Abstract

E-waste between morality and ethics: waste practices in the Czech Republic

This thesis explores the effects of self-interested rationality and the calculative logic of the market on e-waste (electrical and electronic waste) recycling. I show how they are confronted by other modes of relations built upon the logic of care, solidarity, and the imaginaries of social and material pasts and futures. I argue that these relations of mutuality contribute to the economic efficiency of the e-waste recycling sector. Moreover, the thesis studies how the general rules set by the European Union with certain political and economic goals are adopted through the local ways of understanding and creativity. E-waste recycling in Czechia offers jobs to people with disabilities to increase its social credit and profit in the context of fulfilling environmental objectives. However, this strategy has lost its potential due to technological changes in e-waste processing. The incessant fight over the e-waste supply accompanies these changes. Those who have the power to make decisions about e-waste are driven by economic interests and less by social and environmental responsibilities. To understand the aspects affecting these decisions, I scale down to everyday practices and focus on the entanglements of humans and e-waste materials. Through Ingold's approach to the material as part of relations rather than possessing a social side called materiality, I look at e-waste as a specific type of material that actively intervenes in relations with humans and becomes a significant aspect in moral and ethical reasoning. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research, I pursue the environment that brings together people with disabilities and different moral and ethical beliefs and discarded materials that acquire new kinds of value, and I focus on how this e-waste sector deals with self-interested rationality and calculative logic through everyday moral and ethical negotiations of ways of shaping relations with materials and humans.

Keywords