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Is It Easy Being Green? On the Dilemmas of Material Cultures of Household Sustainability

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Abstract

In the 1970s 'greens' were normally thought of as radicals because of their uncompromising political views about sustainability, non-violence, social justice and grassroots democracy. Sometimes greens were marginalised as 'tree-huggers' because of their affinity with the non-human world. Today, in popular discourse, 'green' provides the centre of sustainability gravity (Barr 2003). Green has become a definitive reflection of what individuals are to become as both consumers and citizens. It is easy, it is said, to be green. This is evident from product branding to categories used in government survey results to describe the 'most acceptable' household practices. But as green is drawn into the mainstream of politics and commerce, there are both possibilities and problems. The possibilities are self-evident. The more one might be defined by a 'green identity', the more likely everyday decisions will be informed by choices, attitudes and practices that purport to be 'environmentally friendly'. Individuals start to reflect on everyday practices. Is the tap running as I clean my teeth? Am I carrying my shopping home in a plastic bag? Can I take public transport? But the problems are just as evident. The more green life becomes mainstreamed, the more it shares with consumerism, becoming trendy among the young and affluent and lacking creativity as certain personal actions and consumer products become coded as the 'right' green choices.

Disciplines

Life Sciences | Physical Sciences and Mathematics | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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