

"The world market is a system in crisis!" – Discuss

It has been argued whether the world market is really a system in crisis. Some people think that the statement is true, while some stand against it. Here, while the woman in "The Story of Stuff" thinks that the world market is a system in crisis, the man in "The Story of Stuff – The Critique" thinks the opposite. In this essay, I will discuss both views ("The Story of Stuff" and "The Story of Stuff – The Critique") and by weighing up the reasonability of evidence from both sides, I will make a conclusion about whether I agree with it or not.

▲According to the woman in "The Story of Stuff", all things move through five distinct stages: Extraction, Production, Distribution, Consumption and Disposal. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss both views stage-by-stage.

To begin with, 'extraction' literally means taking the planet's resources. However, according to "The Story of Stuff", it is just a fancy word for "trashing the planet" because to get resources, we have to cut down forests, blow up mountains to get metals inside, use up water and destroy animals' habitats. ▲Actually, she says that we are running out of resources. In the past 30 years, one third of the planet's natural resources has been used up, which means that we are making human life on Earth less sustainable. Moreover, she states that some countries, such as USA, are actually using more than share. For example, USA has 5% of the world population, but it is using 30% of the world resources. ▲As a negative result, MEDCs cope with 'running out of resources' by stealing resources from other LEDCs countries.

On the other hand, the man in "The Story of Stuff – The Critique" argues that "extraction" is not really "trashing the planet", as some resources are reusable. For instance, trees that are chopped down are often replanted. ▲Also, we are not running out of resources much because some of them have not been discovered yet; as we have only touched the surface of the Earth, so we will definitely discover many more deeper down. Even if a resource is becoming more scarce, its price will automatically increase, leading to less people buying that resources. Moreover, using resources actually make life easier for many people on Earth. ▲An evidence for this is that life expectancies around the world have increased. Furthermore, MEDCs are not actually stealing resources from LEDCs. In fact, it is a trade: LEDCs would give MEDCs labour force and resources as an exchange for money, technology and improved living conditions from MEDCs.

Secondly, I am going to discuss "production". The woman in "The Story of Stuff" thinks that the synthetic products that we are consuming are all toxic-contaminated as factories made these products using natural resources and toxic chemicals. The problem is that, only a small proportion of these chemicals have been tested for their impacts on human health and despite their toxicity, some chemicals are still put into our products. For example, BFRs (Brominated Fire Retardants), a toxic chemical which harms the brain, is still put into our pillows and computers. Many workers are also exposed to toxic chemicals in factories, and many of them are women at reproductive age. ▲According to the woman, food with highest level of toxic contaminants is human breast milk, which means that babies keep ingesting toxic chemicals nowadays. Moreover, the factories which produce toxic contaminated stuff move from place to

place and eventually to LEDCs. As a consequence, LEDCs are ones who are suffering the most from the toxic chemicals from those factories.

Nevertheless, the man in "The Story of Stuff – The Critique" disagrees with this. He thinks that "toxic chemicals" is an overused word. This is because chemicals do not have to be toxic, and the toxicity of a product depends on the quantity and how we use it. For example, taking 1 aspirin would be good for our headache, but if we take 100, it would kill you; if we use a pen for writing, it would be ok, but if we drink the pen ink, we will definitely "contaminated". Additionally, nothing is risk free, as a product will always have some unknown risks. BFRs, which are said to be "neuro-toxins" according to the women, actually reduced 20% of fire deaths in the last 10 years. Therefore, we can say that the positive effects of these "toxic" chemicals are more considerable than the other negative effects. Furthermore, the shifting to places of factories has actually had a positive impact on the lives of people in LEDCs: improving significantly their living standard as now they can have jobs to earn money (which they could not do before the factories came in).

Thirdly, I am going to discuss "distribution". "Distribution" involves transporting and selling all the toxic-contaminated stuff quickly by keeping the prices down and keep the people buying them. According to the woman in "The Story of Stuff", to keep the prices down, store workers are not paid well and are not given health insurance. Moreover, she thinks that the real costs of making stuff are not captured in the price, which means we are not really paying for what we buy. This is called "externalising costs". For example, she believes that a radio cannot cost £4.99 because different parts of the radio are made from materials from all around the world; and at each stage people are paying different costs for its manufacturing which are not covered in the final price!

On the contrary, the man in "The Story of Stuff – The Critique" believes differently. He thinks that wages for employment is based on supply and demand, which means if there is a huge supply of labour then wages for a certain job will be lower because many people will want the job. Moreover, he says that the fact that the production process is being globalised should be applauded as a positive thing! Also, he believes that what the woman says about "externalising costs" is not true because the final cost of a product must reflect the costs while producing it, otherwise companies would not make any profit. We should be happy because companies can find the cheapest and most efficient ways of making products so that we are able to buy those things without spending much money. Also, because of this globalised production system, many people around the world are able to have jobs and escape the previous life of abject poverty.

Fourthly, I am going to discuss "consumption". According to the woman in "The Story of Stuff", preserving the golden arrow of consumption had become the main priority for governments and corporations. For example, George Bush urged people to shop even after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York! Additionally, the primary way that people's way is demonstrated is by how much they consume rather than what they do. This leads to perceived obsolescence (changing the way stuff looks to ensure people will continue to consume), which is why people keep go shopping in order not to look unfashionable and out of date. Also, only 1% of materials that go through the system are still in use 6 months later! This is the result of planned obsolescence, which is when

stuff is made to be useless as quickly as possible so we have to keep buying them. ▲As a result of shopping, our living standard might improve, but our life might not be happier because we have less time to enjoy other important things like friends and family!

In contrast, the man in "The Story of Stuff – The Critique" has a lot of points that stand against the woman. He says that George Bush's advice to continue shopping after the terror attacks was good because it showed the terrorists that they would not be intimidated by them. Moreover, consumerism is a good thing because it has turned USA from a 'third world nation' to the world's wealthiest country in 200 years and the consumer goods have increased people's standard of living significantly: before the 'age of consumerism', many people had very a destitute life with low standards of living. In addition, he thinks that planned obsolescence is reasonable because making a product last long would cost the companies lots of money, which means that consumers have to pay considerably more for the product; whereas if they are disposable, lots of people can afford it, and can live a better life. Furthermore, perceived obsolescence is just about people getting a better product, as people will buy the best product to increase their living standard.

Finally, I'm going to discuss the last stage of the materials economy: "Disposal". ▲According to the woman in "The Story of Stuff", an average US citizen produces 4.5lbs of garbage every day, which is twenty times more than 30 years ago. ▲All of this garbage either gets put into a landfill or burnt, which produces super toxins - dioxins. Either way, much pollution is created for land, air and water, leading to climate change. ▲Additionally, some companies and governments just get rid of this garbage by exporting it to LEDCs because they do not want to tackle the situation themselves, which makes people's lives in LEDCs worse. Moreover, even though recycling can be beneficial, some of the products can't be recycled and recycling can never be enough to totally enhance the situation. For every one garbage can you put out to be recycled, seventy garbage cans made from that one garbage can are generated in the upstream "Extraction, Production and Distribution" stages.

However, of course, the man in "The Story of Stuff" opposes to the ideas presented by the woman. He argues that we are not running out of landfill space, as compacting technology has been ameliorated. ▲Additionally, he states that "a large hazard does not equal a large risk". For example, if you live somewhere far away from where dioxins are produced, it is very unlikely that you get harmed from dioxins. Moreover, he gives an example that an area just exports its disposal to an area nearby: New York City to New Jersey. Therefore, we cannot say that people just try to pass this problem to others to cope with, as they themselves will also suffer from the consequences! Furthermore, he says that recycling can only be good ▼➡people do it voluntarily. In fact, most people by recycled stuff home, such as that houses are actually recycled!

In summary, after weighing up carefully both sides, I go with the man's opinion. This is because his points are more reasonable and analytical and outweigh far more the woman's. Most of the points made by the woman are proved wrong by the man, so we just have to believe in the man rather than her. In my own opinion, if we do what the woman thoughtlessly tells us to do, which is to stop consuming, our living standards will decrease significantly. To those who are still on the woman's side, remember this: "We

are not forced to buy things because we live in a free society: if you don't want to shop, then don't!".