefore, the calculating logic arising from the economic model did not allow the possibility of discussing a dimension focused on the symbolic and social understanding of consumption (Barros, 2006).

As a third aspect of interlocution, it appears that an essential contribution of the Assemblage Theory to CCT considers its ability to allow a greater understanding of heterogeneous elements, which can remain together without necessarily forming a coherent whole (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Souza-Leão & Moura, 2022). Thus, this relationship can allow researchers to observe how different human or non-human elements are likely to interact with each other, basing their function on an assemblage and the strategic contradictions of social phenomena, such as consumption, intensifying or reducing the tensions inherent to the analyzed interactions.



In addition, the Assemblage Theory can offer CCT researchers the practical possibility of investigation along stratification lines, through which power relations, resistance, and regrouping can be achieved through consumption. From the perspective of the logic of the assemblage, it can be seen how consumers manage to create Marketing resources to represent the collective and the individuals that compose it since the field established by the CCT tends to portray consumers as co-responsible for the assemblage that guides them (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Hoffman & Novak, 2018).

The culturally constituted world, the consumer good, and the consumer are presented as fundamental pieces to provoke the emerging studies of the consonance between the CCT and the Assemblage Theory. A fourth point of attention can then be raised at this point. Historically, as in many areas of the social sciences, the CCT community has also recently experienced discussions centered on theories corresponding to agency versus those related to structure (Casotti & Suarez, 2016). In this way, the understanding of the Assemblage Theory, in its essence of assembly or composition, could suggest, at the same time, that it would reinforce the premises of the CCT, a vision more adequate to the idea of association and hybridity between humans and non-humans, studied along with the properties of such a realistic social ontology. For DeLanda (2006a), the social context is an agency generated by historical processes, not just language. There are no micro or macro dimensions, such as agency or structure, but a set that cannot (and should not) be reduced to its parts only, generated by recurrent causalities and their contingencies. Thus, understanding the compositions of the social implies advancing the reductionisms of micro and macro determinisms intertwined by consumer culture, especially when considering its experiential aspect.

Several possibilities for research themes emerge based on the perspectives related to the CCT, Assemblage Theory, and their interlocutions. The understanding that we live in a consumer society implies knowledge of contemporary phenomena expressed by cultural consumption practices. In this sense, the assemblage can help smooth out some of the rough edges criticized by CCT researchers, especially when it excessively emphasizes the individual's action in the identity construction process without considering other themes, such as the influence of socio-historical patterns of consumption and market ideologies (Askergaard & Linnet, 2011). The study themes, evidenced here, suggest an investigation that pervades the subjectivity of the agents, considering the ideological and conjunctural forces capable of producing subjectivity and shaping specific forms of agency.

Inspired by studies by Arnould and Thompson (2005), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and DeLanda (2006a), in addition to the emerging perspectives of consumer culture and its experiential issues, Figure 1 was created proposing a research agenda with themes arising from the intersection between CCT and Assemblage Theory. The information in the table does not constitute an exhaustive analysis of the theories studied but highlights contemporary proposals to support advanced studies in the consumption field. Thus, analyzing the weighted questions for the research must consider the theories about the political ideologies, market structures, and power relations that involve consumption dynamics. Other relevant aspects concern the meaning of discourses, technologies, and behaviors that focus on fragmentation and socio-material arrangements to understand the formation of consumers' identities.

**Figure 1**

Emerging questions for research, according to the related perspectives between CCT, Assemblage Theory, and their interlocutions

Perspectives	Emerging questions for research
Family relationships	How can outsourcing child care characterize rituals that can impact family relationships? How can normative cultural discourses incorporate needs rooted in the family structure?
Entertainment	How do cultural products provide consumers with raw materials for building their identities? What drives and strengthens the link between cultural products and consumers in their experiences?
Environment and nature	How do consumers' experiences of nature emerge from a heterogeneous set of resources? How are adverse environmental effects perceived by consumers of nature, considering sustainability?
Consumer communities	What is the role of individual consumer discourses and behaviors in the fragmentation of changing socio-material arrangements? How is the configuration of communities of new consumers and the formation of their identities?
Brands and advertising	How are new markets created from a legitimation process mediated by brands? How can a brand revitalization process promote innovation congruently with prevailing social ideals?
Market dynamics	What is the role of consumption dynamics and its experiential aspects in forming, transforming, and legitimating market dynamics?
Events and regionalization	What is the role of typical events in constructing a region's identity? What symbolic aspects are evidenced from the events, fairs, and parties characteristic of Brazilian cities? How do events influence consumer behavior, characterizing the identity of a place?
General aspects	How can individuals' social actions associate/disassociate with those with whom they interact? How can the arrangements generated by consumption experiences result in responsibilities for the individuals involved since the assemblages are not fixed?

Source: Elaborated by the author (2021).

The proposals presented aim to construct a theoretical knowledge that integrates the elements incorporated into the CCT and the aspects of heterogeneity arising from the Assemblage Theory. Thus, it is possible to superimpose heterogeneous components to locate and extend consumer cultures and markets through their experiential aspects, to renew and update theories of market and consumption, considering conventional, regional, and local aspects and their expressions and borders for the transformation of culture and the way it can be transmitted by individuals and their collectives, instead of simply considering it as attributed. The research agenda mentioned above can therefore include consumers, markets, value, families, homes, technologies, and nature, as well as the management of bodies, space, and taste, as a cultural and symbolic system wrapped in its aspects of social and changeable (Canniford & Bajde, 2015).

Finally, it should be noted that several times, national studies present a gap regarding the implication of the cited characteristics in constructing the identity of the individual and the nation. Therefore, it is impossible to effectively understand the acts of consumption, their subjects, and their contexts. Then, we suggest to incorporate field research and ethnographies into the various national studies, considering practices, patterns, and consumption rituals of different social groups, age groups, genders, and religions. In addition, one can consider the mediation mechanisms that greatly influence material culture and its role in the contemporary world and the study of objects with their implication on Brazilian society (Barbosa & Campbell, 2006; Pinto & Lara, 2011). It is worth emphasizing that the Assemblage Theory can offer an exciting and desirable framework to focus on the abovementioned themes.



DIVERSITY OF RESEARCH METHODS

Considering the relationships between CCT, Assemblage Theory, and their interlocutions, it is possible to notice the favoring of different investigation methods to corroborate their theoretical contributions. Considering methodology, it appears that the CCT corroborated with the traditional marketing and consumer research since it adopted an epistemology of verification based on psychological reductionism and methodological individualism, functioning analogously, qualitative as to logical empiricist methods of validation (Thompson, Arnould & Giesler, 2013; Saatcioglu & Corus, 2018). This initial perspective, in turn, originated several conditions of analysis that consider agency and structure. On the side of the Assemblage Theory, studies on how the connectivity network of modern society allows individuals, objects, and products to work together through continuous interactions in an assemblage provided an understanding of the new possibilities that determine their expansion to reach humans and non-humans, through their actions and connections with each other. The Assemblage Theory presents its perspective based on other consolidated theories, such as Actor-Network Theory (Callon, 2007; Latour, 2005), Practice Theory (Warde, 2005), and Governance Studies (Bonsu & Darmody, 2008). The main contribution of Assemblage Theory to CCT lies in its ability to allow a better understanding of how heterogeneous elements can stay together without forming a coherent whole (Delanda, 2006a; Souza-Leão & Moura, 2022; Arnould & Thompson, 2015).

Considering the objective and the epistemological positioning of the questions suggested for the study with the interlocutions between the two theories, the research presents qualitative characteristics. Qualitative research, according to Yilmaz (2013), is based on constructivist epistemology and explores what is supposed to be a dynamic reality socially constructed from a structure impregnated with value while being flexible, descriptive, holistic, and sensitive to context; that is, a detailed description of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the people involved. Furthermore, the post-positivist, post-structural, constructionist, and critical paradigms lay the groundwork for qualitative

research design's ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations.

Due to its characteristics and construction process, based on the CCT and the Assemblage Theory, it can be considered an epistemological position, from an interpretive perspective, based on phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory. Pinto and Santos (2008) discuss consumer research, in which new theoretical and methodological issues (re)emerge, leading researchers in this field to (re)establish their conversations with subjects in the human and social sciences, such as philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. In this way, the authors bring some epistemological and methodological elements to light, which can serve as the basis for a broad discussion in proposing a new path for consumer research in Brazil based on the CCT and the Assemblage Theory. From an interpretive point of view, what differentiates human action from the movement of physical objects is the fact that the former is particularly significant. Furthermore, phenomenology can be considered a movement that goes from an "initial" descriptive branch – concerned with conscious experience – to an interpretative branch – which began to point to the need to "localize" this experience.

Among the most explored and known qualitative methods, the ethnographic method has been presented as one of the most important and used in research in the social sciences. The ethnographic method, according to Rocha and Eckert (2008), finds its specificity in being developed within the scope of the anthropological discipline, from data collection techniques and procedures complemented by a fieldwork practice originated from a prolonged coexistence of the researcher with the social group to be studied. In addition, the practice of ethnographic field research corresponds to a scientific demand to produce anthropological knowledge data from an interrelationship between the researcher and the subjects studied who interact in the context, generally resorting to the techniques of direct observation research, informal and formal conversations, non-directive interviews, among other techniques. Ethnographic work emerges from a field of knowledge, anthropology, in which understanding and interpretation are privileged forms of knowledge construction. For there



to be a dialogue between Administration and Anthropology, it is necessary: First, respect for the world of the other, assuming a non-ethnocentric posture, that is, of non-hierarchization of the sciences or contempt for the objects of investigation in one or another area; secondly, socialization with the jargon of each area; thirdly, finding possibilities that relativize specific modes of action, as long as this does not harm foundations considered fundamental to the area from which they emerge (Cavedon, 2014).

When discussing consumer behavior, Pinto and Santos (2008) reinforce the importance of combining ethnography and grounded theory since the latter helps the researcher to build a theory starting from the concrete gradually, descriptive level of data until reaching a more abstract, more analytical/conceptual level in which theoretical categories and their interrelationships are established without losing the "richness" of phenomenological-ethnographic data. Thus, one can highlight the authors' concern in arguing that associating phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory is not only a possible alternative but also desirable and, by its nature, applicable to studies involving CCT, Assemblage Theory, and their interlocutions. However, methodological suggestions cannot be restricted to the discussions undertaken here. As the proposal defended in the article is to promote dialogue between theories, it is desirable that these "bridges" are also built in the empirical to go beyond what is developed in the field of consumption.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the discussions triggered in this essay, many opportunities to establish a conversation between CCT and Assemblage Theory became evident considering research in marketing, especially in the Brazilian context, since the country presents diversified cultures in terms of historical, social, economic, and demographic issues, linked to the aspect of consumption.

Returning to the factors that motivated the elaboration of this essay, its objectives were achieved since it was possible to establish a research agenda, contemplating the aspects inherent to the consumer culture capable of promoting the interlocution between the

theories. We also highlight that the Assemblage Theory constitutes, as evidence, a practical option for substantiating research related to CCT, either because it constitutes an established connection with other theories; or because it is characterized as an adequate assumption for the investigation of the consumer and his relations with cultural phenomena.

The insights produced by the theoretical discussion of this study also showed that the Theory of Assemblage, when verifying the dynamics and principles established between the members of a social group, shows how individuals relate to each other in a social system marked by stratification and processes of territorialization. This aspect can contribute, along with the literature related to consumer culture, to the emergence of new research questions, new epistemologies, and methodologies little used by Brazilian researchers. In addition, the studies triggered in this discussion can be used, with their practical implications, for teaching in Administration, especially when dealing with theories and methodological contributions used in consumer studies.

As future challenges arise from this work, there are possibilities for deeper discussions involving multi and interdisciplinary researchers in Anthropology, Sociology, and Psychology, in line with Marketing scholars. As a considerable challenge, one cannot mention that the Assemblage Theory requires the researcher to be able to go beyond traditional CCT texts, which are very focused on discussions related to consumer agency. The Assemblage Theory considers the consumption phenomenon as the result of the agency of several actors articulated in dynamic arrangements (Souza-Leão & Moura, 2022). Although this is a relevant and exciting aspect of the theory, it can, at some point, prove to be a limiting factor due to the difficulty of considering all the actors involved in a phenomenon and the complexity of realizing how to capture some particularities of the events studied.

Finally, this essay fulfilled its objective of initiating a discussion about the intersection between two theories that are so different and, at the same time, essential for the field of study of consumer culture. Establishing the interlocution



between CCT and Assemblage Theory was intended to instigate researchers to think about new perspectives and investigation methods to explore everyday phenomena related to the individual's experience and the social groups to which he belongs in their intensity and completeness.

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Endnotes

1 The translation of the article is the responsibility of the authors.