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ARTIGO

Saias, selins e sensibilidades: movimentos feministas e bens de consumo

Skirts, saddles and sensibilities: feminist movements and consumer goods

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Resumo: *Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar, em perspectiva histórica, momentos de estreita vinculação entre a atuação política do feminismo e as práticas de consumo modernas. O enfoque central será a análise do surgimento da bicicleta como bem de consumo. Ainda que pensada para homens, foi – nos Estados Unidos e em vários países europeus – apropriada pelas mulheres, que rapidamente se transformaram nas suas principais consumidoras. A chegada desse bem de consumo foi relacionada às lutas feministas por emancipação, provocando uma onda de transformações sociais.*

Palavras-chave: *consumo; comunicação; feminismo; bicicleta.*

Abstract: *This article aims to show, in historical perspective, moments of close linkage between the political action of feminism and the modern consumer practices. The main focus will be the analysis of the emergence of the bicycle as a consumer good. Although it was thought for men, bicycle was – in the United States and in several European countries – appropriated by women, who quickly became its main consumers. The arrival of this good of consumption was related to the feminist struggles for emancipation, provoking a wave of social transformations.*

Key-words: *consumption; communication; feminism; bicycle.*

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Introduction

The goal of this study is to examine the historical relationships and partnerships established between social movements – especially feminism[3] – and the representations and practices of consumption. In this bibliographic and documental investigation, we've analyzed mainly the emergency of a certain good – the bicycle – and its appropriations for the libertarian struggles of women, both in regards to their possibilities of locomotion and the expansion of spaces of transit and the redefinition of the borders of their bodies.

Through textual analysis (BAUER; GASKELL, 2002; DUARTE; BARROS, 2009) grounded in the meaningful presence of images and texts of North American advertisement and news from the end of the 19th century, the research reinforces that the phenomenon of consumption, generally perceived through a moralistic point-of-view and bias that locates it as politically reactionary, became, in certain historical circumstances, an ally of the movement for women emancipation (ROCHA; FRID; CORBO, 2015). The case of the bicycle is an example in this sense, justifying its choice as an object of analysis, because this consumer good articulated female struggle in the public sphere – for freedom of transportation – and private sphere – regarding the control of sexual desire.

Academics and lawyers

The criticism to consumption through a moralistic point of view that, at times, even sees it as a "disease" is something normal in the common sense, in media discourses and even in part of the intelligentsia as a counterpart to the hedonistic point of view about the phenomenon (ROCHA, 2005). In fact, it is an old tension that ends up marking many of the interpretations about the meanings and impacts of social phenomena.

3 A more careful revision of the uncountable texts and multiple positions of the complex universe of feminist studies would surpass the limits of this study.

In the case of those related to the universe of communication – consumption, television, advertisement, cellphones, videogames, among others – this tension goes back to the term *Kulturindustrie*, *created by Adorno and* Horkheimer in the classic Dialectics of enlightenment (1947). Twenty years after the first publication of the expression "cultural industry", Adorno (1968), in a new essay called *Résumé* über *Kulturindustrie*,[4] said that the preference for the expression "cultural industry" as a replacement for "mass culture" happened aiming "[…] To exclude beforehand the interpretation that pleases the lawyers[5] of the thing […]" (ADORNO, 1971, p. 287). Thus, the idea of cultural industry aims to comprise the process of massification of communication before the accelerated production of media content in highly industrialized societies. However, this vision presents a subtle redundancy that ends up relativizing the own perspective it aims to accomplish. If human beings have the capacity to transform nature through symbolic systems that elaborate languages, techniques, artifacts, machines, industries, etc., it would be possible to say that every industry is a cultural industry, because it is always necessarily linked to a symbolical level. Therefore, the idea of "cultural industry" in Adorno, less than trying to distinguish a type of "industry" that would produce material goods and other, the cultural industry, that would produce symbolical goods, indicates that the latter is submitted to the same economic interests than the others. Frankfurtian thinkers, that aimed to distance themselves from the supposed protectors of mass culture, reveal, in fact, another intention: the conscious choice of affirm their moral and political position facing the consequences of mass communication for the modern-contemporary society. In this sense, the choice of expression "cultural industry" implies an accusatory perspective – something pertaining to lawyers (*anwälten*) and courts of law – facing the media products and the themes of communication.

It is important to remember that the tendency of positioning oneself morally, choosing "one side" in the mass communication debate, is the

4 Translated for the English language as "Dialectic of Enlightenment" (1941).
5 *Anwälten, in German, means lawyer or jurist.*

central issue of the essay Apocalyptic and integrated, from Umberto Eco (1964). Through this tension between "good" and "evil" – the integrated and apocalyptic from Eco – academics of communication positioned themselves as defenders or accusers in front of a defendant, and, due to this reason, would weave ideas that, in fact, would appear to be more minutes of acquittal or condemnation that, by the own limit of their places of speech, left aside a more detailed examination of fundamental dimensions of these complex phenomena. This "court paradigm" polarized and may have been one of the reasons to leave consumption aside of academic reflections and debates for so long (ROCHA, 1995). Not fortuitously, even if the phenomenon have named the experience that we live in – consumer society –, it is a theme with few studies in the social sciences and it is often filled by ideology and/or emotional involvements that may tend to a strong accusation, or treat it as a futility that would not deserve the same academic credit of those so-called "serious" issues:

> This "moralistic view" of consumption is manifested both in simplistic and naïve discourses and in intellectually sophisticated analyses. However, to treat consumption as a banality or accusing it for the problems we face get in the way of analyses that seek to understand it as a central phenomenon of the modern-contemporary society (ROCHA; FRID; CORBO, 2016, p. 14).

Thus, it is with a certain frequency that investigators of social phenomena face the difficulty of the polarization contained in their themes, which leads them to the risk of turning into the "lawyers of the thing" or choleric inquisitors. Our study, therefore, while it investigates consumption through a historical perspective, contributes, due to the distance that temporality can bring, to perceive historic events in which women's struggle established partnerships with the modern practices of consumption.

Therefore, we will begin listing some transformations that consumption provoked in the established powers, as it was the case for significant contributions of the department store *Selfridge*'s for the struggle of suffragettes in London in the beginning of the 20th century (ROCHA;

FRID; CORBO, 2015) or the alliance between North American feminists and the habit of smoking in the end of the 1920's (LEAL; FREIRE FILHO; ROCHA, 2016). This study, however, intends to reveal that other specific consumer good – the bicycle – motivated change in the cultural and political level, contributing decisively in the struggles, experiences, sensibilities and the existence itself of women more free from the traditions of domination.

Women and consumption

The Industrial Revolution is conventionally taken as a starting point for the formation of modern society. The productivism, the notion of self, the consolidation of the powers of the State, the prevalence of the perception of time as history (ROCHA, 1995), in addition to the mass media and consumption – all characteristics easily recognized in the contemporary society – were managed in the complex transformation of forces that amalgamated forms of production, new cultural values, social re-organizations, political transits and sensibilities around the project that ended up configuring what we call, in a wide sense, of modernity.

It is in this context, already relatively consolidated, that a new model of commercial businesses arrives: department stores, also known as grands magasins, created in France, England and United States of America in the second half of the 19th century which fill a fundamental role in the incentive of sales, in the pecuniary dispendium and, especially, in consumption like we know today:

> In the popular level, this period was marked by the democratization of leisure and fashion and by the arrival of department stores […] like Macy's (1858) in New York, Bon Marche (1869), La Samaritaine (1870) and *Galeries Lafayette (1895)* in Paris, Wakamaker's in Filadelfia *(1877)* and *Selfridge*'s in London (1909). They represented what was called "revolution in sales" […] (BURKE, 2008, p. 32).

The way people acquire goods is transformed and consumption begins, until then, to be experienced as a pleasurable activity. Because of

that, in the environment of these big stores, "[…] Customers were asked to consider shopping not as an economic act, but as a social and cultural event" (RAPPAPORT, 2004, p. 159). In addition to that, the use of media and advertisement in favor of shopping activities are some of the aspects of consolidation of a culture that begins to have in consumption one of the most common practices and one of the most shared representations. Advertisements and posters that announced grands magasins used multiple visual stimuli reproduced in their windows[6] and shopping experiences in the space of department stores.

In this new concept, women began to lead the scene of consumption: because they were the main customers and because they acted as hired employees of these big department stores. The female frequency in grands magasins was extremely meaningful, because it became one of the first public spaces where women could go unaccompanied: "[…] The department store became interesting to the media not only due to the merchandise they sold, but for its definition as a social and cultural institution for women" (RAPPAPORT, 2004, p. 164). As a work space, around 1900, for example, an impressive number of 250 thousand women were employed in British retail – an area with an ongoing development that filled over a third of the total workforce of that country (COX, 2017).

More than that, the relationship between women and consumption enabled by department stores is also marked by a political alliance. In an uncommon partnership, first wave feminists, which also were known all over the world as suffragettes, were articulated in big magazines to advance their political projects:

> […] In London, Paris and different cities in the USA, department stores hosted suffragettes meetings at the same time they invested in advertisement in magazines of the movement. The activists wanted to evidence their features and female elegance with long gowns and accessories, always in the colors purple, white and green […]. With that, they had a

6 The techniques of seduction also appear in the windows of stores allowing visibility to the products offered – since, previously, consumers had to go to the store already knowing what they wished to acquire (ROCHA, FRID and CORBO, 2016).

> two-way street, they were customers of the same department stores that protected them (ROCHA; FRID; CORBO, 2015).

The case of Selfridge's is emblematic. The department store located in the West End, in London, was the meeting place of women who fought for the right to vote. It is known that Gordon Selfridge, the owner, had a favorable opinion on the female suffrage and, "[…] In an almost feminist tone, without any apparent political message, he [Selfridge] portrayed the store as a female 'rendez-vous', or as the ideal meeting spot" (RAPPAPORT, 2004, p. 172). Thus, he embraced the cause of the suffragettes which, not by chance, were also his customers. Selfridge did not only allow meetings in the store's café, but he also made special showcases with colors that honored the movement. In addition to that, he published ads in newspapers pro suffrage produced by women, which meant a financial incentive to the movement (NAVA, 2007). Also in the documentary *Secrets* of Selfridge's (United Kingdom, 2014) and in the TV series Mr. *Selfridge (United Kingdom, 2013), both from the PBS channel, we see the close bond between the image of Gordon Selfridge*[7] *and the leadership characters of the suffragette movement in London in the 1910's.*

The socio-cultural arrangements, in addition to the business model itself, which made the consumption in department stores an essentially feminine activity also worked to signal and reinforce a gender division of tasks in two basic poles of the capitalist system – production and consumption. The production, sphere of the political struggle, something that requires strength, energy and vigor, is dominantly perceived as male; the consumption, sphere of the pleasurable experience of the appeal to emotions, magic and fantasy, is dominantly perceived as female.[8] The perception of these two spheres – the first, male, the second, female – did not stop the political struggle to be processed in the spaces

7 Gordon Selfridge became an inspiration for the playwright Harvey Granville-Barker to write one of the main characters of the post-suffragette play Madras House, from 1911 (NAVA, 2007).

8 To expand the discussion about the differences between production as male and consumption as female, see Stephen Brown (2000)'s text.

of consumption, in a certain way being capable of controlling female activity. In these spheres, whose main reason was to offer leisure and pleasure to women,[9] the political action, paradoxically, prospered. The suffragettes exploited the possibilities within their control exactly to escape from it, establishing the beginning of a fruitful partnership between feminism and consumption that has repeated itself in other events registered in the history of their struggles.

This was also the case of the partnership developed between the cigarette market and female freedom, more precisely concretized in the actions that happened in the US around the brand *Lucky Strike* in the beginning of the 20th century. The event, advertising on one hand, libertarian on the other, was a march that became wordly renowned as the Toches of Freedom, which gathered feminists in the famous Fifth Avenue, in New York, so they could all together, in an act of rebellion, light their cigarettes, showing that the woman could take part of the public space, and cultivate habits that are similar to the male perspective. It is important to reinforce that, until then, smoking was not allowed for women and it worked to strongly mark the differences between what men and women could do:

> […] The moment of smoking would separate men and women, promoting an organization of space that both reflected and engendered social roles of each gender: after a dinner, while the women would go to the kitchen to prepare the dessert, the men would smoke in their libraries [….] (LEAL; FREIRE FILHO; ROCHA, 2016, p. 53).

North American women already had conquered the right to vote and were taking part of public spaces in a more meaningful way in the late 1920's, due to the use of the bicycle. For them, the cigarette was an important symbol in their process of emancipation. *And, in the conjuncture that gathered the rise of consumer culture and the American way of life, the tobacco companies and feminist movements aligned their interests:*

9 Not fortuitously, the choice of the title Au Bonheur des Dames (the paradise of dames) for Émile Zola's novel that has a department store in Paris as setting.

one, motivated by the immense market potential, other by the political expressivity that the act of smoking in public would entail.

Thus, a sales action was organized in 1929 for the Easter Sunday Parade which articulated female freedom and the opening of the tobacco industry for women that paraded with their "freedom torches" (*Lucky Strike cigarettes*) lit. The event had a wide journalistic coverage and provoked a nationwide debate.

The march, of course, presents the particularity of being orchestrated by Edward Bernays,[10] a professional in communication and sales that worked for a brand of cigarettes. But that may also have been the case of the business savvy Gordon Selfridge in his stores. However, these sale strategies, if they ever existed, were only possible due to the power of a partnership – consumption and women's movement – because endorsing the female presence buying in stores or smoking in the streets were a mutual interest.[11] Thus, either because of the forces that move consumption or those who move feminist battles, the analysis of certain consumption phenomena must go through a perspective free of reductionisms that does not necessarily oppose political and market practices. In fact, profitable and reciprocal points of contact meant historical opportunity for both of them – both in shopping in department stores and smoking cigarettes in the streets. What we see next is how another consumer good – now, the politically correct bicycle – was also capable of gathering market interests with female freedom of movement and autonomy over the body.

Bicycles and freedom

Concrete consumer goods or even the phenomenon as a whole may, in certain historical moments, seem articulated to the forces that fought for political freedom – the right to vote – or disputed cultural habits – the

10 Nephew of Freud and a pioneer in public relations that had written the first book and taught the first university course on the theme (CESCA, 2012).

11 The producer's motivations, either sustained only by their market interests, or sustained by the effective commitment with the female cause, will be object of analysis in a future research.

possibility of smoking in public. Therefore, consumption is not a mere reflection of production, nor a simple support for social differentiation and power exercises. In fact, when a product or service resulting from the game of market and productive forces begins to make part of the cultural order, a complex array of meanings are opened and a multiplicity of readings becomes possible by the social actors. It is evident that these readings are conditioned by the function of the good itself, once it would be hard to support a reading that would make a soap, for instance, be part of a meal. These readings are also conditioned by the advertisement narrative that is given both the name and the identity of the consumption good (BAUDRILLARD, 1991; BARTHES, 2003; ROCHA, 1985). However, a product or service can acquire unforeseen meanings for its "function" nor for the advertisement narrative. That was the bicycle's case, whose evident "function" was to transport and it was shaped that way by the advertisement industry.

The point is that the bicycle went far beyond as a support for meanings and allowed more complex and polemic readings than her uncountable possibilities as a vehicle. The bicycle, no pun intended, carried a lot more than it was foreseen and provoked meaningful transformation in the public and political life of women. More than a vehicle, fun or something beneficial to health, it became a support of a real socio-cultural transformation and, in some decades, it was transformed into an active agent of the feminist movement. Not fortuitously the suffragette Susan Anthony[12] expressed, in an emblematic manner, the link between the bicycle and the suffragette movement: "Let me tell you what I think about the bicycle. I think it had done much more for women's independence than any other thing in the world. I stop and marvel every time I see a woman riding a bicycle" (ANTHONY, 1896, p. 10, our translation).

Before heading in that direction, it is important to know some historical milestones to better understand the impact of the invention of

12 Susan Anthony is recognized, along with Elizabeth Staton, as the pioneer of the feminist political action in the United States of America. She organized the 1st Convention for Women's Rights in 1848 and participated in the creation of the *National Womam Suffrage Association* in 1869 (HARPER, 1906).

the bicycle. As it happens with every other relevant invention, the attributions of authorship of the first models of bicycle are very diverse. However, it is common to recognize at least three "classic models", per se, of antecessors of the modern bicycle. The first would be a draft from Leonardo da Vinci, and, even though, as far as we know, it never got out of paper, it is sufficient for the bicycle to have a noble and heroic genealogy (SCHETINO, 2007). Another equally famous prototype was named *Laufmaschine*,[13] but it got popular as *Draisiana*. Invented in 1817 by the baron of Drassler, in Germany, the model came to be produced, but it differs a lot from "our" bicycle, because it was an article whose use was restricted to slopes, since it consisted in rigid structures of wood tied in two wheels, with a fixed axis of direction and with no pedals (VERDÚ, 2017)

Only in 1861 the brothers Pierre and Ernest Michaux developed a new model of two-wheeled vehicle that looked more similar to the bicycle: when inserting pedals in the rim of the front wheel, and above it, fixating a handlebar, the creators of the Veló Michaux allowed the driver some control over the vehicle (SCHETINO, 2007). A little over a decade after the invention of the brothers Michaux, a new English model of bicycle stands out – running against Graham Bell's telephone and Heinz' ketchup – to the visitors of the Universal Exposition of 1876, which took place in Philadelphia, United States (MACY, 2011). It was the high wheelers, more known in Great Britain as penny farthings due to its shape, which referred to two coins: the farthing – the smaller wheel – and the penny – the bigger wheel, where the pedals, the saddle and the handle were installed. The model was visually appealing, but hard to ride up and dangerous, since the possibility of falling was imminent (STRANGE; BROWN, 2002).

Among the many visitors of the Universal Expo, Albert Pope gets specially interested by this new form of transportation in two wheels. However, he only decides to invest in the product when, the next fall, he was surprised, during a horse ride, he was outpaced by someone riding high wheelers (MACY, 2011). Pope realizes the power of the invention – the

13 "Running machine" in German.

potential contained in this future consumer good – and manufactures the first North American version of the model shown in the Universal Expo. His project, however, hit a bump in the patent issue, which already ruled inventions and names, brands, and releases at the time. The solution was to invest in the purchase of patents, founding, in 1878, the Columbia, the first brand of bicycles of the United States of America (MACY, 2011). This is the moment where the audience gets in touch with the consumer good whose impact reverberated in the political sphere when it became one of the symbols of the feminist movement. The horseless carriage, as it was called in the United States, or cheval de fer, as it was known in France, would become an arena of struggle for rights, for the use of bodies, sensitivities and an object of power disputes with unforeseen impacts (STRANGE; BROWN, 2002).

Speaking of horse, an important aspect about the interdiction to the use of female bodies – opening the legs and riding the horse[14] – was extended to the bicycle, and, confirming the law in force, the first female models of high wheelers had both pedals fixated in the same side of the wheel, which would resultd in a precarious balance. However, despite this "moral adjustment", North American women faced the challenge and rode anyway (MACY, 2011).

Beyond the laws of physics, women faced many other difficulties, because every type of argument tried to distance them from the new consumer good. Even between them, the bicycle was a scandal and created heavy criticism, as Charlotte Smith's, one of the founders of the Women's Rescue League, when she says: "[…] The bicycle was an agent of devil's advance morally and physically in different levels" (SMITH, 1896a, p. 1, our translation). However, the most consistent and respected criticism was the "scientific" one, coming from the medical speech, which, in general lines, would condemn the use of the new consumer good for bringing physical and health prejudice, including infertility or, even worse, for creating forms of sexual arousal (MELO and SCHETINO, 2009).

14 The practice of riding a horse wasn't recommended for women. However, when it was unavoidable, they shouldn't be seating with their legs spread over the horse, having to mount "sideways" in the animal. (PONTES e PEREIRA, 2014).

The medical discourse about the bicycle did not reflect health issues, but the ideology of control over female bodies and behaviors:

> The medical warnings around the bicycle were essentially an extension of the concern regarding women. The need of a thorough supervision of the female cycling habits , frequently repeated by doctors of both genders, came in as a response to the threat that female freedom represented for the conventional authority. [...] In addition, the level of interest expressed in the impact of cycling in the female reproductive capacity reflects the expectation of the role of women at the time. As cycling had the potential to avoid them to fulfill their primary roles as wives and mothers, it was deemed inappropriate and dangerous (FLEMING, 2015, p. 15, our translation).

The relationship between the female audience and the bicycle was complex. In the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, a new consumer good was capable to question a set of practices and ideologies of social control of the woman. The bicycle allowed the woman to move between spaces without surveillance or predetermined destinations, which ended up giving way to a freedom of choice deemed undesirable for people in power. It also threatened social control over their bodies and desires, which would no longer be properly domesticated, because opening the legs, having a saddle between them and riding was something beyond the limit of admissible, something that, as the doctors would say, could create uncontrollable sexual excitements and significant prejudice to the confined space of wife and mother. The bicycle threatened many things, but it was part of the process of industrialization and its counterpart, consumption. It implied, therefore, a clash in which the set of cultural arrangements which gave way to the movement for female freedom had in consumption a compatible element.

But, in this sense, it is possible to go even further. The objects and consumer goods exist in a system and are part of a language which the terms should be compatible, as Baudrillard (1968) taught a long time ago. The bicycle was a strong term and implied in the rearrangement or creation of other consumer goods in the formation of an own set that would began to harmonize the multiple goods that were instituted

around it. When a consumer good finds place in the social life, it entails both the reordination of others when the appearance of others that should add in a grammar where the terms are interdependent and everyone wished by the audience. In the women's specific case, the new goods added aim to overcome the numberless difficulties created by the use of the bicycle, especially those related to clothing. Women's clothing available then – uncomfortable corsets, numberless petticoats or long skirts – would make the activity practically unfeasible and weren't coherent with the use of the new good.

As a part of this dynamic of creation or rearrangement of consumer goods, an unusual piece of garment created in the 1850's came back to fashion in full force: the *Turkish trousers, a type of "long johns" for women, in other words, pants that would be held in the ankles and should be used under skirts (Turkish skirts)* that were *slightly shorter than the traditional*. As the name indicates, it was popularly used by Turkish women and, in the United States, became popular as bloomers, honoring one of their biggest fans, the journalist and feminist Amelia Bloomer (MACY, 2011).

The bicycle opened up a system of consumer goods where bloomers became justifiably demanded and gained popularity. The arrival of bloomers in the daily life of North American women, however, was not easy, because seeing women wearing pants and shorter dresses would scandalize society. The limits imposed by the garment would contribute for the burgeouis woman to remain restricted to domestic environments and very different from anything that came before to masculine activities. The work for these women were few, and with the exception of teaching, they would be restricted to subordinate activities (STRANGE; BROWN, 2002). Many teachers, for example, were forbidden of riding a bike, because the bloomers would "confuse" the head of the students. As a school principal to the New York Times, "[…] We were determined to stop our teacher in time before they went too far" (REIMER, 1895, p. 1, our translation).

Bloomer pants, because they fit into a new system of consumer goods, received a strong support of the brand of bicycles Columbia, which began to insert women wearing bloomers in the advertisement pieces and released, still, a series of paper dolls[15] which would include bicycles and bloomers (MACY, 2011). With the "marketing action" avant la lettre, Columbia sought the children's audience, future consumers of bicycles and other goods of the system it activated. Therefore, consumption and the women's movement (which fought for leaving the condition of subordination) found in the clothing industry common interests. The bicycle forced important cultural transformations for women's lives in the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, and, in addition to bloomer pants, other pieces of garment – "[…] Panties, […] Simple hats and skirts with slits" (DEMPSEY, 1977, p. 29, our translation) – were adapted by the power of the bike as a consumer good.

However, the most important aspect of this transformation of values is in the fact that the bike allowed women to establish a new relationship with the public space, after all "[…] The bicycle represented a challenge for the doctrine of separate spheres [between public and private] because it offered women a way to escape the confinement of home" (STRANGE; BROWN, 2002, p. 616, our translation). Not fortuitously, different researchers (MACY, 2011; STRANGE; BROWN, 2002; MELO; SCHETINO, 2009) emphasize this consumer good as a agent of transformation in the feminine condition in the beginning of the last century, ultimately favoring political participation, translated into the right to vote and to academic formation.

The bicycle was defended, used and praised by big names of the first feminist wave in the USA, as Elizabeth Staton and Susan Anthony, who said this vehicle was a women emancipator (STRANGE; BROWN, 2002). Similar consecration could be observed among the French suffragette movement in the beginning of the 20th century (MELO; SCHETINO, 2009). In Great Britain, the 1897 ad asking the definitive

15 Girls toys which consist in a feminine character cut out in cardboard with pieces of clothing, also made of paper, that could be dressed and changed by the child.

arrival of women in Cambridge University was promoted through pamphlets with the illustration of a woman riding a bike (MACY, 2011).

Final considerations

When approaching the feminist theme of studies about representations and consumer practices, illuminating their unusual partnerships, we sought to realize a historical and critical reading which, therefore, is proposed to distance the "court paradigm" (ROCHA, 1995), which, as we saw, is frequent in communication studies.

That way, it was possible to identify in some situations consolidated in our recent history signs that the feminine and the consumption practices orchestrated alliances which would translate in a reciprocal spread of their ideologies. When relativizing moralism in face of this association of poles, frequently treated as incompatible, we can find very different things – the transformation of the female condition also went through the path of consumption. The conquest of the public space and the bigger political participation is consolidated in facts that speak for themselves: women in their bikes engendered modifications in the powers of their time, in clothing, habits, sensitivities. Department stores, cigarettes lit on the streets, adjusted pants and bicycles weaved a complex web of values that, in the same gesture, gathered consumption and political struggle; purchase and suffrage; goods and people.

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