Habit and Taste: ethical consumption and the intellectual milieu

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
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I declare that this thesis is my own work.

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Signature of Candidate
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Abstract

Only relatively recently have the academic social sciences begun to give consumption serious attention as a phenomenon which merits investigation in its own right. Yet ideas about consumption permeate social thought, largely on a taken-for-granted level. This thesis explores the development of Western ideas about consumption in order to identify how and why ethical / sustainable consumption is not given greater consideration or credence as an emancipatory possibility. It tracks an extraordinary degree of antipathy which has been directed toward consumption from the early modern period to the present day, various challenges to these views, as well as how disciplines as distinct as economics and sociology have developed to discourage any more careful and considered investigation into any underlying values or ethical issues connected to the use of goods. More recently in sociology and cultural studies, issues around identity have been the primary point of reference when consumption is discussed. Here consumption is considered in relation to identity through the prism of two diametrically opposed positions: it is regarded either negatively, as shaped by the forces of the capitalist marketplace, or, more positively, as an interesting expression of the agency and specificity of various cultural groups. Many accounts have attempted to find a middle ground, but, as detailed in this thesis, both positions, as well as attempts to reconcile them rest on shaky epistemological foundations. Unanswered questions and internal inconsistencies undercut the rigour of their normative foundations. Yet these accounts and the concomitant focus on identity are nevertheless to a large extent sustained via a larger substrate of debate associated with the structure / agency aporia. So while ethical / sustainable consumption is the subject of increasing public concern and political interest, within the social sciences in Australia in particular, it has proven difficult to change the agenda to incorporate a 'simpler' study of the origins of goods, the impact of their use, or the consequences of their disposal. New perspectives are beginning to emerge, but questions of how and why people undertake ethical and sustainable consumption or how such action might be further supported are still largely displaced by more traditional concerns. Many of these accounts still tend to reiterate an older antipathy, even though on a strategic practical political level it is highly debateable whether they offer any means of achieving more widespread positive change in relation to people's general consumption practices.

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1

Ethical consumption: values and meaning in transition?

Even in the poorest societies, human needs and desires are culturally constituted and socially defined.
(Schudson 1998, p.251)

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.
(Geertz 1973, p.5)

... I would not say that some interpretations are truer than others. I would say that some are more powerful than others. The hierarchy is between forces and not between true and false. There are interpretations which account for more meaning and this is the criterion.
(Derrida interviewed by Kearns and Newton, reproduced in Easthope 1991, p.238)

... the debate is over. We know the science. We see the threat. And we know the time for action is now.
(Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of Calfornia, on the need for emission reduction targets, cited in Davies 2007)

Contemporary debates about which human actions and activities contribute to climate change position ethical / sustainable consumption as a topical issue, one growing in importance as an everyday concern. Yet the idea that consumption can be treated as a definitive area of inquiry is a relatively recent, and still contested development in social theory. 'Mainstream social science', Buttel, Dickens, Dunlap and Gijswijt note in *Sociological Theory and the Environment* (2002), 'has long tended to regard consumption as being relatively epiphenomenal compared to the role played by the master social institutions of the economy and production, states and politics, family, education, and

culture'[1]. Within sociology in Australia for example, there has been a significant body of work on consumption as a general adjunct to other concerns, but these accounts have predominantly treated consumption as not requiring any particular or special analysis. Consumption has simply been viewed as tangential, an ancillary by-product, or symptomatic ailment of larger problems. In *Acknowledging Consumption: a review of new studies* (1995) Daniel Miller wrote of a previous 'extraordinary academic neglect' of studies focusing specifically on consumption, yet as the title of his collection suggests, even in 1995 there were signs of a 'considerable and relatively sudden expansion of interest in the topic of consumption throughout the social sciences'[2].

In the introduction to the *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993), editors John Brewer and Roy Porter also recognised this previous theoretical neglect, referring to the history of consumerism as 'historiographically immature'[3]. They argued

> We need to understand how this system originated and how it functioned. And to do this it is imperative that we investigate in the most comprehensive way the links connecting this material culture (one often highly and increasingly inegalitarian) to the political and social systems with which it has become symbiotic.[4]

In the last few years consumption as an acknowledged area of study *has* gown strongly in its own right, especially in the UK. The amount of new literature has grown exponentially. But I mention these older comments about academic neglect here simply because they remain relevant in Australia, as I shall discuss below. Brewer and Porter's comments are also revealing because while they refer specifically to the discipline of history, by underlining and accentuating the utterly egregious basic inequality in access to material culture and resources they acknowledge the motivating concerns of many other disciplinary perspectives which dismiss consumption out of hand[5]. Nevertheless, when delineating the study of consumption as 'historiographically immature', they signalled their departure and divergence from accounts that dismiss consumption *tout court*. Their study insists these earlier perspectives are radically incomplete: consumption practices merit further examination.

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[1] Buttel, Dickens, Dunlap and Gijswijt 2002, p.20
[2] Miller 1995, p.1
[3] Brewer and Porter 1993, p.3
[4] Brewer and Porter 1993, p.3
[5] Miller (2001) offers a similar assessment.

As with Brewer and Porter I do not wish to diminish, disparage or undercut the driving concerns of the many critics of consumption. Consumption occurs amidst and contributes to problems of abject poverty, malnutrition, appalling income inequality, human rights abuses, cruelty to animals and escalating levels of environmental devastation. In the face of the gross injustices involved in these issues, stepping back from condemning what seems to contribute to them is not easy. And yet this is my starting point in this thesis - to rethink consumption, questioning what might happen if people could consciously come to consider, choose and adopt new patterns of consumption that might mitigate such problems.

Ethical and sustainable consumption as a form of political activity is never going to effect a revolutionary transformation, overturning capitalism as the dominant political/economic *modus operandi*. Yet as a diverse range of examples attest, ethical and sustainable consumption obviously has *some* effect. Most recently PETAs (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) campaign against the mulesing of Australian sheep resulted in an agreement by the wool industry to phase out the practice by 2010. In *The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (2003), Noreena Hertz cites a raft of very effective consumer-based activist campaigns, including the successful consumer boycott and protest at Monsanto's attempt to introduce genetically modified food into Britain during 1999-2000[6]. And in a discussion of the history of ethical consumerism, Irving, Harrison and Raynor (2002) write of a number of others which have achieved their aims. These include -

- campaigns against various British companies undertaking live animal exports.
- the North American boycott of Heinz because their fishing practices caught dolphins as well as tuna.
- the proscription of Icelandic and Faroese fishing industries due to those countries' stance on whaling.
- consumer boycotts against companies including General Motors, Max Factor, Rimmel, Revlon, Yardley, Chanel, and Estee Lauder because they tested their products on animals.
- various fair trade companies addressing worker's rights have also shown strong, rapid growth (vis. fair trade coffee, chocolate and clothing).

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[6] Hertz 2003, pp.125-8

- there has been increased publicity about the abuse of worker's rights by businesses such as Nike, with corresponding consumer reaction. (Examples such as Jonah Peretti's now famous email exchange with Nike[7] are regarded as generating publicity which influences corporate conduct - see appendix A)
- Irving, Harrison and Raynor also cite the boycott against South African apartheid as one of the most high profile boycotts, and mention action against the Burmese military regime by companies including 'Heineken, Apple, Levi-Strauss, Reebok and Coca-Cola'.

More recent statistics indicate that the above examples are not partial or isolated. For according to the 2007 *Ethical Consumerism Report*, in recent years there has been a marked intensification in ethical consumption activity in the UK:

> Household expenditure on ethical goods and services has almost doubled in the past five years: on average, every household in the UK spent £664 in line with their ethical values in 2006 compared with just £366 in 2002, an increase of 81 per cent.[8]

The same report notes that ethical consumption is still carried out largely by a dedicated minority, however it also charts how the instance of ethical consumption behaviour is steadily increasing:

> Whilst ethical spending has become more mainstream, a core of ethical shoppers (6% of the UK adult population or 2.8 million) still account for the majority of ethical purchases. Nonetheless between 1999-2007 there has been an increased predisposition towards ethical behaviours such as recycling and supporting local shops/suppliers, across all age groups of the population. Furthermore consumers are increasingly prepared to check out a business's ethical credentials before spending their cash.[9]

This pattern is also evident within the corporate field. Irving, Harrison and Raynor (2002) noted a significant increase in the number of ethical investment funds: in the United Kingdom investment in these was estimated at '£4 billion in August 2001'. The 2007 *Ethical Consumerism Report* cites an increase in this figure to £7.2 billion. This same report puts all forms of ethical consumption in the UK at around £32.2 billion a year, up from £9.6 billion in 1999, an average increase of

[7] Peretti 2001, and http://shey.net/niked.html, Accessed 10 February, 2009
[8] *Ethical Consumerism Report* 2007, p.3. This report was published by The Co-operative Bank, in conjunction with the Ethical Consumer Research Association (ECRA).
[9] *Ethical Consumerism Report* 2007, p.3

> 15 per cent per annum since 2002 compared to a five per cent annual increase over the same period for overall household expenditure.[10]

Overall growth here shows no signs of slowing, and in their contribution to *The Ethical Consumer* (2005), Clouder and Harrison relate how boycotts and ethical consumption can also deliver more diffuse benefits, with flow on effects such as modification of their own behaviour on the part of other companies in the sector[11]. With all of the above examples then, it is clear ethical and sustainable consumption obviously has *some* effect[12]. The question is if this can develop to become *more effective, more significantly transformative, if* considered more consciously as a possibility within the general societal imagination - *and,* then acted on accordingly. What hinders this occurring? What might facilitate it?

These questions are the focus of two recent qualitative research projects; an Australian report for the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme by Bentley, Fien and Neil, *Sustainable Consumption: young Australians as agents of change* (2004); and a British study led by Clive Barnett (2003-2005), *Governing the Subjects and Spaces of Ethical Consumption*[13]. As its title suggests, Bentley, Fien and Neil's report concentrates on young Australians and is positive about their capacity to practice sustainable consumption; the authors note how their subject's expressed a desire 'to minimise their impact on the Earth'[14]. They also emphasise how 'sustainable consumption policy and practice carries considerable weight around the world', especially insofar as 'Many governments and international organisations have recognised the crucial value of policies that promote sustainable consumption'[15].

The British report by Barnett is not centred on any specific demographic group[16], but it too makes similar observations, with Barnett and his research team noting how 'ethical considerations in shaping consumption behaviour has become increasingly significant', even a 'growth sector in the UK'[17]. With this, one of the main issues Barnett explores in the report is the 'pragmatics of getting people to adopt "ethical" consumption behaviour'

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[10] *Ethical Consumerism Report* 2007, p.4
[11] Clouder and Harrison 2005, p.90, p.99
[12] Clouder and Harrison point out that 'many writers agree that their is compelling and widespread evidence of boycott actions delivering on social ./ environmental goals' (2005, p.102).
[13] This report was commissioned by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council
[14] Bentley, Fien and Neil 2004, p.2
[15] Bentley, Fien and Neil 2004, p.2
[16] Barnett 2007a
[17] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass 2006

and in a subsequent article he and his co-researchers, Paul Cloke, Nick Clarke and Alice Malpass, point out a number of challenges in relation to this, most pertinently, people's sense of their capacity and ability to act in any effective way:

> In government initiatives on sustainability, in campaigning around the environment, and across the range of "ethical" trading initiatives, it is often supposed that the main challenge is to provide people with more information in order to raise awareness of the consequences of their everyday consumption choices: then they will magically change their behaviour.
>
> However people don't necessarily lack information about fair trade, organic food, or environmental sustainability, or third world sweatshops. They actually seem very aware of these types of things, but *they often don't feel that they have the opportunities or resources to be able to engage in these sorts of activities*.[18]

This apparent sense of helplessness correlates with Bentley, Fien and Neil's findings: young people's 'concern does not necessarily translate into personal action'[19]. Often they feel their personal action cannot achieve any real impact[20]. Simultaneously however, many

> did not appear to understand how their own behaviour contributed to environmental problems'[21].

So where Barnett draws into question the effectivity of a solely 'informational strategy' in buoying the growth of ethical and sustainable consumption, Bentley, Fien and Neil call for 'enabling factors [to] be incorporated into sustainable consumption capacity building programs'[22]. Their report outlines the policies which could facilitate such programs, however principally they stress the need for government to become aware of the

> critical role it plays in shaping individual consumer behaviours through institutional, social, cultural and ethical factors, and the responsibility it has to empower people to affect changes in their own lifestyles.[23]

Despite appearances, these reports are not at odds. Barnett simply focuses on how important it is for 'a variety of collective actors to *practically re-articulate* the ordinary moral dispositions of everyday consumption'[24], with policy makers ideally rethinking modes of address in terms of 'frames of reference that already shape people's consumer

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[18] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass 2006. *My italics.*
[19] Bentley, Fien and Neil 2004, p.3
[20] See in particular the chapter 'Young people's views', which details the results of this research (Bentley, Fien and Neil 2004, pp.31-50, esp. p.40).
[21] Bentley, Fien and Neil 2004, p.33. In contrast to Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass's arguments, cited above, many of the respondents to Bentley, Fien and Neil's survey called for the need for more information about ethical and sustainable products and services (2004, p.41).
[22] Bentley, Fien and Neil 2004, p.3
[23] Bentley, Fien and Neil 2004, p.3
[24] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass 2005, p.47. *My italics.*

behaviour', in conjunction with 'devices to actually enable people to adjust their consumption behaviour'[25]. Government can play an important role here in facilitating and enabling action. Barnett just believes the construction of such strategies must take into account the 'embeddedness' of consumption in relation to people's daily activities[26].

For people to become more willing to undertake ethical and sustainable consumption on a larger scale certainly calls for some major shift in the zeitgeist. *Some* kind of shift is indicated by even just the existence of these reports. Yet where the Bentley, Fien and Neil report was developed within the disciplines of International Relations and Environmental Science, Barnett comes from Geography. Barnett's Open University School has a strong social theory orientation, but Geography has not traditionally been considered a social theory discipline. Yet with its acknowledgment of material culture, cultural geography as a discipline is making significant contributions to consumption research[27]. And this brings me to a question that intrigued me at the inception of this thesis, one which became increasingly persistent as my research progressed, developing till eventually it became the prime focus of my project. Why has ethical and sustainable consumption not been given greater credence as an emancipatory possibility within those Australian social sciences traditionally concerned with analysing "the social frameworks and cultural experiences of human life"[28], as one recently 'restructured' university sociology school website in Sydney phrased it. Yet the School had not a single subject on consumption.

I shall discuss this problem of the incomplete accounting of consumption among those in academia claiming the ability to articulate and analyse socio-cultural processes in a little more detail shortly, but I now want to introduce the arguments of two other texts. I have outlined how *Sustainable Consumption: young Australians as agents of change* (2004) and *Governing the Subjects and Spaces of Ethical Consumption* (2003-2005) both intimate how

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[25] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass, forthcoming, 'Citizenship between individualisation and participation: relocating agency in the growth of ethical consumerism in the United Kingdom', p.10

[26] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass 2006

[27] Potter 2008. Miller and Slater 2007. Jackson and Thrift 1995.

[28] 'By studying Sociology you not only learn about life. You also develop valuable abilities for coping with it. This rich and deep understanding of the social world enables you to manage your life more thoughtfully, even more successfully. You acquire a number of specific skills that will enable you to make the most of life and its opportunities. Mastery of these skills is the bridge from a student's hopes and aspirations to their achievement and realisation in adult life--in employment, citizenship activities, and personal pursuits, as well, of course, in the everyday life of effective, involved and fulfilled citizens'. Accessed 16 February 2007: http://sociology.arts.unsw.edu.au/

important the role of government is in facilitating ethical and sustainable consumption. The role of government is also raised in Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (1999), and Noreena Hertz's *The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (2003).

In chapter four I draw out the connection between neoliberal strategies of governance, the subprime mortgage crisis, and corporate power. Obviously the subprime mortgage crisis has meant the relationship between governments and corporations is being further problematised. But writing in 2003, one of Noreena Hertz's principal concerns in *The Silent Takeover* was the disparity between government and corporate fiscal power, and she cited a number of telling statistics:

> Three hundred multinational corporations now account for 25 per cent of the world's assets. The annual value of sales of each of the six largest transnational corporations, varying between $111 and $126 billion, are now exceeded by the GDPs of only twenty-one nation states.
>
> Corporate sales account for two thirds of world trade and a third of world output (Coca-Cola, Toyota and Ford derive nearly half of their revenues outside their base in the United States), while as much as 40 per cent of world trade now occurs within multinational corporations.[29]

In *The Silent Takeover* (2003) Hertz expresses deep reservations about this new global 'marketplace', and is deeply perturbed about how governments are forced to 'tout for business' from corporations and are largely subject to corporate strictures[30]. Nevertheless, in the context of this capitulation Hertz is still hopeful about the potential of consumer activism to impact on and shape corporate behaviour. She believes, moreover, that even though politicians might 'tacitly' and 'furtively' support consumer concerns, they are really otherwise 'impotent'[31]:

> If the state is perceived as no longer to be relied upon to ensure the quality and safety of the food we eat, the air we breathe, or other environment issues, a growing number of people are beginning to bypass traditional political channels and express concerns and demands directly to the bodies that are believed to be able to address their concerns, the corporations.[32]

In contrast to government incapacity, Hertz characterises business as increasingly becoming aware of, and willing to respond to how consumer perceptions affect their 'bottom line':

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[29] Hertz 2003, p.38

[30] Hertz 2003, p.66. She notes also how 'In 1999 state and local governments in the United States gave businesses over $1.7 billion in tax rebates and subsidies', even though 'Study after study reveals no statistical evidence that business incentives actually create jobs' (Hertz 2003, p.67).

[31] Hertz 2003, p.148, p.149

[32] Hertz 2003, p.129

> reputation is paramount. Corporations are increasingly realizing that there are new expectations of them. As their actions become more and more public, they are expected to justify their policies and actions, and address consumers' and shareholders' concerns, to a hitherto unprecedented degree. Does the company mistreat its employees? Is the company damaging the environment? Is the company backing a repressive regime? Can the company be trusted? These are increasingly asked questions, from key stakeholders rather than by politicians.[33]

For Hertz the decline of more traditional forms of political participation[34] make these questions consumers ask about corporations more pressing, rather than less, and with this she argues strongly for the emerging potential of consumer activism:

> there is an increasing realization that tarnishing the corporate image of unethical companies, or leaving their products on the shelves, are powerful weapons.[35]

She too highlights surveys which indicate the general public (at least in North America and Britain), seem willing to act / consume in light of ethical concerns:

> A U.S. survey in 1995 revealed that over 75 percent of Americans would boycott stores selling goods produced in sweatshops. Almost 85 percent said they would be willing to pay up to a dollar more on a twenty-dollar garment if it carried a label guaranteeing that it had been made under humane conditions. A Gallup poll in Britain the same year found that three out of five consumers are prepared to boycott stores or products because they are concerned about their ethical standards, or have already done so.[36]

In contrast to Hertz, in *No Logo* (1999) Naomi Klein focuses less on government and more on the enormous growth in the amount of advertising and the development of new corporate branding strategies. Klein details how products are increasingly 'presented not as "commodities" but as concepts: the brand as experience, as lifestyle'[37]. For Klein

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[33] Hertz 2003, p.144

[34] In 2001, 'Less people voted for any of the British political parties than voted in the final round of the United Kingdom's version of Big Brother' (Hertz 2003 p.123). In the UK between 1984-2000 'people's participation in conventional political activities (such as voting, contacting a politician, and attending a political meeting) has declined, whereas participation in consumption and contact politics (boycotting goods and contacting the media) has grown significantly' (Pattie, Seyd, P, and Whiteley cited in Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass 'Citizenship between individualisation and participation: relocating agency in the growth of ethical consumerism in the United Kingdom' forthcoming, p.4)

[35] Hertz 2003, p.131. 'In recent years it has been possible to witness the fashion trends of consumer protest: from Nestle boycotts in the late 1970s, through anti-apartheid protests in the early 1980s, global warming and rainforest depletion later in that decade, live animal exports in the early 1990s, then the rights of workers in developing countries, and most recently food safety. At each stage protesters secured small victories and corporations changed tack, but with the exception of apartheid in no case was the war won so conclusively that further protest was unnecessary, as we saw with the repeated denunciations of sweatshop labour. Consumer activism seems most effective when consumers remain active' (Hertz 2003, pp.159-60).

[36] Hertz 2003, pp.136-7

[37] Klein 1999, p.21

the huge levels of advertising[38] strongly raise the question of who has the power and capacity to present meaning. She also argues however that people have become more concerned about the impact of the corporate 'actor' precisely because of the huge upsurge in advertising, and the increasing degree to which it now imposes and intrudes on our lives. The unexpected by-product of corporate 'branding' is that in attempting to associate positive qualities with brands, people now regard corporations as directly, personally responsible for their results of all their activities, not just that concerned with the product itself, that which the consumer directly experiences:

> Anticorporate activism is on the rise because many of us feel the international brand-name connections that criss-cross the globe more keenly than we ever have before - and we feel them precisely because we have never been as "branded" as we are today.... For the past decade, multinationals like Nike, Microsoft and Starbucks have sought to become the chief communicators of all that is good and cherished in our culture: art, sports, community, connection, equality. But the more successful this project is, the more vulnerable these companies become: if brands are indeed intimately entangled with our culture and our identities, when they do wrong, their crimes are not dismissed as merely the misdemeanors of another corporation trying to make a buck. Instead, many of the people who inhabit their branded worlds feel complicit in their wrongs, both guilty and connected.[39]

In this Klein owns the power of ethical consumption as a 'political strategy'[40]. And her observations do appear acute given a new willingness on the part of corporations to formulate 'codes of ethics' and investigate sustainable business practices[41]. Companies do attempt to respond to bad press. 'Greenwashing' is an extremely serious concern with this, but some aspects of corporate behaviour have altered, to some degree. For instance, one the largest global fast food chains, Burger King, announced in March 2007 that 'it would begin buying eggs and pork from suppliers that did not confine their animals in cages and crates'[42]. (Bruce Friedrich, vice president of PETA immediately declared this action would 'send a shock wave through the meat and egg industries'[43],

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[38] The International Advertising Association estimates global advertising expenditure will rise to US$510 billion by 2009. Accessed 13 June 2007:
http://www.iaaglobal.org/viewfullSmartChart.asp?smartchartID=169&subsiteID=2
[39] Klein 1999, p.335
[40] Klein 1999, p.342
[41] Business ethics and corporate 'social responsibility' make for good publicity. It is easy to be cynical about these company's motivations and the extent of their genuine commitment. Yet Hertz also views the internet as having the capacity to act as a 'corporate nightmare', and she mentions a range of activist sites including Corporate Watch (www.corpwatch.org), Greenpeace (www.Greenpeace.org), Indymedia (indymedia.net) and Essential Action (www.essential.org) (2003, pp.165-9).
[42] Andrew Martin, 'Burger King Shifts Policy on Animals', New York Times, 28 March 2007
[43] 'Burger King changes policy on animals - rights groups', Reuters, 28 March 2007

'signalling to agribusiness', as Wayne Pacelle from the Humane Society also stressed, 'that the most inhumane factory farming practices are on the way out'[44]. Both organisations will obviously monitor Burger King's practices closely.)

I outline Klein and Hertz's arguments here for two reasons. First, it is vitally important to underscore at the outset that market power is not democratic. This is the main problem associated with the notion of consumption as a 'purchase vote'. As Hertz observes,

> consumer and shareholder activism empowers those with greater purchasing power and those with an ability to change their patterns of consumption with relative ease. It is a form of protest that favors the middle class ...[45]

'Trusting the market to regulate', she writes, 'may not ultimately be in our best interest'[46]. Even though Hertz believes government so often only responds to business initiatives in light of how business may choose to address consumer concerns, government regulation, she states, is still absolutely essential:

> just as consumer choice is premised on high-quality information, so also is it dependent on a framework of rights and regulations to protect the customer from unscrupulous vendors ... Because consumer power is market-based, it is effective only where consumers can convince a company that it is in its financial interests to comply ... Without the official weapons of sanctions, regulation, and restrictive laws, consumers are obliged to organize protests as best they can. Lacking the resources offered by the backing of democratic institutions, they can be ill-equipped to take on vested and powerful corporate interests.
>
> Rather than providing an alternative to governmental action, the rise in consumer activism ironically makes it even more essential for governments to take an active role by providing the necessary information or by enforcing standards of transparency and accountability in business.[47]

Like Hertz, Klein too acknowledges the huge disjunction between government and corporate power, and she also stresses ethical consumption cannot stand as a replacement for democratic government:

> When we start looking to corporations to draft our collective labor and human rights codes for us, we have already lost the most basic principle of citizenship: that people should govern themselves .... Political solutions - accountable to people and enforceable by their elected representatives - deserve

[44] 'Burger King changes policy on animals - rights groups', Reuters, 28 March 2007
[45] Hertz 2003, p.173
[46] Hertz 2003, p.173
[47] Hertz 2003, p.174

> another shot before we throw in the towel and settle for corporate codes, independent monitors and the privatization of our collective rights as citizens.[48]

In chapter four I discuss Klein and Hertz's arguments further in the context of my exploration of the neo-classical and neo-liberal revisioning of economics as a value-free, value neutral 'science', whose most extreme practitioners seek, *selectively,* to undo, remove and deregulate the power of government and the judiciary. The second point I wish to highlight here however, is how both Klein and Hertz represent consumption as something involving *meaning*. This is in radical contrast to how neoliberal economic rhetoric has so often in the past, perpetuated a view of consumption as value neutral and value-free. Arguments about global warming are now also sharply challenging such views (here consumption obviously has consequences), but for all too long neoliberals have depicted consumption as involving singular private concerns beyond the ambit of others, beyond the interference of government. Consumers, it is argued, must be 'free to choose'. I outline the development and internal contradictions of the neo-liberal doctrine in subsequent chapters. Here I just want to emphasise how despite its frequent reference to the 'sovereign consumer', economic theory largely treats actual consumer concerns and motivations as 'irrational'. Unless these can be interpreted in technical and positivist terms, the worth of studying such motivations is dismissed. In this schema, marketing and financial analyses become the only legitimate / worthwhile areas of social inquiry.

Consumption can been seen as involving ethical considerations in many ways. We might begin, for example, by asking what consumption actually means in terms of the objects that are being consumed. Where do the objects come from? What sort of labor practices were involved in the production of those goods? What was the effect on the environment of the production of those goods? Were they tested on animals? What will consuming those goods involve? Will consuming them have an adverse impact on the environment? What will happen after they have been consumed? What will be the effect of their disposal? Can they be recycled, or will they cause long-lasting environmental damage?

Until very recently most of these have been regarded as 'externalities', ethical questions, not economic. Economics as a discipline has, overall, been notably unconcerned with

[48] Klein 1999, pp.441-42

such issues. As I shall discuss in more detail in chapter four, for the bulk of the last century the discipline as a whole has defined itself merely as a technical science concerned with technical rationality, a science which on an impersonal, amoral level is simply concerned, as Lionel Robbins put it in his classic *Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1948), with the study of 'human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses'[49]. Yet human behaviour considered in terms of consumption is not something that can be considered solely in terms of technical rationality, or something that has ramifications at only one particular point. Goods have origins, using them has effects and disposing of them has consequences. Nevertheless, the economic focus has overwhelmingly been set on the consumption moment itself - that is, consumption as it occurs at the point of sale and purchase, together with the factors contributing to this moment, the financial costs which comprise the price of goods. Other considerations receive minimal study and are not regarded as part of 'real' economics.

Hertz and Klein have positioned consumption as something involving values. Yet although Hertz is an Associate Director at Cambridge's Centre for International Business and Management, she can be seen as an unconventional economist. Klein, by way of contrast, writes from outside the academy. Both deliver valuable analysis, but not entirely within the style or scope of the traditional academic social sciences. Another issue that neither address is how any quantum shift in relation to ethical and sustainable consumption might be developed, even though both are obviously aware of the potential of ethical consumption and tap into the mood which sustains it, while furthering its impetus through the media profile they've developed in conjunction with their intellectual practice. But once again, why hasn't ethical and sustainable consumption been given greater credence as an emancipatory possibility within the disciplines such as sociology and cultural studies?

Economics has done its utmost to position itself as a science, and this is a large part of its reason for attempting to excise any understanding of consumption in relation to values. Within disciplines openly acknowledging their status as *social* sciences, consumption has traditionally been perceived through a radically different perspective. Here the importance of the social is accentuated, in contrast and response to the liberal, neo-

[49] Robbins 1948, p.16

classical and neo-liberal stress on 'the individual'. And traditionally consumption has been conceptualised predominantly through the prism of debates about needs and the shaping of identity. This is in turn often, although not always, referenced to a larger concern of how capitalism sustains itself in the face of the inequality market forces deliver. As I will detail in subsequent chapters, these debates have been central, but they have in part contributed to shaping discussion in a manner which has excluded other concerns, including issues around the origins and consequences of goods.

As I mentioned earlier, an academic neglect of ethical consumption is something very apparent in the social sciences in Australia. Probyn's *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities* (2000) focuses on the aspects of identity, everyday affective experiences of food, and how meaning develops in relation to it[50]. Yet while her account incorporates a consideration of the values associated with food, and the ethical ramifications of consumption practices, she stands back from the imperative of ethical 'moralisms', these 'fail to allow for a recognition of the ambiguities of living in an interconnected world'[51]. Hawkins' *The Ethics of Waste: How we Relate to Rubbish* (2006) offers one more recent account which considers the validity of various perspectives, while at the same time acknowledging the importance of issues of pollution and sustainability. Yet in terms of furthering a stronger advocacy of and interest in ethical and sustainable consumption practices Bentley, Fien and Neil's report appears to stand alone. In relation to consumption more generally, there are a number of relatively recent important and valuable Australian academic texts to be sure: *Understanding Material Culture* (2007) by Woodward; *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Culture* (1999) by Bennett, Emmison and Frow; *The Sociology of Consumption: an Introduction* (1997), by Corrigan; and *Slaves of Chic: an A-Z of Consumer Pleasures* (1994) by Finkelstein, are all representative. In *Shelf Life: Supermarkets and the changing cultures of consumption* (1998) Humphrey also notes that within Australian cultural studies consumption has been dealt with through a consideration of popular culture, in a manner similar to the trajectory of British cultural studies[52]. Yet even with this literature consumption as a stand-alone category per se has generally existed on the disciplinary

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[50] She writes that 'while we still do not know the full capacities of bodies, in different contexts they give off clues about their knowledges' (Probyn 2000, p.147). Eating 'can be a mundane exposition of the visceral nature of our connectedness and distance from each other, from ourselves, and from our social environment: it throws into relief the heartfelt, the painful, playful or pleasurable articulations of identity' (2000, pp.13-4).

[51] Probyn 2000, p.35

[52] Humphrey 1998, p.171

margins. In treating consumption as an important phenomenon meriting investigation in its own right the above accounts all make a significant contribution. What I wish to point to here however, is also that ethical consumption seems largely ancillary to such discussions. It is the role of sociology and cultural studies researchers to be concerned with identity, the 'social' and the 'cultural'. But it is also *this* issue that transformed the primary thrust of my work: from an in-depth, theoretically informed examination of ethical and sustainable consumption, to an investigation into why accounts of consumption focus predominantly on identity, while *ethical* consumption - surely also a *social / cultural* concern - has been given far less attention in the literature.

The Australian 'state-of-play' re consumption more generally is frustrating, especially when compared to the research which has been published over the last few years, predominantly in the UK. As I mentioned earlier, new perspectives seem to be emerging, and I will discuss some of these in my final chapter. But it has been the general lack of interest in Australia which has informed, shaped and also structured this thesis. Part of the challenge of any analysis of consumption is that it is necessarily cross-disciplinary, and cross-disciplinarity is not always well regarded. Nevertheless, disciplines theorising aspects of consumption include, but are not confined to marketing, psychology, business and management studies, economics, history, human / cultural geography, environmental science and ecology, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and design. Developing a more comprehensive account of consumption necessitates examining a range of these disciplinary perspectives, and this cross disciplinarity brings both costs and benefits. Clarke, Doel and Housiaux point out in their edited *Consumption Reader* (2003) how any analysis can only 'scratch the surface' of a range of disparate debates[53]. Yet they also note how thinking about consumption across a range of disciplines is extraordinarily generative, as the

> widespread interest in consumption today - conspicuous only by its absence a mere decade or two ago - has led to a vast amount of new research across a wide variety of disciplines, prompting a major re-evaluation of the contributions of earlier social theorists ... [54]

In his edited collection, *Acknowledging Consumption: a review of new studies* (1995) Daniel Miller concurred with, and even extended this assessment of the worth of reassessing various disciplines through the prism of consumption:

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[53] Clarke, Doel and Housiaux 2003, p.20
[54] Clarke, Doel and Housiaux 2003, p.22

> the topic of consumption seems to present a fundamental challenge to the basic premises that have sustained each discipline up to the present.[55]

In *The World of Consumption* (2002) Ben Fine similarly talks of an 'appropriate recognition that the subject of consumption knows no analytical boundaries'[56]. However he adds a strong proviso concerning a growing realisation within the 'study of consumption' of the 'inadequacy' of intra-disciplinary approaches, as well as 'naive interdisciplinary research'[57].

Generality can be extraordinarily naïve. And generality is a feature of this thesis. Yet what I attempt to do here is to re-value consumption by developing an overview of it as a phenomenon in history while measuring it against many traditional accounts. At the same time I examine the merits of positions associated in some way with the structure / agency aporia. To most consumption theorists the ideas I review here are well known, and just the basic building blocks necessary for any extended analysis of consumption. Still, each chapter in this volume could moreover, and possibly should, be developed into a thesis in itself, from my initial chapter on early discourses of consumption from the late medieval period, to my chapter on Douglas and Isherwood, de Certeau, Bourdieu and Fiske. Focusing on ethical and sustainable consumption vis-à-vis various accounts of consumption stretches the ambit of the project even further. However it is this that marks the peculiar contribution of my work.

I believe the route I have taken toward my argument was necessary. The adherence to the many dismissive and also often hostile perceptions of consumption, especially in the Australian social sciences, had to be addressed. When I began this work, little of the most recent, particularly productive research from the UK (which I discuss in my conclusion) had even begun. Neither had the most recent interest from a small number of other Australian academics. There was practically nothing on ethical / sustainable consumption outside disciplines concerned with the environment, or human / cultural geography. Those accounts in the social sciences which did acknowledge consumption as a stand alone category were positive, for the focus on everyday is a key aspect of consumption studies, and the constitution and expression of identity plays a central role in this. Yet at the same time the emphasis on interpretations / accounts of 'identity'

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[55] Miller 1995, p.1
[56] Fine 2002, p.4
[57] Fine 2002, p.x

seemed stifling. And once again, 'critical' social theory meanwhile largely treated consumption as trivial. Then again, while I have mentioned the extraordinary growth in academic consumption studies and suggested that Australia has remained largely untouched by these developments, I should note that despite those academic texts mentioned above, here Clive Hamilton's *Growth Fetish* (2004) and *Affluenza* (2006) remain the acme of popular public commentary on consumption[58]. Easy to read and appealing argued in the style of popular 'self-help' literature Hamilton's texts exhibit certain recurring themes. For Hamilton consumption is opposed to sociality, it diminishes our intrinsically human capacity for human engagement and interaction. There is the clear implication consumption leaves us 'spiritually' bereft, being simply the result of false, irrational desires, driven by emulation and competition over status that is the *engine motivar* of modern economic rationalism[59].

In his introduction to *Acknowledging Consumption* (1995) Miller outlines, and refutes a number of standard clichés which have afflicted serious analysis of consumption for a considerable period of time. He discusses how consumption is frequently depicted as invariably involving some loss of 'fundamental personhood' and 'authenticity'[60]. Among a number of other crucial points he observes how

> Sociologists, in particular, almost inevitably write about consumption as though contemporary society were a decline from some earlier state in which our main relationship to objects was constructed through some form of utility or need (as in vulgarized versions of the term 'use-value').[61]

I argue that approaches to consumption which stress consumerism and commodification exhibit a strong tendency to tap into some notion of 'real needs' as opposed to imposed desires (with their concomitant mental 'impoverishment')[62]. Hamilton's arguments are derivative of a number of early sociological accounts which do just this. I will unpack and critique a few of the more sophisticated versions of these accounts in chapter seven, but I mention Hamilton here, not just because of his popular profile, but because as a

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[58] Bentley, Fien and Neil for instance, refer to Hamilton's work on 'downshifting' as the 'most authoritative of its sort to date' (2004, p.19).

[59] These themes are reiterated in 'discussion papers' such as 'Wasteful Consumption in Australia' (2005). Here consumption becomes pathological, the only solution, therapy.

[60] Miller 1995, p.23, p.24

[61] Miller 1995, p.26

[62] This is even evident in a key paper arising from an ethical consumption workshop from 2001 published through the 'Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World', even though the paper advocates the potential power of ethical consumption to achieve positive social and environmental change, and the strategies through which this might be implemented (Soares and Diehl 2001).

tactical political intervention his work supplies an interesting example of what I believe are the counter-productive effects of his style of argument.

As a media 'talent' Hamilton makes a reliable and authoritative subject. Semiotically, his suits cut a responsible line, as do the fine dining establishments in which he is commonly interviewed. This is not intended as a mean spirited *ad hominem* critique. Hamilton's image is crucial, a key element in the appeal of his arguments. There is no smell or taint of the left-wing lunatic fringe here. For Hamilton speaks as one who has mastered and seemingly transcended the establishment mantra. His study on people consuming too much appears to be directed at people who *can* afford suits and restaurants, but might still be interested in his book, and *may* be in a privileged enough position to act on its recommendations for 'downsizing'. He often utilises the media to highlight various examples of people who have done just that. This is in keeping with the current popular notions of the 'sea' and 'tree change', but Hamilton's arguments are appealing on many levels.

First, according to the *Living Planet Report*, in 2003 Australia had one of the largest ecological footprints in the world (that is, 'the amount of productive land and sea required to provide the resources we use and to absorb our waste'), currently at 6.6 global hectares per person[63]. This same report estimates the supply of land per person available globally is 1.2 hectares[64]. Consumption in Australia is bloated and gluttonous compared to that available to most other occupants of our planet. Clive Hamilton's points about unnecessary and excessive consumption seem all too accurate here.

Yet Hamilton's 'downshifters' have not reduced their circumstances to altogether harsh conditions. They are working less perhaps, but still enjoying a comfortable lifestyle of their own choosing[65]. Ethical consumption is ancillary here. And this is one aspect of the problems with Hamilton's ideas. One could downsize from Hamilton's fine restaurants to a diet of McDonalds and still not tread lightly on the earth. It would be far more desirable for per capita global consumption and living standards to be raised to some more (optimal) parity, yet it is just as important to think about the effects, origins and consequences goods have on a general level. And in this respect Hamilton's

[63] *Living Planet Report* 2006, p.16, p.30
[64] *Living Planet Report* 2006, p.16
[65] In their conclusion to *Downsizing Democracy* political scientists Crenson and Ginsberg refer to the creed of postmaterialism as 'the faith of citizens who have escaped want' (2002, p.237).

prescriptive pop-psychology about how to sustain / maintain / renew 'our' supposed 'socio-spiritual' needs is ultimately counter-productive. For Hamilton simply reduces consumption to a psychological pathology. Across the bulk of the population, those not part of Hamilton's 'target market', those unwilling or unable to adopt his creed, to what extent do views like his deter a fuller consideration of the possibilities ethical consumption offers? For as Humphrey has pointed out,

> Pathologising consumption treads a fine line between resonating with people and turning them away from the very politics and futures you want them to consider ... the pathologising strategy does not have much of a history of intellectual prescience or political success.[66]

Another issue is that while I may find the disparity in access to resources offensive (even obscene), and feel that much consumer culture is reduced to the lowest common denominator, I am also aware that in many ways the right to consume has been a hard fought battle[67]. This fundamental point has been ignored by many critical accounts. Certainly these struggles are rendered almost invisible by modern day critics of consumption such as Hamilton, who often replicate the attacks of their conservative predecessors, whose class prejudices and religious doctrinal motivations they would abhor. So as compromised as any re-telling is, part of the story of this thesis is to bring out the uncanny resemblance between past and present day approaches to consumption, and to show that although surprisingly vivid, these similarities are often overlooked by purely contemporary analyses. This is my primary reason for including my initial chapters which chart changes to the 'material culture' as well as perceptions and discourses about consumption from the late medieval period to the 1850s. My intent here is to highlight how, as Joyce Appleby writes in her contribution to *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993), the frequent pejorative treatment of consumption all too often simply castigates and so dismisses the human creativity and 'variety of human satisfactions sought through the market'[68]. I know reinscribing a history seems to offer just another representation, but I still believe it is essential to situate the current approaches toward consumption in the history of their development if we are to understand the preconceptions they are informed by and often implicitly invoke. For our commonsense understanding of consumption is influenced not only by our everyday

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[66] (Humphrey 2005).
[67] Miller has also pointed out that 'What most of humanity desperately needs is more consumption, more pharmaceuticals, more housing, more transport, more books, more computers' (2001, p.228).
[68] Appleby 1993, p.162

practices, but also by a diffuse, but powerful and rich range of discourses that have been shaped over centuries. These initial chapters are vital to my later arguments insofar as they provide a historical context and connection to many modern day accounts.

Instead of maintaining a constantly, continually, predominantly anthropocentric focus on the effects of consumption on our *identity*, I believe we need to expand that focus to consider the importance of the role of goods in the world in terms of their impact, effect and consequences. This sounds simple, but given the current situation, particularly in relation to addressing the effects of climate change, it seems this must necessarily involve some kind of major shift in the quotidian. And when I say 'we' I am referring not just to society more generally, but to the academic social sciences in particular. Because as it stands, much of the current imperative thrust toward ethical consumption is coming from without. Al Gore's film on climate change, *An Inconvenient Truth,* being one recent example. Barnett, Clarke, Cloke and Malpass also observe how much of the current impetus toward ethical and sustainable consumption has developed through the work of activists[69], as does Klein (1999) and Hertz (2003), Roberta Sassatelli in her contribution to *Global Cultures, Consuming Perspectives* (2006), and Michelle Micheletti in *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action* (2003). Yet I argue 'we' in the academy more generally can, and *should*, also think on a practical and theoretical level about goods in terms of values, as opposed to being antithetical to values. As well as how those values may impact on something other than our 'identity'. For through my research, throughout all this process, I have found my initial hypotheses sustained, even strengthened: the evolution of certain perspectives regarding consumption and the various preconceptions they obtain, have acted to prevent and undercut the possibility of a more engaged intellectual consideration of ethical and sustainable consumption *per se*. What this means in the case of ethical and sustainable consumption is that in certain disciplines theory has lagged behind everyday public perceptions, and even practices. Most importantly, rather than supporting the possibility of building a more engaged connection to others and the environment, such theoretical preconceptions and predilections have acted against this possibility, instead diminishing, discounting, and

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[69] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass 2005, p.46. See also discussion of the role of NGOs in increasing the role of media coverage about ethical consumption in the UK (Clarke, Barnett, Cloke and Malpass 2007a, p.240). Interestingly, with a few exceptions academics have tended to ignore these 'social movements', whose strategies appear directed as much at altering the behaviour of corporate actors as 'educating' individual consumers (Clarke, Barnett, Cloke and Malpass 2007a, p.237). See also (Micheletti and Stolle 2007).

effectively dismissing the emancipatory potential ethical and sustainable consumption represents.

This brings me to the relatively straightforward but obligatory task of defining ethical and sustainable consumption. Ethical consumption is consumption that takes place in light of ethical considerations, that is, consumption which is not based solely on price or aesthetic considerations, but on other values. The character of those values is ancillary to the action itself, whether it's a matter of boycotting French *foie gras* because its production involves painfully force-feeding ducks and geese, or because of French criticisms of the American coalition's invasion of Iraq[70]. Even the most cursory survey reveals how instances of ethical consumption have increased from the later half of the twentieth century, and is now practised by a variety of individuals, companies, grassroots organisations and other loosely affiliated groups[71], as well as governments and supra-government organisations. Obviously some of these advocate and implement ethical consumption more rigorously than others, with daily practises involving 'targets', companies or countries to be actively boycotted or supported. Others undertake ethical consumption in a way that is more sporadic and diffuse[72]. Whatever the degree to which it is practiced, ethical consumption encompasses a wide range of areas; addressing environmental issues, peace and human rights issues, cruelty to animals, development and fair trade, genetic engineering, gender, racism and homophobia. These actions moreover occur in a global context, often being concerned with international issues that go beyond the traditional academic focus on the processes of nation-states[73]. Supported by expansion of the internet[74], these concerns often transgress national boundaries, in a manner that often involves a kind of 'caring at a distance'[75].

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[70] I stress here the subjective aspects of ethical consumption. For organisations such as the Ethical Consumer Research Association however: 'Ethical consumption, put simply, involves buying things that are made ethically by companies that act ethically. Ethical can be a subjective term both for companies and consumers, but in its truest sense means without harm to or exploitation of humans, animals and the environment' (cited in Clarke, Barnett, Cloke and Malpass 2007a, p.238)

[71]These developments are evinced by the rapid growth of organisations such as Consumers International in 1960, one of the first of many groups concerned with ethical consumption and investment. Other include Investors for Corporate Responsibility, the Shareholder Action Network, Greenpeace, the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation, and the Ethical Consumer Research Association.

[72] Evident in practices ranging from the purchase of free range eggs to products promoted through the Buy Australian campaign, to deliberate purchases from the Body Shop, to Oxfam. Micheletti (2003) has a useful review of many of these groups.

[73] Benton and Redclift 1994, p.4

[74] Berry and McEachern 2005, p.70, pp.84-5

[75] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass, forthcoming, 'Citizenship between individualisation and participation: relocating agency in the growth of ethical consumerism in the United Kingdom'

In a sense all consumption is ethical in that it says something about the value system to which a consumer subscribes. As Slater writes in *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997):

> in consuming we do not - *ever* - simply reproduce our physical existence but also reproduce (sustain, evolve, defend, contest, imagine, reject) culturally specific, meaningful ways of life.[76]

Even the decision to eschew consumption based upon ethical principals is itself a value-laden decision, regardless of whether this decision is conscious or not. But while defining ethical consumption in terms of the conscious motivations of consumers is comparatively unproblematic, defining consumption more generally is much harder. As Miller and the contributors to *Acknowledging Consumption* (1995) all stress, it is not just a matter of exchanging goods and services for money[77]. Slater (1997) similarly writes of consumption in terms of a housewife's labour being consumed by her family.

In 'Flights of Fancy: academics and consumer culture' Lee argues consumption is not even restricted to shopping or the moment of purchase:

> consumption describes a process whose manifest aspect is that of the commodity as it passes through a variety of times and spaces: clothes are 'consumed' every time they are worn, cars every time that we drive them and computer games every time they are played.[78]

Lee writes of consumption as both a cultural *and* economic phenomenon[79], however his regular use of the term "commodity" also relays certain negative connotations, implicitly counter-posing the commodity to some purer, 'genuine' perhaps less fiscally tainted form of good (or social exchange), somehow abstracted or removed from our existence under capitalism. Of course his division of what is culture and what is economic (weighing consumption in terms of both) forms an attempt at a helpful working definition, but it also suggests, even begs the partition between 'culture' and 'the economic' in the first place. On this point then, it is once again pertinent to note Barnett, Clarke, Cloke and Malpass' view that:

> a great deal of the consumption people do is not undertaken by them as 'consumers' at all. Much of it is embedded in practices where they are being parents, caring partners, football fans, good friends. Some consumption is used to sustain these sorts of relationships: giving gifts, buying school lunches, getting hold of this season's new strip.

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[76] Slater 1997, p.4
[77] Miller 1995, p.31
[78] Lee 1994, p.523. In their introduction to *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives* John Brewer and Frank Trentmann make a similar point (2006, p.3).
[79] Lee 1994, p.526

> But quite a lot of consumption is done as the background to these activities, embedded in all sorts of infrastructures over which over people have little or no direct influence as 'consumers'. What both of these points suggests is that the problematisation of consumption might require addressing people as more than just rational utility maximizers, because quite a lot of consumption is not sustained by consumers at all.[80]

In *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1994) Daniel Miller argues the twentieth century Western stress on production has shaped a perception which has sidelined, overlooked and undercut the extent to which consumption forms an inextricable part of our material culture. Recent studies also appear to now acknowledge the simple point that consumption does comprise our material culture, if sometimes reluctantly[81]. Miller's argument is particularly interesting however, because he theorises the human consumption and use of goods by adapting and deliberately transmuting Hegel's notion of 'objectification'; externalisation (self-alienation) and sublation (reabsorption) from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Miller argues that despite Marxism using this configuration to describe 'the rupture in social relations through which people are reduced to objects, and objects in turn interpose themselves in relationships between people'[82], from an anthropological perspective, the external world of things vis-a-vis consumption should be considered as a *material culture* which people shape and turn to their own ends. Or, as he writes in *Acknowledging Consumption: a review of new studies* (1995):

> a use of goods and services in which the object or activity becomes simultaneously a practice in the world and a form in which we construct our understandings of ourselves in the world.[83]

And theorising consumption as *material culture* means, as Slater likewise observes, that

> The world of things is really culture in its objective form, it is the form people have given the world through their mental and material practices[84].

Such perspectives position consumption and material culture as something which just reflects the human 'state'[85]. Yet Miller also seems to have overlooked Marx's point in the *Grundrisse* that nothing is easier for a Hegelian to connect production and

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[80] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke and Malpass 2006. See also Clarke, Barnett, Cloke, and Malpass 2007b.

[81] See for instance, Abercrombie, Hill and Turner's *Sovereign Individuals of Capitalism* (1986)

[82] Miller 1994, p.13

[83] Miller 1995, p.30

[84] Slater 1997, p.103

[85] In relation to formulations such as this, in *Consumerism in 20th-century Britain* Matthew Hilton comments that 'when consumption is loosely and lazily interpreted as material culture, there is no end to its applicability' (2003, p.12).

consumption in an indivisible way[86], disregarding the crucial significance of distribution and exchange. Miller's overall point remains acute however. Yet it also leads into the rather fraught structure / agency debates, and addressing these has taken up a far greater portion of this thesis than I would prefer.

My interest in consumption began in my first year as an undergraduate, prompted in part by Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1993) and Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Both texts offered a seemingly straightforward means of thinking about the expression of identity through consumption: Geertz with his cock fighting in Bali, and Goffman's Preedy with his 'sign-vehicle' book on the beach. It was only later I realised how these lucid accounts did, and did not fit in with the structure / agency controversy. They certainly did not mesh neatly with the work of Marx and the Frankfurt School, the latter of whom positioned people's desires as completely manipulated - exemplified by Adorno's famous dictum of the consumer as a 'hopeless figure of curiosity ... wholly determined by the monopoly'[87].

This depiction of the consumer as manipulated recalls aspects of Naomi Klein's arguments mentioned above concerning the pernicious power of advertising. Yet in *Advertising and Popular Culture* (1996) Jib Fowles, a Professor of Media at Houston-Clear Lake, positions advertising as just another entertaining form of popular culture, drawn from culture itself:

> Potential meanings actually flow in both directions: from the advertising / popular culture mix to consumers and from consumers back into the symbol fields.[88]

Klein too notes this flow, but for her it is more indicative of a struggle over meaning, with marketing having a greater capacity to mine and exploit popular culture for corporate advantage[89]. Fowles however, also writes of how, in the US, 'of the 22,000 new consumer products introduced in 1994, an estimated 90% failed in spite of promotional efforts'[90]. And in the introduction to *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption* (2000), Harrington and Bielby refer to Cultural Studies as being

[86] Marx 1974, p.93
[87] Adorno 1991a, p.73
[88] Fowles 1996, p.49
[89] Klein 1999, p.110
[90] Fowles 1996, p.19. See also Schudson 1993, p.37

> perhaps most noted for its now widely-accepted claim that consumers of cultural texts are not passive dupes but rather active participants in the creation of meaning.[91]

Here then, crudely, are the structure / agency debates vis-à-vis consumption. Does advertising *per se* promote an egregious 'consumer culture' as critics such as Christopher Lasch suggest?[92] And do people express their *own desires* and their *own identity* through consumption, or are those desires imposed?

In *Advertising, the uneasy persuasion* (1993) Michael Schudson notes how criticisms of advertising and consumption are evident across the political spectrum[93]. Certainly by the early stages of my doctoral research I had come to realise the extent to which ideas about structure and agency dominated so many accounts of consumption, even the most tangential. At first I had wanted to treat ethical and sustainable consumption as an issue that should overtake questions about structure, agency and the expression of identity through consumption, but I felt impelled to alter my thesis when I realised how in social theory these debates cannibalised most other accounts of consumption. There was very little room in this space for ethical consumption as an issue. Gabriel and Lang refer to the 'relative dearth' of academic literature about consumer activism as 'surprising'[94]. But it is not surprising at all. On the one hand, all too many accounts, influential accounts at that, depict the consumer as manipulated, but simultaneously, as tacitly responsible for all the socio-economic inequality and injustice in society. Zygmünt Bauman for instance, deprecates consumption as just a 'disguise of a free exercise of will'[95]. He simultaneously positions consumption and 'consumer society' as accountable for inequality and all the horrors associated with global deregulation. For instance, referring to two classes of people, those who travel freely, and those who can't, Bauman accuses 'tourist' consumers of needing their vagabond poverty stricken doppelgängers to feel good[96]. Reductionist approaches along these lines are usually associated with ideas about consumption instantiating a decline of culture and the pollution of *proper* social

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[91] Harrington and Bielby 2000, p.4
[92] Schudson 1993, p.6, 1998, p.254, p.261; Gabriel and Lang 2006, p.91, p.109; Fowles, 1996, p.62.
[93] Schudson 1993, pp.6-8
[94] Lang and Gabriel 2005, pp.39-40
[95] Bauman 1998, p.84
[96] Bauman writes: 'the tourist's life is all the more bearable, even enjoyable, for being haunted with a uniformly nightmarish alternative of the vagabond's existence. In an equally paradoxical sense, the tourists have vested interest in rendering the alternative as dreadful and execrable as possible. The less appetizing is the vagabond's fate, the more savoury are the tourist's peregrinations. The worse the plight of the vagabonds, the better it feels to be a tourist (Bauman 1998, p.98).

relations. As per type Bauman cites with approbation other theorists who similarly regret *our* 'melancholic' consumerist 'malaise'[97], and 'the development of an artificially created and subjective sense of insufficiency'[98].

The volume of hostile accounts of consumption is such that in many ways it is astonishing *any* more sympathetic views developed. But in stressing the role of societal structures in imposing 'artificial' meanings upon goods, questioning the possibility of any 'authentic' identity being expressed by consumption, hostile accounts all fall prey to an implicit, counterfactual humanist conception of authenticity / essentialism which also, curiously, provide scant account of agency. Questions raised about problems associated with this perspective led, in turn, alternate views more open to exploring the richness of cultural meanings evoked by goods and the human creativity involved in their use. In chapter seven I detail how such accounts initially developed via various anthropological arguments about the role of goods in maintaining social connections, and later evolved via a search for agency as instantiated via 'resistance'. But Slater also writes of postmodern 'apologias'[99], and the muddy battlefield' associated with the development such accounts, how they dominated much of the work on consumption which took place in the 1990s, but also how they tended to proffer a rather limited theorisation of identity, while at the same time exhibiting an 'obsession' with it:

> One of the less helpful turns taken by consumption studies was the obsession with identity which seemed to reduce all this to the banal question of how to perform a consistent persona, and reduced the object or good to a sign or marker; the object has a materiality only in a semiotic sense: as a *signifier*.[100]

In subsequent chapters I place this new attention to identity / agency in the context of what Benton and Redclift describe in their introduction to *Social Theory and the Global Environment* (1994), as the most 'acrimonious dispute in social and political theory':

> The first and most pervasive of these contests is that between approaches which put human conscious agency at the centre of analysis, and those which

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[97] Carroll cited in Bauman 1998, p.82

[98] Seabrook cited in Bauman 1998, p.94. Bauman (2007) only repeats the same themes, *ad nauseum*.

[99] Miller and Slater 2007, p.7

[100] Miller and Slater 2007, p.18-9. In contrast to Slater, Probyn positions postmodernism as responsible for generating more complex understandings of identity: 'buffeted by the winds of postmodernism that have permeated public debates, it seems that there is a popular acceptance of the fact that identities are henceforth difficult, fragmented, temporary, unhinged by massive changes to modes of unemployment and the economy, re-formations of the family, and the changes in gender and sexual order'. (2000, p.12).

> focus attention on the societal-structural conditions for, and constraints on, action.[101]

I mentioned earlier this thesis takes a *longue durée* view in examining the trajectory and lead up to these debates. Particularly prior to the new research that has recently emerged from the UK my need to unpick the gaps, inconsistencies and flaws in the structure / agency debates seemed to require a full accounting. But I was also taken aback and became absorbed by the sheer depth of hostility toward consumption throughout history. In *Luxury: the Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (1977), Sekora details attacks on consumption evident even in the bible - Eve commits the original sin in consuming the apple[102]. As I will relate in more detail shortly, Fielding expressed alarm about consumption leading to a social decline in the seventeen hundreds, just as Leavis and T.S. Eliot did two hundred years later. The early hostile accounts of consumption have many modern variations. I outline many of these earlier arguments in the next two chapters. To a certain degree these, and later chapters, merely review literature which has already been the focus of much early consumption research. But these chapters also provide an important corrective to more commonplace Australian sociological accounts of consumption which tend to begin by reiterating the views of Simmel, Veblen, Marx the Frankfurt School and Bourdieu, without situating the views of those theorists in any longer term framework of debates. In later chapters I do focus closely on Marx, the Frankfurt School, and in the first of the 'identity debates' chapters I discuss Veblen and Simmel, along with theorists such as Leavis, Eliot, Packard, Barthes, Ewen, Lasch, Williamson and Debord. This chapter also outlines various inconsistencies and tensions associated with the more elaborately articulated structuralist positions, and the first attempts to reassess them on the part of theorists affiliated by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Chapter eight considers the accounts of Douglas and Isherwood, Bourdieu, de Certeau, and Fiske, all of which in varying ways fed into, attempted to address and overcome the structure / agency debates, but in turn contributed to a new 'theoretical hegemony of identity'. In the final chapter, the conclusion, I discuss new research, mainly from the UK, which is now offering alternate perspectives. Once again, I note that with a few exceptions, in Australia the course and parameters of the focus on consumption in social theory still appears largely subordinate

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[101] Benton and Redclift 1994, p.7
[102] Sekora 1977, p.24

to older accounts. Meanwhile, the value of any study of the origins and effects of goods, how and why people undertake ethical / sustainable consumption, or the significance of their doing so remains diminished. Ultimately it is this issue that directs my thesis.

2

Early discourses on consumption: Hobbes, Locke, the Protestant ethic, and mercantile philosophy

> Material goods never simply exist; they are situated within structures of meaning . . .
> (Xenos 1989, p.5)

I mentioned in the previous chapter that my primary concern in this thesis is to draw attention to the 'theoretical hegemony of identity' in the social sciences, as well as the limitations of the structure / agency debate in relation to consumption generally, and ethical / sustainable consumption specifically. These next few chapters focus on older arguments and concerns that later shaped the direction of the structure / agency debate in relation to consumption. Accordingly, these chapters constitute an extended prolegomenon to much of my later discussion: complementing my later refutation of the ideas of the Frankfurt School (and their many epigones), in part by emphasising just how appalling living conditions were for the vast majority in Europe in the past - that strata in Western countries now enjoying the fruits of what Adorno and Horkheimer disparagingly referred to as the 'culture industries'. But I also found it surprising how the Frankfurt School ignored the extraordinary class based restrictions on consumption (*policed* via sumptuary law) which I outline below.

The other aim of this chapter, and the next, then, is also to point to how the contemporary hostility toward consumption is rooted in and devolved from an earlier period of even greater hostility directed against consumption practices we would now consider banal. In this chapter I focus initially on the late medieval period and outline various perspectives on consumption up to the 1650s. I begin with notions of hierarchy associated with the idea of the 'great chain of being', and how that hierarchy took a tangible form in the material conditions of life through sumptuary law. I then consider

the impact of the Reformation and the 'Protestant ethic', the increase in trade from the mid 1600s, and the views of Hobbes and Locke, particularly regarding the extent to which their arguments may have facilitated the development of a new 'market society', as theorists such as C.B. Macpherson claim. Many of the ideas I outline here are based on secondary rather than primary sources. This is largely due to the broad based character of this thesis, and regrettable for the arguments of Hobbes and Locke in this chapter, and Smith and Hume in the next in particular deserve closer attention. Again, however, these next few chapters are mainly intended to set a context, preparing the ground for my later discussion.

Throughout these early chapters, then, I track an emerging practical and theoretical acceptance of consumption developing side by side with a continuing hostility. As with any account of a 'trajectory', I have found that in this, a teleological narrative and a linear order of exposition has been inevitable. Such narratives tend to be reductionist; yet this period was so extraordinary complex, with consumption evoking an incredible multiplicity of responses. Any attempt to capture the nuances and ambiguity of this can only be approximate. (I am also aware of the fallibilities, partialities and limitations involved in attempting to reinscribe any particular history by way of truth-status synecdoche[1].) My conclusions have to be treated, accordingly, as partial. Still, obviously I believe what I trace below has had an impact worth investigating, especially to the extent it may have shaped and fostered the current climate vis-a-vis consumption in the academy. Here then is my primary aim; I believe it essential to situate current discursive manoeuvres in the history of their development if we are to understand the preconceptions they are informed by and often implicitly invoke. Contemporary critics would no doubt reject many of the motivations and prejudices of their predecessors; but there are so many, often unwitting parallels between them. This is unfortunate, especially as so many critics dismiss out of hand the 'variety of human satisfactions sought through the market'[2], while benefiting from so much of what that same consumption regime has delivered.

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[1] My response here however has to be pragmatic. What else could it be. Unless I was going to *supplement* my thesis with an extended and important discussion representing the problems of representation, perhaps drawing for support on a range of 'representative anecdotes' (Chandler 1998).
[2] Appleby 1993, p.162

Material culture in the feudal period

In *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century: The Wheels of Commerce* (1981) Braudel outlines a range of different food eaten by the elite and the masses during the late medieval period[3]. There was a marked disparity. For ruling elites, Dunn records in *The Age of Religious Wars 1559-1689* (1970) 'luxuriated in unprecedented conspicuous consumption'[4]. (Lisa Jardine's *Worldly Goods: a New History of the Renaissance* (1996) gives some indication of this with her delineation of the lush opulence of the architectural detailing and sumptuousness of the exotic Renaissance goods depicted in Carlo Crivelli's *The Annunciation with St.Emidius,* 1486[5], pictured below.) In contrast, most of the rest of the medieval European population lived in conditions of appalling poverty: basic facilities we now consider commonplace were non-existent. For the vast majority during this period poverty was rife and starvation regular:

> Famine recurred so insistently for centuries on end that it became incorporated into man's biological regime and built into his daily life. Dearth and penury were continual, and familiar even in Europe, despite its privileged position.[6]

Both Dunn, and Joyce Appleby in *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth Century England* (1980), observe how in England, one of the wealthier European societies of the Middle Ages, famine was commonplace until around the mid-sixteen hundreds[7]. Braudel details a similarly grim situation in France, which,

> by any standards a privileged country, is reckoned to have experienced 10 *general* famines during the tenth century: 26 in the eleventh; 2 in the twelfth; 4 in the fourteenth; 7 in the fifteenth; 13 in the sixteenth; 11 in the seventeenth and 16 in the eighteenth.[8]

Internecine wars only aggravated this longstanding, utter deprivation. Moreover, while famine may have abated by the 1700s, the lowest 20% of the population still suffered from chronic malnutrition[9].

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[3] Braudel 1981, pp.187-202
[4] Dunn 1970, p.89
[5] Jardine1996, pp.6-10
[6] Braudel 1981, p.73
[7] Dunn 1970, p.116. Appleby 1993, p.162, Appleby 1980, p.27, pp.54-63, p.101, De Vries 1993, p.95.
[8] Braudel 1981, p.74
[9] Appleby 1993, pp.162-3

Carlo Crivelli's *The Annunciation with St.Emidius,* 1486. National Gallery, London

The general hardship did not generate sympathy of the part of those in positions of power. In *The Age of Plunder: the England of Henry VIII 1500-1547* (1976), Hoskins relates how in the 1500s facial branding and enslavement for vagrancy was common in England[10], with the living conditions of those fortunate enough to be housed being little better. The average peasant family lived in cottages with just one room and no ventilation. All household activities were carried out in this space: hygiene and amenities we now take for granted were non-existent. Even 'good-class' English homes enjoyed circumstances little better according to Dunn's recounting of a visiting Dutch envoy's report:

> Floors were covered with rushes which were occasionally removed, "but so imperfectly that the bottom layer is left undisturbed, sometimes for twenty years, harbouring expectorations, vomitings, the leakage of dogs and men, ale-droppings, scraps of fish, and other abominations not fit to be mentioned"[11].

Unsurprisingly, a range of diseases, including frequent outbreaks of plague, contributed significantly to mortality during the period.

European sumptuary law and the great chain of being

Despite these appalling living standards, from the late thirteenth until the eighteenth century ruling elites throughout Europe felt the need to enact laws to ensure that the material goods permitted to each social class were rigidly prescribed and graded according to rank[12]. John Sekora in his classic *Luxury: the Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (1977), discusses how this doctrine of '"consumption by estates" ensured standards of conduct and comfort were fixed according to social rank; liberty and magnificence were reserved for the highest rank but prohibited to all others, and so on down the great chain of being'[13]. Enshrined on a juridical level, encoded in secular legislation and, at least until the Reformation, administered by ecclesiastical courts, sumptuary law created tangible, legal markers of societal status, and was represented as the legal embodiment of a Divine Order.

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[10] Hoskins 1976, p.106. Also Hunt 1996, p.130.
[11] Hoskins 1976, p.2. Also p.119.
[12] The earliest recorded European sumptuary laws were in France in 1294, the latest in Poland in 1776 (Jones 1982, p.97).
[13] Sekora 1977, p.61. He also notes how these conceptions of hierarchy were sustained across scientific, philosophical and religious levels by ideas derived from Greek, Roman, Christian and Hebraic traditions.

Dunn writes that this belief in a God-given Order was a striking feature of the Middle Ages[14], and refers to Shakespeare's (1564-1616) use of Ulysses' soliloquy in *Troilus and Cressida* to illustrate how the hierarchy was even 'considered a measure of civilisation' insofar as it

> perfectly expresses the prevailing contemporary belief that social hierarchy preserves political order and economic well-being.[15]

In *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1990 [1924]) Johan Huizinga similarly describes fourteenth and fifteenth century society in France and the Netherlands, claiming such notions of hierarchy encompassed every aspect of people's daily lives. The established social order, he writes,

> represents a divine institution, an element of the organism of Creation emanating from the will of God, constituting an actual entity, and being, at bottom, as venerable as the angelic hierarchy[16].

One question here of course is the extent to which sumptuary law *was* accepted by the general populace. For despite Huizinga's idealised view of feudal society, there are a number of other accounts which suggest his views may gloss over the complexity of the period. One issue is that Huizanga's idealised view of a religious hierarchy does not cohere easily with the warfare which occurred during this period with such frequent, brutal, and depressing regularity, largely a result of the 'other-worldly' behaviour of pre-Reformation clergy and self-interested actions of the feudal elite. In *The World of Goods* (1996) Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood relate, for instance, how 'perjured oaths were as much a career as a necessity'; the pragmatics of feudal politics involved 'a chain of blackmail, the kings openly handing out feudal rights as the price of conscience'[17].

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[14] Dunn 1970, p.188.

[15] Dunn 1970, p.105

[16] Huizinga 1990 [1924], p.55

[17] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.17, p.18. Huizinga acknowledges various forms of feudal corruption, but still argues the 'violent and dissipated' actions of individuals did not compromise their 'station': 'To the catholic soul the unworthiness of the persons never compromises the sacred character of the institution' (Huizinga (1990 [1924], p.56). In a similar vein Schilling cites Kantorowitz's *The King's Two Bodies: a study in Medieval Political Theology* (1958): 'the King possessed a political, sovereign and permanent body which received its authority from God, as well as an earthly body subject to death ... This conjoined the ideas of Christ's mortal and eternal body with a "sociological distinction between an individual and collective body"' (2001, p.452).

The Great Chain of Being, from Didacus Valades, *Rhetorica Christiana,* 1579

During the middle ages scholastic doctrine ascribed to the notion of a cosmological hierarchy. Earth was at the centre of the universe, surrounded by a number of unchanging, or immutable celestial spheres. Earth wasn't immutable, it was subject to decay, and only Hell was considered lower. This ordered heavenly hierarchy was seen as being properly mirrored by a social hierarchy on earth, what became known as the 'great chain of being'. God was at the top of the rung, and so on down the chain. Even different classes of animals had their place. Established by God; inequality was thus represented as normal and natural.

There is, nonetheless, no doubt religious doctrine promoted the notion of a social hierarchy and attacked consumption *per se*. Hirschman for instance, in *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (1977), notes how at 'the beginning of the Christian era St. Augustine had supplied basic guidelines to medieval thinking by denouncing lust for money and possessions as one of the three principal sins of fallen man'[18]. Augustine feared, Eric Roll also observes in *A History of Economic Thought* (1992), that trade would turn 'men from the search for God'[19]. A similar cautionary tale is evident in Hieronymus Bosch's *Haywain* triptych: in *The Needs of Strangers* (1994) Michael Ignatieff elegantly and entrancingly positions *Haywain* as a terrifying 'pictorial homily', depicting kings and even the Pope recklessly and rapaciously pursuing and succumbing to the false satisfaction of various worldly temptations[20]. Then again, Abercrombie and Turner's 'Dominant ideology thesis' interrogates the extent to which such intellectual formulations of the 'great chain of being' even filtered down to subordinate classes:

> Although such a doctrine appeared to give religious and even natural sanction to the feudal social order, it was simply not generally available to the peasantry since it was so often couched in an intellectualized form.[21]

Abercrombie and Turner's argument is convincing to a certain degree, for sermons were in Latin. But in relation to consumption specifically (as opposed to 'ideology' more generally), sumptuary law was a disciplinary strategy that was regulated and policed (even if sporadically, as Hunt suggests in *Governance of the Consuming Passion: a History of Sumptuary Law* (1996)). Moreover, the all too graphic images based on Aurelius Prudentius Clemens' poem *Psychomachia: The Battle for the Soul of Man* (c.405AD), carved, and literally plastered on churches all over superstitious and largely pre-literate Europe, were all too visible didactic illustration that Luxury (always personified as a woman) was ungodly[22]. Huizinga's writes of religious attitudes 'saturating' late medieval life and thought, and of there being 'a marked tendency of thought to embody itself in images'[23]. One famous and horribly graphic carving at Moissac (Tarn-et-Garonne) in France

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[18] Hirschman 1977, p.9
[19] Roll 1992, p.33
[20] Ignatieff 1994, pp.65-79
[21] Abercrombie and Turner 1978, p.155
[22] Sekora discusses how *Psychomachia* was read widely during the Middle Ages, notes its importance in contributing to perceptions of 'luxury' (Sekora 1977, p.44), and cites various public examples of *Psychomachia* imagery.
[23] Huizinga 1990 [1924], p.147

shows Luxury in anguish, snakes biting or suckling her breasts, toads poised repugnantly at her mouth and vulva. That, and other similar images can be seen on-line[24], and are discussed in Weir and Jerman's *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (1999). The poem itself spells out appropriate behaviour and the dangers of luxury and overindulgence through the example of the battle between the personified Christian Virtues and Vices, with Luxury / Indulgence, first beguiling and seducing the Virtues: '*Eal œt gaderunge mid gepende* ("The whole throng, with changed banners went over to Luxury"[25]). Sobriety subsequently confronts Luxury, they battle, and Luxury is defeated in the most casually gruesome manner:

> she [Sobriety] raises the cross of Christ high before the horses who draw the chariot of Indulgence. She pushes the holy wood against the bridles. The beasts are frightened and run away down a steep path; the chariot and its driver are dragged helplessly along. Dust blows in her face, she is thrown out and her body catches in the wheels so that she is the brake that stops the runaway. Then Sobriety strikes the death blow by hurling a great stone that she finds nearby. Chance found the stone and then Chance directs its short flight so that the nose and teeth of Luxury are smashed and her red lips are driven into the arch of her ruined mouth. The teeth are loose in their sockets, her throat is torn, and the chopped tongue spits out bits of its bloody flesh. This meal of her own body sickens her: she swallows the crushed bones and vomits the lamps she has eaten.
>
> Sobriety speaks: "Drink up. You drained many cups before, surely you can stomach your own body. You have reveled in your excesses of sweetness; you should enjoy morsels like these. The taste of death must be bitter in your mouth; this last draught of wine must turn your previous pleasures to gall". Then she dies.

In *Governance of the Consuming Passion* (1996), Alan Hunt details how sumptuary law escalated between the waning of feudalism and the onset of early mercantile capitalism (1300 - 1600)[26]. Yet he also positions the very existence of sumptuary law as a response to challenges to the socio-political order, noting sumptuary law

> is rarely, if ever, associated with stable relations of hieratic domination, but is a product of circumstances in which a hieratic order has come under internal pressure.[27]

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[24] Anne Marshall lists various allegorical friezes depicting the seven deadly sins and battles between the virtues and vices in England http://www.paintedchurch.org, Accessed 10/2/2009. One frieze from Shropshire is considered a reference to the battle between Luxury and Temperance in the *Psychomachia*: http://www.paintedchurch.org/jousclav.htm. Another site, http://www.beyond-the-pale.org.uk/zxLuxuria.htm, features carvings which are far more grotesque, Accessed 10/2/2009.

[25] Tuve 1966, and Budny 1997, p.365

[26] Hunt 1996, p.146-7 & p.173

[27] Hunt 1996, p.105

This brings to bear questions about the extent to which sumptuary law *was* regarded as a legitimate imposition of the socio-political hierarchy. On one hand Hunt writes that there seemed a 'broad consensus that favoured the existence of such laws', insofar as 'most sections of the population shared general agreement that sumptuary laws were both desirable and necessary'[28]. On the other, he observes how 'their existence rarely induced systematic enforcement practices from the rulers or compliance from the populace'[29]. He concludes if sumptuary law were rigorously imposed the 'consensus' supporting its existence would have been threatened.

Given the horrendous poverty, hardship and political tumult experienced by so much of European society during this period, we might begin to suspect that challenges to the hierarchy through consumption were uncharacteristic. The horrendous disparity in living conditions contributed to the Peasants' War of 1525, for instance, during which time a priest, Thomas Müntzer, referred to elites as 'ravening wolves' 'pitifully devastating' Christendom[30], while comparing other priests and clergy to vipers, temporal lords and rulers to eels. 'You can see', he says, 'that handsome sight of eels and vipers all fornicating in a heap'[31]. But of course drawing generalisations about Europe during this period is fraught. One of the more curious indications of the success of religious attacks on consumption during this period was also the practice of publicly burning goods considered evidence of unnecessary 'vanity'. Huizinga describes these bonfires of the 'vanities' as a longstanding feature of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, and writes of them being encouraged by 'diatribes of preachers against dissoluteness and luxury'[32]. Of these bonfires, he writes of Savonarola's (1452-98) being perhaps the most famous, boasting the destruction of at least one Botticelli. However Huizinga notes that the custom was 'prevalent both in France and Italy' well before Savonarola's time. He also represents these public displays not as bizarre or unusual, but as just another example of the religious zeitgeist[33]. Of course the degree of this religiosity would have

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[28] Hunt 1996, p.355

[29] Hunt 1996, p.355. Hunt does not mention many instances of enforcement for blatant transgressions but it is very tempting to surmise that those wealthy enough to afford goods proscribed to their 'station' were more likely exempt. Hoskins for instance notes that along with the great landowners, the wealthiest group in England during the 1500s were 'merchants engaged in foreign trade' (Hoskins 1976, pp.177-8). He notes also that this group enjoyed considerable political influence.

[30] Müntzer 1966, [1524], p.161

[31] Müntzer 1966, [1524], p.163

[32] Huizinga 1990 [1924], p.13. Savonarola took control of Florence from 1494.

[33] MacIntyre 1980. Huizinga (1990) [1924]. Dunn 1970.

varied in strength and intensity between classes, regions, countries, and was likely mitigated by and pragmatically utilised according the manoeuvring of various political, mercantile and even religious elites[34]. Still, these bonfires appear to strongly support the argument that religious discourse played a significant role in the struggle over the meanings attached to goods, and informed general perceptions, and the range of daily practices and activities across the spectrum of classes.

Then again, in 1497 Savonarola was charged with heresy, excommunicated, and burnt at the stake. An outcome more in line with Hunt's argument about the extent to which the populace tolerated the enforcement of sumptuary law. And there was also Luther's shock during his visit to Rome in 1510-11 at the lax religious practices and irreligious views of its citizens. Yet Luther's subsequent prescriptions were so stringent Max Weber later argued they resulted in such a popular religious asceticism it fostered an ethic of accumulation which enabled capitalism to take shape. Whether or not this was actually the case, whether Protestant asceticism resulted in a materialist ethic that was a causal factor in the creation of capitalism, or just perhaps contributed to a more subtle and long term process of change, the impact of the Reformation in relation to more general perceptions of consumption is important to consider, for from the 1650s there appear the first initial attempts to reconcile the beginning of an increase in material wealth, for those outside elite classes, with religious doctrine.

'Idle hands make the Devil's work'

In *A Short History of Ethics* (1980) Alistair MacIntyre describes the unfolding of the Reformation, noting how both Catholicism and early Lutheranism perceived everyone as guilty, and all desires sinful. With Catholicism however, the soul could be redeemed through the purchase of indulgences. For the early Lutheran, Calvinist and Methodist sects[35] in contrast, redemption could not be purchased. For Luther MacIntyre writes, God is 'omnipotent'; the *only* power able to determine the fate of penitents. However in this the role of faith was paramount. For Calvinism the same precepts apply, but the soul was also predestined, attaining heaven depended solely on God's grace: 'no amount

[34] From the pragmatism of, for instance, the elites of the fifteenth century Florentine Renaissance mercantile principalities, to the irreligious military intercessions of the Papacy which were intended to further their political / business interests, particularly prior to the Reformation.
[35] These were only the first of many protestant sects, which later included Baptists, the many varieties of Anabaptists, English Protestants, Anglicans, and so on.

of good works or sacraments', David Ingram writes in *Critical Theory and Philosophy* (1990), 'would guarantee one's "election"'[36].

Luther's doctrine disseminated fairly rapidly and became popular for a range of reasons, not just because of dissatisfaction with Catholicism. The internal politics of the Holy Roman Empire[37] and hostilities with France are noteworthy because at first they provided a distraction (and later support), allowing Luther time to raise heated debate about the probity of Catholic practices. For by the time Luther was condemned by the Papacy and proscribed on a secular level in 1521, his use to German territorial elites seeking release from Papal interference and taxation had become clear. The 'Protesting Estates' who supported Luther in 1529[38], just realised an opportunity to consolidate and improve their own political and economic standing. For as J.W. Allen details in *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (1960 [1928]),

> Despite the amount of strictly religious controversy in Germany, nowhere else did the struggle so completely turn on property and jurisdiction.[39]

MacIntyre argues Luther garnered the support of these elites by legitimating their political resistance on a theological level, while simultaneously insisting the peasantry adhere stringently to the existing political and socio-economic order[40]. This 'bifurcated morality' MacIntyre writes, was just validated via a concern over the 'psychological transformation of the faithful individual'[41]. Subsequently Calvin too 'sanctions the autonomy of secular activity at every level where morals and religious practice do not directly conflict with such activity'[42].

Although elites appear to have found the political / economic advantages of Luther's ideas appealing, in his contribution to *The Reformation* (1972), Gerhard Ritter argues that

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[36] Ingram 1990, p.55. Ingram represents Luther, Calvin and Methodists as all advocating predestination. For Elton (1963, p.170) and MacIntyre (1980) it is only Calvin.
[37] The death of Emperor Maximilian in 1519, for instance.
[38] The Edict of Worms proscribing Luther was not enforced, and in 1529 the Emperor was forced to issue another decreeing its enforcement.
[39] Allen 1960, p.xvi
[40] Luther, writes MacIntyre, was unequaled in advocating obedience and 'upholding the absolute rights of secular authority' (MacIntrye 1980, p.123).
[41] MacIntrye 1980, p.122-24. With Luther 'the commandments of God became a series of arbitrary fiats for which to demand any natural justification is at once impious and meaningless' (MacIntyre 1980, p.122). The individual must obey God's injunctions which, as the 'only true moral rules', require no 'further rationale or justification'. As all actions were condemned and simultaneously forgiven, it became 'impossible to raise the question of merit of one action against another' (MacIntyre 1980, p.123).
[42] Here then 'political and economic activity can proceed effectively unchecked by any sanctions whatsoever' (MacIntrye 1980, p.123).

in Germany at the time, belief among artisans, burghers and peasants was overwhelmingly important[43]. Luther's arguments about the vital importance of faith found a place here. Faith was the key element; work was represented as a way of not doubting God's existence, the idea being that gainfully employed, one would not have time to think[44]. Work thus became an essential means of demonstrating obedience to God. At the same time prosperity and accumulation began to be regarded as a sure sign of God's forgiveness and grace:

> since unwavering faith was considered necessary for salvation, it was only natural for members of these sects to look for some confirmation of their election in this world. Interpreting literally the Old Testament stories, in which God rewards the faithful with material goods, they came to regard the pursuit of wealth in a totally different light than their Catholic brethren. Of course, this was an *ascetic* pursuit. These Protestant capitalists rationalized their unbrotherly, selfish competition by segregating themselves from the less fortunate (who were stigmatized as lazy and God-forsaken), and devoting their enterprises to the greater glory of God.[45]

In this, according to Weber a certain character of acquisitiveness became a virtue[46]:

> they approved the rational and utilitarian uses of wealth which were willed by God for the needs of the individual and the community. They did not wish to impose mortification on the man of wealth, but use his means for necessary and practical things. The idea of comfort characteristically limits the extent of ethically permissible expenditures ... they set the clean and solid comfort of the middle-class home as an ideal.[47]

A number of strong criticisms have been drawn against Weber's thesis. Hunt cites Werner Sombart's refutation of Weber; Italian economic expansion prior to the Industrial revolution, he says, was fuelled 'by a class of merchants ... enthusiastically engaged in consumption battles with the old nobility'. These merchants were not 'frugal capitalist accumulators'[48]. Hunt also records that during Calvin's rule in Geneva 'there were around 800 arrests, that resulted in 76 banishments and 58 death sentences for sumptuary law and moral offences'[49]. The very existence of such transgressions suggests the partial scope of 'Protestant aestheticism', and McCraken relates how Chandra

[43] Ritter 1972, p.140
[44] I am indebted to Damian Grace for this insight.
[45] Ingram 1990, pp.55-6
[46] In *The Worldly Philosophers* (1972) Heilbroner argues that in a radical departure from earlier Christian and Hebraic religious traditions, the Protestant Ethic meant certain forms of consumption became permissible across a range of classes, so that 'Acquisitiveness became a recognized virtue - not immediately for one's private enjoyment, but for the greater glory of God' (Heilbroner 1972, p.33).
[47] Weber 1978,,p.171
[48] Hunt 1996, p.90. See also Sassatelli 2007, pp.9-10.
[49] Hunt 1996, p.169

Mukerji also notes patterns of 'non-utilitarian consumption even among Protestants whom Weber supposed had forsworn it'[50]. Agnew however, in his contribution to *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993) writes that Mukerji

> did not so much discard Weber's psychohistorical sequence of savings and spending, asceticism and hedonism, as telescope it in time. As a result she transformed a story of anguished cultural and temperamental change from one ethic to the another into a portrait of complementary and mutually energizing traits. Early modern capitalists saved *and* spent, and, in doing so, ushered in modernity.[51]

Another issue is raised by Hirschman in *The Passions and the Interests* (1977) when he argues that in Europe he Protestant ethic did not initiate any sudden dramatic social change:

> the new rose out of the old to a greater extent than has generally been appreciated. To portray a lengthy ideological change or transition as an endogenous process is of course more complex than to depict it as the rise of an independently conceived, insurgent ideology concurrent with the decline of a hitherto dominant ethic.[52]

In *Dutch Civilization in the 17th Century and other essays* (1968) Huizinga similarly argues that

> Prosperity flowed quite naturally from the medieval system and there was never a point where the old was deliberately shaken off and the new warmly embraced.[53]

It is obvious Weber's ideas have generated heated responses in a manner which has directed debate along a particular channel. Let me clarify here however - I am not outlining Weber's thesis in order to enter into a discussion about the precise periodisation of capitalism. I too doubt his ideas can be applied in an encompassing manner, across the board. His thesis is nevertheless fascinating insofar as to date, a supposed 'Protestant' guilt about consumption remains a commonplace trope (regardless of whether or not that 'guilt' is actually inconsequential in practice[54]). But the other factor I want to highlight here is that while notions of personal gain had been positioned

[50] 'Mukerji uses this discovery to argue that consumerism predates the rise of capitalism and that, furthermore, consumerism helped to create the capitalism it is conventionally supposed to have followed' (McCracken 1990, p.9).

[51] Agnew 1993, p.23. See also Sassatelli (2007, p.34), who writes that even 'amongst Protestants there was no lack of materialist attitude or expenditure for consumption, rather there was a greater sobriety in the goods produced and consumed'.

[52] Hirschman 1977, p.4. Hirschman argues the mercantilism of the Protestant Ethic was more a response to a general intellectual dialectic between the passions and reason, with the notion of "interest" providing the balancing theoretical / moral synthesis.

[53] Huizinga 1968, p.25. Huizinga argues the landscape of the Federated States, its social and ethical conditions, all permitted a system more conducive to trade and socio-economic equality.

[54] Schudson 1998, p.250

as blasphemous[55], during the seventeenth century cultural conceptions of the profit motive *gradually began to change.* And in this respect, as Colin Campbell writes, Weber's thesis provides one possible insight into how 'a previously denigrated pattern of conduct became not simply accepted but also highly regarded'[56].

Emanuel de Witte's *Interior with Woman at Virginals*, c.1665, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen

Interpretation is tendentious, but the quietude of this painting suggests the subdued luxury of the rooms was somehow intended to be legitimated by steady activity as opposed to indolence. The simple lines pare back the impact of the opulence and luxury depicted, the somber but rich colouring evokes a religious tenor. The covered heads of the women can be read as matching this, suggesting modesty and Christian virtue. The pleasure of the music is similarly validated and moderated through the impression of dedication and quiet restraint. Restraint and balance are again emphasised by the harmonious ordering of the square and rectangular patterning of the furnishings, the perspectival lines of the rooms, door frames, mirror, chair, and floor patterns; all also suggestive of the pure, ordered mathematical unity of God's world. Religious themes are further supplemented by the passages through the extended corridor, the ephemeral rays of the sun, even the glossy, almost seemingly transcendent sheen of the paint itself.

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[55] Heilbroner 1972, pp.20-3. Valenze 2006.

[56] Campbell 2003, p.796

Dutch trade, enterprise and mercantile philosophy

Dunn notes that sometime during this period, merchants, 'traditionally disdained by the priests as moral parasites and by the knights as moral cowards, [came to feel] confident that they now formed the most dynamic social class'[57]. The seventeenth century Protestant Dutch Federated States who began thriving on trade and enterprise and became wealthy because of it represented perhaps the most notable example of this change. Certainly the 'remarkable texture of the seventeenth century Dutch material culture', as Jan de Vries puts it[58], was also admired by the English. In *The Embarrassment of Riches* (1997) Simon Schama positions the Dutch as rather more ambiguously ambivalent ('the anxieties of superabundance'[59]). Nevertheless Christopher Berry in *The Idea of Luxury* (1993) and Joyce Appleby also both note how (regardless of potential anxieties) English admiration of Dutch trade gave rise to a substantial body of early economic literature aimed at interpreting Dutch success and developing practical measures to emulate it[60]. Appleby remarks, moreover, that despite the initial mundane character of the goods traded by the Dutch,

> The inevitable contrast with Spain, the possessor of legendary treasure teetering on the verge of bankruptcy for nearly a century, only underscored the novelty of the Dutch success.[61]

Notwithstanding the growing regard for and admiration of Dutch trade, mercantile economic philosophy was at the time more concerned with fostering the nation's exports as opposed to imports. Here consumption, and consumption of imports in particular, was seen as diminishing a nation's wealth, leaching the sum total of the value of the goods from the nation as a whole[62]. Exports, in contrast, were thought to increase the political power, strength and wealth of the nation, which was conceptualised in terms of bullion[63]. On a practical level, this admiration resulted in the Navigation Acts of 1651

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[57] Dunn 1970, p.116
[58] de Vries 1993, p.91
[59] Schama 1997, xi
[60] Appleby 1980, pp.73-98
[61] Appleby 1980, p.74
[62] Harth 1970, p. 22
[63] As Clarke explains, in *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology* (1983), the 'task of economic theory, in the forms of *mercantilism*, *cameralism* and *canonism* was to advise the sovereign on how best to regulate the economy in order to enhance the wealth and power of the state. Such theories confined their economic attention essentially to exchange relations, seeing economic advantage to lie in securing an advantageous exchange and seeing political power the means to achieve such advantage, while the wealth so secured was considered to strengthen the State in pursuit of its domestic and foreign ambitions' (Clarke 1983, pp.8-9).

and 1673 that aimed to overturn Dutch dominance of international trade by attempting to ensure, de Vries details, that trade ran in 'a closed circuit' within the English market, instead of through the Federated States[64].

The longstanding attitude of mercantile philosophy toward consumption is evinced by a preamble to an English parliamentary sumptuary law statute of 1463 Hunt cites, that acknowledges mercantile as well as religious concerns about consumption's deleterious effects:

> the commons of the said realm, as well as Men and Women, have worn and daily do wear excessive and inordinate array (and Apparel) to the great Displeasure of God, and impoverishing of this realm of England and to the enriching of other strange Realms and Countries to the final Destruction of Husbandry of this said Realm.[65]

Appleby notes the continuation of this theme in English economic literature some two hundred years later, where it was still 'believed that English consuming habits represented a threat'. Critics ...

> seized on the pervasive hostility to the French in the Restoration as a means to check the drive for economic individualism and free trade. *What is significant in the development of social thought was the predisposition of those in industry to take a defensive stand toward economic growth and to argue instead for a retrenchment in consumption.* Rejecting the definition of trade as a benign exchange of superfluities, the manufacturers' tracts concentrated upon the husbanding of national resources rather than the cultivation of trading opportunities.[66]

It is important to note here that these mid-seventeenth century arguments in favour of leashing consumption took place in a time of rapid change. There was a huge growth in the European population[67], trade with relatively unknown societies such as China, Java and India increased dramatically, there were innovations in banking, new technologies associated with agriculture and transportation, and a rising volume and variety of

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[64] These Navigation Acts only succeeded insofar as they raised both English imports and exports by 50% between 1660-1700. de Vries 1993, p.87. Appleby 1980, p.103. Marx 1974a, pp.75-6.

[65] cited in Hunt 1996, p.134. Sekora also notes how mercantile philosophy was implemented on a practical level in terms of parliamentary acts in relation to trade (Sekora 1977, p.118).

[66] Appleby 1980, p.123. *My italics.* See also Hunt 1996, p.362 on cameralism, and Berry 1994, p.103.

[67] Appleby 1993, p.163. Braudel comments that 'Nobody knows the total population of the world between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries' (1981, p.34; 1982, p.42), but he also states 'that there was a prolonged population rise between 1100 and 1350, another between 1450 and 1650, and a third after 1750; the last alone was not followed by a regression' (1981, p.33). And so as the earlier population growth rates were quickly reduced by subsequent mortality rates, it was not until after 1750 that the world population experienced a sustained rise. Braudel subsequently estimates population growth in Europe 1500 - 1750 at 0.17% per year (Braudel 1982, p.245).

imported commodities, especially textiles from outside Europe[68]. The surge in both national and international trade and commerce was extraordinary. At the same time a new tactic of lower prices with lower profit margins on individual sales led to even further increases in the volume of sales and overall profits obtained[69]. These changes are elaborately detailed in Appleby's *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth Century England* (1980), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993) edited by J. Brewer and Roy Porter, Porter's *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1990), and also Ferdinand Braudel's *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century: The Wheels of Commerce* (1981). In contrast to the abject hardship of the earlier centuries, a wealth of new products became available, existing products became increasingly affordable, and an unprecedented level of material abundance became increasingly apparent. Appleby, Simon Schama, and de Vries all specify how it was domestic consumption which sustained and drove both English and Dutch economic growth in the earlier period, with trade centering on rudimentary goods such as basic materials and foodstuffs[70]. From around the mid-seventeenth century however, more complex and exotic imported goods began to feature. But the sum of these developments was that a whole range of consumption items became accessible to groups to whom such goods had previously been out of reach.

Banal luxuries

The plethora of goods at that time considered luxurious ranged from coffee, sugar, tea, pepper and chocolate, through to tobacco, textiles and assorted household goods such as furniture, flat plates, glass panes and curtains[71]. We now consider these items

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[68] Dunn 1970, p.89

[69] Appleby 1980, pp.114-5. Early writers 'also publicized the idea that prosperity involved enlarging the incomes of those of middling fortune' (1980, p.115).

[70] Appleby 1980; Schama (1993); and de Vries (1993).

[71] The first recorded coffee house in England was in 1652 (Wills 1993, p.141), with coffee being consumed en-mass by 1750 (Shammas 1993, p.199). Sugar, previously a luxury generally given as a gift, became plentiful sometime around 1700 with consumption increasing '*twentyfold* from 1663 to 1775, while the population only increased from 4.5 to 7 million' (Mintz 1993, p.265). Tea became available in 1660, was popularised from the 1690s, and consumed en-masse by 1750 (Wills 1993, p.141), (Shammas 1993, p.183, p.199). Spices such as cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg, pepper had been consumed from an early period (Wills 1993, p.133) (see also Shammas 1993, p.179), but only became available to a wider range of classes from the eighteenth-century. Demand for textiles increased after 1670 (Wills 1993, p.136), and prices dropped (Shammas 1993, p.193). De Vries notes a number of analyses of probate inventories which reveal a steadily improving standard of household furniture and furnishings from the 1650s on (De Vries 1993, pp.100-1). In Holland between 1550-1750 'tins and wooden bowls and dishes made way for pottery and delftware' (De Vries 1993, p.100). And Weatherill records that English ownership of curtains identified in probate inventories rose from 7% in 1675 to 21% in 1775, with ownership of pewter plates from 9% in 1675 to 45% in 1725 (Weatherill 1993, p.221). China had traded porcelain with Portugal from the late sixteenth-century

commonplace. Then, they were remote, unusual and luxurious. Yet although these products had become increasingly available, there were still appalling disparities in wages, wage growth, wealth and living and working conditions. Many new products, as well as material prosperity, still remained beyond the reach of most. Dunn for instance, notes how in the 1600s 'Dutch commercial prosperity was strictly limited to the upper and middle classes'[72]. In England during the 1700s, Porter writes,

> A shockingly large mass of urban poor were still occupying lean-tos and cellars, with rural poor inhabiting shacks made of wattle, turf and road scrapings ... At Bridgenorth things were worse, for they led troglodyte existences in homes gouged out of the cliff face. With timber shortage and enclosure, many could not even afford a fire.[73]

Given this horrendous inequality, its extraordinary that even when new products became more accessible to the lower classes, their consumption still fell into a dubious 'grey' area vis-a-vis sumptuary law; if not technically illegal, they fell into categories bordering on the proscribed. Shammas for instance, details how prior to 1800 sugar, coffee and tobacco were consumed en-masse but only 'over the objections of contemporary social critics who considered labouring class consumption of products formerly classed as luxuries a shameful waste of money'[74]. And these items still *were* luxuries. At least until last century tea, for example, an item we now consider ordinary, even mundane, was still so expensive it was kept under lock and key. In elite households the used leaves migrated down the social ladder to end up in the scullery, used many times over. Café-au-lait similarly originated from servants selling used grinds to street vendors who then mixed the grinds with watered down milk and sold the resultant drink on the street. Yet despite the restricted nature of lower class use of items such as these, their purchase and use generated enormous hostility with writers from Shakespeare to Defoe, Smollett and Fielding depicting the hierarchy and inequitable conditions as acceptable, even natural and necessary[75].

(Morris and Bielenstein 1968, p.326), but from the mid-1700s this trade percolated through to the rest of Europe. See also Braudel's comments on changes in furniture and everyday house hold goods, such as chairs, glasses, forks and food such as sugar, pepper and oranges (1981, pp.183-6). Note also Styles' comments that by the eighteenth century '[t]he middle and lower levels of the market were expanding ... as trends already established in the seventeenth century were reinforced' (1993 p.539).

[72] Dunn 1970, p.104

[73] Porter 1990, p.215. See also Hobsbawm (1969).

[74] Shammas 1993, p.178

[75] Dunn 1970, Sekora 1977, Ignatieff 1994.

The degree of elite hostility toward lower class use of products considered luxurious only grew as these items became increasingly available. Prior to the 1700s, however, while the outcry against luxury was vehement[76], the tone of the hostility was simply that directed against a violation of the 'natural' order rather than that directed against a distinct threat to that order. For this period represented only the beginnings of a shift in the demographics of wealth and power, as in England a rapidly emerging bourgeois mercantile class responsible for facilitating the increased levels of trade and industry was now beginning to find access to political power and influence with their growing wealth. As Clarke observes,

> Commodity producers, and, more particularly, merchants, came to form an economic interest that challenged customary authority, developing more democratic forms of political community and pressing their interests politically. In this way the development of commodity production, while not immediately challenging the foundations of the society within which it arose, presented a challenge to the established forms of social regulation ...[77]

As time went by this mercantile class came to display their new wealth in tangible, visible ways that were previously only accessible to the elite. So although this new abundance was still principally utilised by the gentry (inciting some political agitators calling for the justification of privilege[78]), it slowly crossed the blurring class divisions.

Trade and prosperity

While the early religious notions of hierarchy manifest in sumptuary law co-existed strangely with the burgeoning levels of trade and consumption, it is in this context that Hunt's reference to sumptuary law as 'a case of the proverbial attempt to shut the stable gate after the horse has bolted'[79], can be seen as most apt. As time went by however, reconciling sumptuary law restrictions with the growing abundance became increasingly difficult. Simultaneously it became apparent that the new types of goods had become indispensable, and that if the laws against consumption were adhered to, they would not only 'bankrupt the nation'[80], but also impoverish the lives of the increasingly broad

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[76] Hunt writes that the extent to which sumptuary law violations were punished is difficult to ascertain. As transgressions were generally summary violations details of enforcement is sketchy, varying also between as well as within countries (Hunt 1996, pp.325-56).

[77] Clarke 1983, p.8

[78] Such as the Diggers and Levellers during the 1600s (MacIntyre 1980, pp.152-6) (Dunn 1970, p.150) (see also Macpherson 1970).

[79] Hunt 1996, p.147. Hunt stresses sumptuary laws could not be reduced to any one consistent target or theme, yet he also observes the increasing power of the mercantile class meant a 'sharpening' of the sumptuary law in response (Hunt 1996, pp.150-2).

[80] Appleby 1993, p.167

spectrum of classes who enjoyed the new variety of goods that had become available. Berry, for instance, cites a tract by Mun, a director of the east India Company, published in 1664 (but written about thirty years earlier), where he asks, without trade, 'what will become of our Ships, Mariners, Munitions, our poor Artificers and many others?'[81] Berry notes how in this same tract Mun was moralising against luxurious consumption, but concludes he simultaneously 'adumbrates arguments that will subvert this understanding. It is significant that it is in the context of "trade" that this subversion occurs'[82].

The debates these issues generated around consumption and trade were becoming increasingly intense, and by the end of the 1600s a number of different approaches had come to co-exist; mercantilism v's the 'protestant ethic' v's the perceived need for sumptuary law v's the pragmatics and possibilities of everyday life. Into this mix humanism's more positive view of human nature was also slowly filtering through via the dissemination of the ideas of thinkers such as Erasmus, Thomas More, and the Cambridge Platonists (the latter of whom displaced the previous focus on God's omnipotence and predestination in relation to the problem of theodicy with a new emphasis on God's benevolence and love.[83]) It was in this context that in the mid to late 1600s Hobbes and Locke had developed arguments that legitimated the 'sovereign' desires of individuals, according to C.B. Macpherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (1970). Many aspects of Macpherson's account have been criticised, as I outline below, but I believe his analysis remains particularly useful because it focuses directly on how the 'desire for "commodious living"' was thought of by the political philosophy of this pivotal period. Here, Macpherson's account, taken together with the criticisms directed against it, offers an insight into how the primary political debates of the period accommodated, facilitated or protested the increased trade and associated changes to consumption practices.

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[81] Mun cited in Berry 1994, p.105
[82] Berry 1994, p.104
[83] Campbell 1990, pp.111-113, pp.115-122. Dunn also notes how from the time of the Renaissance and the early scientific revolution humanism's new 'buoyant faith in rational human progress' had slowly developed (Dunn 1970, p.189).

Macpherson on Hobbes's 'market society'

In *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (1970) Macpherson writes that Hobbes and Locke both built on a range of less sophisticated and systematised social contract and natural rights theories to develop their own more elaborate positions, with the work of both positioning 'the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them'[84], what Macpherson refers to as 'possessive individualism'. He begins his argument by adumbrating the standard interpretation of Hobbes' theory of political power: in a hypothetical 'state of nature' men contract an agreement amongst themselves to give power to a strong sovereign who could ensure order amongst them, so avoiding the state of 'warre of every man against every man', driven what Hobbes saw as the key motivating force and essential feature of human nature; the need to avoid violent death, coupled with a 'desire for "commodious living"'[85]. This desire for "commodious living" Hobbes saw as their primary aim, for desire, in Hobbes' view, was a natural fact beyond the ambit of traditional condemnations: morality and law were purely societal creations[86]. To the extent 'safely contained'[87] desire delivered civilisation, it was even honourable. As Berry writes, citing Hobbes:

> It is because "the pleasures of wealth and greatness ... strike the imagination as something grand and beautiful and noble" that men embark upon "toil" and the "continual motion of industry". It is this industry which is

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[84] Macpherson 1970, p.3

[85] 'The Passions that encline [natural] men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them' (Hobbes cited in Macpherson 1970, p.29, also p.19). MacIntyre discusses how Hobbes, influenced by Eucilid (300BC) and Galileo's (1564-1642) mathematical method of breaking things down into the simplest elements, believed that using this method he could theorise society in terms of its individual elements, arguing people could be explained at the simplest level in terms of their twin desires for domination and for the avoidance of death (MacIntyre 1980, pp.130-4). Attempts to achieve these things in the state of nature involved brutal competition; 'an incessant struggle of every man with every man, a struggle of each for power over others' (Macpherson 1970, p.19). Or, the 'perpetual and restless desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death' (Hobbes cited in Hindess 1996, p.36). The principal benefit and rationale for Hobbes' absolutist sovereign is, then, as Berry notes, his ability to 'enforce the conditions to enable its subjects to pursue their desires for "commodious living"' (Berry 1994, p.115). These hypothetical subjects would then transfer to the sovereign all their natural powers and natural rights, for as Hindess specifies, 'there is no scope for anyone to question the legitimacy of the rule to which they are subjected' (Hindess 1996, p.48). Macpherson states that Hobbes knew the 'state of nature' in which his 'social contract' took place never actually existed in reality. Hobbes was merely adopting a 'logical hypothesis' as a rhetorical device in order to enlighten his contemporaries about their 'true' state (Macpherson 1970, pp.60-2, pp.104-5). Also Macpherson 1970, pp.20-5, p.72.

[86] In the state of nature traditional condemnations had no place; 'The notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice have there no place'.

[87] Within the society contained by the sovereign, human desires and passions retained the brutal motivations they exhibited under the state of nature: 'The natural condition of mankind is within men now, not set apart in some distant time or place' (Macpherson 1970, p.25).

> responsible for all "the sciences and arts which ennoble and embellish human life".[88]

Versions on this theme would be mooted Adam Smith and David Hume a hundred years later. The important point to note, however, is how in this Hobbes refutes traditional religious, Aristotelian, as well as Epicurean and Stoic arguments about the desirability of a desire-less state[89]. For Hobbes, 'Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another'[90]. The cessation of desire is a 'living death'.

Thus far is a fairly straightforward reading of Hobbes. The more provocative and contentious aspects of Macpherson's account relate to the extent to which Hobbes actually conceived of a competitive *market society* in the way we would understand it today. For Macpherson interprets Hobbes as regarding labour as a 'commodity'[91], with 'the value or worth of every man ... determined by the market'[92]:

> where labour has become a market commodity, market relations so shape or permeate all social relations that it may properly be called a market society, not merely a market economy'[93].

For Macpherson Hobbes's model 'did correspond in large measure to seventeenth-century English society'[94], and he writes that as per Hobbes' social contract theory in this 'market society' the sovereign could impose whatever behaviour they believed necessary for the maintenance of society[95], but otherwise,

> there could be no question of imposing a system of values from outside or above. Hence there could be no question of finding a hierarchy of wants or of rights or obligations. Everyone's must be assumed to be equal.[96]

According to Macpherson then, Hobbes frees human desires from tradition, and aside from the sovereign enforcing the system, '*social order was no longer dependent on the maintenance of the hierarchy*'[97]. The sovereign could ensure 'Luxurious consumption' was 'discouraged', but his *modus operandi* was not so much focused on regulating desire (which,

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[88] Berry 1994, p.165. Macpherson cites Hobbes on this point also: 'Covetousness of great Riches, and ambition of great Honours, are Honourable; as signes of power to obtain them' (1970, p.154).
[89] Berry 1994, p.113
[90] Hobbes cited in Slater 1997, p.77
[91] Macpherson 1970, p.37
[92] Macpherson 1970, p.80
[93] Macpherson 1970, p.48
[94] Macpherson 1970, p.16
[95] Macpherson 1970, p.96
[96] Macpherson 1970, pp.77-8. Macpherson writes that state regulation existed in Hobbes' model, but this was in order to maintain the system, it did 'not affect the mainspring of the system', and so 'a mercantilist policy is perfectly consistent with the model' (Macpherson 1970, pp.57-8).
[97] Macpherson 1970, p.89. *My italics.*

as Berry also argues, Hobbes represented as outside reason's province and the determination of others[98]). The role of the sovereign was *only to regulate the system in which desires could be orderly pursued*[99].

Hobbes's view of human nature vis-à-vis the pursuit of desires was 'widely condemned' Macpherson concedes, and certainly 'not accepted by any significant group or movement in England in his own century'[100]. In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1990) Campbell writes of how the Cambridge Platonists 'detested' Hobbes, so much so that the intensity of their arguments against him impacted on the 'more influential clergy' to such an extent that from the mid-1680s it became *de rigueur* in charity sermons to emphasize that Man was created in God's image and so inherently benevolent, sympathetic and empathic[101]. The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Locke's pupil, also saw Hobbes as having 'threw all Order and Virtue out of the World'[102], with Locke himself disagreeing with many of Hobbes's arguments, not least his support of absolute sovereign power[103]. For Macpherson however, none of this lessened the impact of Hobbes's views. In *Reason and Nature in Eighteenth Century Thought* (1968) Harris even goes so far as to claim 'the challenge of his fundamental assumption remained', insofar as Hobbes' view of Man's passion and desires and powers 'demolished the moral order of the universe', 'shattering the Platonic assumptions of the great humanist tradition'[104].

Macpherson on Locke's ratification of desire

Despite Hobbes and Locke's more obvious disagreements in relation to the social order, Macpherson argues that the ideas of both exhibit a similar 'possessive individualism'. Taking a similar tack, Sheamur, in his contribution to *Economics and Ethics* (1996), argues that Locke bypassed many criticisms directed at Hobbes by arguing that human capacities to shape and work the earth were given by God specifically so that *man's duties to God* could be fulfilled. In this, Sheamur views Locke as ratifying desire as God-given,

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[98] Paraphrasing Hobbes in *Leviathan* Berry writes 'the end [of desire] itself is not reason's province; we do not do something because it is rational but because we *want* to do it' (Berry 1994, p.119).

[99] Macpherson 1970, p.96. *My italics.*

[100] Macpherson 1970, p.90, 91 & p.106. See also Berry 1994, p.118.

[101] Campbell 1990, p.116, pp.119-22

[102] Shaftesbury cited in Berry 1994, p.118

[103] With Locke the sovereign no longer has the unquestioned right to absolute power. As Hindess states 'the holder of that power is regarded as having very definite obligations towards its subjects' (Hindess 1996, p.48), with sovereign power legitimate *only* insofar as it supplies a stable, overarching regulatory framework within which desires could be safely pursued.

[104] Harris 1968, p.45, p.46

hence natural and necessary. Achieving those desires means discharging duties to God[105]: having *rights* in order to do so is vital. Macpherson goes further than this however, seeing Locke as supplying a positive moral, worldly as well as religious basis to justify why desires should be pursued: first, as depicting acquisition as having positive flow-on effects acting in the interests of, and benefiting all; and so second, instead of being viewed as morally destructive, in fact having beneficent outcomes consistent with religious doctrine[106].

Macpherson writes that Locke developed this argument through several stages. First, according to the scriptural doctrines and natural law theory (with which Locke concurs), 'the earth and its fruits were originally given to mankind in common'[107]. In the 'state of nature' the consent of others was not needed to ratify what men obtained from nature – there was enough to supply everyone, and God had instructed men to work the earth and help themselves to the results of their labour. For Locke,

> As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property.[108]

As Macpherson observes:

> No consent of the others is needed for this appropriation. For God commanded man to labour the earth, and so entitled him to appropriate whatever land he mixed his labour with; and besides, the original appropriation was not "any prejudice to any other Man, since there was enough, and as good left" for others.[109]

In this state of nature no-one was justified in taking what they could not use. This was both 'foolish' and 'dishonest'[110]; it would go to waste, denying others. With the advent of money however, spoilage is prevented. The key point here is that money legitimates holding and accumulating possessions[111]. This in turn justifies the appropriation of land

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[105] Shearmur 1996, p.47

[106] In his essay 'The Nature and Logic of Capitalism', Heilbroner restates this approach: 'Locke sets out to demonstrate that *unlimited* private acquisition, for centuries the target of the most scathing religious and philosophic criticism, was in fact compatible with both the dictates of Scripture and the promptings of right reason' (Heilbroner 2003, p.65). These themes are also evident in Hirschman's the *Passions and the Interests* (1977) where the pursuit of money / passions was comes to be seen as a steadying rather than disruptive character trait.

[107] Macpherson 1970, p.199

[108] Locke cited in Harris 1968, p.58

[109] Macpherson 1970, p.202

[110] Locke cited in Macpherson 1970, p.234

[111] 'The introduction of money by tacit consent has removed the previous natural limitations of rightful appropriation, and in doing so has invalidated the natural provision that everyone should have as much as he could make use of' (Macpherson 1970, pp.203-4 & p.211).

held in common, for even in the event of a shortage, appropriation and accumulation by some is depicted as bettering the condition of all:

> he who appropriates land to himself by his labour, does not lessen but increase the common stock of mankind. For the provisions serving to the support of humane life, produced by one acre of inclosed and cultivated land, are (to speak much within compasse) ten time more, than those, which are yeilded by an acre of Land, of an equal richnesse, lyeing wast in common. And therefor he, that incloses Land and has a greater plenty of the conveniencys of life from ten acres, than he could have from an hundred left to Nature, may truly be said, to give ninety acres to Mankind. For his labour now supplys him with provisions out of ten acres, which were but the product of an hundred lying in common.[112]

In this Macpherson, MacIntyre and Heilbroner all charge Locke with too easily assuming these gains will be justly distributed (instituting further debate re the extent to which Locke's arguments were designed to legitimate elite enclosures of land held in common for centuries, as well as the European invasion of the Americas[113]).

Aside from this latter point, however, thus far Macpherson's interpretation of Locke is not particularly contentious. After presenting Locke as validating accumulation however, Macpherson then positions him (as with Hobbes) as viewing labour as a commodity, with the appropriation of that labour by others in return for wages as fully justified:

> Locke took it for granted, throughout his justification of the natural right to property, that labour was naturally a commodity and that the wage relationship which gives me the right to appropriate the produce of another's labour was part of a natural order.[114]

For Macpherson then, although Locke starts from a foundation of equality in a state of nature, where 'rational behaviour' equates with 'industrious appropriation', the character of this equality changes when as 'unlimited accumulation becomes rational, *full rationality is possible only for those who can so accumulate*'[115]. Elites are elite because they are rational and have the capacity to accumulate. This rationalises the class hierarchy: poverty is a '*moral shortcoming*'[116] which just proves the *rational incapacity* of labouring classes and the depravity of the poor[117]. For Macpherson, Locke positions this

[112] Macpherson 1970, pp.211-2

[113] See Tully 1993

[114] Macpherson 1970, p.220

[115] Macpherson 1970, p.232. p.233. *My italics.* Locke cited in Macpherson: "God gave the World to Men ... for their benefit, and the greatest Conveniencies of Life they were capable to draw from it... He gave it to the use of the Industrious and Rational, (and *Labour* was to be *his Title* to it;) not to the Fancy or Covetousness of the Quarrelsom and Contentious". See also Marx (1977, p.77) on this point.

[116] Macpherson 1970, p.226

[117] In his report on the poor law, 'A Report of the Board of Trade to the Lords Justices Respecting the

'disproportionate and unequal' system as being tacitly agreed to by all by their 'use of money'[118]. And it is this reasoning MacIntyre refers to when he argues Locke captured and transmuted the debate about the existence of natural rights by connecting the notion of individual interests to tacit consent, thus legitimating coercion on the part of the state and justifying the inequality of existing property relations[119]. So where the 'mediaeval idea of natural law envisaged man as living strictly within the confines of a moral system imposed by God'[120], Macpherson concludes Locke overturns such views and provides a

> moral foundation for bourgeois appropriation ... [and] also justifies, as natural, a class differential in rights and in rationality, and by doing so provides a positive moral basis for capitalist society'[121].

Tully on Macpherson: 'no one had a vision of a full-scale commercial or capitalist society'

One interesting aspect of Macpherson's account of Locke's justification of accumulation is its consonance with the 'Protestant ethic' and its religious-moral ratification of poverty. Yet in *Locke in Contexts* (1993) James Tully cites a wide range of criticisms that he believes displaces Macpherson's 'possessive individualism' thesis, and calls into question Macpherson's reading of Hobbes and Locke. Tully charges Macpherson as being so motivated by 'the development and operation of capitalism' that he elides the 'diversity' of views of the period, and 'misidentifies the primary problems', chiefly political, which seventeenth century theorists were addressing[122]. Seventeenth century theorists, Tully writes,

> were not concerned with justifying unlimited accumulation in a market society but with more basic political problems of political order, preservation, state-building, obedience and liberty in a situation of insecurity brought on by a

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Relief and Employment of the Poor', Locke writes of the 'growth of the poor' being a result of 'nothing else but the relaxation of discipline and the corruption of manners' (Locke cited in Bourne 1969 [1876] Vol.One, p.378). Macpherson notes, 'The idle poor he seems to have regarded as depraved by choice; the labouring poor as simply incapable of a fully rational life because of their unfortunate position. But whether by their own fault or not, members of the labouring class did not have, could not be expected to have, and were not entitled to have, full membership in political society; they did not and could not live a fully rational life. These were not only Locke's assumptions, they were also his readers'. When he makes these assumptions, as in the passages we have quoted from the *Considerations* and *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, he does not need to argue them' (Macpherson 1970, p.226).

[118] Macpherson 1970, p.234
[119] MacIntyre 1980, pp.157-6
[120] Harris 1968, p.65
[121] Macpherson 1970, p.221
[122] Tully 1993, pp.72-8

> century of civil wars, religious wars, the Thirty Years' War, and the European wars of the latter half of the seventeenth century.[123]

Tully also claims that Macpherson didn't understand how Locke utilised the concept of 'property', insofar as Locke thought of 'property' in terms of the proprietorship of capacities in the political, not economic sphere. Locke was not working within the dynamics of a capitalist mindset as 'no one had a vision of a full-scale commercial or capitalist society'[124].

The accession of William and Mary definitively altered the English political landscape, however Tully's criticisms have merit to the extent Locke, and certainly Hobbes, still existed in a restrictive quasi-feudal, religious and hierarchical state. Of course it was implausible they had any conception of a 'market society' as we understand it today, and of course questions of political governance were their primary concern. Despite this however, I do not think it altogether judicious to take Tully's criticisms as given. As I discuss below, it may be more productive rather, to examine what else various tensions around the interstices of Macpherson and Tully's ideas might suggest about how Locke may have conceptually navigated the radical change in the consumption patterns of English society during this period.

The first important point is that in *Virtue, Commerce and History* (1985), J.G.A. Pocock takes issue with Macpherson's interpretation of Hobbes and Locke, but he cites Matthew Wren, among others, as thinking in terms of a physical understanding of property owned[125] (as compared to Tully viewing 'property' as only a political 'proprietorship of capacities'). Similarly, while Pocock notes republican thought during this period conceptualised 'property' primarily in terms of its delivering the right to political participation, thus civic virtue, political participation here is still predicated on physical ownership. More suggestive still is Deborah Valenze's recent research in *The Social Life of Money in the English Past* (2006), where she positions the seventeenth and eighteenth century understanding of 'property' as intrinsically connected to the value of persons conceived of in monetary terms. Valenze cites numerous examples, from the slave trade, to the trade in vagrants, indentured labor,

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[123] Tully 1993, p.77. The European conflicts over political power were 'the overriding issue of English political thought and action from 1640 to 1690' (Tully 1993, p.12).
[124] Tully 1993, p.77
[125] Pocock 1985, pp.61-8. See also Appleby's discussion of the work of Barbon and North – but this is more a discussion of the ratification of trade and human desires (1993, p.165).

to apprentices, to the trade in children hired to beggars, the trade in 'involuntary migrants', to marriage settlements, to female chattel status, to wife-selling, to marriage settlements and dowries; all indicative of how people were objectified as 'commodities for sale'[126]. For during this period, 'monetary discourse', 'called attention to a literal transaction involving people, not just rhetorically, but as part of an economically motivated activity in which individuals were moved across distances or transferred from one proprietor or another'[127]. Given such examples, Tully's positioning of Locke's understanding of 'property' in rarefied political *sans* economic terms appears, if not idealised, then certainly partial.

With the extraordinary increase in consumption and trade around this period, clearly contemporary ways of understanding, grappling with, making sense of these changes, and sometimes validating them would have been diverse. Locke's opinion of these changes certainly deserves a more detailed analysis than I can allow for here. (I have already given more space to various interpretations of his views than I intended.) However I note that while Tully corrects Macpherson for mistaking Locke's primary area of concern as being economics, as opposed to politics, Tully also notes that for Locke the practical 'art of government' included

> increasing the productive capacities, maintaining the welfare of subjects, and of co-ordinating these to bring about the "riches and power" of the community.[128]

Again, it is difficult to discern here how Tully excises the significance of Locke's interest in economic, as opposed to political issues, given what seems to be Locke's clear interest in the best means of generating, as Macpherson phrases it, 'further capital by profitable investment'[129]. Pocock certainly notes Locke's interest, and even participation in the 'financial revolution of the 1690s, and his being one of 'a new class of investors ... who had lent government capital that vastly stabilized and enlarged it, and henceforth lived off their expectation of a return (sometimes a marketable one) on their investments'[130]. Tully does acknowledge the central role Locke played in economic management and debates[131], yet in his eagerness to depict Macpherson's thesis as one-sided and

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[126] Valenze 2006, pp.183-259
[127] Valenze 2006, p.224
[128] Tully 1993, pp.62-3
[129] Macpherson 1970, p.207
[130] Pocock 1985, p.68
[131] Tully 1993, p.63

anachronistic he glosses over Locke's interest in economic issues; mentioning, but eliding Locke's membership of the Board on Trade, (which was connected to his political affiliation with the Whigs and their financial and mercantile concerns), his influential role in the debate over money supply and coinage[132], and the new rules on public credit and debt[133], as well as his thoughts on the best means of utilising the poor as an economic resource:

> the individual labourer is considered as a resource who, on the one hand, needs to be cared for, and, on the other, can be reformed by repetition and practice to be a productive and utile part of a strategy to increase the strength of the nation *vis-a-vis* other states.[134]

The second key issue raised by Tully's criticisms of Macpherson concern the extent to which Locke's ideas can be linked to a growing practical political acceptance of consumption across a range of classes. For Locke retained, as Berry notes, 'much of the older censorious moralistic tone in his treatment of fashion'[135]. It is this, as well as Locke's views about the importance of social restraints[136], that Tully refers to when he argues that in no sense can either Hobbes or Locke be seen as supporting unlimited consumption:

> From Hobbes to Locke *unlimited* consumption was not considered rational or morally permissible.[137]

Tully argues that questions around the dynamics of commercial society were not taken up so explicitly until the eighteenth-century. Yet even from a cursory overview of the seventeenth century economic literature it is clear concerns about developing trade as means of strengthening the nation, as opposed to consumption as a source of corruption,

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[132] Appleby 1980
[133] Tully 1993, p.91
[134] Tully 1993, p.66
[135] Berry 1994, p.118
[136] Locke had clear views of appropriate civic behaviour. In *Discourses of Power* (1996), Hindess refers to how Locke mooted a 'Law of Opinion and Reputation' which operated by 'secret and tacite consent' (Hindess 1996, p.60). Hindess writes Locke believed this 'Law' would moderate desires due to unspoken but tacit community standards, with this system being 'more directly effective in the regulation of behaviour than the laws of God and the commonwealth' (Hindess 1996, p.59). As Springborg observes in *The Problem of Human Needs and the Critique of Civilisation* (1981), in this Locke (perhaps writing against Hobbes), stresses the power of judgment in acting against the potentially corrupting powers of desire: 'Will is the power to direct or suspend the operations of desire which allows the individual to lay aside the pursuit of ephemeral pleasures in favour of moral rectitude, by applying reason to ascertain moral laws and the sanctions of religion to follow them ... by the insertion of the faculty of judgement between desire and volition, he tried to rescue man from the subjectivity of appetite and sensuous need' (Springborg 1981, p.31). He writes for example, that 'The faculty which God has given man to supply the want of clear and certain knowledge, in cases where it cannot be had, is judgment' (1964, p.402).
[137] Tully 1993, p.77. *My italics.*

were subject to heated debate. Appleby and Berry detail (at length) how arguments for free trade were developing around this period (instanced in the earlier tract I mentioned by Mun). These were still debates at the time, not full possibilities, but Appleby argues in relation to the economic theorists of the 1690s, that

> The positive construction they put upon the independent decision making of market participants represented nothing less than a major reevaluation of the role of self-interest in social relations.[138]

One other factor glossed over in the Tully's discussion of Macpherson's interpretation of Locke's interest in economic issues was Locke's mercantilism. Again, I am unable to give this issue the attention it deserves, but it clearly had a central impact on Locke's view of consumption and free trade. Tully and Macpherson both recognize Locke's mercantilism: a mercantilism, as Tully outlines, where 'labour power, property relations, and trade are regulated by political power, or government, in order to preserve and "strengthen" the state'[139]. For Locke here 'the wealth and strength of the nation is assessed relative to other European states in a zero sum situation of commercial and military rivalry'[140]. Macpherson, on the other hand, positions Locke as 'a mercantilist to whom the accumulation of gold was a proper aim of mercantile policy not as an end in itself but because it quickened and increased trade'[141]. Here I note again that with mercantilism, the consumption of goods, especially imported goods, is seen as depleting, as opposed to contributing to a nation's wealth. The acquisition of money in the form of bullion was thought to build on that wealth. I propose then, that Locke's mercantile views accorded a difference between consumption, being the use of goods, and accumulation, which mercantilist philosophy understood in monetary terms. Yet Valenze also notes that Locke did not advocate the hoarding of money; out of circulation it 'may lie dead, and thereby prejudice Trade'[142]. How can Locke's views be summed from this? Locke supported trade, but certainly never advocated free trade in any 'pure' form[143]. I would argue then, despite Tully's arguing Locke's mercantilism precluded him from legitimating a capitalist market system, Locke's mercantilism did not actually

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[138] Appleby 1980, p.183. See also p.190 on the similarity of such perceptions to Hobbes' views.
[139] Tully 1993, p.85
[140] Tully 1993, p.63 & 85
[141] Macpherson 1970, p.205
[142] Locke cited in Valenze 2006, p.129, fn.37
[143] As is evident in his report to the government regarding the promotion of the linen, and prevention of the wool trade in Ireland (Locke cited in Bourne pp.363-72). See Bourne for a discussion of Locke's preeminent role in the Board of Trade from 1696-1700 (1969 [1876] Vol.Two, pp.346-94).

prevent him and other early modern commentators from prosecuting the factors which would enable a fuller market society to take shape. In short, Locke's more superficial attacks on consumption do not automatically equate with an attack on trade / acquisition benefiting the nation, especially if the balance of that trade lay in England's favour. For as Locke stated,

> The chief end of trade is Riches & Power which beget each other.[144]

As a final point, I note that one especially curious feature of Tully's argument is that he writes as though eighteenth century market society just 'appeared' ('a new kind of moveable, non-landed property appeared'[145]), and eighteenth century theorists responded[146]. So while owning that eighteenth century theorists built on seventeenth century thought, Tully simultaneously represents that eighteenth century thought and practice as removed from any generation in, and alien to, the seventeenth century. I would argue strongly here that eighteenth century methods of dealing with market society did not spring from the ether. Neither did market society. It came about because people's mental horizons and landscape of possible action permitted it. Given this, perhaps instead of viewing the Macpherson / Tully debate solely in terms of an argument about the periodisation of capitalism (which as Tribe notes in *Genealogies of Capitalism* (1981) is a fraught enterprise anyway), perhaps it is more productive to examine what else their accounts of Locke might suggest. Even if Locke was primarily concerned with political issues, and didn't intend the implications Macpherson draws, there is, as Tully observes, a difference between what a theorist might intend and how their work is used[147]. (Locke certainly could not have predicted how Enlightenment philosophers, or Thomas Jefferson, would subsequently interpret him.) And the tensions in Locke's work, as Tully acknowledges, do permit alternate explanations. Hirschman notes how 'the possibility of mutual gain emerged from the expected workings of interest in politics, quite some time before it became a matter of doctrine in economics'[148]. In

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[144] Locke cited in Macpherson 1970, p.207

[145] Tully 1993, p.91

[146] Tully 1993, p.92

[147] Tully keenly defends Locke from interpretations of his work that frame it in a conservative manner, noting 'a similar concept can be used in various and indeed contradictory ways in different political contexts', and that Locke's theories have been utilised in a range of ways (Tully 1993, p.81).

[148] Hirschman 1977, p. 50. Certainly Locke's ideas initially only operated as weapons or alibis in political contests among the elites (Macpherson 1970). Sekora details for instance how eighteenth century government writers for Walpole's Whigs utilised Locke to answer the opposition Tory attacks on luxury (Sekora 1977, p.118). Pocock is more cautious however, writing that 'Locke's *Treatises* are

this, I propose that Locke's mercantile philosophy, by validating an increase in trade, ensured his arguments, in conjunction with Hobbes's, enabled the possibility for a greater acceptance of consumption than had previously been the case.

For around this period there certainly was some sort of shift taking place. Appleby has identified an equivalent, increased level of support for consumption from a range of Restoration theorists including John Houghton, Dalby Thomas, Francis Gardiner, Nicolas Barbon, Dudley North, and Thomas Coke[149]. She even sees these views, arguments and debates as clearly forming and shaping, along with a developing strand in the economic literature of the time, a new perception 'of man as a consuming animal with boundless appetites, capable of driving the economy to new peaks of prosperity'[150]. In a parallel, but less emphatic vein, Valenze too writes of changing conceptions of money and the use of it between the mid-1600s and the early 1700s, where money came to be seen as more 'beneficial', and 'the dominant connection between money and moral danger was in decline'[151]. She observes that

> The detoxification of money was never complete, and fresh avowals of the divisive impact of riches would surface in the eighteenth century', but no longer would money be almost unanimously regarded as having the wholesale potential for corruption'.[152]

Hirschman also notes a shift, and he cites a 1704 'technical book on commerce' by Samuel Ricard, which advocated the civilising propensities of trade:

> Through commerce man learns to deliberate, to be honest, to acquire manners, to be prudent and reserved in both talk and action.[153]

Ricard's book, Hirschman notes, was so popular it was 'reprinted repeatedly over the next eighty years'[154]. And it is these sorts of arguments Porter is also referring to when he writes of the inception of a new phase in the consumption debates,

> Resourceful apologists contended that desire, and its gratification via rising personal consumption, were not, after all, dangers to the soul, self or state; properly understood, they were universally beneficial[155].

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closely associated, and yet cannot be connected, with the establishment of the eighteenth century Whig commercial regime and the reaction against it in the name of virtue' (Pocock 1985, p.48).

[149] Appleby 1980, pp.168-176. See also Berry 1994, pp.115-25 on Dudley North's opposition to sumptuary law as an impediment to trade in *Discourses upon Trade* (1691), and Davenant and Barbon's advocacy of free trade.

[150] Appleby cited in Porter 1993, p.65

[151] Valenze 2006, p.145

[152] Valenze 2006, pp.117-8

[153] Ricard cited in Hirschman 1986b, p.108

[154] Hirschman 1986b, p.108

These new arguments, I stress again, were not straightforward, one-sided, or uncontested. In the next chapter I shall examine how they were taken up and developed throughout the eighteenth century.

[155] Porter 1993, p.65

3

Corruption and virtue: Mandeville, Hume, Smith, Rousseau

... the love of money is the root of all evil . . .
(St. Paul, I Tim., vi. 9, 10)

In his brilliant *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1990) Roy Porter writes in vivid detail of the 'struggle, tension and conflict' in English society during the 1700s[1]; he also notes the huge growth in trade bolstered by the new security of parliamentary credit underwritten by the Bank of England, established 1694 (in part due to Locke)[2]. Yet while many of the late seventeenth century economic theorists I mentioned in the previous chapter had supported this growth in trade, from the late 1600s and beginning of the 1700s, the degree and tone of the hostility towards consumption among commentators also grew dramatically. The increased availability of goods to people whom were still ostensibly proscribed impinged, all too visibly, on what had been the exclusive domain of elites. For lower class, as opposed to elite consumption, was in particular still interpreted as a threat to the hierarchy. Appleby refers, for instance, to a 1683 pamphlet that argued aristocratic consumption should be exempt from any strictures, as they had been granted 'dispensation'[3]; Hunt records that in 1698 Sir Richard Cocks called for further sumptuary laws in order 'to hinder the expensive and vain way of living of our merchants and traders'[4].

The effectiveness of the moralist's attacks is drawn into question simply by the dramatic increase in the variety of goods and services consumed from the beginning of the eighteenth century alone. The attacks *were* emphatic however. Pocock describes how

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[1] Porter 1990, p.98
[2] Porter 1990, p.188, p.202. See also Appleby 1980.
[3] Appleby 1980, p.134
[4] Cocks cited in Hunt 1996, pp.360-1

these debates were also crucially tangled up in issues of political governance relating to the move to a more mercantile economy, and how shifting political allegiances complicated many of the positions that were taken. In such debates, he writes, theorists such as Swift, Davenant and Defoe 'were employing a highly ambivalent rhetoric, replete with alternatives, conflicts, and confusions, of which they were very well aware and in which they were to some extent entrapped'[5]. That aristocrats such as Sir Richard Cocks felt pressed enough to call for 'dispensation' is, nevertheless, telling. For the use of luxurious items was now being attacked not just in relation to the supposed moral degeneracy of merchants, traders and the poor: Appleby observes that Republican texts were now also being drawn on to argue elite consumption was getting out of hand:

> classical republican texts [were used] to stigmatize novelty as the harbinger of social unrest. Using the essay form to inveigh against the new consuming tastes, these Augustan moralists read the goods they saw in haberdashery shops and food stalls as dangerous signs of corruption and social degeneration... The only antidote: frugality and simple living for the people, *austere civic virtue in their leaders*.[6]

Sekora writes of how Whig politicians often took this tack against the Tories, but as with Pocock he too notes that the debate did not fall strictly along party lines. It seems ideas of luxury were extraordinarily fluid, and the type of 'luxury' being attacked often varied, depending of course on the preconceptions and motivations of who was doing the attacking. These differences of opinion did not, moreover, take place just at the level of discourse. In England in 1725 the self-styled 'Society for the Reformation of Manners' claimed responsibility for 91,899 arrests in relation to sumptuary law transgressions[7]. Half a century later, as Sekora records, the writer Smollett still bruited hanging as an appropriate punishment for such violations[8].

Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*

From all the early literature supporting commerce and consumption Mandeville's was the most (in)famous. His strong and open legitimisation of the national benefits of consumption, challenged religious arguments, conservative moralists, and mercantile philosophy, as well as Republican views that consumption would lead to a civic decline. Consumption, he argued, would not lead to the corruption of the *res publica*, but rather

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[5] (Pocock 2003, pp.446).
[6] Appleby 1993, p.165. *My italics.*
[7] Sekora 1977, p.61
[8] Sekora 1977, p.110

contribute to 'civic energy'. His *Fable of the Bees* (first published as *The Grumbling Hive* in 1703, edited and added to regularly in subsequent years), was an argument for full employment, busy national *and* international export and imports[9], as well as for the validity of demand and fashion in maintaining trade:

> The Root of evil Avarice,
> That damn'd ill-natur'd baneful Vice,
> Was Slave to Prodigality,
> That Noble Sin; whilst Luxury
> Employ'd a Million of the Poor,
> And odious Pride a Million more.
> Envy it self, and Vanity
> Were Ministers of Industry;
> Their Darling Folly, Fickleness
> In Diet, Furniture, and Dress,
> That strange ridic'lous Vice, was made
> The very Wheel, that turn'd the Trade.
> Their Laws and Cloaths were equally
> Objects of Mutability;
> For, what was well done for a Time,
> In half a Year became a Crime;
> Yet whilst they alter'd thus their Laws,
> Still finding and correcting Flaws,
> They mended by Inconsistancy
> Faults, which no Prudence could foresee [10]

In the above stanza Mandeville refers to the arbitrary and frequently changeable nature of attributions of luxury and sumptuary law legislation. The vices he was promoting were those condemned by the religious and conservative moralists wishing to maintain the hierarchy. *This* is what is the subject of even his most infamous claim that

> even the most vicious and decadent of tastes and desires will stimulate the economic enterprise needed to satisfy them, thus increasing wealth and civic energy.[11]

In writing that 'societies cannot be raised to wealth and power, and the top of earthly glory without vices'[12], and writing against, 'frugality and the aesthetic virtues'[13], Mandeville, Harth details, was mocking the short sightedness of those denigrating consumption, as well as derisively accentuating the hypocrisy of others who, indulging in

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[9] As long as 'wise government' ensured the balance of that trade remained equal (Berry 1994, p.133).
[10] Mandeville 1970, pp.68-9
[11] Slater 1997, p.177
[12] Mandeville cited in Robinson 1962, p.17
[13] Harth 1970, p.21

the new and exotic types of goods which had become available, did not practice what they preached. Mandeville's 'goal', Appleby insists,

> was to point up the hypocrisy in the outcry against luxury, not to endorse the abandonment of society to the consuming impulses of the least discerning members of society[15].

In *The Idea of Luxury* (1994) Berry argues Mandeville said little that had not been said before, but that it was the explicit nature of his views and 'deliberately provocative' mode of expression that ensured his '*succès de scandale*'[16]. For as Porter observes, while 'Mandeville's formula scandalized many by its audacity, it was the golden rule by which many lived'[17].

A changing world order: 'The power of money as the world is now constituted is real power'

Sekora discusses how anxiety about the connection between luxury and civic virtue was a trope shared by Plato, Aristotle, Cynic, Sophist, and early Stoic philosophy, Seneca, Cato, Cicero, Sallust, and Augustine. Moralists drew on these classics in an attempt to combat the many who, as Porter colourfully writes, 'cocked a snook at killjoy denunciations of the pleasures of the flesh, finding them morbid, envious or splenetic'[18]. For in the wholesale condemnation of 'luxury' in the wake of the 'furore stirred up by Mandeville'[19] Sekora and Berry both refer to the huge volume of eighteenth century debates on luxury, 'taken up and pursued throughout the world of letters from St Petersburg to Boston, from Naples to Aberdeen'[20]. Most commentators believed strongly that prosperity, luxury and avarice would only lead to the decline of civilisation[21]. Where Mandeville went to some lengths to refute perceptions that luxury led to effeminacy and military weakness (arguing against the perceived virtuosity of Sparta[22], and noting that '"wild Rakes" whose health has indeed been impaired by

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[14] '... the Fashionable Ways of Living, the Manners of the Age, that are often practis'd and preach'd against by the same people' (Mandeville cited in Harth 1970, p.21).
[15] Appleby 1993, p.167. Also Berry 1994, p.126. Robinson argues Mandeville intended 'to show up the double standard of a people, purporting to be Christian, who value wealth and national glory above all' (1962, p.17). Smith also noted Mandeville was writing in response to 'popular aesthetic doctrines' (Smith cited in Robinson 1962, p.18).
[16] Berry 1994, p.127
[17] Porter 1990, p.258
[18] Porter 1990, p.258
[19] Berry 1994, p.138
[20] Berry 1994, p.126
[21] Sekora 1977. See also Muller 2002, p.40
[22] Berry 1994, p.127

"Excesses of Wine and Women" have still fought bravely'[23]), historical studies were industriously drawn on to prove the opposite. In 1727 'pseudonymous editor', Caleb d'Anver's, for instance, argued Rome's

> Luxury and Profuseness led the Way to Indigence and Effeminacy; which prepared the Minds of the People for Corruption; and Corruption for Subjection; as they have constantly succeeded one another, and will do so again, in the same Circumstances, in all Countries, and in all Ages'[24].

Sekora writes that later allegories of this ilk included Leland's *History of the Life and Reign of Philip King of Macedon* (1758), and Montagu's *Reflections on the Rise and Fall of Ancient Republics* (1759)[25]. But despite the customary didactic moralism, he too stresses that many such accounts were not clear-cut. He discusses, for instance, how Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776) conveys a similar trope, but also 'distinguishes between harmless and harmful luxury'[26]. Pocock, in *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (1985), similarly characterises Gibbon as not antipathetic to luxury per se, but as with 'Defoe, Montesquieu, Hume and others', *ambivalent* about its effects, especially in so far as it involved trade[27]. Sekora also notes Defoe's lack of consistency and how this was largely connected to the benefits of trade, the growth of that trade, and its impact on the class structure[28].

Throughout the eighteenth century the '"material drift" driven by a remorselessly creeping demand for more and better consumer goods of all kinds'[29] associated with trade led to an inventiveness, richness, variety and ephemera of items which cannot be over emphasised. In *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1990) Porter outlines many of these in fascinating detail. The benefits of trade were not distributed evenly in this boisterous and violent society where children of seven could be hung for stealing a

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[23] Berry 1994, p.133

[24] Cited in Sekora 1977, p.64

[25] Sekora 1977, p.96-7 & p.103. Hirschman notes the Republican virtues of ancient Rome were 'sobriety, civic pride and bravery. Luxury by contrast, 'destroyed the republic and eventually the empire' (Hirschman 1986b, p. 114).

[26] Sekora 1977, p.103

[27] Pocock recounts Gibbon's belief about the problem of senatorial disposition at the time of Alaric's 'sack' of Rome being associated with 'an economy of conspicuous consumption, not of profitable exchange' (Pocock 1985, p.148).

[28] Sekora 1977, pp.116-18

[29] Jones cited in De Vries 1993, p.101. De Vries adds that from the Middle Ages 'probate inventories seem to reveal an analogous "material drift" driven by a remorselessly creeping demand for more and better consumer goods of all kinds. "Consumer revolution" hardly seems to be the right term for such a protracted and broadly based process' (de Vries 1993, p.101).

petticoat, women could be burnt at the stake for murdering their husbands, public executions deemed a popular form of entertainment, and bodies of criminals lined streets mired in ordure (which passed for a sewerage system)[30]. Porter also points out numerous instances of lucrative political patronage and sinecure, the regular 'smudging of hard and fast distinctions between the worlds of criminality and politics'[31]. He notes nonetheless, some overall improvement in living standards:

> there was a growth of well-being which filtered down, however unequally, to improve the standards and quality of living of much of the population (though often heightening contrasts between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots') ... much of this new wealth was being translated into personal goods, raising many households from subsistence levels to some comfort and style ... spare cash was widely laid out on entertainment and enjoyment.[32]

This overt consumption regime was an obvious, logical focus for anxieties about the growing 'cash nexus'. Especially because despite the increasing prosperity, some toward the top of the hierarchy had come under threat. Most notable, Xenos documents in *Scarcity and Modernity* (1989) were the 'ruined gentry selling their houses to rich merchants'[33]. Porter writes of how the peerage, by way of contrast, cunningly maintained, even increased their financial standing: it was the landed gentry whose financial status was dangerously tenuous and fluid[34]. Meanwhile, there was a new concern that the supposed niceties and verities of previous societal relations were being destroyed, for as the conservative English parliamentarian Bolingbroke protested in his *Dissertation on Parties* (1733/35): "THE POWER OF MONEY AS THE WORLD IS NOW CONSTITUTED IS REAL POWER"[35].

Despite any concerns about the new 'cash nexus', curiously enough the complaints against luxury which evoked the greatest furore throughout the seventeen hundreds were those which targeted the lower classes[36]. Yet Porter notes how 'the mass of working people' simply did not benefit from the new prosperity: 'A proletariat, and a

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[30] Porter 1990, p.191-203
[31] Porter 1990, p.99
[32] Porter 1990, p.214
[33] Xenos 1989, p.17. See also Tribe, who discusses this process in the early sixteenth century, but also cites the *reversal* of this process 'in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' (Tribe 1981, p.17).
[34] Porter 1990, pp.59-66
[35] Bolingbroke cited in Sekora 1977, p.68. See also Hirschman, but note his brief and non-class specific argument that, for the most part, in the 1700s, compared to the fears about the wildness of the passions, the docile 'doux' of making money was regarded as quite acceptable: 'the dominant appraisal of the "love of gain" was positive, if somewhat disdainful' (1977, p.57).
[36] Sekora 1977, p.107

lumpenproletariat, were forming'[37]. However the all too evident poverty made no difference to the complaints. Sekora cites Fielding's *Enquiry into the Cause of the late Increase of Robbers* (1751) as being representative of a general alarm about a 'vast torrent of Luxury'. Fielding himself saw trade as responsible, having

> given a new Face to the whole Nation ... and ... almost totally changed the Manners, Customs, and Habits of the People, more especially of the lower Sort. The Narrowness of their Fortune is changed into Wealth; the Simplicity of their Manners changed into Craft, their Frugality into Luxury, their Humility into Pride, and their Subjection into Equality.[38]

Even the many food riots of 1757, Sekora records, were taken as a sign of lower class aspiration indicative 'of the depravity of the times'[39]. Meanwhile, alongside elite criticisms of the new middle class[40], Sekora details instances of the middle class attacking the working poor in turn[41]. Porter too writes of gradations of social distinction in England and a 'pecking order' that fed on 'status differentiation'[42]. To critics, no matter what their station, perceptions of a righteous social hierarchy were paramount; most just envisaged their own consumption as being on a level exempt from what they proscribed. Nevertheless, it was lower class consumption of newly available goods, situated as it was at the bottom of this scale, which resulted in the greatest chorus of malediction. At this time in Britain when democracy was viewed as a terrible potential evil, lower class consumption was positioned all too easily as representative of this dreadful potential threat[43]. The vibrancy of imported East Indian cloth, for instance, whose popularity swept across all classes, was one all too visible sign in this regard[44]. Cissie Fairchild describes how in France there was also a market for 'cheap copies of aristocratic luxury items'[45] giving lower classes access to what was previously only the province of elites. Again, this novelty was seen to represent social unrest and for many moralists was an *unnatural* upheaval in the order of things. In 'The meaning of things: interpreting the consumer economy in the eighteenth century', T.H. Breen details debates in America, as

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[37] Porter 1990, p.213

[38] Fielding cited in Sekora 1977, p.91

[39] Sekora 1977, p.65. He records 'the normal economic attitude and practice of the century' was that working class wages 'should provide for only slightly more than mere subsistence' (1977, p.125).

[40] Sekora notes how John Brown's *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757), with its diatribe against the luxury of 'commercial classes', became so popular it was reprinted seven times during its first year of publication (Sekora 1977, p.93).

[41] Sekora 1977, p.75

[42] Porter 1990, p.49

[43] Pocock writes of Gibbon as being fearful of 'democratic fanaticism' (Pocock 1985, p.155)

[44] Appleby (1980, pp.166-9) also documents the resultant complaints of English wool manufacturers.

[45] Fairchild's study of the Parisian market between 1750 to 1850 notes the demand and plethora of 'populuxe' goods (1993, p.228, p.242).

late as 1768, about whether 'equality' in dress threatened the 'divinely sanctioned social order'[46]. As the material expression of societal change consumption was a visible portent of an intangible but menacing threat.

Fairchild writes of how by the mid-eighteenth century the enforcement of the sumptuary laws had been largely abandoned in most countries[47]. Slater notes there were numerous attempts to revive them[48], but that on a practical level enforcing sumptuary law had simply become too difficult. Huge numbers of consumers had come to depend on the range of new consumption items, as well as the huge fiscal gains and employment the associated trade delivered. Much of the increased taxation revenue throughout the eighteenth century, Porter details, also derived from 'new levies' such as 'indirect taxes on consumption'[49]. And in his very clever, droll "Consumption: disease of the consumer society", Porter records how sometime around the 1700s the shift in the traditional ways of thinking about consumption even translated into language. Prior to the seventeenth century the term consumption had been primarily associated with the wasting disease we now call tuberculosis, and as a metaphor for national health was used to suggest a national 'dissipation of accumulated resources, leading to economic entropy'[50]. With the new level of trade and material abundance however, it became apparent that

> Buying and selling were vital for life-giving commerce.[51]

Heibroner too notes the French Physiocrat Quesnay, who influenced Adam Smith,

> insisted that wealth sprang from production and that it flowed through the nation, from hand to hand, replenishing the social body like the circulation of blood'[52].

Slater similarly observes how from the 1700s the word also gradually took on more positive connotations related to the health of the nation, prefigured in terms of the stimulus of demand which could lead to wealth and material well-being[53].

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[46] Breen 1993, p.255. Reverend Johnathon Mayhew made this particular complaint, although there were many others.
[47] France, for instance, had no new sumptuary laws from the 1720s (Fairchilds 1993, p.231), and by the 1780s cheap copies of aristocratic luxury items became widely available (Fairchilds 1993, p.230).
[48] Slater 1997, p.30, p.69
[49] Porter 1990,p.117
[50] Porter 1993, p.59
[51] Porter 1993, pp.58-9.
[52] Heilbroner 1972, p.47. Porter too notes this metaphor, and its probable derivation from William Harvey's 'discovery of the circulation of blood' (Porter 1993, p.58).
[53] Slater 1997, p.177

Hunt maintains 'sumptuary law came in as an expression of a pre-modern critique of luxury and goes out as a soon-to-be discarded vehicle of economic protectionism'[54]. Clearly societal perceptions of consumption and luxury were changing. However Fairchilds argues that the impact of sumptuary law on subsequent thought and social practices still remained significant, with the disciplinary force of those laws being internalised[55]. Hunt too writes of the influence of sumptuary law after its demise:

> The sumptuary ethic lived long past its participation in an active hegemony; it survived as a component of a cultural nostalgia for a time when people knew their place and that place was recognizable from their dress and deportment.[56]

Slater also argues that for some time after, the right to consume various 'luxury' items was still regarded as belonging to the elite and upper middle classes alone[57].

In chapter eight I discuss Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) and his notion of *habitus*, which charts how certain behaviours, habits and tastes remain the prerogative of certain classes, insofar as class position's generate ways of viewing the world and provide skills and guidelines for appropriate behaviour. *Habitus* provides one possible way of viewing how conceptions of hierarchy remained entrenched. Once again, however, no matter the force of the discourse its power must be qualified by each instance of lower class consumption of items outside their 'station'. Nevertheless attempts to demarcate the hierarchy appeared to remain unambiguous: Slater, for instance, relates a astonishing, perhaps unlikely account of churches still detailing obsolete sumptuary laws on an annual basis:

> Until the nineteenth century it was customary for sumptuary laws to be read from the pulpit in every church at least once a year - a daunting task, since ordinances regarding dress alone often ran more than one hundred duodecimo pages.[58]

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[54] Hunt 1996, p.99. Although he also qualifies this: 'The similarity and dissimilarity of protectionist and sumptuary laws is not to be resolved by definitional fiat. Rather I propose to treat them as being located within distinct discursive traditions and thus able to address the same objects of regulation and frequently ... as forming coexisting traditions' (Hunt 1996, p.302).

[55] Fairchilds also notes that 'before the late eighteenth century the lower classes had been inhibited from buying luxury goods not only by their cost but also by sumptuary laws and their own acceptance of a heirarchical social order' (1993, p.230).

[56] Hunt 1996, p.329

[57] '... eighteenth-century conservatives regarded luxury as a vice of the poor and middle classes, who strive above their station; the aristocracy have a culturally legitimate right, through their breeding and status superiority, to refined and excessive consumption' (Slater 1997, p.79). See also Braudel 1981, p.311, Appleby 1993, pp.165-7, Hunt 1996, pp.332-4.

[58] Sekora 1977, p.61

Porter likewise details how the force of religious strictures were given further impetus by many conservative and historical scholars:

> Churches preached against the love of lucre and the sin of unbridled appetite, while civic humanism prophesied that private enrichment sapped public liberty and virtue[59].

By 1750 London had, Porter notes, 'perhaps 150,000 retail outlets'[60] for a 'population of about 675,000'[61]. Pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall and Ranelagh thrived, as did theatres and all kinds of sport from bearbaiting to cock-throwing and horse-racing[62]. All were patronised by rich and poor alike. There were 'masquerades, waxworks, magic-lantern shows, cock-fights, panoramas, hippodromes, puppet-theatres'[63]. In the meantime, engaging resort towns such as Bath attracted the ire of moralists such as Smollett, and Porter writes of explanations for visits there being whitewashed:

> 'Taking the waters' for medicinal reasons was the excuse, but in reality it was a holiday haven. Visitors flocked in to idle away time, ogle the exquisite, haggle matches for their daughters, and, above all, gamble.[64]

In this, as well as so many other activities,

> forms of enjoyment which had previously been private, exclusive and monopolised by the very rich were becoming open to the paying public at large.[65]

Hume and Smith: 'The increase and consumption of all the commodities which serve to the ornament and pleasure of life are advantageous to society ...'

Aside from Mandeville's (in)famous provocation the two writers most obviously (and more respectably) responsible for displacing and undermining the attacks on consumption during the 1700s were Adam Smith and David Hume. Both connected their ideas with reason, freedom and social progress, and both strongly positioned the continued complaints against consumption and free trade as 'pernicious to society'[66]. Consumption, as opposed to merely trade, they argued, was responsible for generating conditions that benefited the nation as a whole. In this both represented consumption

[59] Porter 1993, p.58
[60] Porter 1990, p.25
[61] Anderson 1996, p.5
[62] Porter 1990, pp.229-30, pp.294-95
[63] Porter 1990, p.232
[64] Porter 1990, p.227
[65] Porter 1990, p.
[66] Smith cited in Robinson 1962, p.19

and consumer sovereignty, associated with 'the economic pursuit of self-interest by economic man'[67], as quite acceptable, even necessary. They believed it would also improve the material conditions of all, and in a novel manner also actually attempted to consider those at the bottom of the socio-economic strata.

Following Mandeville, Berry comments, there were two standard views of the way luxury impacted on the strength of nations:

> Those in favour of luxury emphasise employment or industry as a source of national strength, while those opposed emphasise military valour and associated traits as the chief prop of states[68].

Berry points out that in his 1742[69] essay 'On Luxury', Hume reversed both accounts, arguing 'Refinement on the pleasures and conveniences of life has no natural tendency to beget venality and corruption'[70]. At the same time he declared consumption *vital* to a functioning military, insofar as desire for goods develops the capacity of labour which can then be channelled and used when necessary in order to maintain military strength:

> The increase and consumption of all the commodities which serve to the ornament and pleasure of life are advantageous to society, because at the same time that they multiply those innocent gratifications to individuals they are a kind of *storehouse* of labor, which, in the exigencies of state, may be turned to the public service. In a nation where there is no demand for such superfluities men sink into indolence, lose all enjoyment of life, and are useless to the public, which cannot maintain or support its fleets and armies from the industry of slothful members.[71]

Here commerce, for Hume

> rouses men from their indolence; and presenting the gayer and more opulent part of the nation with objects of luxury, which they never before dreamed of, raises in them a desire for a more splendid way of life than what their ancestors enjoyed'[72].

As Berry points out, Hume saw the results of commerce delivering a progressive development of refinement and civilisation[73]: however this was still prefigured in terms of

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[67] Slater 1997, p.41
[68] Berry 1994, p.137
[69] There appears to have been a number of editions of "On Luxury". Muller dates it at 1742, Sekora, 1752 (Sekora 1977, p.110, Muller 2002, p.41).
[70] Hume 1995, pp.494-5
[71] Hume 1995, p.492
[72] Hume cited in Xenos 1989, pp.11-2
[73] Berry 1994, p.145

the value of 'industry' with the 'love of gain' intended to 'prevail over the love of pleasure'[74].

David Hume and Adam Smith were friends and interlocutors. Like Hume, Smith also refuted arguments that trade was corrupting and would weaken the nation[75]. And with the *Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776 (the same year as the American Declaration of Independence and its pronouncement of 'certain unalienable human rights'), his stance became a most effective, famous counter to the arguments of the moralists[76]. Smith's argument for the necessity for trade and commerce was based on a complex ethical and philosophical foundation. This was delineated in the *Theory of Moral Sentiment* (published in 1759), and was concerned with the improvement, Heilbroner avers, of human *society* in general[77], in a manner that attempted to rebut conservative moralists head on. For Smith was not, Joan Robinson stresses in *Economic Philosophy* (1962), simply advocating the unbridled pursuit of wealth or the validity of unlimited desires[78]: when he declared consumption the sole purpose of production he was attempting to validate consumption in terms of the work involved in producing goods to be consumed[79]. Properly channelled, the pursuit of self-interest he believed would result in public benefits, and the motivations generated by consumer interactions would develop human 'sympathies and sociability'. Slater too notes Smith's belief that emulation and desire would generate morality and empathy, leading a progressive improvement in material conditions, society and culture:

> 'consideration on the part of others' is not a form of moral corruption but the very basis of morality and social solidarity, and the basis of emulation is to a very large extent an innate human desire for aesthetic pleasure, a drive to culture. Their arguments are based on the notion of 'sympathies': it is through the human imaginative capacity to place ourselves in the position of the other, and to view self and other 'from the standpoint of a "spectator", a hypothetical Other embodying the values and customs of a given society' that we can see, and desire and aspire to, the satisfactions which various goods (forms of wealth) can

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[74] Hume cited in Hirschman 1977, p.66. Berry also notes Hume's payment 'of dues to the moralist tradition', although 'the whole tenor of Hume's argument runs counter to that tradition' (1994, p.144).
[75] Berry 1994, p.170
[76] Smith 1990, p.28
[77] Heilbroner 2003
[78] This is the case on an individual rather than societal level: on a societal level Smith still believed unlimited desires necessary to drive the new prosperity. However these were not necessarily negative. Smith disagreed with Mandeville's representation of every passion as wholly vicious' (Smith cited in Robinson 1962, p.18). On an individual level Smith disparaged aspirational and 'frivolous types of consumption', advocating instead the importance of prudent investment.
[79] See also Gabriel and Lang 2006, p.33, and Appleby 1993, p.168.

> offer. Yet this capacity for sympathy is also the basis of all moral behaviour and social solidarity[80].

Smith's principal target in the *Wealth of Nations* was mercantile philosophy. As I mentioned earlier, this had enjoyed considerable political sway since the late 1600s; it had become even more influential in the eighteenth century. And in comparison to conservative moralists and the mercantile economists[81], Smith's views were quite progressive. As Appleby details, Smith was progressive insofar as he hoped that free from the constraints of oppressive, nepotistic feudal systems of government equilibrium in the market would result in an abundance for all:

> Smith saw that in the esteemed primitive societies where men and women retained the whole of their produce, there was material equality, but lives of misery and want. In commercial societies with their flagrantly unequal distribution of wealth, the labouring poor prospered as well.[82]

Although 'liberal' in the sense of being concerned with the betterment of society, Smith remained opposed to universal suffrage: women and 'inferior' men were 'naturally' excluded from his schema. Smith also still held a Deist view of Nature as God's creation; this creation was ordered as precisely as a mechanical system. As a working epiphenomenon of God's *natural* system, Smith believed the market would act with perfect, pure rationality to refine orderly *social* equilibrium from the multitude of

[80] Slater 1997, p.81. Appleby further notes that Smith believed that at some point people would come to place more value on attempting to improve their condition by investing prudently, encouraged by the mechanism of consumption itself as people's 'sociability' and moral feeling 'developed' through their engagement with others (Appleby 1993, p.169). This in turn mitigates their self-interest, but still ensures 'social benefits' as Clarke puts it, 'ensue' (Clarke 1983, p.21). Hirschman also notes Ricard's less famous 1704 defence of commerce's civilizing powers, 'reprinted repeatedly through the next eighty years' (1986b, p.108).

[81] As an tactic for developing prosperity and growth mercantile policy was not, as Dunn records, intended to benefit 'subordinate' classes (Dunn 1970, p.165). And mercantile policy was still going strong well into in the early 1800s. The English Corn Laws for instance, ratified and validated by mercantile ideas saw the imposition of huge taxes on grain imports which artificially increased the price of English grain, benefiting the landed aristocracy. As Heilbroner documents, this led to a situation in 1813 when, 'despite the extraordinary hardship experienced by the poorer classes of the time, a bushel of wheat sold for a price equal to nearly twice a workman's whole weekly wage' (Heilbroner 1972, p.79). Clarke too writes that where conservatives called 'for a restoration, in one form or another, of the medieval order, enforced by Church and State and governed by an hereditary ruling class' (Clarke 1983, p.115), writers in the liberal tradition were 'reactive', being against any 'return to medieval forms of social regulations' (Clarke 1983, p.11)

[82] Appleby 1993, p.168. See also Berry 1994, p.161. He also argued sumptuary law was the 'highest impertinence and presumption on the part of kings and ministers in their effort to watch over the economy of private people' (Smith cited in Berry 1994, p.115).

different and competing desires[83]. As Slater and Tonkiss relate in *Market Society: Markets and Modern Social Theory* (2001),

> In advancing a claim for the mutual gains from trade, Smith drew on the eighteenth-century physiocratic belief that a "harmony of interests" ordered human affairs. While seemingly guided only by self-interest, market behaviour is in fact co-ordinated as if by an "invisible hand" to bring general benefit to all. Smith in this way twinned the physiocratic concept of natural order with a contemporary philosophical emphasis on "interest" as shaping individual action (Hirschman 1977) ... The art of association in a commercial society, then, is based on the beneficial effects of self-interest.[84]

Appleby relates that Smith believed classical republican thought was incapable of explaining to the 'economic changes transforming society', and she maintains that providing such an explanation was a motivating force that informed the work of the Scottish philosophers[85]. She notes that Smith's account was deemed a more credible analysis, with his ideas achieving widespread publicity and support. Coupled with an increasingly optimistic and economically confident nationalism which Porter depicts England developing in the eighteenth century, such views appear in turn to have had an impact on certain strains of Republican thought:

> down at least to the 1780s, it was the world of ancient politics which could be made to seem rigid and austere, impoverished because underspecialized; and the new world of the social and sentimental, the commercial and the cultural, was made to proliferate with alternatives to ancient *virtus* and *libertas* ...[86]

Sekora notes in 1757 Walpole even went so far as to label the classics outmoded:

> Throw away your Greek and Roman books, histories of little peoples[87]

So this is the context in which consumption and trade increasingly came to be positioned as transcending their connection with dangerous and morally degenerate passions, becoming instead vehicles for beneficent interests, as Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (1977) records, with the pursuit of acquisitions viewed as a steadying, even convivial, rather than disruptive, character trait.

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[83] Slater 1997, p.41. This conception was explicitly expressed by Burke when he argued 'the laws of commerce are the laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God' (Burke cited Clarke 1983, p.48).
[84] Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.42, pp.39-53.
[85] 'classical republican thought utterly failed ... in explaining the economic changes transforming society' (Appleby 1993, pp.167-8).
[86] Pocock 1985, p.50
[87] Sekora 1977, p.106

With this shift in perception its curious that, towards the end of the century, first the French and then the American revolutions were represented as tangible manifestations of what many moralists feared the new consumption regime to signify. These revolutions were political struggles, but to the extent they were also struggles over taxes and disproportionate access to resources, they were conflicts about consumption. On the role of consumption in relation to the American revolution, Michael Schudson contends 'Political activism in the years leading up to the American Revolution was organised around consumer identity and the nonimportation of British consumer goods'[88]. Citing Breen, Schudson holds that

> While traditional political action was available only to propertied white males, consumer-based protest could be much more widely shared. Basing protest on consumer identity was a radically egalitarian move and a novel one: "No previous popular rebellion had organized itself so centrally around the consumer".[89]

On this point of the equity as being expressed through the market, however, despite the increasing ratification of Smith's solution, and the positioning of consumption and trade as delivering civility, another group were beginning to become increasingly vocal during this period: socialist critics, denouncing the market system as based on intrinsic exploitation[90]. But whatever the source of the arguments against free trade, Smith's enduring account positioned consumption as a vehicle driving prosperity; all complaints were regressive. Here embedded in Smith's conception of economic life, Clarke writes, was the notion that all class relations should and 'could be harmoniously regulated on the basis of competitive pursuit of individual self-interest'[91]. Yet even towards the end of

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[88] Schudson 1998, p.260

[89] Schudson 1998, p.260. Also Breen's 'Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution' in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 50 (1993): 486

[90] Clarke notes the theoretical opponents of the political economists included conservative as well as socialist critics, and more moderate liberals: 'First, political economy had to face conservative critics who believed that the development of capitalism was undermining the established order and creating a society marked by conflict and moral degeneration. Second, it had to face socialist critics who believed that exploitation was inherent in the capitalist system and who proposed reform on the basis of co-operation. Third, it had to face criticism from those who accepted the fundamental social relations of capitalist society, but who could not accept that such social relations could be regulated solely by the free play of the market' (Clarke 1983, p.115).

[91] Clarke 1983, p.119. Also Berry 1994, p.162-5. In relation to this approach, keep in mind also, that even prior to the economic devastation and wide unemployment wrought by the Speenhamland Law of 1792 (Polanyi 2001), well into the 1800s a commonly held view was that the poor were so idle they should remain poor or they would not be prepared to work (Heilbroner 1972, p.37). It was in this context that the least manifestation of comfort on their part generated cries of complaint. Yet see Appleby also for a detailed analysis of seventeenth century writer's views, acknowledging their awareness of the unremitting levels of unemployment (1980, pp.129-157).

the eighteenth century Clarke observes how Smith's ideas were subject to criticisms related to political power, class and the distribution of wealth in society, from across the political spectrum. Here consumption was still targeted by conservatives and religious moralists as transgressive and degenerate, by mercantile economists as economically detrimental, and by socialists as illustrative of the unequal distribution of material well being and symptomatic of the incapacity of the free market policies to achieve the reform necessary to address that inequality.

Shifts in Republican attitudes during the 1700s only added to the layered complexity and diversity of views. In discussing elite attempts to formulate / reconcile idealised conceptions of active political citizenship and civic virtue in the face of the new challenges and threats offered by the growth in commerce and credit, Pocock writes of republican notions of virtue being redefined 'with the aid of a concept of "manners"' connected to a new 'relationship' with 'things'[92]:

> if he could no longer engage directly in the activity and equality of ruling and being ruled, but had to depute his government and defence to specialized and professional representatives, he was more than compensated for his loss of antique virtue by an indefinite and perhaps infinite enrichment of his personality, the product of multiplying relationships, with both things and persons, in which he became progressively involved.[93]

Of course such a position once again only relates to elite acceptance of their *own* consumption, but Pocock discusses how this ideal changed yet again after 1789, when those strands encompassing an acceptance of consumption as a practice of virtue, morphed into new

> denunciations of commerce as founded upon soullessly rational calculation and the cold mechanical philosophy of Bacon, Hobbes, Locke and Newton.[94]

This shift, as well as the other positions mentioned in the preceding paragraph can be further transposed against Colin Campbell's arguments in *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1990). For Campbell identifies yet another thematic approach toward consumption which he sees as first developing as a result of the Cambridge

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[92] Pocock 1985, p.48

[93] Pocock 1985, p.49. He continues, 'Since these new relationships were social not political in character, the capacities which they led the individual to develop were not called "virtues" but "manners", a term in which the ethical *mores* and the juristic *consuetudines* were combined, with the former predominating. The social psychology of the age declared that encounters with things and persons evoked passions and refined them into manners; it was preeminently the function of commerce to refine the passions and polish the manners ... (Pocock 1985, p.49)

[94] Pocock 1985, p.50

Platonist's 'optimistic theodicy of benevolence'[95], which in turn facilitated the movement of Sentimentalism early in the eighteenth century, and later Romanticism proper.

Campbell on Sentimentalism, the 'Romantic ethic' and 'taste'

Campbell's richly drawn study makes conscious reference to Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1978), and attempts to draw connections between a number of different strands of thought from the Protestant 'Ethic' on with the aim of providing an explanation of the emergence of a new 'ethic' associated with Romanticism. Campbell acknowledges Romantic social and economic criticisms of society, yet in an acrobatic twist argues that Romanticism inadvertently fed into and enabled the tremendous growth in middle class consumption that developed during the 1700 and 1800s. He stresses that in no sense could Romantics be regarded as intending to bring about this 'state of affairs'[96], especially given their general repudiation of bourgeois conventions. He nevertheless cites a number of studies which note how the 'expansion of demand in the early part of the Industrial Revolution was essentially middle class in origin'[97], driven by a new propensity to spend rather than save[98], notes a rise in leisure activities around the time, the growth of fashion, and an enormous increase in romantic fiction (along with the development of notions of romantic love). All this seems indicative, Campbell writes, of 'fundamental changes in beliefs, values and attitudes'[99].

Campbell contends that the more general economic arguments of the time ratifying consumption and trade were not 'compelling enough' to account for this change, or 'to counteract' what he regards as a previously 'powerful Puritanical suspicion of luxury consumption'[100]. Neither does he believe arguments stressing emulation and imitation are convincing enough to explain the decline of Protestant aestheticism. He argues instead, that the key to understanding the character of these changes was the development of a new self-directed imaginative capacity for day-dreaming[101], supplying a detailed analysis of the changes he believes enabled this capacity for daydreaming to

[95] Campbell 1990, p.118
[96] Campbell 1990, p.208
[97] Campbell 1990, p.25
[98] Campbell 1990, p.18
[99] Campbell 1990, p.28
[100] Campbell 1990, pp.28-31, p.100, pp.202-3, p.31
[101] Campbell 1990, p.76-8

develop; initially because of how shifts in various currents in religious thought impacted on societal notions of ideal behaviour[102].

Campbell believes the Protestant search for evidential signs of each individual's 'state of grace'[103], postulated by Weber, played a central in this process. Going beyond Weber, Campbell contends that even after the weakening of predestination as a doctrine, this concern about 'signs' led to a more generalised belief that various pointers, including 'displays of feeling', could be representative of 'the fundamental spiritual state of an individual'[104]. The influence of the Cambridge Platonists' rejection of Hobbes was critical here, and Campbell charts, at length, the development of their ideas and progression of their influence[105], claiming their views shaped a new 'optimistic theodicy of benevolence' in England[106]. As this spread via sermons, he believes it linked 'a pietistic strand of Puritan thought to a neo-Platonic philosophy, [in a manner that] *served to create an "emotionalist" ethic of Christian sensibility*'[107]. With increasing secularisation subsequently belief and emotion came to be 'identified in such a way that an expression of feelings was thought to serve in place of an expression of faith'[108].

Campbell positions the doctrine of Sentimentalism as being the initial domain in which this new tendency played out. He writes of how it became 'especially fashionable' in England 'in the 1740s and 1750s', with ideas about 'sensibility' as a character attribute being its main feature: sensibility as a personal quality involved the capacity to feel and express an emotional response, and as a character ideal was regarded as representative of moral virtue[109]. Sentimentalism supported a view 'that only feelings can be truly relied upon to indicate that which is good'[110], and was concerned with personal conceptions of appropriate feeling, usually exhibited in 'indulgent' excess of normal societal

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[102] Campbell 1990, p.116-17
[103] Campbell 1990, pp.123-31
[104] Campbell 1990, p.131
[105] Campbell 1990, pp.107-23. 'In the years following the Restoration this theology of benevolence spread outside the small circle of scholars who constituted the Cambridge Platonists to meet with increasing acceptance among the more influential clergy ...' (Campbell 1990, p.119)
[106] Campbell 1990, p.118
[107] Campbell 1990, p.118. *My italics.*
[108] Campbell 1990, p.133
[109] Campbell 1990, pp.138-41. Campbell refers, for instance to Raymond Williams, who cites Lady Bradshaugh in turn 'as commenting in 1749 that the word "sentimental" is "so much in vogue among the polite"' (Campbell 1990, p.138)
[110] Campbell 1990, p.151

expectations[111]. Sentimentalism was thus less focused on societal conventions[112], but also tacitly and implicitly proffered new norms in turn:

> Responsiveness to beauty thus became a crucial moral quality, such that any deficiency in this respect became a moral lapse, whilst correspondingly virtue became an aesthetic quality, such that, in turn, any moral lapse was 'bad taste'. [113]

Campbell argues that one key aspect of Sentimentalism relates to how manners and taste were perceived differently by the upper and middle classes. This is one reason why he believes that the growth in middle class consumption cannot just be explained away as emulative. He positions the aristocracy as still being 'drawn to the classical ideal' (of restraint), rejecting middle-class claims to distinction, and regarding the middle-class conception of taste as pretentious and vulgar (but here too 'appearance was taken as a major indication of the degree of one's mastery of good form as a whole and hence as a prime index of character'[114]. It is easy to surmise how Republican thought, as outlined in relation to Pocock and Appleby's arguments above, may have played a role here). Campbell claims then, that while elites partook in luxurious consumption, they did so with stoic 'restraint', and advocated an adherence 'to carefully defined standards of propriety'[115]. He does note the difference between aristocratic rhetoric and reality (gout was an 'occupational' hazard), but believes this does not discount the importance of 'approved forms of conduct'[116]. He contends the eighteenth century middle class, in contrast, did not find the neo-classical tradition appealing[117], although they still felt the force of its 'claim to moral and cultural superiority'[118]. Yet he also points out the

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[111] Campbell 1990, pp.140-5

[112] This idea, that only feelings could be relied upon to determine good, again was only possible, Campbell argues, following the arguments of thinkers such as the Cambridge Platonists and the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, who associated goodness with beauty (Campbell 1990, p.151), 'making both morality and aesthetics a matter of emotional intuition' (Campbell 1990, p.152).

[113] Campbell 1990, p.152. In his contribution to *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993), Campbell adds that 'Consequently 'taste' itself became the most important of an individual's qualities of character' (Campbell 1993, p.49). Here then, it was felt that an individual's sensibility could be determined 'through their aesthetic taste or sense of beauty' (Campbell 1990, p.152).

[114] Campbell 1990, p.160

[115] Campbell 1990, pp.203-5

[116] Campbell 1990, p.166. Dissolute types of aristocratic conduct 'often represent attempts to demonstrate heroic or manly qualities; consequently they are typically communal, taking the form of character contests in which there is a predominant concern to demonstrate strength, stamina, will-power and self-control' (1990, pp.166-7). Note that this conduct Campbell refers to is gendered, female members of the elite may, he believes, have been more receptive to Sentimental character ideals (1990, p.172).

[117] As a doctrine it 'was too far removed from their interests' (Campbell 1990, p.149).

[118] Campbell 1990, p.149

inconclusive debates over the determination of beauty at the time: reason was being called on in vain to provide a guide to universal standards, but increasingly, there was a

> growing feeling that this discerning faculty, based on individual sensibility, expressed itself in such a complex and manifold way that no such measure could exist.[119]

Campbell mentions middle class irritation with these debates, and with the 'aesthetic paternalism of neo-classical writers'[120]. He also discusses how an alternative middle class claim (or discourse), developed in response:

> aesthetics itself became a battleground in the class struggle for cultural hegemony waged in the second half of the century. For as the middle classes sought to contest the elite's taken-for-granted claim to moral and cultural superiority, they increasingly found that their own lack of any claim to aesthetic distinction counted against them.
>
> Just as the eighteenth-century English aristocracy were most vulnerable to the criticisms of immorality and extravagance, so were the rising middle classes most vulnerable to the charge of being vulgar, that is, of lacking 'taste' in both the behavioural and aesthetic senses of the word. In order to counter this accusation, there was a move to develop an essentially 'bourgeois' aesthetic and norm of conduct, and to argue that it, and not upper-class neo-classicism, represented 'good taste'.[121]

Here then, from the mid-eighteenth century, a number of theoretical positions had increasingly begun to collide: the increasing failure of elite appeals to tradition as a means of determining beauty, disagreements as to what the essential universal standard of what beauty might actually consist of, and 'a growing individualism'[122]. All combined he writes, to ensure a new emphasis came to be 'placed upon self-determination in matters of taste'[123]. Debates about standards of judgment remained an issue, but Campbell believes it is at this point that 'fashion' came into its own[124].

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[119] Campbell 1990, p.155
[120] Campbell 1990, p.156.
[121] Campbell 1990, pp.149-50
[122] Campbell 1990, pp.155-6
[123] Campbell writes that where Shaftesbury and Hutchinson had not drawn a distinction between individual's 'innate' ability to discern beauty and universal standards, with Hume 'sensibility could be seen as totally subjectivist' (Campbell 1990, p.156).
[124] One key point to note here however is that Campbell positions fashion as meeting the need of an 'underlying predisposition' (1990, p.159), rather than being a commercial strategy imposed from above in any simply conceived way. Again, arguments that emulation drove the consumer demand of the time are, he believes, inadequate: 'This combination of circumstances, where a strong desire to manifest a highly valuable personal quality existed, and yet no commonly agreed aesthetic standard could be found to replace the classical ideal, led to the development of modern fashion, the other crucial factor being the very real demand for novelty which the search for emotional pleasure naturally stimulated' (Campbell 1990, p.158).

The 1800s most commonly spring to mind as the hegemonic domain of the bourgeois aesthetic, but Campbell seems to sketch here clear traces of its inception. The aristocracy, their ideals unsupported by reason, fell back on customary 'norms and conventions', while the middle classes instead drew on a mix of Sentimentalism, Protestantism and 'certain classical ideals' to position their interpretation of taste in terms of 'a quasi-charismatic quality of near-spiritual dimensions'[125]. Sentimentalism, then, ratified the view that felt emotions were pleasurable and should be indulged[126], and with an 'enthusiasm' repugnant to the aristocratic neo-Stoic ideal, expressing taste, and thus virtue via consumption accordingly became legitimate in terms of the bourgeois horizon of permissible social strategies[127].

Sentimentalism as a doctrine did fall out of vogue toward the latter part of the 1700s Campbell records, coming to be viewed as excessive, suspect, and even insincere[128]. But he contends the attitudes it permitted in relation to consumption were only fostered by the concomitant shift to 'a full-blown romanticism' which developed through a new stress on 'natural', as opposed to 'artificial' feelings[129]. It is tempting to suggest that Rousseau's response to artificiality may have played a role in this shift[130]. Yet while

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[125] Campbell 1990, p.150, p.159. The middle class, 'true to their religious heritage, regarded 'taste' as a sign of moral and spiritual wealth, with an ability to take pleasure in the beautiful and to respond with tears to the pitiable equally indicative of a man (or woman) of virtue' (Campbell 1990, p.205).
[126] Whether such emotions derived 'from pity, benevolence, love, grief or horror' (Campbell 1990, p.141). This, Campbell argues later, 'was an ethic which inevitably provided powerful legitimation for the pursuit of emotional pleasure' (Campbell 1990, p.205).
[127] Campbell 1990, p.153-67
[128] Campbell 1990, pp.173-4
[129] Campbell 1990, p.177
[130] In *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997) Slater for instance, writes of how Rousseau was part of a general reaction against materialism and industrialisation, focusing instead a new attention on the 'artistic', personal development of a 'true' inner self (Slater 1997, pp.15-6). Slater points out that Rousseau, unlike Smith and Hume, did not believe that culture developed 'civilisation' or 'sympathies', only unnatural vices. Where Hume and Smith saw desire and emulation operating as civilising forces (Slater 1997, p.78), Rousseau, Slater writes, argued that society 'actually delivers heteronomy - man's needs are determined by the fashions, opinions and scrutiny of society ... he becomes 'other-determined' (Slater 1997, p.78). Here, as Slater further outlines, 'Emulation replaces that authenticity with mere appearances' (Slater 1997, p.81). Xenos too notes how for Rousseau it was society which caused people to emulate one another simply in order to be recognised as a 'socially acceptable self' (Xenos 1989, p.23), and that he saw this as an altogether negative process, not only because it prevented the *authentic* formation of self, but because it also ensured the immediacy of natural desires become transformed into a malformed and unhealthy dependency upon vice. Here Rousseau, Xenos adds, saw 'signs of slavery in the conventions of civilized life and its symbols of success' (Xenos 1989, p.23). In an unpolluted state of nature humans desired nothing more than the satisfaction of their immediate needs. In their 'natural state' human desires were not insatiable, as Hobbes and others had proposed, they only became so as society developed and emulation occurred.

Campbell does not discuss Rousseau, he does mention a number of other factors[131], including Romanticism's relation to certain Sentimentalist 'ideals and attitudes', and its growing out of and constituting a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism[132].

The Romantic movement was inconsistent, diverse, and was represented by a gamut of writers and artists from across the political spectrum[133]. Campbell acknowledges that defining Romanticism is 'notoriously difficult', as is making any definitive claims about the movement as a whole[134]. Yet, as with Sentimentalism, Campbell positions Romanticism as providing a new arena for competing understandings of 'taste'. One crucial point he mentions is how even at the very beginning of the Romantic movement the previous middle class antipathy toward the aristocracy had diminished. Divisions within the middle class which had developed at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century in the context of the atmosphere wrought by the French and Industrial Revolutions, now become the new arena of opposing concerns as anxieties were directed toward the establishment regime supporting 'cold, impersonal economic forces'[135]:

> The waning of the old aristocracy, and the rise to prominence of the trading and business classes, meant that the sentimentalist critique of the nobility - indicted for their emotional stoicism, frivolous extravagance, and an arrogance that his a lack of spiritual depth - was increasingly irrelevant, and it came to be recognized that the real enemy of sensibility lay in the cold-hearted utilitarian philistinism of the *nouveaux riches*' began to be seen as representative of repressive conventionality to be rebelled against.[136]

It is in this context that Campbell describes the key appeal of Romanticism in relation to middle class consumption as being its ability to connect 'taste' vis-à-vis imagination and creativity to a spiritual quest:

> With the ... reaction against an overly narrow rationalism ... and the incorporation of an evangelical spirit into sensibility, the key attribute of 'taste' became transformed into a capacity for seeing into the nature of sacred truth,

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[131] Campbell positions Gothic and romantic novels, especially popular with women, as crucial in generating a 'sense of dissatisfaction with the world' and the development of a 'generalized longing' that resulted in 'the critical break with traditionalism which occurred in the second half of the eighteen century' (Campbell 1990, p.176, pp.174-8).

[132] Campbell 1990, p.179, p.181

[133] Winch 2004. Chandler 1998.

[134] Campbell 1990, p.179. As does Chandler 1998.

[135] Campbell 1990, p.179

[136] Campbell 1990, p.178. With Romanticism 'an individual's true sensibility became validated as much by their defiance of convention as by the direct manifestation of emotional susceptibility' (Campbell 1990, p.177).

> relabelled 'imagination', and used to link the aesthetic with the spiritual rather than the ethical.[137]

Signalled here is the tendency, which some more conservative strains of Romanticism exhibited, for societal improvement to be prefigured in a less material vein. But Campbell also discusses how Romantics more generally regarded art (their art) as having the capacity to awaken the feelings necessary for correct conduct[138]. In this, pleasure, as opposed to a didactic moralism also played a key role:

> moral insight and improvement is achieved *through* the medium of pleasure itself, such that this becomes the moral agent.[139]

As I mentioned earlier, Campbell stresses that with their rejection of bourgeois conventionality in no sense could the Romantics be seen as intending to ratify consumption. Overall however, he contends that, with its emphasis on pleasure Romanticism unintentionally legitimated an imaginative hedonism, a kind of 'day-dreaming, longing and the rejection of reality, together with the pursuit of originality'[140] that he sees as supporting certain aspects of modern consumer behaviour. In this he positions consumption 'as a voluntaristic, self-directed and creative process in which cultural ideals are necessarily implicated'[141], and argues that Romanticism's unintended legitimation of consumption provided a powerful justification 'counteracting both traditionalistic and utilitarian restraints on desire'[142]. Challenges to tradition, the

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[137] Campbell 1990, p.182. Here he also ratifies Romanticism as a mode of feeling; 'it tends towards the new, towards individualism, revolt, escape, melancholy, and fantasy' (Gauderfroy-Demombynes cited in Campbell 1990, p.181). Campbell also notes that while skeptical about religion, the Romantics 'still took for granted the association between nature and religious truth which had characterized Deism' (Campbell 1990, p.183). He adds that 'the romantic was as fascinated by the distinctive nature of his own self as by his powers of the imagination ... it was the forces of nature within man, the passions and promptings of the id, which came to be regarded as the ultimate source of all thought, feeling and action, the very seat of the imagination' (Campbell 1990, p.183-4) .

[138] Campbell 1990, p.187. See also Chandler 1998.

[139] Campbell 1990, p.191. Rejecting societal conventions, the Romantic, Campbell writes, 'becomes not merely a virtuoso in feeling but also in pleasure, something he must prove by creating cultural products which yield pleasure to others. Pleasure indeed becomes the crucial means of recognizing that ideal truth and beauty which imagination reveals - it is the 'grand elementary principle of life' - and thus becomes the means by which enlightenment and moral renewal can be achieved through art. These are urgently needed in a society now thoroughly imbued with the life-denying philosophy and institutions of a materialistic utilitarianism' (Campbell 1990, p.205).

[140] Campbell 1990, pp.201

[141] Campbell 1990, p.203

[142] 'The romantic ideal of character, together with its associated theory of moral renewal through art, functioned to stimulate and legitimate that form of autonomous, self-illusory hedonism which underlies modern consumer behaviour ... The romantic world-view provided the highest possible motives with which to justify day-dreaming, longing and the rejection of reality, together with the pursuit of originality in life and art; and by so doing, enabled pleasure to be ranked above comfort, counteracting both traditionalistic and utilitarian restraints on desire' (Campbell 1990, pp.200-1).

bourgeois and the utilitarian take a moral form and force, while consumption, and pleasure through consumption is ratified[143].

Campbell's overall account is elaborate and seems well supported. Yet the same criticisms that were directed at Weber can be applied to Campbell (as he himself acknowledges). As with Weber, the increase in consumption from 1650 suggests there was a longer-term process of change that Campbell simply does not account for. One reason for this may be his reliance on McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb's *Birth of a Consumer Society* (1982), which claimed there was a new, unique type of 'consumer revolution' in the mid-1700s that supposedly 'drove' the Industrial revolution. This was one of the first new studies focusing specifically on consumption; its arguments have since been reassessed, as evident in *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993), for instance. But yet another issue is raised in this same book: Porter notes the 'fashionable fastidiousness' of Sentimentalism, yet his extremely funny discussion of the eating habits of the more comfortably situated classes in the eighteenth century details practices of consumption that can only be thought of as cheerfully gluttonous *materiality* (moderated only by occasional anxiety). Campbell's 'stoic' aristocracy and idealised middle class daydreamers appear effete in contrast. (Despite the 'occupational' hazard of gout.)

To what extent then can Campbell's Romantic 'ethic' be applied in broad-brush strokes? The radical increase in middle class consumption in the 1700s does appear to have represented *some* kind of change. Campbell is perspicacious in regarding emulation as a

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[143] Campbell ties this transformation of consumption in England around the 1800s to a more general transformation of Western modernity: 'The cultural logic of modernity is not merely that of rationality as expressed in the activities of calculation and experiment; it is also that of passion, and the creative dreaming born of longing' (Campbell 1990, p.227). Yet one point Campbell does not raise which deserves consideration is how Romanticism as a doctrine was directed toward the lower classes. Briefly, I note here that Romanticism is usually interpreted as stressing rebellion. One different perspective is offered, by Xenos, however, who in *Scarcity and Modernity* (1989), positions Carlyle, Morris and Ruskin as arguing that societal change should be configured in terms of 'the subsumption of desire within an ordered whole' (1989, p.58). He sets this encouragement to accept the status quo in the aftermath of an awareness of the brutality and horror of the French revolution, and notes that this stance was directed towards the 'lower' orders in particular, with a doctrine advocating individual responsibility and 'wise management of one's labour and consumption, within an overall order of nature and society' (1989, p.56). Here a pragmatic acceptance of one's material circumstances (for signs of wealth were 'sham externalities' (1989, p.56)) was also represented as offering the consolation of a heightened aesthetic sense of life. This aestheticism was, moreover, positioned as feasibly supplying all lack, even with the increasingly evident horror and poverty of industrialisation. Consolation for material wants was realised through denying the importance of those wants and accepting, instead, a 'higher' plane of values.

wholly inadequate explanation for this[144]. Yet his response, depicting the change as a result of individual (if albeit contextual) daydreaming, somehow also seems to underplay the grounded lived reality of eighteenth century 'selves' situated in the context of uneasy, fluctuating class / status based social relations. Any diffuse Romantic justification of consumption that Campbell associates with an aesthetic 'project of self', also needs to be transposed against the practical, and simultaneously aesthetic social role consumption practices played. This should not be conceived as emulation, but more as part of longstanding practical, pragmatic and individual aesthetic expressions of social lived reality, which applies just as much to the idealisations of Pocock's Republican elites.

Bourgeois consumption and 'taste'

Regardless of the extent to which Campbell's thesis can be considered representative, with the increase in consumption, by the 1800s the fears of earlier conservative theorists were clearly realised: the new prosperity and the financial changes that had developed from around the seventeenth century meant the traditional hierarchy, established by birth and expressed through land holdings, could now, at least potentially, be overturned by wealth gleaned through traditionally despised occupations. In England this was all too evident with asset rich merchants and cash poor gentry. And whereas in the past a lower class person's increase in wealth was less likely to result in any increase in status, now, in conjunction with 'appropriate' forms of consumption, status itself developed into a consumer item[145], which could, at least potentially, be acquired, in a range of complex hues, across the spectrum of the fine gradations in social class. This was particularly galling to the aristocracy; who believed, Sekora points out, that they 'possessed the right to rule, not the moneyed men who were natural subjects, who had no virtue themselves and who led a herd of blind mercenaries'[146].

Here then, at the time of the Peterloo massacre (where armed militia charged a group of 60,000 peaceful protesters, resulting in hundreds of casualties and 'perhaps a dozen fatalities'[147]) we have Jane Austen's novels, focused on upper-middle social niceties and anxieties about status distinctions (where subordinate class struggles do not rate a

[144] Campbell specifically refers to McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb's *Birth of a Consumer Society* (1982), but his arguments can also be directed towards texts such as McCracken's *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (1990).
[145] Slater 1997, p.70
[146] Sekora 1977, p.69
[147] Chandler 1998, p.15-7

mention). For as Slater notes in *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997), the overall irony of the Romantic disparagement of bourgeois norms is that by the nineteenth century, certain types of consumption had come to be viewed as signifiers of sensibility, refinement and taste; as signifiers of the 'authentic' self[148]. Even Romantics were not exempt: Campbell notes that bohemians, for instance, did not disparage all material wants:

> whilst the bohemians (who espoused an especially rigorous form of romantic faith) despised the bourgeoisie for the importance they attached to such material possessions as houses and furniture, they themselves valued books, works of art, music and clothes. Of course, they did not share the same pattern of valuations as the bourgeoisie but the fact remains that their philosophy of life did not involve a simple rejection of goods so much as a distinctive attitude towards their meaning and use.[149]

From the end of the eighteenth century the traditional signifiers of elite class and status became increasingly tendentious; as dress and accoutrements could no longer be 'read' and interpreted as an accurate representation of social position[150], the meanings of these previously uncomplicated signifiers began to change:

> Whereas previously people were adjudged according to 'stations' in life revealed by their appearance, now appearance could be viewed as a misleading 'act' which mystified the true nature of personhood which lay deep within ...[151]

In sum, it seems this new kind of moral imagination, generated and perpetuated by the celebration of the aesthetic aspects of certain consumption goods and services, was so pervasive that even the disease consumption itself, Roy Porter relates, came to convey the idea of 'an intriguing, enticing languor ... associated with superior imagination, talents and discrimination'[152]. It seemed sensibility through consumption could be acquired, in whatever sense of the term.

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[148] 'The individual's style of goods, activities and experiences was no longer a matter of pure social performance (as Sennett (1977) argues it was for the eighteenth century) but a matter of personal truth and authenticity' (Slater 1997, p.16). See also Campbell 1993, p.54.
[149] Campbell 1993, p.54
[150] Sennett 1994, p.65
[151] Miller 1995, p.25
[152] Porter 1993, p.67

Flowers of the Southern Hemisphere, Fanny Macleay, circa 1830

This Australian colonial painting references *A Flower Piece* by the Dutch master van Huyssen. It exhibits classic Dutch still life motifs; heavy flowers at the fullest moment of bloom, with the almost imperceptible insects supplying other references to the ephemeral. The urn containing the flowers, and the statues and buildings in the background also evoke classical civilizations Europeans hoped to emulate (but note the tastefully covered cherubs). Elizabeth Windshuttle situates *Flowers of the Southern Hemisphere* in the genre of fashionable, non-scientific feminine flower painting (Windshuttle 1985). Science was a gentleman's pursuit, and the sexual character of Linnaeus's classification system also meant that botany was considered too risqué for women (Fara 2003). Macleay's depiction of these plants would, nevertheless, have been valued within the scientific community - an earlier companion piece, *Flowers of the Northern Hemisphere*, was hung in the Royal Academy in 1824, and 5 of the 16 Australian natives depictured above were not illustrated in English botanical magazines until after 1836 (Windshuttle 1988 p.61, p.94, fn.53). In keeping with the classical aesthetic tradition (Campbell 1990, p.148) this is botanical art intended for the edification of the viewer. Here, despite Macleay's father's precarious financial standing, she demonstrates her character, sensibility and taste, situating herself as refined and accomplished. Her depiction of the butterflies also recalls her father's famous collection, further establishing her position as a legitimate member of the elite.

As sumptuary laws were abandoned, and eventually even forgotten, other signifiers of status such as education, 'taste' and the awareness and use of certain cultural codes were used more frequently to establish connections to elite status[153]. Slater positions the Kantian aesthetic, contrasting educated contemplation against sensate bodily absorption and activity, as one philosophical elaboration of these concerns:

> Bourgeoise cultural consumption is defined in terms of a Kantian aesthetic in which the audience calmly and knowledgeably *contemplates* the art-work; popular consumption is characterized by emotional and bodily immersion in an event.[154]

In *Distinction* (1984) Bourdieu had advanced a similar view, arguing that this aesthetic, while universalising its judgements of elite taste as good taste, actually conceals the class origins and class based capacity of those able to acquire and display the various signifiers of elite taste, ensuring the fine distinctions involved always seem inherent. Interestingly enough, transgressing class boundaries via attempts to acquire signifiers of higher status retains negative connotations today: 'aping one's betters' is represented as unnatural, vulgar and grotesque. The BBC comedy *Keeping Up Appearances*, for instance, is based solely around the torments a middle aged housewife inflicts on her family and acquaintances in her desperate, cumbersome, excruciating and doomed attempts to 'rise above her station'.

Given the range of views outlined above it is unsurprising anxiety about consumption continued throughout the nineteenth century amidst the general turmoil, radical change and political upheaval of the period. Trade nevertheless continued to grow even more dramatically, particularly in England, with ever more novel and exotic products becoming increasingly available - except for the many at the bottom of the industrial and agrarian ladder who continued to experience horrific working conditions, penury, and in Ireland, particularly, famine and starvation. (Ireland's landlords ensured the country 'remained a net exporter of food', in the years 1845-48 while 'over one million Irish men, women and children slowly starved to death'[155].) Meanwhile, from the Georgian through the Victorian era new innovations impacting on everyday existence ranged from

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[153] These included gardens, knowledge of art etc. Mukerji for instance, writes that 'taste became more important as capitalism made social rank more unstable' (1993, p.442).
[154] Slater 1997, p.57
[155] Easthope 1991, p.9

ready-to-wear clothing, folding umbrellas[156], flushing toilets[157], full length mirrors[158], cast-iron stoves[159], elevators, and gas, then electric lighting[160]. Hot air balloons hovered over London from the late 1700s; 1785 'was the year of the first cross-channel flight'[161]. Less visible, but equally important technological advances included 'scientific livestock breeding, soil chemistry, steam power and manufacturing by machine'[162]. These developments furthering industrialisation, along with speedier transportation via the canals, then better roads and railways, all resulted in yet further growth in trade, bringing in turn further unprecedented socio-economic alteration and change.

Despite so many new products becoming available, the social dislocation and economic inequality brought about by industrialisation was extreme. Workers in traditional trades found themselves replaced by large scale industrial machines, and with the decline in rural employment, migration to cities increased, further contributing to the decline of older forms of rural life. The extreme hardship wrought by the resultant dislocation was only suggested in the black industrial novels of Hugo, Dickens and Hardy[163]. The evidence Marx cites in *Capital* (1976) is far more horrific. Meanwhile alongside such conditions, the growing middle class prospered[164], and from the late 1700s the outcry against luxury began to change direction. It was increasingly argued that '*doux commerce*' had the capacity to 'cordialise mankind'[165], and this transformation was regarded as reaching its epitome, Hirschman notes, in the new so-called 'civility' of the bourgeoisie, with their supposed characteristics of 'industriousness and assiduity (the opposite of indolence), frugality, punctuality, and, most important perhaps for the functioning of

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[156] The folding umbrella had only been invented in 1705, but by 1785 featured in about 31% of lower-class probate inventories. Prior to that time an umbrella was a cumbersome luxury which had to be carried around by servants (Fairchilds 1993, p.230 & p.235).
[157] Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, p.372
[158] Corbin 1990, p.460
[159] Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, p.391
[160] Elevators were first used in 1846 and electric lighting in 1882 (Sennett 1994, p.348).
[161] Porter 1990, pp.270-71
[162] Dunn 1970, p.93
[163] Williams 1977
[164] 'There is no dispute about the fact that *relatively*, the poor grew poorer, simply because the country, and its rich and middle class, so obviously grew wealthier. The very moment when the poor were at the end of their tether - in the early and middle forties - was the moment when the middle class dripped with excess capital ...' (Hobsbawn cited in Xenos 1989, p.37)
[165] Paine [1792] cited in Hirschman 1986b, p.108. Marx's later bitterly sarcastic use of the appellation was intended with the greatest scorn.

market society, probity'[166]. At some point during this period then, the outcry against luxury previously targeted so vehemently against subordinate classes began to be directed more against modes of living outside the acceptable bourgeoisie norm. With this, as Slater describes, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, elite, as well as the lower class consumption and behaviour, came to be frequently represented as undisciplined, perfidious and seditious. For as suggested by Hogarth's popular irreverent, mass produced etchings with their didactic moral tales,

> By the nineteenth century, luxury was redefined: it was now the vice of an aristocracy with too much money and idleness. Working-class consumption then came to be seen as akin to aristocratic luxury, and often allied with it (drinking, gambling, horses, boxing and so on are debauched entertainments of both upper and lower classes.[167]

The new department stores and new-found bourgeois pride

Along with the increasing levels of trade and industrialisation, another significant change occurred around the end of the eighteenth century with the decline of the guild system[168]. This had exercised enormous control over both social and economic life, not only in relation to what kind of goods could be produced and thus consumed, but also in terms of how those goods could be distributed. Fairchilds discusses how in France for example, with the guild system in place, with a very few exceptions it had only been possible to purchase single items legally through a guild manufacturer[169], or from relatively small scale markets or illegal vendors[170]. In *The Bon Marché: Bourgeoise Culture and the Department Store* (1981), Miller details how the cessation of the guilds from the early 1800s enabled shops to begin selling multiple items in one place. The further development of large department stores in the 1850s became a particular concern for

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[166] Hirschman 1986b, p.109. In Robinson Crusoe for instance, Crusoe's father comments 'that the "middle state" is "the most suited to human happiness, not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and sufferings of the mechanic part of mankind, and not embarrassed with the pride, luxury, ambition and envy of the upper part of mankind"' (cited in Hirschman 1986a, p.43). See also Curren 1982, p.224.

[167] Slater 1997, p.79

[168] Guilds last longer in France than in England but were phased out in Paris in 1791 (Fairchilds 1993, p.228, p.231, p.242) (Heilbroner 1972, p.34), and throughout Europe were under challenge from the end of the 1700s. However the guild edicts were not rigidly enforced even prior to their being phased out completely (Jones 1982, p.102). This finally occured in England in 1813, as late as 1846 Sweden, Denmark 1849, Austria 1859, and across Germany in 1869 (Hobsbawm 1979, p.35) (Heilbroner 1972, p.34).

[169] Heilbroner 1972, pp.19-20 & pp.28-9. Fairchilds notes this was particularly the case in Paris (1993, p.232), and Miller also states that in France 'guilds regulated and limited entry into the various trades. They insisted that each seller be confined to a single specialty and to a single shop' (1981, p.22).

[170] Fairchilds 1993, p.242

critics. These department stores were a radical departure. They encouraged, yet simultaneously reflected the expanding bourgeois disposition; this was expressed through their unashamed ratification and celebration of bourgeois consumption, and their avid and sure acceptance of the new found bourgeois pride and self-satisfaction. The British Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, proudly showcasing the fruits of modern trade and industry[171] represented a similar illustration of the political acceptance and manipulation of this shift. Built with glass, iron and wood, it departed for the first time, despite some hostile opposition, from the previously rigid adherence to classical architectural forms, materials and motifs.

Many of the new department stores were also built using these new materials, and as with the British Exhibition they offered a fantastic spectacle[172]. Both were advertised as such, and both featured an enormous range and diversity of goods from around the world. The department stores catered in particular to the prosperous new bourgeois class who, subsidised by European colonial aggression and lower class industrial penury, could now afford to pay for practically whatever kinds of exotic goods they desired. The stores relied on low margins, relatively low prices and high turnover[173]. Consumers were allowed free entry, and were under no obligation to buy[174]. Instead of haggling, from 1800 on goods began to be marketed with fixed prices[175]. Symptomatic of the increasing rationalisation of the labour force and oppressive labour practices, Miller argues that these stores also ensured consumption became a far more pleasurable activity[176], becoming places where women could meet and spend time without fear of harassment. The lives of the new generation of bourgeoisie women who patronised these stores, previously circumscribed narrowly within their local districts, opened up as new territories became accessible due to the developing transport systems[177]. With this, as

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[171] Steegman 1987, p.15. Also Xenos 1989, p.37 & p.86. Xenos notes Benjamin's comment on this and the subsequent World Expositions as "places of pilgrimage to the fetish commodity" (1989, p.86).
[172] Parker 2003
[173] See Schudson (1993, pp.150-1) for a discussion of a similar, slightly later trend in America.
[174] The advertising catalogue of one Parisian store, the Petit Saint-Thomas, promised 'the freedom to view merchandise without being harassed to buy it' (cited Miller 1981, p.26). However Walsh's (1999) study of eighteenth century stores questions whether customers during the 1700s were actually pressured to buy - but this study also seems to focus on stores catering to the upper class.
[175] Miller discusses how 'advertisements from the late 1830s called attention to fixed and marked prices' (1981, p.25). He also notes the time consuming nature of haggling (1981, p.24).
[176] Miller 1981, p.24
[177] Miller also cites the creation of the broad Parisian boulevards, the railroad and the rationalization of Omnibus companies (1981, pp.35-7).

Crossick and Jaumain write in *Cathedrals of Consumption: the European Department Store 1850-1939* (1999), the

> department store now appears as not merely a huge sales hall, but as a meeting place, a site for female sociability and arguably also emancipation.[178]

The dangerous frenzy of consumption and bourgeois feminine morality

English trade continued to expand even more dramatically during the nineteenth century. As Hobsbawm notes in *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (1979), it almost doubled from 1800 to 1840, then 'Between 1850 and 1870 it increased by 260 per cent'[179]. The new department stores were the principal repositories of the huge growth in trade and, as obvious signifiers of a radically changing world order, became obvious targets for the usual fears about consumption, this time with an outpouring of elite anxiety about the decline of family life around the mid-1800s. Within the strict morality of the time the gravest concerns centered around women, who were portrayed as seduced, or at the very least as vulnerable to seduction when placed in the midst of these 'supercharged', hedonistic and supposedly morally questionable environments, away from the moderating influence of husband and family[180] (shades of Campbell's hedonistic daydreaming). Transposed against the idealised image of the wife/mother as regulating the conduct (and the consumption) of the household[181], this concern about appropriate feminine consumption fed into the popular morality tales of the age. There were fears that the department stores would result in women abandoning their 'proper' duties towards husband, children and family[182], or even abandoning their families altogether[183]. It was also believed that the new frenzy of consumption led formerly respectable bourgeois women to spend beyond their means. For Miller discusses how around this period it was perceived that a desire for excessive purchases equated with immorality, as

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[178] Crossick and Jaumain 1999, p.2
[179] Hobsbawm 1979, p.33
[180] Miller 1981, pp.192-6, p.211. Crossick and Jaumain also write of how 'the absence of conventional boundaries' in these new department stores 'engendered contemporary anxieties' (1999, p.2).
[181] Obverse to the fear of women as being subject to 'darker influences' is the representation of women as the exemplar of the moral ideal. As Ruth Smith notes in her 'Order and Disorder: the Naturalization of Poverty', 'In the nineteenth century, middle- and upper-class women were considered the embodiment of moral goodness. As such they became the primary agents in the process of socialization through which women taught children the bourgeois ideology of public autonomy and private morality. Through this mission, women themselves upheld the order that defined and controlled nature; they were complicit in the inner construction of "good nature"' (Smith 1990, pp.222-3). See also Donzelot 1979, and Hunt & Hall 1990, p.81.
[182] Crossick and Jaumain 1999, p.31, Tiersten 1999, pp.116-7
[183] Miller 1981

was the case with Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Tiersten, in her study of gender and the politics of consumption in Paris, similarly outlines that another French novelist, Henri Boulet, argued the emotions engendered by shopping 'mimicked the emotional cycles of an adulterous wife'[184]. Stories of problems deemed sexual in origin, such as hysteria, irrationality, and kleptomania, were frequently reported as being connected to some kind of primitive impulse, seemingly resistant to the Evangelical Victorian belief in the power of education and their insistent striving for and concern with a 'higher' kind of morality. Miller notes how Saulle, an early French psychotherapist writing on kleptomania, believed that:

> Women of all sorts, drawn to these elegant surroundings by instincts native to their sex, fascinated by so many rash provocations, dazzled by the abundance of trinkets and lace, find themselves overtaken by a sudden, unpremeditated, almost savage impulse[185].

Perhaps the principal fascination with this phenomenon was the exciting belief that this the newly respectable bourgeois class of women's refinement could be overcome by an onslaught of wild and raw instinctual desire, tinged with a sexual overtone[186]. This must have threatened the relatively recently acquired status of this class and their emphasis on the newly 'comfortable' public morality. Certainly the vehemence directed towards the upper and lower class consumption suggested a displacement of bourgeois anxiety onto a disreputable Other, perhaps suggesting the fear of the return of the 'repressed'. Around this time there was also, Clarke records, an

> ideological resurgence of models of a hierarchical gradation of rank and status that corresponded not only to economic conditions, but also to personal moral qualities and educational achievements.[187]

This renewed emphasis on bourgeois morality drew on an updated version of Protestant asceticism, with lesser tones of Campbell's similarly moralistic, quasi-spiritual, Romantic 'ethic'. Smith's eighteenth century ratification of 'comforts', understood as 'the happy mean between biting necessity and indulgent luxury', was also now promoted, changed, and 'narrowed' here, as Appleby details, to

> to a family-based respectability in the nineteenth-century. Increasingly the desire to better oneself became associated with the motive of providing for one's family. Novelists gave respectability a distinctly material embodiment in

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[184] Tiersten 1999, fn. p.132
[185] Saulle cited in Miller 1981, p.202
[186] Miller 1981, pp.200-6, Crossick and Jaumain 1999, pp.31-2, Tiersten 1999, pp.120-23.
[187] Clarke 1983, p.129

> the cleanliness and cut of clothes, the privacy afforded in the home and the accoutrements required to support the round of domestic rituals.[188]

This resurrected alibi supporting the bourgeois Victorian desire for possessions supported, in turn, still further criticisms of women's consumption. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the morality of the time and the moral panics about women in department stores, new, increasingly vocal attacks on luxurious consumption were overwhelmingly directed towards women, and overlooking masculine forms of luxurious consumption, instead targeted at female 'fripperies'. Despite respectability in the home being based around, and validated by the consumption which was carried out by women, as Vickery contends in her study of Lancashire woman Elizabeth Shackleton, women were 'relentlessly derided for their petty materialism and love of ostentation'[189], with women's purchases being frequently denounced as unnecessary luxuries. As Breen further notes, the term "luxury" itself 'was usually described as a "she", as effeminate, soft and weak'[190]. Berry too comments on the longstanding and extensive gender bias against women's consumption (even evident in the description of Luxury as a woman in Prudentius' *Psychomachia*). Building on the concerns about the degenerative power of consumption mentioned earlier, it was now women who were positioned as primarily responsible for softening the moral fibre of the nation, and diminishing national Virility[191].

The other factor here is that with the renewed Victorian stress on education, particularly a classical education focusing predominantly on Greek and Roman texts, now many Victorian men's understanding of ideal masculine behaviour would have been influenced by classical thought. The Aristotelian conception of virtue saw the ideal masculine life 'ruled by reason rather than desire'[192]. Here women are represented as properly 'man's inferior in reason and public virtue'[193]. Elite men, as opposed to women and 'inferior' classes of men, were simply associated with a 'higher' realm of activity and thought. Elite consumption was again justified as an expression of elite rationality: for despite his supposed concern with a 'higher' realm of thought, a principal feature of

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[188] Appleby 1993, p.169
[189] Vickery 1993, p.274
[190] Breen 1993, p.256
[191] Appleby 1993, p.167. Slater 1997, p.82. Hunt 1996, pp.80-2.
[192] Slater 1997, p.82
[193] Vickery 1993, p.274

Aristotle's 'great-souled man', and thus for many his Victorian counterparts, was the enjoyment of 'conspicuous consumption'; for as Aristotle put it: "he likes to own beautiful and useless things, since they are better marks of his independence"[194]. Clearly, here the attacks on women's consumption exhibited extreme bias, because as Vickery uncovers in her own extensive study and finds confirmed in other research on consumption patterns of the period,

> female consumption was repetitive and relatively mundane, male consumption was by contrast occasional and impulsive, or expensive and dynastic.[195]

Dandies and flaneurs in particular were renowned for and even identified by their consumption practices, yet they simultaneously maintained an extremely misogynistic view of women and women's consumption. Such disparagement was a common feature of magazines such as Punch[196], and commenting on a similar tone adopted by the American press, a female correspondent to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* wrote; 'I have several times in your Paper seen severe Reflections upon us Women, for Idleness and Extravagance, but I do not remember to have once seen any such Animadversions upon the Men'[197]. These criticisms are still common in modern vernacular – in the film *American Beauty* for instance, masculine consumption of items such as red sports cars are portrayed as autonomous and liberating; feminine consumption of household items as oppressed and oppressive.

In demonising women's consumption it is easy to forget that far from being overcome by, or solely focused upon luxurious bourgeois fripperies, as an oppressed and 'utilised' class, women have more often, as Irigaray notes, been treated as commodities themselves, as objects for patriarchal exchange. From at least the time of ancient Greece, women have also sustained men's idealised, supposedly 'reasoned' collaboration with the spiritual world at their own expense in the material[198]. As Appleby similarly notes:

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[194] Aristotle cited in MacIntyre 1980, p.79. Sekora notes that Aristotle saw subordinate consumption as potentially subversive (Sekora 1977, p.33).
[195] Vickery 1993, p.281
[196] Campbell 1993, pp.51-2
[197] Breen 1993, p.256
[198] Utilising Marx, Irigaray argues women have been treated as commodities, that have been used as 'a mirror of value of and for man' (1997, p.178). Further, 'Women are the symptom of the exploitation of individuals by a society that remunerates them only partially, or even not at all, for their work' (1997, p.188).

> Classic republicanism had taught that men - and it was just men and only men of independent means - realized their full human potential when they participated in civic affairs. Supported by a substructure of labouring men and all women, this idealized citizen realized moral autonomy because of his independence from the necessities imposed by nature and through the interaction of a community of peers[199].

As this thesis progresses, the staying power of these formulations, particularly evident in the work of many critical theorists, will become clear. But in general, in privileging production, so often 'characterized as collective, male, creative and useful', and implicitly and explicitly denigrating consumption, so often characterized as 'individualistic, female, parasitic and pointless'[200], these approaches exhibit a tacit, subtle gender bias operating to the detriment of women[201]. Even in terms of depictions of the difference between popular and high culture, Andreas Huyssen observes a further prejudice:

> ... the political, psychological and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities.[202]

This bias had a long pre-history, but as a discursive construction it was adopted last century in such an enthusiastic and persuasive manner it metamorphosed into a rigid orthodoxy of its own.

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199 Appleby 1993, p.167
200 Vickery 1993, p.274
201 See also Pringle 2001
202 Huyssen cited in Fowles 1996, p.71

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Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose: classical political economy, utilitarianism, marginalism, and modern economics

> The relations of production are not simply 'economic' relations, spontaneously created by individuals on the basis of the pursuit of their rational self-interest.
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> (Clarke 1983, p.6)

The main purpose of the previous two chapters was to drive home the depth of hostility exhibited toward consumption throughout history. Despite attempts by Smith and Hume to position consumption more positively, even today commentators frequently take the hostility toward consumption as legitimate, and the reasons for it as given. I shall examine some of these more recent positions in subsequent chapters. This chapter considers an alternative discourse; it provides an overview of how economics as a discipline largely celebrates consumption, yet at the same insists consumption requires no in-depth analysis. For as Slater shows in *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997), economists largely represent consumer motivations as the province of other disciplines, viewing such motivations as 'irrational', and the value of studying them questionable. Hirschman similarly observes how

> The complex psychological and cultural processes that lie behind the actually observed market choices have generally been considered the business of psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists.[1]

In the orthodox economic schema, technical, positivist marketing analyses become the only worthwhile areas of inquiry relating to consumption. As with Slater however, I believe that the focus on this kind of *technical, formal rationality* results in a foreshortened analysis, for while economists position

[1] Hirschman 1986c, p.143

> individual choice at the centre of their moral and social world, it is something they can say very little about: we do not get to see individuals coming to formulate their desires and interests, only the way in which they calculatedly pursue them.[2]

A further concern is that the manner in which orthodox economists excise the full range of diffuse social beliefs and meanings associated with consumption from their disciplinary sphere of interest means they also dismiss the ethical aspects of consumption practices. I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis how thinking about consumption as something involving values requires that we should be prepared to consider, *inter alia,* where goods come from, the labour practices involved in their production, if they were tested on animals, and their impact on the environment, before, during and after consumption takes place. Orthodox economics has largely treated such questions as outside the ambit of its interest. Mises, a well known neoclassical economist, for instance, even boasted of economics being a 'science of praxeology', concerned only with

> the means and ends chosen for the attainment of such ultimate ends. Its object is means not ends. In this sense we speak of the subjectivism of the general science of human action. It takes the ultimate ends chosen by acting man as data, it is entirely neutral with regard to them, and it refrains from passing any value judgement. The only standard which it applies is whether or not the means chosen are fit for the attainment of the ends aimed at.[3]

In this doctrinal statement the 'proper' role of the discipline is positioned as focusing only on the technical aspects leading to the consumption moment itself - consumption as it occurs at the point of sale and purchase, together with analysis of the financial costs and technical processes contributing to the price of goods. More 'diffuse' factors, such as the human rights record of the country that good has been produced in, or the effect of the production of that good on the environment have until recently received minimal attention, not being regarded as properly the concern of 'real' economics.

Goods, nevertheless, have origins, using them has effects, and disposing of them has consequences. Consumption involves frameworks of belief about the world, and having beliefs inescapably means making reference (explicitly or implicitly), to some kind of ethical standards. The recent scientific consensus about the need to address global

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[2] Slater 1997, p.43. See also Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.33. In Slater's view, a fuller account of consumption requires the analysis of 'culture' and 'the economy' as a coherent whole. The confected analytic division between them, he says, has resulted in the effective 'disappearance of consumer culture itself' (Slater 1997, p.51).

[3] Mises cited in O'Neill 1998, p.44

warming has begun to challenge the orthodoxy, and initiate a shift in policy prescriptions, but this shift is only recent, and still strongly contested. So why was Mises so proud of his program? Why has economic theory largely attempted to disregard any larger range of concerns?

I began researching this chapter with the aim of outlining the ramifications this disciplinary perspective has had in relation to consumption specifically: I found reasons for it that spoke of a particular political program tied to the development of the discipline. From the neoclassical to the neoliberal economists a theoretical strategy was used to promote a political, socio-economic agenda: marketed through new technical 'refinements' in the 'science' of economics this agenda deprioritises attempts to address the more oppressive and inequitable aspects of the current day global economic environment. Accordingly, this chapter, while primarily concerned with how economic thought came to proffer a discourse positioning consumption as value-free, also offers an account of a political agenda.

In the first part of the chapter I chart the evolution and attractions of neoclassical, or marginalist theory - dominant up until the Great Depression, when Keynes's ideas came to constitute the most complete and successful challenge to the neoclassical orthodoxy. However since the 1970s it has been neoliberalism's re-worked marginalism that has enjoyed a hegemonic status in the political arena. Despite numerous, longstanding criticisms, it has only been in the last year with the 'subprime' mortgage crisis that the hegemony has been threatened. For free market fundamentalism aka neoliberalism is being judged and deemed bankrupt: as Stiglitz has recently observed, 'Even the right in the United States has joined the Keynesian camp with unbridled enthusiasm and on a scale that at one time would have been truly unimaginable'[4].

I do not attempt to engage fully with these events here, only to chart the broad shifts in economic thought that led to neoliberalism's dominance over the last thirty years, how neoliberalism 'speaks to' and has taken up the neoclassical themes which are the focus of the initial section of this chapter. A fuller examination of in-depth criticisms of neoliberalism along with alternatives theories that could have been taken up, would, in any case, have necessitated at least another chapter, more likely another thesis. And this

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[4] Stiglitz 2008

has recently been undertaken; Mark Blyth's *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (2002) offers one particularly good analysis of the North American political strategies and economic policies informing that period. *Machine Dreams* (2002) by Phillip Mirowski features an in-depth account of refutations to its basic mathematical premises glossed over by the orthodoxy during the twentieth century. A forthcoming collection, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, edited by Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe also promises a detailed examination of the funding, and concerted organisational effort expended on promoting neoliberalism as an economic doctrine and rationality of government[5]. And James Galbraith's *The Predator State* (2008) offers an insightful account of the neoliberal contribution to the subprime mortgage crisis.

The obvious question in any study of the development of neoclassical and neoliberal doctrine is what sort of government, and what sort of freedom is being promoted. Hindess notes that as a practical philosophy of government liberalism has traditionally contained a 'fundamental ambiguity'[6]; advocating ideals of freedom while simultaneously viewing 'subordinate' classes and cultures *as not yet capable of autonomy*:

> The liberal ideal may be for the state to rule over, and to rule through, the free activities of autonomous individuals but liberals have traditionally taken the view that substantial parts of humanity do not, as a matter of fact, possess the minimal capacities for autonomous action that would enable them to be governed in this way.[7]

This is a key aspect of liberalism, the shadow side of its doctrine of 'freedom'. For liberalism has traditionally treated 'subordinate' classes and cultures as objects to be worked upon and 'improved' so as to derive maximum 'benefits' according to liberal ideals of what constitutes 'progress'. It is in this sense that liberals such as Smith and Hume found the market a useful mechanism for inculcating the requisite, ideal liberal qualities, or capacities, of self-government and self-regulation, self-restraint and industry, they deemed desirable. Here the poor (as Locke also reckoned), become a utile resource[8]. The beauty of the market then, was that as a *naturally* regulating system, it was

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[5] van Horn and Mirowski 2005.

[6] See Hindess 1998, p.211. Also Hindess 1993b.

[7] Hindess 2002, p.133. See also Hindess 1998, p.211, Hindess 1993b.

[8] See for instance Locke's 1697 report on the poor law, 'A Report of the Board of Trade to the Lords Justices Respecting the Relief and Employment of the Poor', where he discusses 'proper methods for setting on work and employing the poor ... making them useful to the public, and thereby easing others of that burden' (Locke cited in Fox-Bourne 1969 [1876] Vol.One, pp.377-91).

thought capable of automatically controlling populations, 'regulated' Hindess writes, 'and coordinated without direction from a single controlling centre[9].

But just as the sugar market was built on the back of the slave trade, and the growth in the tea trade depended on the trade in opium Britain imposed by force on China, neither the origins and consequences of the 'free' trade in such goods cohered too easily with the overtly stated liberal values of freedom and autonomy. Depicting the market as a *natural* force, then, and now, is still a notion that goes quite some way towards alleviating liberal responsibility for the human action which directs its deleterious effects. In the meantime, the dominant impulses of economic thought have also inhibited awareness about the possibilities of ethical consumption, restricting also the incidence of legislative programs that could generate and support its development. As I shall detail below, neoliberalism has maintained this strategy, while finessing and transforming the liberal myth of 'freedom' to a doctrine of government, turning the implementation of market relations into a bureaucratic art form.

The initial section of this chapter then, constitutes a close analysis of the steps through which economic theory developed in this respect. My account is non-sequential -- I first consider Bentham's concept of utility, how that was taken up by marginalist, or neoclassical economists, how they promoted their ideas as supplying answers to the 'problem' of price not satisfactorily addressed by Smith and Ricardo. I then return to Hume, outlining how the marginalists drew selectively on key aspects of Hume's arguments about reason in order to position economics as a technical, as opposed to social science. Here I point to how marginalism selectively cherry-picked Hume's ideas to suit a conservative political program. In the latter part of the chapter I focus on how neoclassical economics dealt with growing arguments for democratic reform, was challenged by Keynes following the Great Depression, and how its program was

[9] Hindess 2002, p.134. Or, as Hayek put it: 'It was men's submission to the impersonal forces of the market that in the past has made possible the growth of a civilization which without this could not have developed' (Hayek 1997 [1944], pp.151-2). Hindess also points out that: 'Rather than describe liberalism as committed to governing through freedom, then, it would be more appropriate to present it as claiming only that there are important contexts in which free interaction can serve as an instrument of regulation: that is, that certain populations, or significant individuals, groups and activities within them, can and should be governed through the promotion of particular kinds of free activity and the cultivation of suitable habits of self-regulation, and that the rest must therefore be governed in other ways' (2003, pp.6-7). In a similar manner, Rose likewise comments that 'The autonomy of the self is thus not the timeless antithesis of political power, but one of its objectives and instruments of modern mentalities of government ... Governing in a liberal-democratic way means governing through the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them' (1992, p.147).

subsequently reconstituted (and transformed) via neoliberals such as Friedman and Hayek.

Bentham's utilitarianism

Bentham's *Introduction to the Principals of Morals and Legislation* (1996 [1780]), is arguably one of the most important precursors to modern economics, and he begins with the simple proposal that people benefit by maximising what brings them happiness, while avoiding what causes them pain. Bentham then proposes the sum of individual pleasure and pain can be calculated, and he uses the term *utility* as a descriptor for the resultant sum, which he then argues can be used to compare any one person's utility to another. Incorporating the doctrine of the greatest good for the greatest number enabled Bentham to conclude utility could be used to institute programs of reform aimed at delivering the benefits to the population as a whole[10].

Bentham's formulations form a strange contrast to the eighteenth century moralist's concerns about excessive and luxurious consumption. Heilbroner regards 'the greatest good for the greatest number' as validating any kind of consumption, effectively rationalising any dictat of the market:

> the utilitarian framework provided the final resolution of the moral dilemmas of the economic process by its assertion that whatever served the individual served society. By logical analogy, whatever created a profit (and thereby served the individual capitalist) also served society, so that a blanket moral exemption was, so to speak, extended over the entire range of activity that passed the profit and loss test of the marketplace.[11]

Rosen argues that valorising the market was not Bentham's intent. Conditions of terrible scarcity were becoming increasing apparent during the early industrial revolution, and Rosen views Bentham as being particularly concerned about disparities in wealth: with diminishing utility intended to take into account, at the level of policy, the varying relative degrees of satisfaction which individuals in different financial circumstances would feel according to improvements in their circumstances. For Rosen, Bentham's main aim was to develop a *modern* theoretical foundation on which to base

[10] As Slater writes, 'individual actions and social policies should be analysed and judged rational and proper, in terms of their consequences for producing a total sum of pleasure and pain, utility and 'disutility' (Slater 1997, p.45).

[11] Heilbroner 1985, p.115. Galbraith also notes how utility suited ideas about increased productivity, being effectively reliant on and equated with increased levels of consumption (Galbraith 1984).

efficient and practical reforms, where the 'diminishing utility' of the wealthy justifies the potential redistribution of their wealth[12]:

> An addition of wealth to a rich man would bring far less increased happiness than the same additional amount would bring to a poor man. Similarly, a decrease in the wealth of a rich man would cause less pain than for a poor man. Bentham's emphasis on equality as an end of legislation and as part of his very conception of happiness thus made equality an important aim of public policy.[13]

Bentham may have been writing with beneficent public outcomes in mind, yet as with Heilbroner, Slater too notes how Bentham's philosophy dismisses socially embedded moral sentiments, and effectively discounts the richly complex range of human emotions and motivations, while positioning society as a collection of rational utility maximising egoists[14]:

> Bentham ... replaces the variety of social motives with the single, and individual, self-interested motive of "maximising utility" ... replaces "society" and "culture" (the substantive character of human wants in particular ways of life) with "reason", with abstract calculation and with quantification.[15]

Hopkins makes similar observations in his contribution to Polanyi's *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (1957), noting that for Bentham, 'all objects, persons as well as things, [are regarded as] as means and never ends in themselves'[16]. And Slater also writes that while Smith and Hume sought to validate individual desires, the difference between them and Bentham was that they still based 'morality and self-interest itself in an innately *social* sentiment, a desire to be approved of by others'[17].

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[12] Writing in the context of Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism, Bentham was trying to avoid transcendental or metaphysical ideals. Haddad notes how the influence of Hume's arguments ridiculing any universal standard of morals informed his approach (1996, p.69), but Bentham was also responding to a longstanding theoretical trend. Hirschman records how Bacon was one among many others engaged in a 'systematic attempt at shaking off the metaphysical and theological yokes that kept men from thinking inductively and experimentally' (1977, p.21). Greek Epicurean philosophy also played a role, for as Springborg notes, 'the Epicureans in general enjoyed a considerable revival in the European Enlightenment precisely because they had developed a rudimentary theory of human motivation that was in some sense "scientific" or secular rather than theological' (1981, p.22).

[13] Rosen 1996, p.xxvii. Roll cites J.S. Mill as referring to Bentham as 'the great subversive' in this respect (Roll 1992, p.324). For Macpherson however, 'as soon as Bentham had thus demonstrated the case for equality ... it had to yield to the case for productivity' (1975, pp.20-1).

[14] Here 'solidarity and economic growth arise automatically from the isolated hedonic calculus of monadic individuals' (Slater 1997, p.81).

[15] Slater 1997, p.45

[16] Hopkins 1957, p.283

[17] Slater 1997, p.81

It is ironic Adam Smith is so often presented as a 'founding father' - for while modern economics gestures regularly to him, it is characterised by a focus on technical means / ends rationality. Slater states this not a result of Bentham's influence alone, but concludes that neither can his influence be underestimated. Utility effectively posits a singular, universal conception of human nature; Slater also believes it tends to close off the need for any further enquiry into consumption, becoming

> a tautology which says nothing about particular needs but simply infers their presence or absence from the act of buying. To say that someone bought something because it represented a utility to them adds nothing to our knowledge of why they bought it, what their motives or needs were.[18]

In this, as Joan Robinson elaborates in *Economic Philosophy* (1962), utility supplies 'a metaphysical construct of impregnable circularity', which many economists have used since as an expedient smokescreen[19]. Yet while utility proved so useful for economic theory, the manner which the redistribution of wealth connected to 'diminishing utility' also offered particular tensions which subsequent neoclassical economists felt the need to bypass. I will revisit this point below.

From Bentham to Marginalism, in the context of the problems of price and distribution raised by Smith and Ricardo

It was in the late 1800s utility was first formally used to dismiss any motivations or values connected to consumption. The concept was given a 'scientific' *imprimatur* when three theorists, Jevons, Menger, and Walras, separately, but almost simultaneously, all began combining Bentham's notion of utility with differential calculus to represent the incremental amounts of 'diminishing utility' resulting from the increased consumption of a good[20]. Here incremental amounts of 'diminishing utility' were measured in order to determine the unit price of a good by following 'laws' that stated supply and demand could be regulated to a point of equilibrium. Theoretically at that point, Clarke explains, it was argued under 'ideal' market conditions price should equate with the cost of the factors of production, if those factors are fixed[21]. This new theory, now known as

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[18] Slater 1997, p.44

[19] Robinson 1962, p.47

[20] Roll notes how marginalism was anticipated by Gossen in 1854 (Roll 1992, pp.341-3), and with a range of variations was subsequently taken up by Edgeworth (1845-1926), Marshall (1842-1924) and Pigou (1877-1959) in England; Böhm-Bawerk (1851-1914), von Wieser (1851-1926), von Mises (1881-1973) and Hayek (1899-1992) from Menger's Austrian school; Pareto (1848-1923) from Walras' Laussanne School at Switzerland; and John Bates Clarke (1847-1938) in America.

[21] 'It can be shown that under appropriate assumptions (including the absence of ignorance, inconsistency and uncertainty) the interaction of demand and supply will give rise to a unique set of

marginalism or neoclassical economics, was represented as sophisticated, scientific, and universally applicable, and the marginalists made full use of the concept, extending it to a whole range of items and activities[22]. (Appleby deprecatingly observes how this 'permitted all the passions of motivation from frivolity, vanity and boredom to ambition, avarice and need to be weighed on the same scale'[23].) Yet it was this representation of scientific universality which assisted the marginalists in supplanting the ideas of Smith and Ricardo, whose focus on the cost of the factors of production in contributing to the price of goods had not been successful in reconciling the consumption and production sides of the price and value 'equation': the discrepancy between the exchange price value of a good, and its value in use.

Robinson documents how Smith tried to explain how value could be measured, focusing primarily on the 'appropriate' value of a good, as determined by the cost of labour and other factors of production. She also points out that Smith maintained that price must be just, as 'Value rules because it is fair and right', even though he never explained inconsistencies in prices, even to his own satisfaction[24]. She writes that it was this which prevented Smith's ideas achieving long-term dominance as an encompassing general theory, even though his vision of the market as a neutral, self-regulating system retained an enduring force. Robinson notes that following Smith, Ricardo did not deal successfully with the price / value conundrum either, but that his work also gave rise to a new concern. Like Smith, Ricardo focused on determining how productivity could be increased, trying to take into account all the factors involved in production[25]. However in this he inadvertently brought into question the appropriate recompense which should be apportioned, accruing from the price of a good, to the capital and labour involved in the production of that good[26]. This highlighted a conflict of interest between classes, drawing into question the moral justification of capitalist profits[27]. With the social and political unrest throughout the early to mid-nineteenth century identifying and

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stable equilibrium prices that clear all markets by equalising supply and demand. These prices are those that correspond to the free and rational choices of all the individual members of society seeking to achieve their own optimal solutions to the conditions of scarcity' (Clarke 1983, pp.152-3).

[22] Xenos 1989, pp.71-2. Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.50.

[23] Appleby 1993, p.171

[24] Robinson 1962, p.28. She notes Smith's motivation for theorising value was to support his arguments about methods of increasing production and the desirability of free trade (1962, p.30).

[25] One of Ricardo's most well known contributions involved integrating international trade into Smith's theories about the comparative advantage.

[26] Robinson 1962, p.31

[27] Robinson 1962, p.34. Also Roll 1992, p.340. Ricardo also called for the Corn Laws to be repealed.

elaborating on this issue only promised to exacerbate conflict. What is just as significant however, is that in conjunction with Malthus' mordant *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), Ricardo's ideas cast doubts over the belief in the autonomous, beneficent progression of the market that had been popularised by Smith. As Heilbroner notes,

> natural forces which once seemed teleologically designed to bring harmony and peace into the world now seemed malevolent and menacing.[28]

In *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge and Politics* (1998), O'Neill explains that the marginalists successfully supplanted Smith and 'resolved' the price / value problem by presenting price as 'an indirect measure of subjective states'[29] (what Jevons referred to as 'subjective utility'[30]), as opposed to just an amalgam of the sum of the costs of production. Here the issues Ricardo raised were bypassed - marginalism was presented as technically and mathematically 'rigorous' - and able to explain small changes in the price of goods at a temporal moment, significantly 'abstracted', as Clarke puts it, 'from the particular social and historical context within which economic activity takes place'[31]. The varying capacity of different individuals to pay was just subsumed under a new emphasis on the 'accurate' movement of price refined by the influence of 'the whole', supposedly balanced by the regulation of supply and demand to a point of natural 'equilibrium'[32].

The core aims of marginalism in the context of Victorian desire for reform

The Victorian desire for reform was robust (if also partial, in terms of its objectives and social basis for support for them), and it formed a curious juxtaposition to how utility theory was used to excise any consideration of the moral justification of capitalist profits. At the same time however, in addition to the doubts about the market raised by Ricardo and Malthus, Heilbroner also outlines how impetus for more positive change in Britain developed wider legitimacy through the popularity of J.S. Mill's *Principals of Political Economy*, published in 1848, the same year as Marx and Engel's *The Communist Manifesto.*

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[28] Heilbroner 1972, p.100

[29] O'Neill 1998, p.36

[30] See Skidelsky 1992, p.41. As Slater writes; 'each individual has his or her own utility function which cannot be judged from the perspective of anyone else's' (Slater 1997, p.56).

[31] Clarke 1983, p.16

[32] As Xenos states: 'whereas classical political economy had taken wealth as it subject, neoclassical economics focuses on economizing actions, beginning with individual ones and then aggregating them' (Xenos 1989, p.71). Here, as Clarke writes, 'In its theory of price, marginalism explains the formation of prices as an expression of the individual rationality of economic agents, competitive exchange serving optimally to reconcile the conflicting interests of these individuals so as to reconcile individual and social rationality' (1983, p.157).

Heilbroner writes that in contrast to popularised renderings of Smith, Mill positioned the market not as an impervious natural force, the expression of a 'harmony of interests', but something which could, and *should*, be improved through intervention[33]. Written in the context of conditions of highly visible abundance set against terrible scarcity, Clarke argues these accounts ensured many came to question the capacity of the autonomous free market to achieve reform, to solve societal inequities, and to address the dissimilitude between the 'freedom' of individuals and the maintenance of social order[34]. As the increasingly visible horrors and general dislocation of Industrialisation worsened throughout the mid-1800s, the idea of a self-moderating and self-adjusting market also fell completely out of sync with the nineteenth century 'religious-conversion narrative' of Evangelism[35]. Robert Skidelsky further outlines how romantics such as Carlyle and Ruskin wrote against what they saw as the egoism of the classical economists who 'would, by destroying existing social relations, prepare the way for anarchy and revolution'[36].

The marginalists and political economists were responding to very different circumstances, yet both had similar aims. The political economists were celebrating and defending nascent free market capitalism against political nepotism. The marginalists, in responding to the many critics of the free market, focused on defending capitalism against detractors who questioned whether the free market really was a panacea. The political influence of the working class movement was growing around this time, and Roll discusses how their concerns were given particular force through socialist arguments[37]. Skidelsky positions socialists as the most vocal critics of the free market, and as such, the marginal economists' principal targets[38]. Yet Clarke and Xenos both argue the marginalists just responded by shaping the ambit of theoretical economics so as to avoid even the need to justify inequalities in access to goods and services; in this simply sidestepping concerns about inequality, and changing the terms of the debate[39].

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[33] Heilbroner 1972, pp.126-9. Also Xenos 1989, pp.40-3.
[34] Clarke 1983, p.14 & 16
[35] Xenos 1989, p.44. Clarke 1983, pp.148-9. Skidelsky also writes that 'classical political economy founded by Adam Smith and his followers was out of tune with Victorian evangelism because it offered no scope for the benevolent motives' (Skidelsky 1993, pp.41-2)
[36] Skidelsky 1992, p.42
[37] Roll 1992, p.329
[38] Skidelsky 1992, p.49
[39] Clarke 1983, p.146, also p.154. Xenos 1989, pp.70-9.

Marginalism and the shift from God and Nature, to Science and Nature

I mentioned earlier that Adam Smith's 'hidden hand' conception of the market has enjoyed longstanding theoretical success. Smith understood the market as maintaining a 'harmony of interests'[40], and based this on the idea of there being underlying laws regulating distribution, part of a pattern ordered and determined by God. Attempts to replace metaphysical with scientific foundations did form part of a longstanding trend, challenging such conceptions such as Smith's, but Darwin's 1859 publication of the *Origin of the Species* undermined traditional foundations of justification even further. Marginalism's contribution to this issue was significant, for the doctrine seemed to address the crisis in the religious faith of the intelligentsia that was exacerbated around the 1860s[41], offering a 'modern' shift in focus from God and Nature, to Science and Nature. In this marginalism also represented itself as a hard science, focusing on the mathematically quantifiable. For as Xenos observes,

> marginalists sought to expunge metaphysical substances and contingent historical episodes from their theory.[42]

By explaining the individual acts of economic agents as something that could be understood in a purely technical way, and *only* needed to be understood on this level, the marginalists avoided any problems associated with philosophical, ethical or religious foundations of justification, 'overcoming' what was represented as a 'fruitless' consideration of ethical and moral issues resulting in questions deemed just too hard to resolve. As the British marginalist Marshall (writing largely in response to the moral philosopher and economist Sidgwick), declared,

> We are not at liberty ... to ... exercise ourselves on subtleties which lead nowhere.[43]

Despite its dismissive tone, this statement is also indicative of the degree to which the marginalists exhibited an abiding concern over the need for action, along with a need to justify their program. In his *Pleasure Wars: The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (1988) Peter Gay argues that the Victorian 'age of confidence was also an age of anxiety'[44]. Writing prior to the Depression in conditions of increasingly evident bourgeois

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[40] Clarke 1983, p.13
[41] Skidelsky 1992, p.26
[42] Xenos 1989, pp.70-1
[43] Marshall cited in Skidelsky 1992, p.40
[44] Gay 1998, p.3

prosperity, existing alongside still appalling poverty, Marshall self-assuredly, yet still nervously opined that

> the social and economic forces already at work are changing the distribution of wealth for the better: that they are persistent and increasing in strength; and that their influence is for the greater part cumulative; that the socio-economic organism is more delicate and complex than at first sight appears; and that large ill-considered changes might result in grave disaster.[45]

Hume vis-à-vis marginalism: further justification for economics as a technical science, and for the separation of economics from ethics

The marginalists called on Smith to support their arguments of the market being an ideal self-regulating system, but Slater records that they also made use of Hume's arguments. As with other Scottish Enlightenment thinkers Hume had questioned established norms, mysticism and superstition[46]. He went beyond any simple Enlightenment criticism of ecclesiastical authority however, averring there were no universal truths, 'eternal rational measures of right and wrong'[47]. Religion could not be relied on as a foundation for ethical justification, but neither could reason: for reason could not, Slater relates, 'prescribe the ultimate ends or meaning of life'[48]:

> For Hume ... reason arises solely from sensation and is therefore limited to observation of that which exists; it is therefore incapable of moving from 'is' to 'ought', of moving from what it knows to be the case to stating what should be, of deriving values from factual knowledge (crudely, unlike the physical properties and movements of an object, its 'value' or 'rightness' cannot be observed). Reason therefore cannot prescribe the ultimate ends or meaning of life ... Reason, mirroring the general course of modernity, can dethrone the absolutism of traditional values but by the same token cannot provide socially authoritative values to replace them.[49]

Hume's criticisms of ethical rationalism caused a great controversy[50], yet he also believed people had a moral sense, and that moral judgements guide action[51]. Like Smith, Hume

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[45] Marshall cited in Barber 1988, p.193

[46] See for instance Hamilton 1992, p.43.

[47] Hume 1968, p.44, also Hume 1969c, p.20.

[48] Slater 1997, p.48. See MacIntyre 1998 and also Varoufakis 1996.

[49] Slater 1997, pp.47-8 . See also MacIntyre 1998.

[50] Particularly with statements such as it is 'not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger' (Hume 1969a, p.6).

[51] MacIntyre 1998, p.169. Where Locke still acknowledges religion as the foundation of morals, Hume bases this in social experience and interaction. This is particularly evident in terms of how religious faith imbues Locke's work, with God viewed as providing the basis for existence. See for instance Chapter x, Book iv, of the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, 'Of Our Knowledge of the Existence of God' (Locke 1964, p.379), and also the first paragraph of 'Essays of the Law of Nature: Is there a Rule of Morals, or Law of Nature given to us? Yes.' (Locke 1998, pp.81-88).

viewed moral sense as developing through social interaction, with 'sympathy' arousing a positive response within us, allowing us to empathise with others, and this empathy is a characteristic to be welcomed[52]. Yet as Copleston stresses in *A History of Philosophy* (1964), for Hume reason plays no *foundational* role in this process; 'moral distinctions are not derived from reason'[53]. Moral feeling alone determines values, as morality, Hume writes, 'is more properly felt than judged of'[54]. For Hume then, our desires and passions are not determined by reason. The only role reason plays is in assisting us to calculate how to obtain what we desire:

> Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.[55]

Reason determines how desires might be obtained, but *cannot* determine desire itself:

> Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular.[56]

Slater delineates that this latter aspect of Hume's thought was drawn on to promulgate the liberal motif that reason could not have any legitimate role in determining the validity or acceptability of what individuals should or should not consume[57]. He notes Hume's ideas about the separation of facts and values informed Bentham's work, and were likewise taken up by the marginalists to support a focus on technical, empirical aspects of human behaviour. Yet while certain of Hume's arguments and phrasing *do*

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[52] Aiken describes Hume's view as follows: 'The importance of conventions lie precisely in the fact that as nature provides no natural remedy for the irregularities and anti-social tendencies in human behaviour, it is necessary that conventional rules of conduct be established which will be generally observed. The social utility of such conventions lies first of all in their universal observance. In this every man has an enduring interest ... it is Hume's belief that as man came to be aware of the social utility of rules of justice they will be led by such moral sentiments as they possess to "concur with interest" (Aiken 1968, p.xxxix-xl).

[53] Copleston 1964, p.133

[54] Hume 1968, p.43. He believed however that 'reason and sentiment concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions. The final sentence, it is probable, which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praiseworthy or blameable; that which stamps on them the mark of honour or infamy, approbation or censure; that which renders morality an active principle and constitutes virtue our happiness and vice our misery: it is probable, I say, that this final sentence depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species. For what else can have an influence of this nature? But in order to pave the way for such a sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distinct comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained' (Hume cited in Copleston 1964, p.133).

[55] Hume 1969a, p.5

[56] Hume 1968, p.33. Also Hume 1969b, p.9.

[57] Slater 1997, p.46-8

lend themselves such an approach[58], whether or not this is consistent with Hume's overall thought given the important role he granted the social is moot. Nevertheless, in the standard liberal utilitarian tradition needs are always represented as originating endogenously (Slater writes, 'from the separate and private interior world of the individual ego'[59]), with each individual's preferences being a private matter, and the motivations supplying 'utility' solely the right of each individual to determine according to their own criteria[60].

Marginalist free trade and the naturalisation of unequal class relations

In this tradition any consideration of values associated with or underlying consumption become wholly subjective, and thus ancillary. Yet although Hume was conscripted to extinguish the importance of ethics and transform the domain of the economic to the purely technical[61], we should be very wary of any attempt to position technical decision-making as value-free. Clarke observes that while the marginalists may have presented themselves as scientists solely concerned with the *means* by which humans provision themselves, they were actually providing 'a naturalist justification for capitalist social relations'[62], in a manner not unlike Smith. But where Smith's hidden hand had represented the market as maintaining a 'harmony of interests'[63] in equilibrium due to underlying laws which regulated distribution in an ordered pattern determined by God, the marginalists just transposed God with 'science', while maintaining a *natural* 'harmony of interests' ensured individuals attained functionally-given economic ends[64]. Macpherson too notes how the marginalists posited 'just rewards', that is, accurate compensation for work, insofar as 'the capitalist market ... gave everyone - labourer, entrepreneur, capitalist, and land-owner - exactly what his contribution was worth'[65]. Clarke charts how in this the state was positioned as 'benevolent' and 'neutral'[66] (or generally ineffectual), and largely 'uninfected' by the financial and political power of

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[58] For instance: 'If we take in hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact or existence? No. Commit it then to flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion' (Hume cited in Copleston 1964, p.120).
[59] Slater 1997, p.56
[60] Slater 1997, p.46
[61] Slater 1997, p.47. Heilbroner 1985, p.115.
[62] Clarke 1983, p.148
[63] Clarke 1983, p.13
[64] Clarke 1983, p.164
[65] Macpherson 1975, p.23
[66] Clarke 1983, p.192

business or established elites. He argues that this was a total reversal from the position of the political economists, and that in this reversal the marginalists also naturalised unequal class relations and positioned complaints by subordinate groups about inequality as threats to the *organic* operation of the market.

Disutility

Utility had proven a powerful concept for the marginalists, however it also retained traces of Bentham's original equitable aims, recognising, Macpherson writes, 'an order of urgency of wants in every man, ranging from the most basic necessities to pure frivolities'[67]. This meant that at some level utility always recalled claims for a redistribution of wealth:

> To recognize an order of urgency of wants would be to cast serious doubts on the ability of the market systems, with all its inequalities of income, to maximize the aggregate utility of all members of society, which ability is offered as the system's great justification.[68]

The marginalists were well aware of this problem, but utility was intrinsic to their doctrine and Marshall in particular, Roll details, still found it necessary to use it[69]. Other marginalists tried to get round the issue by using Hume to argue that subjective considerations of value could not be measured or compared being private and unobservable, even metaphysical. Jevons for instance, in discussing 'subjective' utility, wrote that 'every mind is inscrutable to every other mind and no common denominator of feeling is possible'[70].

Pareto and pure 'science'

A solution was finally derived courtesy of a second generation marginalist, Vilfredo Pareto, whose work enabled the conclusion that by focusing solely on price, utility could be bypassed[71]. Where interpersonal comparisons of utility were both undesirable and pointless, price on the other hand, was simply an observable, *technical fact*, representing what came to be known as 'ordinal utility'. As Roll relates,

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[67] Macpherson 1975, p.25
[68] Macpherson 1975, p.25
[69] Roll 1992, p.351, p.427. Also O'Neill 1998, p.36.
[70] Skidelsky 1992, p.41. Roll, 1992, p.351. Attempting to address criticisms against his use of 'utility', Marshall wrote, 'It is essential to note that the economist does not claim to measure any affectation of the mind in itself, or directly; but only indirectly, through its effect' (cited in O'Neill 1998, fn.7 p.182).
[71] Menger had bruited the notion of 'ordinal' utility, but Pareto formalised it (Roll 1992, p.374).

> a purely "ordinal" conception of utility sufficed for the formulation of a theory of choice ... The scale of preference as exhibited in conduct is the only determinate phenomenon; any number of utility functions could fit it.[72]

Price was accordingly deemed the most accurate indication of those subjective states according to the 'revealed preferences' of consumers. This represented a seemingly elegant empirical solution to the problem of utility / demand as the underlying value elements of previous marginal utility analysis could be eradicated[73], and the egalitarian motivations behind Bentham's original conception discarded. Twentieth century neoclassical economists were subsequently able to overcome 'deficiencies' they perceived in the work of earlier marginalists such as Marshall[74], and able to view any incorporation of utility, as Paul Samuelson determined, as something 'which deserves the impatience of modern economists'[75]. Samuelson was instrumental in resuscitating and reworking Pareto's ideas[76], and this is especially significant because Samuelson's textbook *Economics*, according to Roll, was one of the mostly widely used during the second half of the twentieth century, to the extent it actually reshaped the preoccupations of the discipline[77]. What is important to note here however, is that notions of 'ordinal utility' and 'revealed preferences' are predicated on stifling investigation into any and all motivations associated with consumption / demand.

For with this shift later marginalists, and subsequently neoliberals were able to position the discipline as dealing with tangible, established 'facts', as opposed to merely being reliant upon a certain hypothesis about human nature and society. Both slighted questions about human nature and metaphysics and, representing them as unnecessary distractions impeding the grounded, 'real life' issues of formal economic concerns, then placed themselves above and beyond any need to consider such questions, which were dismissed as the province of other disciplines. On a theoretical level at least, orthodox

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[72] Roll 1992, p.377

[73] Roll notes that in one of his earlier works, *Cours d'Economie Politique* (1896-7), Pareto takes the position 'that the constancy of inequality in the distribution of income reflects inequality of human activity, which is a universal and natural category' (Roll 1992, p.376)

[74] Roll 1992, p.427. Also Mirowski and Hands 2006.

[75] Samuelson cited in O'Neill 1998, fn.19 p.182

[76] The notion of 'revealed preferences' was Samuelson's (1938) contribution, although Mirowski has also written of the 'complexity of the debate' around this period (2006, p.4), and of the various inconsistencies of Samuelson's account, criticisms of which he just largely ignored (Mirowski, 2002).

[77] Roll 1992, pp.488-92. And Mirowski writes that Samuelson was 'most strident in his insistence upon the "scientific" character of neoclassicism' (2002a, p.226).

economics finally began to regard itself as being perfectly value-free. As Mises proudly claimed:

> Because it is subjectivistic and takes the value judgements of acting man as ultimate data not open to any further critical examination, it is itself above all strife of parties and factions, it is indifferent to the conflicts of all schools of dogmatism and ethical doctrine.[78]

The marginalists did not have to dwell on subtleties that led nowhere. As Joan Robinson has pointed out however, they still based their approach on a particular philosophical conception of people as self-seeking egoists[79].

This Hobbesian egoism also supported the marginalists in their quest to avoid formulating any theory of tastes or preferences. Tastes could be treated as 'exogenous', isolated and atomistic. Here need, Xenos notes

> is constructed solely out of the individual's preferences, without any trace of social determination. Marginal utility theory is deliberately unconcerned with the sources of the individual's desires (it stipulates only that such desires exist as empirical fact) or with the process by which people order them (it stipulates only that they do order them) ... For the marginalists, the only issue of any relevance is the fact that a good has entered the realm of the economic because an individual wants it, and expresses that want.[80]

With their supposedly 'natural' laws in place, which were then elevated to the highest expression of 'individual rationality'[81] the marginal economists with their 'ideology to end ideologies'[82] as Robinson terms it, were not concerned that the real world did not equate with the pure mathematical rationality they envisaged. Discrepancies merely illustrated the need for reforms in order to ensure a 'cleaner' operation of the market. As Clarke writes:

> The pure theory offered an abstraction that represented an ideal world against which reality could be measured and proposed reforms could be evaluated. It is therefore no criticism of the marginalist analysis to note that reality does not accord to its abstractions: *insofar as the real world does not accord with*

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[78] Mises cited in O'Neill 1998, p.46

[79] Robinson 1962, p.21 & p.53. Xenos similarly refers to how the marginalists used diminishing marginal utility to proffer 'value free' calculations along with a tacit value-laden conception of human nature: 'needs in the aggregate are infinitely expandable, but economizing individuals are continuously engaged in allocative acts that involve limitations on particular needs, rendering them calculable'. He continues, 'It is the movement from need to need that simultaneously provides for conditions of relative satiety and absolute scarcity - needs are satisfied only as long as there are other, unsatisfied ones to which the individual can turn. Individuals decide that they have had enough of one thing only at the same moment they decide that they want something else even more. Desire - restless, perpetually unfulfilled - underlies the marginalist notion of need' (Xenos 1989, p.70).

[80] Xenos 1989, p.70

[81] Clarke 1983, p.157

[82] Robinson 1962, p.53

> *the abstractions of marginalism it is not economic theory that is in error, but the real world that is in need of reform.*[83]

The marginalist 'solution'

Despite their desire for a 'cleaner operation of the market, early marginalists were more open to government intervention than the earlier political economists, although they stressed this intervention should be minimal and designed to cause the least disturbance to the 'natural' equilibrium. Regulation which might prevent the formation of monopolies was permissible[84], for instance, but if other solutions to problems of price or distribution were followed those prescriptions would overrule the need for the market to 'set value'. And it in this sense the marginalists presented the role of the economist as merely being a 'solicitous statesman'[85] providing useful analysis and occasional corrective advice to ensure the smooth working of the economic 'mechanism'. So while economics was represented as a technical, scientific discipline removed from any concerns about social inequality, it was usually intimated that inequality would (eventually) just be ameliorated by marginalist prescriptions. Economic benefits would 'trickle down'. In the meantime groups who did not ascribe to the marginalist agenda, and sought to trespass on the economic domain only promised, in their view, to act to the detriment of society as a whole. And for the marginalist economists the correct government response to complaints *was not an acceptance of the rights of individuals to lobby government in accordance with any democratic process*; instead, the marginalist doctrine implicitly advocated, Clarke argues, the repression of such complaints:

> class conflict is no longer fundamental to capitalist economic relations, but rather is a superficial disturbance that arises as special interests seek to subvert the competitive process to their own ends. For the economic liberal the formation of classes, and the consequent class conflict, is entirely illegitimate, and the State is required to legislate to prevent the formation of agreements in restraint of trade by means of which classes seek to pursue their ends.[86]

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[83] Clarke 1983, p.165. *My italics.*
[84] Barber 1988, p.203 & p.206
[85] Using Hirschman's analogy, this also once again recalls the popular liberal view of the world as God's 'clock', which although self-operating and repairing still needed judicious tinkering.
[86] Clarke 1983, p.190

Capitalism, democracy, freedom

Macpherson relates in *Human Needs and Politics* (1977) how the 1832 Reform Act (which extended the franchise to seven percent of English adults[87]) was achieved in a climate of elite fear about loss of property and power[88]. Such fears about political unrest were not without grounds (the French revolution still being relatively recent), however Graeme Duncan in *Marx and Mill: Two views of social conflict and harmony* (1973), insists there was never any serious threat. He records that 'reformers' played on such fears 'to push reluctant governments into action'[89], with some English middle class radicals arguing for democracy 'primarily as a means of drawing the working class into society and thus reducing the extent and the dangers of class conflict'[90]. In this it appears the beneficent aims of the Victorians rested on a doctrine of educative control; the idea that if the working class were educated they would come to adopt appropriate behaviour: frugality, restraint, sobriety, industry and deference. Duncan for instance, cites an 1858 editorial in the Manchester Guardian, where education was regarded as having

> made the lower classes more intelligent, more self-reliant, more energetic, has taught them to think more justly of their fellow countrymen, to feel ashamed of their former prejudices, and to acknowledge that it rests with them and not with any Government to ameliorate their social condition.[91]

These docile, disciplined workers[92] were meant to accept the status quo.

It was in this context Marx criticised his liberal contemporary John Stuart Mill for failing to recognise the endemic inequality of capitalism, despite Mill's concern about social issues. As Duncan details, Mill and his followers were 'struggling for the extension of the franchise and other political reforms'[93], but Marx argued that this would not determine

[87] Parliament of New South Wales, Accessed 8/11/8: http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/HistoryResponsibleGovernment

[88] Macpherson for instance, writes that 'classical liberal theory was committed to the individual right to unlimited acquisition of property, to the capitalist market economy, and hence to inequality, and it was feared that these might be endangered by giving votes to the poor' (1977, p.19). Lewis similarly observes how 'With the growth of an industrial working class and recurrent signs of its discontent, there was a natural fear that mass democracy would lead to seizure of the wealth and property of the privileged classes as well as the end of their political dominance' (Lewis 1992, p.22).

[89] Duncan 1973, p.33. Although the Russian revolution of 1917 could have been seen by some, however, as a justification for that fear.

[90] Duncan 1973, p.36. Skidelsky discusses how desire for reform was also connected to evangelism and rejection of egoism (1983, p.42), and Elizabeth Windschuttle positions the 1832 Reform Act as a new alliance between the elite and upper middle classes (Windschuttle 1985, p.2).

[91] Duncan 1973, p.36

[92] Rose 1990, 1992, Gascoigne 2006

[93] Duncan 1973, p.3

political power[94]. Under capitalism real political power was only obtained through the ownership of property, along with an effective validating ideology. Marx saw capitalism, with or without democracy, as simply offering new forms of institutionalised domination and systemic inequality. And for Duncan, to the extent that the vote 'was conceived as both an incentive to good behaviour and as a reward for good conduct - an appropriate gift to men who had demonstrated their virtue, especially their conservatism'[95], Marx's analysis could be considered correct. Certainly by the 1867 Reform Act a new elite confidence could be contrasted against the earlier fears of 1832[96]. (And the system of representative government then instituted still excluded 84% of the adult population[97].)

Clarke points out that liberals consistently dismiss Marx's identification of the structural limitations of democracy vis-à-vis capitalism. From Smith on, he writes, the 'moral justification for capitalism was based fundamentally on the progressive character of the capitalist system'[98]. This 'progressive character' is represented as the freedom to produce and consume free from traditional constraints[99], enabling both political freedom and optimal material outcomes. At the same time, the role of government in this is, ideally, minimal: in *Morality and the Market: Consumer Pressure for Corporate Accountability* (1990) Craig Smith cites Mises, for instance:

> Government means always coercion and compulsion and is by necessity the opposite of liberty. Government is a guarantor of liberty and is compatible with liberty only if its range is adequately restricted to the preservation of economic freedom.[100]

With this denegation of government, liberals promote the benefits of market freedom by selling consumer sovereignty as the optimal 'steering' mechanism[101]. Yet neoliberals such as Milton Friedman have gone even further, claiming an actual symbiosis between capitalism and democratic freedom[102]. In *Myth America: Democracy vs. Capitalism* (2003)

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[94] Marx perversely also criticised Hegel for not recognising the need for universal suffrage, while, of course, still maintaining it was, as Ingram puts it, 'but a pretext for the wealthy to extend their class domination under the rational guise of advancing the common interest' (Ingram 1990, p.17).
[95] Duncan 1973, p.36
[96] In 1867 the franchise was extended to artisans, and in 1885 to workers and agricultural labourers.
[97] Parliament of New South Wales, Accessed 8/11/8:
http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/HistoryResponsibleGovernment
[98] Clarke 1983, p.42. O'Neill observes that Smith believed 'commercial society increases welfare not because of the manner in which it satisfies consumer preferences but despite the way it does so'. Human desires may not necessarily be 'good' but they foster characteristics which are (1998, pp.60-1).
[99] Such as hierarchical laws, guild restrictions and nepotistic government. See O'Neill 1998, p.77.
[100] Mises cited in Smith 1990, p.16
[101] Smith 1990, p.3
[102] Stilwell 2003, p.28

William Boyer details how the myth of this supposed synthesis has become a commonplace feature of the popular imagination, but he strongly disputes such a simplistic association.

The increasing levels of trade from the mid-seventeenth century on did result in a shift in the balance of power from the traditional aristocracy to a wealthy mercantile class. But the horrendous conditions that many of the working class were subject to deteriorated even more dramatically during Industrialisation. The improvement of these conditions in Western countries and the development of Western democratic freedom, only began with the political agitation of the mid-1800s, developed during the late 1800s[103], and seemed to consolidate itself, as Lewis observes, after elite recognition of the working class sacrifices during WW1[104]. In conjunction with an enormous level of popular political activism, it was these factors that contributed to the extension of the franchise, and led to regulations protecting workers, along with supportive welfare system. (Which still had to be strenuously fought for, as Mark Blyth details in *Great Transformations* (2002), in relation to American policies during the 1930s and 40s[105].)

So while, as Slater puts it, 'capitalist development has generally been characterized by the slow extension of formal rights against a background of real disadvantage'[106], these 'formal rights' have occurred separately to the operation of capitalism. There are also indications these early gains are being reversed, not to mention large parts of the world where capitalism has simply not delivered positive outcomes. I have already cited Klein's observations about the need for governments to control free market depredations. She further emphasises how this is particularly vital in relation to global trade, and refers to how the hopes of the development community about the positive benefits of trade and foreign investment have given way to despair:

> Until the mid-eighties foreign corporate investment in the Third World was seen in the mainstream development community as a key to alleviating poverty and misery. By 1996 ... that concept was being openly questioned, and it was recognized that many governments in the developing world were protecting lucrative investments - mines, dams, oil fields, power plants and export processing zones - by deliberately turning a blind eye to egregious rights violations by foreign corporations against their people ... in case after case, foreign corporations were found to be soliciting, even directly contracting, the

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[103] Curren 1982, p.224
[104] Lewis 1992
[105] Blyth 2006, pp.49-95
[106] Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.68

> local police and military to perform such unsavory tasks as evicting peasants and tribespeople from their land; cracking down on striking factory workers; and arresting and killing peaceful protestors - all in the name of safeguarding the smooth flow of trade. *Corporations, in other words, were stunting human development, rather than contributing to it.*[107]

Friedman, Hayek, Keynes: managing 'The Market'

The Great Depression was a sharp rejoinder to marginalist views. And it was in the context of the Great Depression with its unrelieved hardship that Keynes began to doubt the efficacy of the 'self-regulating' market, even though, as Eric Roll documents, Keynes' ideas were initially 'rooted in the Marshallian version of neo-classical economic doctrine'[108]. With his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), Keynes questioned the capacity of the free market to achieve equilibrium in the long run (in the long run 'we are all dead'[109]). He also disputed here a number of philosophical precepts of neoclassical thought, including its adherence to Hume's fact / value distinction[110], as well as its rendition of economics as universally applicable[111]. But Keynes' primary aim was to set in place a new program: he believed unemployment could and *should* be alleviated by using government spending to 'kickstart' the economy in times of depression.

In *A History of Economic Thought* (1992) Roll describes Keynes' effect on policies on a practical political level as unprecedented. There was no 'direct family relationship between Keynes and Roosevelt's New Deal'[112], but the parallels between them were obvious, so despite Keynes's subsequent criticisms of the New Deal, his *General Theory* was also regularly used as a rationalisation for it[113]. The success of both ensured that government fiscal policy using Keynesian demand management strategies (in

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[107] Klein 1999, p.338. *My italics.*
[108] Roll 2002, p.442. Karl Polanyi also positioned marginalism as responsible for the Depression, disparagingly referring to it as 'the corrosive of a crude utilitarianism combined with an uncritical reliance on the alleged self-healing virtues of unconscious growth' (Polanyi 2001 [1944], pp.35).
[109] Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.122
[110] Sheehan discusses Keynes's disagreement with Hume in Keynes's *Treatise on Probability* (1921) and his view about how 'there could in many situations be rational judgments of probability, and these ought to be utilised in determining moral basis for action. These judgments should be used, not in calculations of the social good, but in guiding action in complex and difficult situations in the light of fundamental moral values' (1996, p.53, pp.45-66).
[111] Sheehan 1996, pp.54-5
[112] Roll notes that Roosevelt's New Deal 'evolved in a purely *ad hoc* manner and primarily by men little versed in economic theory of the Keynesian or any other variety' (1992, p.475). Blyth similarly refers to its influence as 'marginal at best' (2002, p.76, fn.92).
[113] Roll 1992, p.475

conjunction with pastoral social welfare programs), eventually came to be regarded as a beneficent and temperate way of promoting equality while improving the living standards of all[114]. With WW2 there was an extraordinary new impetus and capacity to collect statistical data, and as quantitative analysis developed, Western governments began to use data with openly interventionist policies buoyed by the mathematical validity of a new 'science' of 'hard fact', and the 'market' was directly, openly manipulated as never before[115]. Economists increasingly came to utilise mathematical formulae and attempt to apply these to everyday life[116].

Keynes's ideas are often held up as the obverse to marginalism insofar as Keynes acknowledged the inherent failings of the market. Yet Peter Kriesler has observed how 'much that has been labelled as "Keynesian" economics are attempts to derive Keynesian results in neoclassical theory'[117]. Stilwell and Jones also argue that in the academy Keynesian ideas were often only used to support neoclassical prescriptions:

> Keynesianism was introduced into the conventional syllabus, but only at substantial cost to its conceptual autonomy. Its role has been reduced to a subsidiary one of generating recommendations for appropriate government economic policy while the supposed theoretical integrity of the neoclassical system has remained intact.[118]

In *Market Society: Markets and Modern Social Theory* (2001) Slater and Tonkiss too note that 'by the 1950s Keynesian macro-economics had been integrated into a "neoclassical-Keynesian consensus"' which used national accounting figures to calculate, through the marginal increments on a 'Phillips curve', an 'optimal' trade-off between unemployment and inflation[119]. Yet even with this 'neoclassical-Keynesian consensus' (what some have even referred to as a 'statistical theology'[120]), with the lower unemployment rates during the 1950s and 60s, a new neoliberal economic doctrine began to gain prominence. Arguments that inflation rather than unemployment was the primary obstacle or

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[114] Hindess 1987. Also Slater and Tonkiss 2001, pp.122-3. And 'Within a welfarist politics', Slater and Tonkiss observe, 'the right of citizens to meet their basic needs is seen as the substantive corollary to the formal rights of citizenship' (Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.133).
[115] Roll 1992, pp.461-71
[116] Mirowski 2002a
[117] Kriesler 1996, p.217. See also Axel Leijonhufvud 's *On Keynesian Economics and the Economics of Keynes: a Study in Monetary Theory* (1968).
[118] Jones and Stilwell 1986
[119] Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.123
[120] See Nelson's (1997) cynical, opportunistic and strategic apologia for free market doctrine through his presentation of Samuelson's 'Keynesianism' as a 'progressivist' theology.

deterrent to growth, the Phillips curve 'spurious'[121], and the type of government intervention recommended by Keynes simply damaging to long term economic well being, all gained increasing currency.

In a preliminary chapter from their forthcoming *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, Van Horn and Mirowski detail how this new brand of neoliberalism as a doctrinal movement was instituted in the 1940s via a network of like-minded theorists, with Hayek one of its principal organisational architects[122]. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* essay was published in 1944[123]: in the book he at once hints at, dismisses, and elides the importance of government:

> we cannot, within the scope of this book, enter into a discussion of *the very necessary planning which is required to make competition as effective and beneficial as possible.*[124]

Subsequent offers of corporate financial support did help foster an 'appropriate' stance toward government, enabling Hayek to foster networks that became key centres of neoliberal thought -- the Chicago School, and the Mont Pèlerin Society[125]. Other 'quasi-independent' strains of neoclassical economics that played an influential role in the transition from neoclassical to neoliberal economic doctrine included 'German Ordoliberalism, Austrian political economy, Christian Neoliberalism, and so forth'[126]. Slater and Tonkiss discuss the Austrian and Swiss Lausanne 'Schools'[127]. And Mirowski

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[121] Friedman 1988

[122] Van Horn and Mirowski 2005, p.34

[123] This became extremely popular in North America in 1945 when it was published by *Reader's Digest* in a rudimentary abridged version (and later as a cartoon). The *Readers Digest* version is still available through the British right-wing think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs:
http://www.iea.org.uk/record.jsp?type=book&ID=43 Accessed 16 December, 2008
The cartoon version is available on-line from the Ludwig von Mises Institute website: http://mises.org/books/TRTS/ Accessed 16 December, 2008

[124] Hayek 1997 , p.31. *My italics.*

[125] The Volker Foundation was the primary initial source of funding, and Van Horn and Mirowski (2005) details how this funding led to the early concerns about corporate monopolies held by some of the Chicago School's early liberal supporters (Henry Simons) simply being set aside. The focus instead turned to 'guaranteeing the freedom of corporations to conduct their affairs as they wished' (2005, p.33). Later Mirowski notes that the Volker Foundation was motivated by a desire to countermand the 'socialist tendencies they thought had infected economics' (2005 p.86).

[126] Mirowski 2006a, p.463

[127] In *Market Society* (2001) Slater and Tonkiss mention two main schools of neoliberal doctrine, the Austrian and Swiss Lausanne, and the principal difference between them, the notion of 'market clearing', or equilibrium. The Swiss school which developed from Walras and Pareto, sees free market supply and demand able to approach and reach equilibrium, signifying the market's capacity to respond efficiently to a range of competing demands. (Discussing views about equilibrium in North America Mirowski and Hands have observed that 'the third quarter of the twentieth century was not the best of times for Walrasian general equilibrium theory' (Mirowski and Hands 2006, pp.4-5).) The alternative Austrian school (Hayek, Menger and Mises), views equilibrium as deferred insofar as it is

and van Horn note the role of the Cowles Commission and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where Samuelson taught from 1940: military funding played a crucial role in the development of both[128]. A wealth of support - Cold War funding from the military and well-heeled corporate donors - ensured the spreading, concentric spheres of influence of all these different groups; their associated activist think tanks[129], growing number of Centres and Foundations, coupled with the McCarthy era attacks on communism, all combined to nourish, sustain and promote neoclassical / marginalist economic theory. There were a whole range of disputes between the various neoclassical schools[130], but Mirowski also writes that toward the last quarter of the twentieth century these disputes were subsumed under a transnational neoliberal movement with an agenda aimed at instituting a new form of political governance in order to 'foster the spread of "free market" relations'[131]. So while neoliberal thought is often conflated with its neoclassical, liberal antecedents, Van Horn and Mirowski stress the difference is that neoliberalism tacitly regards government as *necessary* to implement market conditions[132], despite the contrary message its rhetoric conveys.

In terms of the more public challenge to Keynesian ideas it was the Chicago School economist Milton Friedman who was the public face and a key player in the political uptake of neoliberal policy prescriptions. His *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) supplied new

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subordinate to the dynamism and constancy of change necessary for 'optimal' market operations: the 'dynamic effects of competition and innovation in markets' (Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.52). Here the focus is more on price as a method of communication enabling effective responses to competing demands: as 'an information signal or system of shared meaning between market actors, rather than as a neutral mechanism that brought supply and demand into alignment. With this move, markets may be seen as rich information networks - even as a kind of "conversation" between buyers and sellers' (Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.53). Enforcing market 'flexibility' and minimising government intervention is presented as the key to success here. (The Mont Pelerin Society website elaborates on this theme: http://www.montpelerin.org/home.cfm).

[128] In a interview Mirowski recently stated that 'military money was largely the initial common denominator: the Office of Scientific Research and Development, the Office of Strategic Services, the Office of Naval Research, the Atomic Energy Commission, the MIT Radiation Lab, the Applied Mathematics Panel, and so forth' (Mirowski 2005, p.85). Mirowski's *Machine Dreams* (2006) supplies an extended account of the strategies and dealings of the neoclassical economists associated with the Cowles Commission, and Samuelson's role in fostering the neoclassical orthodoxy.

[129] With discussion papers supporting 'timely interventions in local political controversies' (Mirowski 2006a, p.463).

[130] Mirowski stresses that 'It is of paramount importance to observe that no single discrete doctrine served as an all-purpose "litmus test" for neoclassical orthodoxy in the immediate postwar era.' (Mirowski 2007, p.1.2). However he notes that differences were mitigated by 1980 as graduates migrated between schools as faculty members (Mirowski 2005, p.91). He notes also how these differences (in relation to consumption / demand theory in particular) formed a conceptual edifice which made the neoclassical doctrine as a whole less vulnerable to criticism (2002).

[131] Mirowski 2005, p.89, p.91-3

[132] Van Horn and Mirowski 2005, p.37

doctrinal precepts, but just as importantly, proved tremendously popular[133]. But what particularly enabled Friedman to gain credence was that by the early 1970s the quasi-Keynesian policies then practiced did not appear able to address the new phenomenon of stagflation, the unprecedented increase in *both* unemployment and inflation[134]. At the time, Friedman's reputation had been buoyed by an opportune empirical prediction of stagflation through a 'Natural-Rate Expectations Augmented Phillips Curve' (which positioned Keynesian theory as responsible for stagflation)[135]. When he claimed he had a new 'scientific' understanding of the way the money supply impacted on demand and how the money supply could be manipulated to generate 'real' economic growth, as opposed to that 'manufactured' by Keynesian policies, his claims were taken seriously. Friedman was also a determined and proficient media performer; as he marketed his 'monetarist' neoliberalism he even argued his policies could have prevented the Great Depression, and for a time his arguments vis-a-vis the money supply even become the new 'it' theory[136]. Here Friedman also provided high profile support for other schools of neoliberalism calling for reduced fiscal intervention on the part of the state[137], private ownership and deregulation, as opposed to public ownership and legislative regulatory controls[138]. And from the 1970s, particularly in the UK under Thatcher and US under Reagan, these policies were represented as being the *only* solution to rising unemployment and inflation[139]. At the same time it was argued that even if government could gain the necessary understanding and knowledge required to run the economy,

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[133] Van Horn and Mirowski note that the book was also regarded as intellectually simplistic, and made no attempt to engage with alternate positions (2005, pp.50-1).

[134] Inflation in Britain for instance, reached 25% in 1975, yet the monetarist's policies were already in place by this point when, as the British Treasury cut government capital works program. As unemployment rose to over 10% in 1981, this was taken as the final confirmation that the Keynesian policies had failed (Barratt Brown 1984, p.71).

[135] Leeson 1996b, p.250

[136] Leeson 1996b, p.252

[137] Slater and Tonkiss write that Friedman's rhetoric about reducing the influence of government found crucial 'political' support from the two other main schools of neoliberal doctrine, the Austrian and Swiss Lausanne schools. Both positioned the market as 'the most efficient means of economic allocation and co-ordination' (Slater and Tonkiss 2001, pp.51-2), and both united in their antipathy towards welfare provisioning in particular. Although frequently referring to the lack of choice in the USSR (Gabriel and Lang 1995, p.15), in this they too were writing against perceived deficiencies in Keynesian demand management strategies. See also Hindess 1987, p.123.

[138] Pusey refers to this as economic rationalism, 'the dogma which says that markets and money can always do better than governments, bureaucracies and the law. There's no point in political debate because all this just generates insoluble conflicts' (Pusey 1991). Slater and Tonkiss describe how both Friedman and Hayek argued governments were failing to cope with a range of contending demands (Slater and Tonkiss 2001, pp.123-5, p.139).

[139] In *Economic Rationalism in Canberra* (1992) Pusey outlines a requisite policy capture in Australia. Democracies in general, were positioned just as not fully able to cope with an increasing range of demands (Crozier 1975).

people's 'rational expectations' account for, and thus counteract and nullify the beneficial intent of government intervention (while also impacting negatively on the freedom of individuals and creating a "culture of dependency"[140]). Subsequently these ideas were widely promulgated via Friedman's 1980 television series, *Free to Choose*, and his popularist best seller of the same name.

In his 2008 Milton Friedman Distinguished Lecture James Galbraith details the disastrous impact of Friedman's policies, and how the American Federal Reserve discarded monetarism as a practical policy tool by the early 1980s[141]. In *The Predator State* (2008) Galbraith also relates how monetarists actually positioned the failure of their policies as a success (due to the subsequent decline in unemployment)[142]. However the principal tactical achievement of the monetarists and other neoliberals has arguably been their very public representation of Keynesian policies as responsible for stagflation. Yet this representation is highly questionable. Mark Blyth's *Great Transformations* (2002) offers a fascinating analysis of the strategies on the part of business along with various political decisions, especially under Nixon, which created the conditions contributing to stagflation, even prior to the turmoil that followed the collapse of the Bretton Woods agreement and the gold standard. Galbraith also details the role the collapse of the gold standard played[143].

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[140] Slater and Tonkiss 2001, pp.139-40

[141] Galbraith writes: 'From 1979, the Federal Reserve formally went over to short-term monetary targets. The results were a cascading disaster: twenty-percent interest rates, a sixty percent revaluation of the dollar, eleven percent unemployment, recession, deindustrialization through the Midwest including here in Ohio, and in Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin, and ultimately the debt crisis of the Third World. In August 1982, faced with the Mexican default and also a revolt in Congress - which I engineered from my perch at the Joint Economic Committee - the Federal Reserve dumped monetary targeting and never returned to it' (2008a, p.5) ... 'the monetarists' recession of 1981-82 was by far the deepest on the postwar record. It was far worse than any inflicted under Keynesian policy regimes' (Galbraith 2008a, p.7). While more recently Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke 'tightened' the money supply (2008a, p.9), he and others offering 'vague and imprecise' variations on Friedman's ideas (2008a, p.5) have proven utterly incapable of accounting for events such as the financial meltdown associated with the subprime mortgage crisis (2008a, p.10). See also Coleman (2007) for a discussion of how monetarism was abandoned in Australia by 1985.

[142] Galbraith 2008, p.40

[143] Galbraith outlines how 'The Bretton Woods rules provided that if the United States ran a trade deficit, other central banks could demand gold in payment, drawing on the formidable gold hoard the United States had accumulated during the two world wars.' However the growing trade deficit meant this system 'could not be sustained'. In 1971, 'Nixon closed the gold window and devalued the dollar'. (2008, p.41) With this, exports became cheaper, and imports more expensive, and 'immediately raised the price, measured in dollars, of commodities traded around the world'. Nixon then instituted price controls, and 'imposed export curbs to prevent U.S. producers from diverting supplies to the more profitable export markets'. Worldwide inflation grew, with oil initially being exempt; 'But that meant oil producers were suffering from inflation in the price of everything they consumed ... in

The curious aspect of all this is the extent to which these issues were sidelined at the time, while Friedman's ideas filtered through to the public at large, and came to dominate public debate, despite being firmly discredited as policy tools by the mid-1980s. Yet Galbraith observes a difference between how neoliberal prescriptions are expounded in the academy, how they are used in political rhetoric, and how they taken up in the policy arena. I will return to this point below. Here I note that in the academy, despite monetarism being discarded as a policy tool, Friedman's influence remained, and served to support neoliberalism more generally[144]. Following Friedman's ascendency Keynesian ideas were relegated to quaint historical footnotes: economics curricula increasingly began to disseminate neoliberal doctrine as economic Truth[145]. (The impact of this trend was only exacerbated in the larger public arena as the doctrine infiltrated high school economics (the take up of which grew rapidly from 1970s)[146].)

Economics as a 'species of social thought' [147]

With neoliberal theory then, individual freedom is predicated on the freedom of the market, which, subject to the steering mechanism of consumer sovereignty, uses price to deliver the *most legitimate* human desires[148]. Human action and behaviour is viewed as quantifiable and all desires morally equivalent. The proto-Hobbesian vision of existence as the war 'of every man, against every man'[149] the promotion of people as asocial, amoral, rationally calculating agents, acting autonomously and against others was only ratified further by the neoliberal adoption of Nash's game theory in the 1970s. Here, Mirowski writes, was a new 'vision', ratified as science, depicting

> everyone as driven to falling back on their own wits, cynically manipulating others, lacking even a trace of communal intelligence or transpersonal commitment[150]

1973, following the Yom Kippur War, the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC) struck back, abruptly quadrupling the oil price. And by then, domestic price controls had been largely lifted, so the shock could not be kept away from American consumers' (Galbraith 2008, p.42).

[144] Galbraith (2000), in his witty account of the denial of various key economic problems associated with monetarism at the 2000 The American Economic Association conference writes that Friedman and his disciples' primary achievements have been to eradicate 'all alternative theories of inflation'.

[145] Mirowski 2005. See also Stilwell (2006) and Jones and Stilwell (1986) for a discussion of the struggle in the Economics Faculty at the University of Sydney.

[146] See for instance Maier 2002, and Cahill 2005

[147] Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.36

[148] O'Neill writes that Hayek, for example, sees 'well-being as preference satisfaction and justifies the market as an institution that best ensures that the preferences of individuals are satisfied' (1998, p.53).

[149] Hobbes cited in Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.30.

[150] Mirowski 2005, p.93. Also 2002a, pp.331-49.

In this 'rational' new neoliberal marketplace those who can pay take precedence over those who cannot, all under the auspices of rhetoric claiming long term ends justifies the means[151]. Economic costs such as the environment and human rights cannot be part of the government or business agenda, because this would gainsay the doctrine of individual consumer sovereignty. Yet at the same time the doctrine of consumer sovereignty, Crocker and Linden write, 'blocks moral deliberation and judgement about consumption choices'[152], effectively permitting business to abdicate moral responsibility and engage in any form of ruthless practice that might improve their 'competitive' edge. In *Morality and the Market: Consumer Pressure for Corporate Accountability* (1990) Craig Smith also comments that this framework permits almost any injustice. Any corporate guilt that might arise can be assuaged because it is 'the market' which is responsible:

> The corporate executives believe in the power of the consumer because this is how ideologies work. Any guilt they may have, about dubious practices that are a consequence of corporate power or merely the recognition of that power, is allayed in the process.[153]

A good example: in 1992 Lawrence Summers, then chief economist of the World Bank, argued that 'the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that'[154]. The reason? The 'demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have a very high income-elasticity'[155]. The memo from which this was leaked was couched in logically rational, amoral, scientific and mathematical language. Delivered in an environment in which such an approach could not only be offered but also *reasonably* defended, it was divorced from any consideration of the meaning or consequences of the economic action in question. Yet while executives may fall back on the cover of a comforting, if hackneyed ideology, Joel Bakan's *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (2004), delineates how corporations, legally considered as entities in themselves, with profits their only legislatively slated aim, are in effect required to disregard moral considerations altogether:

> the corporation can neither recognize nor act upon moral reasons to refrain from harming others. Nothing in its legal makeup limits what it can do to

[151] In her contribution to *Economics and Ethics* (1996), Gill refers to neoliberalism as a 'philosophical position that justifies means in terms of the ends which they are believed to serve' (Gill 1996, p.147).
[152] Crocker and Linden 1998, p.4
[153] Smith 1990, p.39
[154] Summers cited in The Economist February 8, 1992 p.62
[155] Summers cited in The Economist February 8, 1992 p.62

> others in pursuit of its selfish ends, and it is compelled to cause harm when the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs.[156]

Bakan also notes the corporate imperative to attempt to sidestep or bypass democratic regulatory 'restrictions' as well:

> Because regulations reduce profitability, strategies to remove them make good business sense. The executive who, out of principled concern for the integrity of the democratic process, refuses to be involved in political influence, fails his or her shareholders, as well as the corporation's legal mandate to protect its best interests. The job of a corporate executive is not to promote democracy but to manage its uncertainties and avoid the obstacles it presents.[157]

The Art of Exercising Power

Neoliberal doctrine clearly 'speaks' to the corporate arena, and the legal status of corporations as 'persons' compliments and furthers that doctrine, particularly insofar as corporations become the perfect Hobbesian actors. I have also noted Mirowski's arguments about how neoliberalism seeks to use government to rigorously promote a free market agenda, even as it attacks government intervention per se. I have further noted the neoliberal capture of the economics discipline in the academy. However I mentioned earlier the distinction Galbraith has drawn between the views promoted in the academy, generalised political rhetoric, and actual policy. Galbraith argues that in the North American political arena, although Democrat and Republican party rhetoric celebrates the benefits of the 'free' market and deregulation, in actuality both have practiced what he terms a distorted quasi-*Keynesian* intervention, coupled with strategic deregulation[158]: 'free' market doctrine is now only used as a 'legitimating myth'[159]. Furthermore, due to the disastrous effects of the Reagan-era policies Galbraith believes that in the practical policy arena economic conservatives are no longer regarded as having credibility:

> The economic conservative still reigns supreme in the academy and on talk shows, but in the public realm, he is today practically null and void. He does not exist. And if he were to resurface today in the policy world, offering up the self-confident doctrines of 1980, he would be taken seriously by no one. Today in the great policy house of conservatives, there are only lobbyists and the

[156] Bakan 2004, p.60.
[157] Bakan 2004, pp.101-2
[158] For instance, in 1999 Congress under the Democrats repealed the Glass-Steagall Act (1934). This allowed commercial, as well as investment banks to engage in investment transactions. The type of unregulated lending associated with the 'subprime' mortgage crisis subsequently exploded, and the safety net protecting savings vanished.
[159] '... something to be repeated to schoolchildren but hardly taken seriously by those on the inside' (Galbraith 2008, p.xi).

> politicians who do their bidding. There are slogans and sloganeers. There are cronies and careerists.[160]

Galbraith's concern is to identify who benefits from the government policies and intervention that actually does take place. His comments provide a clue, and in this the differentiation between his view, and Mirowski's, is not as great as first appears.

I have outlined how as a philosophy and a practical doctrine of government marginalist and neoliberal 'free' market ideas operate under false pretences. Over a century ago Marshall acknowledged, even if he buried that acknowledgement in footnotes, that marginalism aimed at improving already energetic British national interests at the expense of others[161]. Hertz notes similar strategies in America:

> Woodrow Wilson's proclamation that "the world must be made safe for democracy" has been presented as the driving ideology behind U.S. foreign policy for most of the last century. This is clearly misleading ... Throughout the last century, the United States has cloaked a foreign policy based on trade considerations, and centred on safeguarding private economic interests in a veil of a concern for democracy.[162]

The difference between marginalism and neoliberalism is that neoliberals have sought to turn their practices of government into a bureaucratic art form catering to transnational corporations who have in effect largely abandoned national affiliations altogether.

Bourgeois prosperity of the 1800s was built on the back of slavery and a range of other colonising practices (evident in terms of the trade in tea / opium, sugar and Indian cloth for instance). Today's privileged Western consumers, and the multinational companies who supply them, likewise benefit from the oppressive labour practices and labour relations experienced by workers in poorer non-Western countries, and even within those Western countries themselves:

> According to UN Development Programme data, between the 1960s and 1990s, the income of the richest 20 per cent in the world grew from 70 per cent to 85 per cent of the world total, while the share of the poorest one fifth fell from 2.3 per cent to 1.4 per cent.[163]

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[160] Galbraith 2008, p.5: 'principled conservatives are guilty of taking the myths they helped create too seriously, and to sophisticated people, that makes them look a bit foolish' (2008, p.7).

[161] Robinson 1962, pp.65-6 & pp.124-9

[162] Hertz 2003, pp.90-1. Hertz also lists a range of instances of US government industrial espionage on behalf of US based corporations, along with numerous other examples of corporate / government malfeasance (2003, pp.72-90).

[163] Gabriel and Lang 1995, p.25

In 2006 World Bank researcher, Branko Milanovic, argued that these glaring inequalities which exist on a global level are getting worse, not better[164]. Even more recently, he has claimed that earlier statistics may have actually underestimated the extent of the problem[165]. This 'free' market is not free, but tied to systems of constraints and exploitation that are all too illustrative of the degree of inequality inherent in the capitalist system. The neoliberal doctrine of an ideal 'free' market controlled by price delivering optimal solutions exists in an era when multinationals have the power to dominate nations, and, in fact, often gross far more than many nations. Meanwhile, Klein has noted how multinational corporate power has been brought to bear in order to elude regulation on an international scale:

> Centuries of democratic reforms that had won greater transparency in government suddenly appeared ineffective in the new climate of multinational power ... Disillusionment with the political process has been even more pronounced on the international stage, where attempts to regulate multinationals through the United Nations and trade regulatory bodies have been blocked at every turn.[166]

John Kenneth Galbraith, Baran and Sweezy, and Mandel, have all likewise drawn attention to how markets can be subverted and controlled, prices set, and political patronage obtained 'so as to evade market competition altogether'[167]. In the context of the new global marketplace Hertz too records a range of instances of US government industrial espionage on behalf of US based corporations[168], along with numerous other examples of corporate / government malfeasance[169] (and this was even prior to the subprime mortgage fiasco). Governments, she wrote in 2003, are now also being forced to 'tout for business' via 'corporate welfare':

> In 1999 state and local governments in the United States gave businesses over $1.7 billion in tax rebates and subsidies ... [170]

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[164] Milanovic 2006

[165] Milanovic's most recent research shows that global inequality is worse than even he previously realised: 'new numbers show global inequality to be significantly greater than even the most pessimistic authors had thought. Until the last month, global inequality, or difference in real incomes between all individuals of the world, was estimated at around 65 Gini points – with 100 denoting complete inequality and 0 denoting total equality, with everybody's income the same – a level of inequality somewhat higher than that of South Africa. But the new numbers show global inequality to be 70 Gini points – a level of inequality never recorded anywhere' (2008).

[166] Klein 1999, p.341

[167] Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.22

[168] Hertz 2003, pp.72-6

[169] Hertz 2003, pp.76-90. Then there are the more 'straightforward' cases of corporate malfeasance: Enron 2001, WorldCom 2002, One-Tel 2001, HIH 2001, National Textiles 2000, and so on ...

[170] 'Study after study reveals no statistical evidence that business incentives actually create jobs' (Hertz 2003, p.67). Despite this, 'Corporations effectively auction off promises of new jobs, infrastructure

The $700 billion North American government subsidisation of the financial sector now renders this $1.7 billion insignificant. Yet with hindsight it appears such a predictable outcome of the neoliberal agenda. For James Galbraith has recently stressed, despite the way free market rhetoric has been (ab)used, corporations were never in favour of the 'free' market at all:

> In the real world, the autonomous individual is not the active agent who matters most. The business enterprise, the company, the corporation is. And companies do everything they can to take advantage of human changeability. They seek to control markets, even to replace them altogether. And often they succeed ... the 'free' market is actually a threat, a source of uncertainty and risk. To the greatest extent possible, therefore, it is made to disappear. Only the fiction that the company operates in a market is maintained, for the obvious benefit of shielding the corporation of close scrutiny of its actual business methods.[171]

For Galbraith, the 'political deliberations' operative in North America over the last few years, the neoliberal rhetoric, coupled with what he calls a quasi-Keynesian government intervention, have not been about encouraging any 'level playing field', let alone a more favourable distribution of wealth, or even an attempt to maintain the national interest. What has occurred, he writes, has simply been a vigorous, brazen, and sophisticated predatory, crony corporate capitalism:

> The administration, following the installation of George W. Bush, became little more than an alliance of representatives from the regulated sectors - mining, oil, media, pharmaceuticals, corporate agriculture - seeking to bring the regulatory system entirely to heel. *And to this group was added another, overlapping to some degree, of equal importance: those who saw the economic activities of the government not in ideological terms but merely as opportunities for private profit on a continental scale.*[172]

In such circumstances neoliberal rhetoric about 'freedom' only serves, as Burchill terms it, as 'an "art of government" which uses economic thought as an organising force'[173] in a manner that serves to maintain a docile, self-regulating, compliant and 'flexible' working population. So here we can consider Rose and Miller's point that

> The language that constitutes political discourse is more than rhetoric. It should be seen, rather, as a kind of intellectual machinery or apparatus for

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investment, and economic growth to the highest international bidder, declining to move to or threatening to pull out of countries whose employment costs and taxes are too high, or where standards are too stringent or subsidies and loans not forthcoming. Globally, dominant companies increasingly call the shots, able to move money freely, deciding for themselves where to invest and produce, where to pay taxes, and playing these potential sites off against one another ... National governments appear increasingly impotent in the face of the giant corporations' (2003, pp.60-1).

[171] Galbraith 2008, pp.22-3

[172] Galbraith 2008b. *My italics.*

[173] Burchill 1991, p.29

> rendering reality thinkable in such a way that it is amenable to political deliberations.[174]

One notable feature of the subprime crisis is that so few economists saw it coming[175]. Yet the scale of it is just so extraordinary. Ben Bernanke, current Chairman of the Federal Reserve, even as recently as 2007 made complacent pronouncements about the North American economy[176]. His theoretical affiliations are evident however. Speaking at Friedman's 90th birthday in 2002, Bernanke, touted as an expert on the Great Depression, celebrated Friedman's analysis of, and solution to it:

> As everyone here knows, in their Monetary History Friedman and Schwartz made the case that the economic collapse of 1929-33 was the product of the nation's monetary mechanism gone wrong. Contradicting the received wisdom at the time ... Friedman and Schwartz argued that 'the contraction is in fact a tragic testimonial to the importance of monetary forces ... Let me end my talk by slightly abusing my status as an official representative of the Federal Reserve. I would like to say to Milton and Anna: Regarding the Great Depression. You're right, we did it. We're very sorry. But thanks to you, we won't do it again.[177]

It is harsh to say Bernanke has been proven clueless. But as Skidelsky recently put it, 'mainstream theory has no explanation of why things have gone so horribly wrong'[178]. Nevertheless even prior to the crisis the consensus supported intervention that favoured the wealthy, and accounts that celebrated the 'free' market overlooked or disregarded the extent of the power of elite networks, liaisons and alliances to facilitate and enable elite transgressions and subtle forms of resistance to the political, legal and economic constraints that impede their aims[179]. This occurred, and still occurs at a level far removed from any conspiracy[180], and is still evident betwixt ethical and honest practices and concerns. The more ethical and redistributive Keynesian theorists could still be warned here: to hope that governments are 'uninfected' by the power of business and established elites, and can achieve positive social outcomes in the face of that power ...

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[174] Rose and Miller 1992, p.179. See also Rose 1992.
[175] Galbraith 2008c
[176] Galbraith 2008a
[177] cited in Galbraith 2008a
[178] Skidelsky 2008
[179] Hindess (1993, p.374) observes how the separation of economy / state / society sets in place a far too rigid distinction. The state is not a structural entity separate to the economy; they are entwined through interpersonal networks, connections and alliances. See also Hindess's incisive report for the Democratic Audit of Australia, *Corruption and Democracy in Australia* 2004.
[180] Considered even in terms of a 'internally competing, peacefully disunited ruling class' (Therbon 1992, p.53).

well, it is possible, but unfortunately, there are too many instances where government actions have supported and reflected predatory interests.

In relation to consumption specifically, the beauty of liberal economic theory was that it validated consumption, enabling an acceptance of improved material conditions across a range of classes, thus facilitating new forms of human creativity, untrammelled by hierarchical feudal constraints. It gave credence and validity, though selectively, to the rich multiplicity and variety of human desires. And when I say selectively here, I am again referring to the gender bias against women's consumption that I mentioned in the previous chapter. Lauding capitalism, liberal economists celebrate consumption as the means by which 'sovereign individuals' can rationally pursue their individual needs. At the same time, orthodox theory, Slater notes, generally regards those needs as completely distorted and misshapen by irrational factors external to the economic equation, such as advertising and fashion[181]. This inconsistent stance is implicitly gendered, and yet again features the rational, amoral *man* versus the irrational, manipulated *woman*[182]. It is this kind of disordered and illogical unpredictability academic economists have viewed as a problem they would prefer to scythe from their antiseptic model of choice.

The tragedy of the theoretical predilections of liberal political economists from Hobbes through to Bentham and the marginalists was, Appleby concludes, that their theory trammelled conceptions of the human and human creativity into a narrow individualism, dominated by the rigid structure of the market, and devoid of any of the care and connectedness to human culture and the environment which was the font of that creativity in the first place:

> Variety and abundance became a permanent feature of western society, revealing the fecundity of human inventiveness, the insatiability of human curiosity, the splendour of human talents and the inaccuracy of aristocratic assumptions about ordinary people's abilities. Yet the reigning social theories assumed that human beings invariably sought gain through the equally invariant invisible hand of the market. Scholarly light narrowed to a laser beam directed at the workings of rational choice, utility maximization and competition for

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[181] Slater 1997, pp.49-50

[182] In *Social Communication in Advertising* (1986), Leiss, Kline & Jhally note this dualism, and how while many economists argue that advertising is a 'valuable contributor to the efficiency and freedom of the market economy' (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1986, p.4), others believe it simply disables the unimpeded freedom of individuals (Leiss et al 1986, p.16).

> scarce resources while the rich diversity of human personality found no place in social theory.[183]

It is in this context that thinking about consumption and material culture as something having and reflecting values becomes so important. There are evident, structural flaws connected to capitalism. Are we are now seeing the demise of neoliberal doctrine? Perhaps not ... its historical roots run deep, its organisational structure is well established, and its various incarnations have proven enormously resilient in the past. Meanwhile the critical issue of addressing climate change not only remains unresolved, its importance also appears to have been displaced. And ethical consumption? The idea of using ethical consumption as an emancipatory tool also buys right back in to the basic premise of the supposed free market system -- it is obviously not an option for those subject to the power imbalance of 'the market', where the ability to pay is the sole mechanism determining whether desires should be satisfied and 'asymmetries of power'[184] are consistently disregarded[185]. However while neoliberals have fostered the fallacy of a 'level-playing field' that effectively just promotes a 'new' kind of naturalised feudalism where monetary might equals right, *to ignore the values given expression by consumption is to buy right back into the neoliberal paradigm, in a more damaging way, that ascribes to and validates the workings of the whole philosophy.* Goods have origins, using them has effects, and disposing of them has consequences. To ignore this ensures a sad deficit in any kind of social analysis.

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[183] Appleby 1993, p.171

[184] O'Neill 1998, p.64

[185] Craig Smith discusses consumer sovereignty as 'the rationale for capitalism' and argues that 'The legitimacy of such a system rests on whether and what decisions are made in markets. Hence the argument for ethical purchase behaviour becomes an argument for capitalism' (1990, p.3). And my thesis, that a range of inequitable conditions can improve via 'purchase votes' lies dangerously close to the neoliberal application of the concept of 'consumer sovereignty', which is used to absolve the 'amoralism' of the market.

5

Marx

> It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids ...
>
> (Marx 1985, p.83)

In the previous chapter I broached Marx's critique of capitalism's touted promise of freedom - this chapter develops that account while considering in more detail Marx's view of need, consumption, and how this might relate to ethical consumption specifically. Marx's work in relation to consumption and need is of course important in its own respect, but in the introduction I also mentioned the tendency of many strains of social theory to regard consumption with disdain. Such conceptions have been taken as a given; further inquiry is deemed unnecessary. I shall examine some of these accounts in subsequent chapters, however this chapter is an important precursor to my later discussion, insofar as Marx's views have informed many of these later accounts. For following in Marx's theoretical wake a standard view of consumption is that it is primarily responsible for sustaining capitalism. Any expression of identity through consumption in this conception is artificial, imposed by the distortions of the capitalist system. Here Marx maintained the earlier longstanding hostility on the part of conservatives toward consumption, while turning it on its head: consumption was not symptomatic of any threat to the social order, simply an expression of its enduring actuality.

In her *The Theory of Need in Marx* (1974), Agnes Heller writes that while Marx's work has been taken up in relation to many different concerns (although principally with reference to class conflict and inequality), there has been comparatively little research on how Marx viewed human need. Yet as Kate Soper observes in *On Human Needs: Open and Closed Theories in a Marxist Perspective* (1981), need is central to Marx's theory as a whole --

while there are many different ways of interpreting Marx, a common thread that underlies every interpretation is some explicit or implicit view of need, insofar as capitalism is perceived as failing to fully meet human need, and so must eventually be surpassed by a system which can do so more successfully. For as Soper notes, the 'scientific' or economic determinist aspects of Marx's work, as well as that which evinces a more philosophical / anthropological perspective concerned with values, both still rely on the existence of abjectly *dissatisfied* needs. In relation to the economistic versions of Marxism for instance, Soper writes that 'whatever the sketchy nature of its outlines, this humanist 'anthropology' lies 'as a background to the economic analysis, always perceptible but seldom remarked upon'[1].

Soper and Heller both position need as a central issue for Marx, yet as Heller points out, while the term permeates his conceptual vocabulary, the detail of his argument is spread quite diffusely throughout his work. Meanwhile, Heller writes, Marx 'never actually defines the concept of need itself'[2]. A significant proportion of my analysis in this chapter is centred around Heller's discussion of Marx's theory of needs, Soper's *On Human Needs* (1981), and Patricia Springborg's *The Problem of Human Needs and the Critique of Civilization* (1981). Soper and Springborg both view Marx quite differently to Heller, and Soper is actually quite scathing of the position Heller takes. But one reason Heller's account has proven useful for my purposes is that in actually discussing Marx's understanding of need at length she enables me to draw out various inconsistencies and tensions in relation to Marx's account of need, which are too often glossed over, with the questions they raise remaining unexplored. Heller attempts to reconcile these inconsistencies, I believe unconvincingly (as with Soper). But what Heller's explication of Marx does facilitate is a challenge to all interpretations which take Marx at 'face value', as simply condemning the 'need' that occurs or is expressed through consumption, and who then employ him as an epistemological touchstone on which to support their own similar claims. In this chapter then, I briefly outline a standard interpretation of Marx's critique of consumption and capitalism, then move on to a discussion of Heller's more specific analysis of Marx's account of need, before considering how his work might actually relate to ethical consumption per se.

[1] Soper 1981, p.33
[2] Heller 1974, p.23

Marx on capitalism and political economy

Marx refuted the economic liberalism of political economy by arguing that, in contrast to the liberal belief that capitalism offers the greatest degree of material wealth and freedom in which to produce and consume, that such 'freedoms' are illusory. Labour is coerced into selling itself for less than the value of what it produces, and Marx believed that workers, although 'formally free', really have no choice but to sell their labour as a commodity in a manner that sustains life, but impoverishes the rich potential of our human capacity to fruitfully engage with and beneficially transform both the world and ourselves:

> Political economy, this science of *wealth*, is therefore simultaneously the science of renunciation, of want, of *saving* - and it actually reaches the point where it *spares* man the *need* of either fresh *air or physical* exercise. This science of marvellous industry is simultaneously the science of *asceticism and* its true ideal is the *ascetic* but *extortionate* miser and the *ascetic* but *productive* slave.[3]

Yet despite his critique of the human costs of capitalism, Marx was also effusive in his praise for the material developments it delivered[4], which as he details in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, is a result of the truly authentic engaged human activity of shaping our environment in accordance with our needs. This interaction with the environment was what Marx regarded as the essential quality of being human, as through labour, and through need, people altered objects and their environment and so shaped not only the world, but in the process also transformed themselves[5]. As Patricia Springborg recounts in *The Problem of Human Needs and the Critique of Civilization* (1981), for Marx,

> It is in desire that man comes to know himself, at first negatively, as a being to which what it needs is lacking; and then positively as he becomes aware of the being that he is and what it means to complete the lack and satisfy his needs. In this way, these physical needs which he shares with the animals become the opportunity for him to distinguish himself from other animate existence by his capacity for self-consciousness and rational thought.[6]

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[3] Marx 1968, p.150

[4] Capitalism has, as Marx put it, 'accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades' (Marx and Engels 1985, p.83).

[5] Marx 1968, pp.111-14. As Abercrombie, Hill & Turner put it, 'Human beings are defined by their active appropriation and transformation of nature through their labour. At the ontological level, therefore, Marx saw human individuals as agents who, in transforming their environment, necessarily transform themselves' (1986, p.7). See also Miller 1994.

[6] Springborg 1981, p.3

To this extent then, Marx acknowledged the 'all-round civilizing influence' of capitalism, insofar as even within the capitalist market system, people attempt, through production and consumption, to satisfy and develop their needs[7]. As Springborg notes, Marx in fact 'explicitly condemned utopian primitivism' labelling such perspectives as promoting

> the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilization, the regression to the *unnatural* simplicity of the *poor* and crude man who has few needs and who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even reached it.[8]

On this point, as Kate Soper stresses, Marx did not have any quarrel with the political economist's positive view of the material gains generated through production:

> Marx's attack on Smith and Ricardo could be said to be directed not so much against their faith in production, which indeed he regarded as a definitely enlightened aspect of their thought (as opposed to the nostalgic-regressive character of romantic critiques of capitalism), as to their failure to appreciate that the capitalist mode of production was itself but an historical and limited form of that productivity, whose barriers would be progressively overcome with the emergence of socialism and passage to communism.[9]

So, while acknowledging the positive aspects of capitalism, Marx also viewed it as a transitional societal form. Although capitalism as an economic system promotes forms of human creativity, he believed that under capitalism human ingenuity and resourcefulness would increasingly become foreshortened and misshapen, because this creativity takes place within the market system, and is forced to be amenable to and trammelled within its constraints:

> His labour is therefore not voluntary but coerced; it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another.[10]

For Marx, due to the profit imperative, the free, creative activity of labour would increasingly become constrained, and non-market, non-profit forms of creativity discouraged and suppressed, as under capitalism, goods come to be deemed valuable only according to how they are measured in monetary terms. As Heller relates,

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[7] Springborg 1981, p.2
[8] Marx 1968, pp.133-4. Springborg 1981, p.2.
[9] Soper 1981, p.23
[10] Marx 1968, pp.110-11

> Use values that do not represent exchange value cease to be objects of production. Capitalism "quantifies" all its objective expressions and produces them (as it also produces the needs directed towards them) only if it is "profitable" to do so ... [it] quantifies the complexly qualitative world of human needs, turns it into quasi-exchange value and renders it "purchasable"; all qualitative needs that can be neither quantified nor purchased are inhibited.[11]

So despite the historically situated and transformative view of needs apparent in Marx's thought as a whole, even the increasing number of goods produced under capitalism cannot be seen to represent genuinely satisfying needs or desires. As Heller elucidates, citing Marx to support her point,

> Capitalism is the pimp that by constantly producing new objects creates an unending stream of new needs which make people prostitute themselves. The numerical growth of needs will never be able to become *true* wealth, because it is merely a *means* serving an alienated force, alien to individual human beings, i.e. the expansion of capitalist production: "The extension of products and needs becomes the ingenious and calculating slave of inhuman, artificial and imaginary cravings".[12]

For Marx the failings of this system meant that it eventually *must* be surpassed by a system responsive to a more diverse range of human needs. For the difference under socialism, as Springborg observes, is that

> Man under socialism will be for Marx a man rich in needs, but these will spring from the unfolding of his latent powers and potentialities and not from the dictates of an economic system.[13]

In Marx's thought then, the desire for commodities is envisaged as existing in and contributing to an egoistic world whereby people only become increasingly alienated from each other, and only interested in their own individual concerns:

> The world of commodity exchange is the world of the universality of egoism: that of personal interest. The subjects of exchange are indifferent to each other; they stand in relation to each other only for the realisation of their personal interests: as regards the "need for other people" (which as we know, Marx considered to be the highest and "most human" need), the reduction is total.[14]

The consumer sovereignty that also serves as the liberal justification for capitalism, is not just inadequate, then, but, as with the supposed freedom of labour, wholly illusory. As Marx puts it, 'in the depths, entirely different processes go on, in which this apparent

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[11] Heller 1974, p.55
[12] Heller 1974, p.50
[13] Springborg 1981, p.2
[14] Heller 1974, p.64

individual equality and liberty disappear'[15]. The lack of freedom evident in the capitalist system of production is certainly not compensated for or ameliorated by any freedom to consume, at least not in any 'real' way:

> Economic theory has, in spite of its lipservice to economic freedom, eliminated real freedom from its image of man by maintaining that perfect consciousness and knowledge permits only one, unequivocally determined kind of action, that is, action which leads to the maximization of material gains measured in terms of money.[16]

So it seems clear this interpretation lends itself to a rigorous castigation of material gains and 'wants', as opposed to some more 'authentic' need. Writing in this tradition, Macpherson, for instance, has noted that the capitalist system of production is such,

> that for most people, their productive labour cannot itself be regarded as fulfillment or development of their capacities. Fulfillment and development of individual capacities become, therefore, increasingly a matter of the development and satisfaction of wants for all kinds of material and, in the broadest sense aesthetic or psychic goods.[17]

Yet given that Marx also celebrated the developing richness of human needs, even under capitalism, when thinking about consumption within capitalist society, how is it possible to clearly reconcile what needs met by consumption might be regarded as acceptable, civilising, human, and real? As opposed to 'cravings' which are misshapen?

Natural, necessary and socially produced needs

Clarifying Marx's understanding of need in any definitive manner is difficult, because as I noted previously, Heller writes that even though 'Marx uses the concept of need in order to make definitions ... he never actually defines the concept of need itself'[18]. Heller does, nevertheless, attempt to pin down a number of different formulations Marx uses when discussing needs, and the first of the terms she identifies is 'natural', as opposed to 'socially produced needs'. This distinction, she argues, is crucial to Marx's whole approach, but is also deeply problematic since, as Heller stresses, Marx believed there are no endogenous, or purely *natural* human needs. In contrast to the stereotypical neoliberal rhetoric featuring autonomous, sovereign consumers, for Marx, needs come about in the context of and through interaction with others and with the environment. And although Marx acknowledged the existence of physical / biological needs, as Heller

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[15] Marx 1974, p.247
[16] Marx cited in Holbrook 1977, p.183
[17] Macpherson 1975, pp.30-1
[18] Heller 1974, p.23

details, this too is a *social* phenomenon, and the reduction of human need to its purely physical / biological aspect was *anathema* to Marx[19]. One of Marx's main criticisms of the prescriptions of political economy, in fact, was that this is what their ideas would increasingly reduce human needs to[20]. As Michael Schudson writes in his contribution to *Ethics of Consumption: the Good Life, Justice and Global Stewardship* (1998),

> For Marx, the frightening invention of capitalism is not the creation of artificial or new needs but the emergence of a concept that there *is* such a thing as a purely physical or biological need. Other social systems had treated human beings as social entities, not biological machines ... Only capitalism conceived of people as raw material and only capitalists dared calculate the minimum amount it would take to keep workers alive and healthy enough to work in factories and reproduce in families the next generation of labourers.[21]

So when Heller points out that in *Capital*, Marx also contrasts 'natural needs' with 'necessary needs', natural needs being needs for physical survival such as "food, clothing, fuel and housing", and necessary needs being related to the 'degree of civilization', 'habits', and the 'historical and moral element'[22], she is careful to stress that Marx viewed 'necessary needs' as social, whereas 'natural needs' serve just to maintain life, but are still more than animal needs. Heller notes the *social* aspect of need is the crucial factor in all of these classifications[23], and she concludes that the distinctions Marx was making were heuristic[24]. Yet while Heller declares that this was a 'descriptive concept', but also a necessary one[25], Kate Soper implies that to qualify Marx's formulation of need in this way is pointless:

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[19] For Marx, 'needs aimed merely at survival cannot form a general, historical-philosophical group of needs which is independent' (Heller 1974, p.29).

[20] Marx 1968, pp.106-19, p.147-50: 'Self-renunciation', he writes, 'the renunciation of life and all human needs, is its principal thesis'.

[21] Schudson 1998, p.252

[22] Heller 1974, p.30

[23] 'If we state that the structure of need as a whole can only be interpreted in its correlation with the totality of social relations (and a quotation from Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* will prove this point), then it follows that only socially produced needs exist, and "natural needs" (whose mode of satisfaction changes the need itself) also have this "socially produced" character' (Heller 1974, p.31).

[24] Heller also observes that in the *Grundrisse* Marx distinguishes between two sorts of need under capitalism, insofar as "a historically created need has taken the place of the natural one" (Marx cited in Heller 1974, p.30). However the overall thrust of his work seems to be towards the social aspect of need, because while there was a change in the concept of 'necessary needs' between *Grundrisse* and the third volume of *Capital* (Heller 1974, p.31), and whereas in the *Grundrisse* Marx seemed to distinguish between needs 'created by society' and 'natural' needs, in Marx's thought overall Heller argues that '"Necessary" needs *develop*, historically, they are not dictated by mere survival; the cultural element in such needs, the moral element and custom, are decisive, and their satisfaction is an organic part of the "normal" life of people belonging to a particular class in a given society' (Heller 1974, p.33). See also Soper 1981, p.88.

[25] Heller 1974, p.33

> Hunger is still hunger, as Marx admits; biological drive is biological drive, but only in an abstract sense that has no concrete reference, and tells us nothing about the specifically human experience of it, since that experience is integral with the mode of its gratification.[26]

Commodity fetishism

In this interpretation nevertheless, distinguishing between 'natural' and socially produced' needs seems to be merely a matter of degree. Yet Heller also doesn't dwell on commodity fetishism, the process whereby needs, in Marx's view, become warped. As I mentioned earlier, for Marx, a key aspect of capitalism was that the inequitable nature of the system was concealed because, as Slater puts it, 'The true source of value - human labour - is not visible'[27]. As the processes involved in the making of commodities are clouded or mystified, commodities come to be regarded as something other than human products. Rather than being merely a result of human labour and having value only because of that labour, reified, almost god-like qualities, values and meanings begin to appear as inherent in the commodity itself[28]. In a futile attempt to recover, within themselves, those powers taken away by the production process, people feel impelled to purchase more and more goods, whatever the disjunction between the use, exchange and labour value of the commodity might be[29]. Commodities become so seductive and irresistible that they become responsible for sustaining a system that only spirals down to ever worsening modes of exploitation:

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[26] Soper 1981, p.88

[27] Slater 1997, p.111

[28] 'The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him (Marx 1968, p.108).

[29] As I shall discuss in subsequent chapters, later thinkers have extended the power of this process as a way of explaining the longevity of capitalism by arguing that as capitalism has developed, the process of commodity fetishism has escalated to a point where human powers and need for value have been displaced onto things in a way that has become increasingly inescapable. For instance, Dupré argues that under late capitalism fetishisation impacts on every aspect of life: 'This alienating tendency turned into a real fetishism of commodities only when the production of exchange value pervading all of modern culture converted every aspect of it into a commodity. For such a total reification of life to take place, the commodity economy first had to gain control over the entire production process and to transform mental attitudes as well as methods of production and distribution. In earlier stages of capitalism this "economic mystification" existed only with respect to money and interest bearing . . . Modern capitalism has abandoned this fetishization of a particular substance in favor of the abstract category of exchange value. In elevating exchangeability into the sole standard of economic profit, it has universalized the fetishist attitude that was once limited to a single aspect of the production system' (Dupré 1983, p.48). Yet as I shall detail in the following chapter, this interpretation elides the importance Marx placed on the eventual, inevitable, supercession of capitalism, and so goes against the overall tenor of his work. See also Clarke 1983, p.68.

> Under private property their significance is reversed: every person speculates on creating a *new* need in another, so as to drive him to fresh sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to seduce him into a new mode of *enjoyment* and therefore economic ruin. Each tries to establish over the other an *alien* power, so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish need. The increase in the quantity of objects is therefore accompanied by an extension of the realm of alien powers to which man is subjected, and every new product represents a new *potentiality* of mutual swindling and mutual plundering ... [30]

In discussing Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism, Patricia Springborg argues that the concept ineluctably leads to the conclusion that Marx was tacitly, but also quite definitively proposing the existence of non-genuine, illusory needs. She states

> throughout the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* as well as *Capital* itself we find ourselves constantly reminded that capitalism perpetuates itself precisely by treating articles of use as bearers of wealth, thus persuading people to produce, exchange and accumulate them in a volume and at a rate quite unrelated to their genuine needs. Although this argument is nowhere to my knowledge explicated in these terms, Marx's critique of capitalism would be meaningless if we did not assume it. In other words, the whole thrust of his distinction between use value and exchange value serves to remind us that whatever the mechanisms may be that allow us to inculcate a demand for the ever-increasing flow of commodities that capitalism produces, they stand in stark contrast to the needs of man under socialism.[31]

Marx's argument as a whole depends on the idea that capitalism fails to adequately meet human needs and therefore *must* be surpassed by a system that can do so more successfully. The continued existence of the system is explained with reference to people not fully registering its dynamics and not realising that it simply does not satisfy some deeper, more real need. But what, specifically, are these real needs capitalism does not fulfill? For Heller argues quite definitively that according to the terms of Marx's own theoretical framework there can be no non-genuine needs:

> "imaginary" needs do not exist. Whether needs are "normal" or whether they are "artificial" (using the words negatively) depends completely upon the value judgments with which we define "normality". However, even if we sought a so-called "objective" criterion we would only be able to conclude that, at any time, "normal" needs are those which individuals deem to be such; "sophisticated" or "unnatural" needs, on the other hand, are those which the majority regards as such. The concept of "artificial" needs is ambiguous even in Marx.[32]

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[30] Marx 1968, p.147. Also Springborg 1981, p.95.

[31] Springborg 1981, pp.1-2

[32] Heller 1974, p.50. Paraphrasing Marx himself, Heller writes that, 'it is irrelevant whether the needs are in the stomach or in the imagination. Satisfaction of a need is the *sine qua non* of any commodity. There is no value (exchange value) without use value (satisfaction of needs), but use values (goods) may well exist without value (exchange value), as long as they satisfy needs (which is precisely the definition

Heller does draw out the ambiguities in Marx's work, but the argument that needs are social creates certain problems. The problem with arguing that Marx viewed all needs as social is, as Nicholas Xenos comments in *Scarcity and Modernity* (1989), that

> Marx's attempt to base a critical theory of capitalism - one which entails its supercession - on the ground of a theory of need collapses once the claim that all needs are social in composition is taken seriously.[33]

Indeed, for Xenos,

> Marx can foresee a communist society of abundance only because he retains the substantively empty notion of "authentic" needs in the domain of material wants that acts as a limitation his general theory of need denies.[34]

Radical needs

Heller tries to maintain the basic thrust of Marx's program as a whole and so she tries to reconcile these issues with a discussion of what she refers to as 'radical needs', a notion she extracts from Marx's work as a whole, although she does not attribute the term directly to him. With this discussion however, Heller only seems to emphasise how Marx's study of needs is so qualified as to be amorphous. She writes that radical needs are the driving force behind the eventual transition to communism insofar as the 'radical need' that occurs on an individual level but is necessarily an essential human feature common to all, has the greatest influence on the unfolding development of the societal structure:

> The functioning of the economy in the guise of natural law belongs in fact to commodity production and only to it, as an expression of commodity fetishism. The positive overcoming of private property cannot therefore in any way proceed in the form of a "natural necessity"; the essence of this process is the overcoming of fetishism and the revolutionary liquidation of the appearance which social existence has of being a quasi-law of nature. Although it has economic aspects, the transition *cannot* be a purely economic process, but must be a social revolution and is only conceivable as such.[35]

The tension between the structural economic interpretation of Marx as opposed to Heller's focus on Marx's earlier work is apparent here, especially when, even more directly on this point she stress that

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of use values). It needs to be made clear from the outset that Marx uses the concept of need in order to make definitions, but that he never actually defines the concept of need itself' (Heller 1974, p.23).

[33] Xenos 1989, p.54

[34] Xenos 1989, p.53

[35] Heller 1974, p.81

> The necessity of the "transition" is not in fact "guaranteed" by any *natural* law but by *radical needs*.[36]

These 'radical needs' cannot, moreover, be reduced to the 'general interest' (a notion which Heller also spends some time criticising). She writes, for instance, that 'Marx recognises no needs other than those of individual people'[37], supporting this point by citing Marx himself:

> The general interest is precisely the generality of self-seeking interests.[38]

Yet nowhere in *The Theory of Need in Marx* (1974) does Heller concretely define 'radical needs', although they *are* diffusely conceptualised in terms of the need to use and consume material objects, in a manner that generates and sustains the mechanisms of capitalism, but somehow, simultaneously, also manage to enable its supercession:

> According to Marx, radical needs are *inherent* aspects of the capitalist structure of need: without them, as we have said, capitalism cannot function, so it creates them afresh every day. "Radical needs" cannot be "eliminated" from capitalism because they are necessary to its functioning. They are not "embryos" of a future formation, but "members" of the capitalist formation: it is not the *Being* of radical needs that transcends capitalism but their *satisfaction*. Those individuals for whom the "radical needs" already arise in capitalism are the bearers of the "collective Ought".[39]

Once again though, what are these needs? Heller invokes the dialectic when arguing that it is only due to lack that we can reconcile the development of those legitimate radically human needs with an alienating system. As needs that 'shape the human personality'[40] only diminish under capitalism, thus repressed, they raise even further the need for fresh rapprochement with our 'species being'[41]. Heller seems to be aiming for a clear cut definition of 'radical needs' when she refers to Marx's view that 'The capacity for objective activity is thus one of the greatest needs of man'[42]. This suggests that Heller equates Marx's 'radical need' with what she regards as the essential human need to freely produce, but of course under the terms of her own interpretation of Marx this occurs in conjunction with the need to use those objects.

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[36] Heller 1974, p.84
[37] Heller 1974, p.69
[38] Marx cited in Heller 1974, p.64
[39] Heller 1974, pp.76-7
[40] Heller 1974, p.51
[41] Note also Heller's argument, that 'In Marx's interpretation, alienation is not some sort of long-standing "distortion" of the species or of human nature; the essence of man develops within alienation itself, and this creates the possibility for the realisation of man "rich in needs"' (1974, pp.46-7).
[42] Heller 1974, p.42

In her discussion of radical needs Heller often connects production to consumption in relation to need in an undifferentiated way, when in fact a distinction between the use aspects of consumption and need, and production and need, might add considerably to the clarity of her account[43]. And although Heller so hopefully accepts and offers this nebulous 'radical need' as an eventual solution to the inequities and oppressions of capitalism, she did not convince Soper for one, who in her review of Heller's book, entitled 'The Needs of Marxism' (1977), commented that Heller's 'vision' of methods of producing and expressing 'Being' seemed rather 'vacuous'[44].

Yet given that Heller has phrased her interpretation in this way, at what point in the 'progression' of the capitalist system can we, once again, clearly and decisively differentiate the 'radical needs' inherent within the capitalist system, from the 'inhuman, artificial and imaginary cravings'[45] that also sustain it? Certainly economic lack as opposed to luxury is not sufficient criteria to determine the existence of an 'authentic' need, because as both Heller and Springborg note, Marx himself abandoned this tack in his later work, although some inconsistency in his position on this is still evident. As Springborg directly states:

> Marx in the 1844 Manuscripts had criticised political economy for its inhumane perspective on the individual as nothing but a "totality of needs" in which the pressing needs of the poor were not differentiated from the ephemeral needs of the rich. He was anxious, then, that his approach should not be equated with that of political economy and its indiscriminate treatment of needs as wants equally deserving of satisfaction. In his later scientific writings, however, this is a distinction that Marx no longer tries to press. So by the time we come to *Capital* he is ready to argue that use value simply depends on something being wanted and that "the nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference" (Vol.1, p.43). Marx is undoubtedly sufficiently aware that his concept of "human" needs was a metaphysical and not a scientific concept. This does not mean he abandons it altogether, however. In *Capital* Marx makes the general argument that, under the capitalist law of accumulation, production is geared to the self-expansion of capital rather than the satisfaction of needs, obviously

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[43] On this point, although not in relation to Heller's argument specifically, Soper writes: 'In the absence of anything more specific by way of explanation of what is meant by labour becoming life's prime want, one is bound to suspect either that "labour" is doing duty for the concept of needs in general (in which case we are not greatly informed by being told that it becomes the prime need), or else that Marx's vision of communism is imbued with a work ethic that is insufficiently distinguished from that of bourgeois society' (Soper 1981, p.197).

[44] Soper 1977, p.42

[45] Marx cited in Heller 1974, p.50

> referring to needs that are in some sense genuine in a way that run-of-the-mill wants are not.[46]

Macpherson has maintained that 'Marx's whole point about the future good society was that it would be a realm of *freedom* - freedom for people to develop their own needs and wants in whatever ways they liked. It would have been perfectly inconsistent for him to say in advance what they would be'[47]. Yet this statement suggests Macpherson is either being disingenuous, or mistaken in believing that he has grasped the implications of Marx's thought as a whole. If Marx was really unwilling to make determinate statements about need, he could have been more cautious about applying appellations as categorical as unnatural 'cravings'.

Soper, in discussing the dichotomous nature of Marx's work, the disjunction between his early more philosophical / anthropological position, as opposed to his later focus on scientific / economics, grants that Heller's book draws attention to 'the extent to which historical materialism as a 'science' of history calls in question traditional notions of scientificity based on the disjuncture between 'fact' and 'value', and the assignation of all 'facts' to the realm of science and all 'values' to the realm of morality'[48]. Soper criticises however, what she calls Heller's 'exegesis and synthesis' of Marx, arguing that Heller 'states' rather than 'critically assesses' the internal contradictions of Marx's theory as a whole[49]:

> It is a pity that Heller, having exposed this tension, and shown us some of the ways it is reflected in Marx's work, then stops short, being content to tell us simply that Marx "never separates value judgements from economic analysis; if he had done so he would be an anti-capitalist romantic". She seems unconcerned with the epistemological questions this raises.[50]

In her subsequent book, *On Human Needs: Open and Closed Theories in a Marxist Perspective* (1981), Soper argues, as in her earlier review, that Marx, 'being as concerned as he was with establishing the scientificity of scientific socialism, and too ready to accept that this must have positivistic credentials, never managed to pose the problem that is raised by

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[46] Springborg 1981, p.106. The inconsistency in Marx's position on this is evident in comments such as 'There are not too many necessities of life produced in proportion to the existing population. Quite the reverse. Too little is produced to decently and humanely satisfy the wants of the great mass' (Soper 1981, p.96, from *Capital Vol.3*).

[47] Macpherson 1977, p.34

[48] Soper 1977, p.39

[49] Soper 1977, p.38

[50] Soper 1977, pp.39-40

the co-presence in his thought of a 'factual' and an 'evaluative' discourse'[51]. This meant that Marx 'never expressly poses this problem of 'true' need as a problem or aporia created at the heart of his own thought, nor does he ever attempt to confront it'[52]. For Soper, commenting on the all too nebulous nature of Marx's theory of need in her review of Heller's *The Theory of Need in Marx* (1974),

> the Marxist theory of needs is not there to be extracted from a reading and exegesis of Marx's texts but something that is yet to be constituted.[53]

Springborg likewise argues that

> Needs represent basic human motivations and they represent the form in which man's relation to the world is actualised, but more than that they are tangible manifestations of an underlying human nature. So much is this so, that one is justified in asking whether, indeed, we are to understand Marx's concept of needs in the literal sense at all. In other words, Marx so characteristically refers to the whole range of human powers in the abstract as "needs" that we are prompted to ask whether these have to be concretely expressed as needs to count as such or not.[54]

Ethical consumption and need

The very obviousness of the appalling problems of capitalism enables the standard quite negative interpretation of consumption, synthesized from a general approximation of Marx's approach as a whole, to survive in a taken-for-granted state. But with the internal contradictions, and amorphous and qualified formulations of Marx's approach to need, how might he rate a phenomenon such as ethical consumption, given that it is consumption which, while still enmeshed within the dynamics of the capitalist price and profit system, is not orientated completely towards the profit dynamic of that system, but towards other forms of need? In more orthodox interpretations of Marx's work, ethical consumption would, no doubt, simply be regarded as maintaining the capitalist status quo, rather than facilitating any radical change. And certainly this is the case. Yet neither does ethical consumption accord with the notion that under capitalism, commodity exchange only facilitates alienation. Ethical consumption forms a strategic attempt to ameliorate the more adverse aspects of the exploitation of capitalism by at

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[51] Soper 1981, p.26

[52] Soper 1981, p.21. As George McCarthy notes in his *Marx's Critique of Science and Positivism* (1988), a 'generally accepted' interpretation of Marx, based on his later work, has ensured an emphasis has been placed on the 'scientificity' of Marx's 'historical materialism' which, as a 'scientific' economic critique, stresses the inevitable *natural* transition from capitalism to communism'. However McCarthy disputes the break between these two periods, arguing that the earlier work provides a strong theoretical foundation for the later.

[53] Soper 1977, p.39

[54] Springborg 1981, p.100

least attempting to address the needs of others, according to judgments about the relative desirability of the origins and / or consequences of specific goods. Ethical consumption then, although antithetical to Marxist orthodoxies, specifically acts against the typology of liberal, neoclassical and neoliberal economic thought. And while Marx never unambiguously delineated his understanding of needs, he certainly believed the ostensible, although also inconsistent liberal approach towards consumption as a private affair, warranting no intrusive judgments, had absolutely no foundation. This is particularly the case when considered in relation to labour as a 'commodity'[55], as Marx's analysis was dedicated to revealing how under capitalism workers increasingly have no choice but to submit to market imperatives[56]. One of his main criticisms of the early political economists was that while they focused on commerce as a means of improving the relations between people, they disregarded any consideration of what was involved in the production of goods, except in terms of monetary cost. This is not the case in relation to ethical consumption, which is often directed against aspects of the labour production process. In 'Mobilizing Consumers to Take Responsibility for Global Social Justice', Michele Micheletti and Dietlind Stolle, for instance, detail the fascinating recent history of ethical consumption activists targeting companies who use sweatshop labour[57]. In *Boycotts and the Labor Struggle* (1913) Laidler offers an older history of boycotts undertaken by labor activists in North America. And while under the terms of more orthodox Marxism it can be argued that such action merely takes place according to the whims of a complacent and self-satisfied bourgeoisie, it is nevertheless important to take into account that ethical consumption is not generally aimed at sustaining exploitative excess.

Distribution and Exchange

In the *Grundrisse* (1974) Marx wrote of the immediate connection between production and consumption[58], but he also made quite sardonic statements about the vital importance of noting the *division* between production and consumption insofar as it is the dynamics of distribution and exchange under modern industrial capitalism that prevent

[55] Nicolaus 1974, p.20

[56] As Ingram puts it, 'the quasi-natural, *objective* laws of the market, the mechanism of exchange determines the flow and value of all commodities, human and non-human alike' (1990, p.22).

[57] Micheletti and Stolle 2007. See also Wiedenhoft 2006.

[58] 'Production, then, is also immediately consumption, consumption is also immediately production' (Marx 1974, p.91).

individuals from producing according to their needs (without, of course, again specifying exactly which needs which capitalism does not requite):

> in production the members of society appropriate (create, shape) the products of nature in accord with human needs; distribution determines the proportion in which the individual shares in the product; exchange delivers the particular products into which the individual desires to convert the portion which distribution has assigned to him; and finally, in consumption, the products become objects of gratification, of individual appropriation. Production creates the objects which correspond to the given needs; distribution divides them up according to social laws; exchange further parcels out the already divided shares in accord with individual needs; and finally, in consumption, the product steps outside this social movement and becomes a direct object and servant of individual need, and satisfies it in being consumed.[59]

In his 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse* (1974), Nicolaus details how Marx actually

> explicitly attacks the notion that "production is immediately identical with consumption", and shows that this notion, in the greatest of hands – for instance Ricardo's – may lead to profound insights, but not to a grasp of the totality in process, and ultimately results, in lesser hands, in childishness and absurdity.[60]

Marx writes,

> The producer's relation to the product, once the latter is finished, is an external one, and its return to the subject depends on his relations to other individuals.[61]

Nothing was easier for a Hegelian, Marx scornfully noted, to connect production and consumption in an indivisible way[62]. A more equitable system actually depends on the development of more equitable mechanisms of distribution and exchange, and in the wholesale castigation of the role consumption plays in sustaining capitalism this, I argue, is something that is all too often elided. Nevertheless, to the extent the question of a more equitable system of distribution and exchange is still based on questions about the determination of value and the determination of need, in abdicating a deeper analysis of these issues Marx's analysis remains incomplete. Soper, for one, argues 'Marx only "solves" the question of political justice by refusing to allow it to exist as a political question'[63], and in discussing Marx's famous dictum about the mechanism of distribution in a communist state, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs', she furthermore notes that

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[59] Marx 1974, pp.88-9
[60] Nicolaus 1974, p.39
[61] Marx 1974, p.94
[62] Marx 1974, p.93
[63] Soper 1981, p.194

> by treating "needs" and "capacities" as natural, as an original, predetermined property of individuals, and by allowing them to decide *for* society what that society shall be like, Marx naturalises politics itself: the whole burden of political decision is handed back to Nature, where our "nature" will decide what we need, and what we do will be determined by what "nature" can do.[64]

To the extent that Soper's views have force then, Marx commits exactly the same error of which, as I outlined in the previous chapter, he accused the political economists.

It seems clear that the modern 'flexible' deregulated labour market, as with the factory / industrial system to which Marx was specifically addressing his critique, can be unfulfilling, oppressive and alienating. It is clear that capitalism is horrendously exploitative and that material and monetary wealth are distributed in an extremely unequally manner. The significant majority of people are not recompensed for their labour in any just way, especially when compared to others whose income levels seem obscene. Meanwhile, the United Nations 2007 World Food Programme Annual Report estimates that every year 4 million people die as a result of poverty and hunger, while 854 million people remain undernourished[65]. In light of this, Marx's criticisms of the lack of satisfaction of needs still seem all too accurate, and his prediction of the system's inevitable decline appealing. Despite this I believe that placing the responsibility for the longevity of this system upon commodities and consumption is not feasible. Even aside from the serious theoretical inconsistencies in Marx's work in relation to need, it is placing too much weight on 'consumption' to blame it for the parlous state of capitalism. Consumption is not simply evidence of alienation, a distorted manifestation created by the perversions of the system resulting in the imposition of artificial needs. Ethical consumption in particular highlights the shortcomings of such an approach. Marx's critique viscerally illuminates the nature of exploitation in the capitalist system. But within that exploitation human care and concern can still occur, and this is still possible even within the prism of commodity exchange.

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[64] Soper 1981, p.194. Xenos also writes of Sahlin's argument that 'Marx advances the idea that primitive societies are a part of nature, not history, a distinction that is based on the view that primitive societies reproduce rather than augment their limited needs' (Xenos 1989, fn.38. p.62).
[65] United Nations World Food Programme Annual Report 2007, p.13

6

The Frankfurt School

> ... women have escaped the sphere of capitalistic production only to fall the more completely into the clutches of the sphere of consumption. They are fascinated and restricted by the immediacy of the surface world of commodities no less than men are fascinated and restricted by the immediacy of profit.
>
> (Adorno 1941, p.396-7)

> ... almost all studies of housewifery ... have demonstrated, this is one of the least valorised, most lowly and most commonly denigrated practices of the modern world. The self-effacing, normative, moral and aesthetic concerns of housewifery reveal starkly the absurdities of economic theory and the barrenness of colloquial accounts of consumption. The very concept of 'choice' is revealed to be very far from some autonomous, independently generated act. Rather it is a limited condition that bears the burden of histories of social category formation in terms of class, gender and other parameters, the normative adjudication of families and peers, and the pressure of business attempts to ensure their particular profitability ... while shopping and consumption may be a source of considerable pleasure, it may equally be regarded as the source of considerable anxiety.
>
> (Miller 1995, p.36)

> Luxury is the source of this female insurrection.
>
> (Cato, according to Livy, cited in Sekora, 1977, p.21)

In 1907 the American government legislated against consumer boycotts on the part of labour activists, representing it as a threat to the free operation of capitalism[1] Such boycotts had achieved improvements in working conditions, but the restrictive legislation did not impinge on the consciousness of the first generation Critical Theorists' of the Frankfurt Institut of Social Research. And why would it? When the School first formed in 1923, this legislation was an insignificant American as opposed to European historical juridical event that would have in no way drawn their notice. Especially given their

[1] Laidler 1913, p.144. Smith 1990. Weidenhoft 2006.

greater philosophical concerns, their hopes for and interests in transcending the capitalist system as a whole, the Frankfurt School did not consider ethical consumption as a possible method of effecting social change, but articulated Marx's bitingly expressed but also consistently qualified polemics against consumption even more strongly, in the process subtracting his careful qualifications.

I mentioned in the previous chapter Marx's tremendous influence on sociological accounts of consumption. This influence was largely filtered through the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt Institut of Social Research which was founded with the aim of taking up the train of Marx's work from a politically motivated and dedicated social justice perspective. In this the School saw themselves as taking up the mantle of Marx's concerns in a wide ranging, sophisticated and philosophically rigorous way, with an approach that combined theory with studies of actual social conditions, 'an interdisciplinary vision of a practical theory'[2]. And while the range of their work is far too elaborate to cover here, a significant proportion of their focus was on popular, or mass market consumption, best known through Adorno and Horkheimer's 'Culture Industry' essays, and Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1972). It is this focus on mass market consumption which draws my concern, because in expounding their critique, the School presents consumption in a wholeheartedly negative light. As Lowenthal, for instance, scathingly maintained,

> What on first sight seems to be the rather harmless atmosphere of entertainment and consumption is, on closer examination, revealed as a reign of psychic terror, where the masses have to realize the pettiness and insignificance of their everyday life.[3]

The citation from Adorno I began this chapter with intimates the strongly gendered character of the School's analysis, but the similarity to Marx's more bluntly expressed, less gender specific account is also evident. So too is the contrast to the arguments of the political and neoclassical economists; following Marx, their position was also a target for the School's critique[4].

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[2] Ingram 1990, p.59

[3] Lowenthal ['The Triumph of Mass Idols' 1944] cited in Kellner 1989, p.155

[4] Slater and Tonkiss mention how Adorno's aim, for instance, was to illuminate the falsity of representations that consumption / capitalism enables freedom: 'the figure of the sovereign consumer ideologically embodies a notion of freedom and supports the (false) claim that this freedom has already been achieved in the marketplace' (Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.163).

My aim in this chapter is to outline the arguments of the Frankfurt School in order to develop a slightly more detailed consideration of the shortcomings of their (in)famous true / false needs perspective, intrinsic to their view of consumption, as well as how the School diverged from Marx's views in advocating and developing this perspective. I mentioned in my introduction there are still theorists who ascribe to some either implicit or explicit version of the Frankfurt School's true / false needs approach. Clive Hamilton is the most obvious example. However for many other contemporary theorists of consumption it has become almost *de rigueur* to dismiss the Frankfurt School style accounts as reductionist (Woodward 2007, Slater 1997, Miller 1995, Featherstone 1991). I outline some of these positions in my final chapters, and ratify some of their conclusions in this. The influence the debate between these accounts has exercised over the direction of subsequent consumption research is an important aspect of my concern with the specifics of the Frankfurt School's arguments here. Below then, I outline the genesis of the Institut's negative approach towards consumption, and the various theorists, in addition to Marx, whose work supported and contributed to their account in this regard, principally Freud and Weber. My discussion in this section draws heavily on four main sources; Patricia Springborg's *The Problem of Human Needs and the Critique of Civilisation* (1981), David Ingram's *Critical Theory and Philosophy* (1990), Douglas Kellner's *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (1989), and Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination* (1996).

Inception vis-à-vis Marx

From their inception in the early 1920s the principal question the Frankfurt School theorists were concerned with was why the transition to communism had not occurred[5]. Even from the beginning the School never regarded Marx's work as received doctrine[6]. They were, nevertheless, at first optimistic about the decline of capitalism; as time went by, however, their hopes began to fade. By the early 1930s, especially with the rise of Fascism instead of communism as a dominant societal impulse, members of the School 'no longer believed that emancipation was imminent'[7]. They lost, as Jay notes in *The Dialectical Imagination* (1996), 'that basic confidence, which Marxists had traditionally felt, in the revolutionary potential of the proletariat'[8]. During this period, especially with the

[5] Ingram 1990, Springborg 1981, p.7-8
[6] Jay 1996, p.254, and also Kellner 1989, pp.11-12.
[7] Ingram 1990, p.48
[8] Jay 1996, p.44

rediscovery of the philosophical, Hegelian ancestry of Marx's work[9], they also increasingly came to regard the 'vulgar determinism' and 'received truths'[10] of orthodox and revisionist Marxists[11], in perpetuating an inevitable theory of emancipation, as not only theoretically inadequate, but also as complicit in sustaining the continuing conditions of oppression. These factors resulted in a shift in their theoretical emphasis, formalised under Horkheimer's directorship in 1930, away from a faith in the perceptive capacities of the working class, to a renewed appreciation of, and belief in, the emancipatory capacities of the educated, elite and critical social theorist. Subsequently, as Ingram notes in *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (1990):

> one detects in the Frankfurt School's theoretical writings of the late thirties a return to a more Hegelian emphasis on the superior, "detached" understanding of the philosopher vis-à-vis potential revolutionary practice.[12]

The influence of Freud

Martin Jay writes of how the School scattered in 1933, fleeing Nazi Germany, relocating first to Geneva and America shortly thereafter. He notes that with the growing stress they placed on theory and their increasing pessimism about the revolutionary potential of the working class, the School subsequently came to view the reason for the failure of the transition to communism as a result of a growing 'falsity' of beliefs about felt need across the spectrum of the population created by successful ideological impositions from what they eventually came to refer to as the 'culture industries'[13]:

> If it can be said that in the early years of its history the Institut concerned itself primarily with an analysis of bourgeois society's socio-economic

[9] Jay 1996, p.42. Ingram mentions that this was supported by a similar position Lukács's adopted in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) (see Ingram 1990, p.60), and also, as Kellner outlines, by others such as Karl Korsch in "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) (see Kellner 1989, pp.10-11).

[10] Jay 1996, p.48

[11] Ingram 1990, p.31 & 38. Kellner also refers to such approaches as 'dogmatic, reductionist and objectivistic metaphysical materialism' (1989, p.22). Jay notes also the influence of thinkers such as Croce and Dilthey, and writes that: 'Hegel's stress on consciousness as constitutive of the world challenged the passive materialism of the Second International's theorists' (1996, p.42, p.11).

[12] Ingram 1990, p.36

[13] Jay identifies the inner circle around Horkheimer, of Pollock, Adorno, Lowenthal, Marcuse, and Fromm, as those whose work 'formed the core of the Institut's achievement' (Jay 1996, p.31). Adorno only a full time member after 1938 (Jay 1996, p.21), but contributed articles to the first publication of the Institut's journal *Zeitschrift* prior to this and was involved even prior to this during the 1920s (Jay 1996, p.27, p.87). During the interwar years the tradition of the School was maintained principally by Adorno and Horkheimer, who placed their emphasis more on theory alone (Kellner 1989, pp.84-5). Jay notes the more 'pessimistic' tone that occurred after the shift to America (Jay 1996, p.44). David Ingram likewise notes this increasingly pessimism in conjunction with a growing stress on theory.

> substructure, in the years after 1930 its prime interest lay in its cultural superstructure[14]

Where Marx had understood ideology as a false doctrine which, masquerading as a universal truth, in fact maintained the authority of the status quo, during the 1930s the Critical Theorists began to take the view, as Ingram outlines, that Marx had seriously underestimated what enabled its pernicious impact:

> Although Marx had understood the significance of ideology in reproducing the system, he had no inkling of the subtle psychological dynamics informing its tenacious hold on the masses.[15]

In this sense the Frankfurt School shared an implicit similarity with an aspect of liberalism that I discussed earlier, that is, they viewed people as *not yet* autonomous – although if they began to ascribe to the Critical theorists' ideas it was possible they might become so at some point. Yet regardless of this uneasy concurrence with liberal thought, the increasing focus on the role of ideology and the 'falsity' of need cohered particularly well with the School's rejection of the scientistic and purely economic versions of Marxism, for As Ingram relates, they dismissed

> "scientistic" versions of Marxism as insufficiently critical, arguing that *a philosophically enlightened social theory could adduce universal moral standards from historical practice* ...[16]

I shall return to the issue of 'universal moral standards' shortly. Here I note Soper's point that the traditional scientistic / economistic strand of Marxism attempted to expunge all metaphysical elements or value claims about what need should be, generally refusing to even consider the question of values at all, regarding this as just part of 'an ideological project'[17]. However Ingram writes of the growing influence of Freudian psychoanalytic theory following its introduction to the Institut in the late 1920s, and its importance in terms of the Frankfurt School's views about the economistic aspects of

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[14] Jay 1996, p.21
[15] Ingram 1990, p.39
[16] Ingram 1990, p.31. *My italics.*
[17] '... the very posing of the question: 'what is it, that human being beings need?', let alone the attempt to answer it, is regarded as fundamentally mistaken and can only form part of an ideological project - at its worst consisting in the reproduction of a Feuerbachian speculative anthropology that cannot be reconciled with the 'scientific' problematic of historical materialism, at its best a doomed attempt to transcend the 'non-scientific' status of speculative anthropological categories while still having recourse to them and while still trying to accommodate the ethical or ideological aspect of Marxist social criticism within its scientific aspect' (Soper 1981, pp.31-2).

Marx's arguments[18]. Jay also discusses the School's 'audacity' in drawing on Freudian psychoanalytic theory, but too notes that Horkheimer came to consider it one of the School's 'Bildungs mächte' or theoretical foundation stones[19]. And while the School used Freud in a range of ways, his principal contribution was in relation to the development and extension of ideology as a concept vis-à-vis false consciousness and false needs:

> Like Hegel, they were inclined to regard cultural artifacts - especially those of art and philosophy - as best revealing the true interests and norms underlying the just and happy society [however] ... What was needed was a psychological science explaining the natural and social dynamics of consciousness as such. Their discovery of Freudian psychoanalysis filled this gap by enabling them to appreciate the *instinctual* dynamics underlying ideological false consciousness.[20]

Normative criteria, immanent and transcendent critique

As I discussed in the previous chapter, a key aspect of Marx's thought was that he celebrated the developing richness of needs, even under capitalism, even as he simultaneously attacked the existence of 'unnatural' needs, while never specifying exactly what an 'authentic' human need should be. As I mentioned above, the Critical Theorists made statements just as antithetical to consumption as Marx, but demonstrated far less compunction about qualifying their claims. They justified their position, Kellner details, by arguing they held an 'emancipatory interest'[21], distinguishing their understanding of 'philosophical ideas' from 'ideology' by arguing philosophical ideas *should* play a role in criticising society. Horkheimer, Jay relates, in fact believed the researcher had a *duty* to criticise society. To do otherwise would just be to maintain the status quo:

> In fact it was his duty to reveal those negative forces and tendencies in society that pointed to a different reality. In short, to maintain the formalistic dualism of facts and values, which traditional theories of the Weberian kind so strongly emphasized, was to act in the service of the status quo. The researcher's values necessarily influences his work; indeed they should consciously do so. Knowledge and interest were ultimately inseparable. [22]

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[18] Jay 1996, pp.25-8 and Ingram 1990, p.31. Jay further comments that 'In the 1970's it is difficult to appreciate the audacity of the first theorists who proposed the unnatural marriage of Freud and Marx' (Jay 1996, p.86).
[19] Horkheimer cited in Jay 1996, p.102
[20] Ingram 1990, p.31
[21] Kellner 1989, p.204
[22] Jay 1996, pp.81-2

Ingram relates that the School justified their views as an 'immanent' critique, objectively 'truthful' and critically 'accurate' insofar as the values offered by their criticisms were measured against the undelivered promises of capitalism, measured in turn against 'goals of universal justice and happiness'[23]. He claims they revisited Marx's earlier engagement with Hegel in order to formulate this position, believing

> with Hegel that the "truth" of these ideas consisted precisely in their transcendence of a "false" or imperfect social reality. Obviously, the criteria of truth to which they appealed was not correspondence with factual historical reality, but correspondence with *essential humanity and its goals of universal justice and happiness*.[24]

The Critical Theorists were attempting an uneasy balancing act here, and Kellner notes Horkheimer also stated such 'goals' have 'to be developed and modified constantly in the course of experience'[25]. Jay observes how Horkheimer rejected 'all claims to absolute truth'[26], while maintaining that 'Each period of time has its own truth ... although there is none above time'[27]. He also describes how Horkheimer stressed the social, cultural and historical position of the researcher, yet still tried to grant them a position from where they could effectively 'deconstruct' that which they observed:

> it would be a mistake to see intellectuals as *freischwebende* (free-floating), to use the term Mannheim had taken from Alfred Weber and popularized. The ideal of a "free-floating" intellectual above the fray was a formalistic illusion, which should be discarded. At the same time, it would be equally erroneous to see the intellectual as entirely *verwurzelt*, rooted in his culture or class, as had Volkisch and vulgar Marxist thinkers. Both extremes misconstrued subjectivity as either totally autonomous or totally contingent. Although definitely a part his society, the researcher was not incapable of rising above it at times. [28]

The problem, Jay writes, was that while they rejected Mannheim's position, it was one their own increasingly came to resemble[29].

In *The Theory of Need in Marx* (1974), Agnes Heller writes that whether 'immanent' or 'transcendent', there are major problems involved in attempting to formulate 'a *general* system of needs which, so to speak, is "suspended above" individual people and is at a

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[23] Ingram 1990, pp.38-9.
[24] Ingram 1990, pp.38-9. Kellner similarly writes that 'Critical theory does not offer any absolute foundation for morality and politics, yet it attempts to overcome relativism through its intense focus on human needs, sufferings and struggles in the present age' (Kellner 1989, p.35).
[25] The text Kellner references is 'Materialism and Metaphysics' (Kellner 1989, p.28).
[26] Jay 1996, p.63
[27] Jay 1996, p.63
[28] Jay 1996, pp.81-2
[29] 'Despite their scorn for Mannheim's ideas about free floating intellectuals, the Frankfurt School's members came increasingly to resemble his model' (Jay 1996, p.292).

higher level than the personal needs of the individuals who constitute society'[30]. The positing of a Truth underlying ideology, which only certain theorists have privileged access to, has been a commonplace aspect of Enlightenment discourse, and this positions these theorist as *outside*, immune to, and somehow beyond the influences of the society they are judging. In her subsequent book, *The Power of Shame* (1985), Heller notes

> All division of needs into true and false ones based on the theory of fetishism assumes that the position of the judging persons transcends the society in question.[31]

Despite this, she writes,

> none of the advocates of the theory of 'true' and 'false' needs seriously faces the question of how one know if one's consciousness is not a fetishized one. Or if they do face it, they do not proceed in a consistent manner.[32]

Such a stance does not offer a situated argument, but the delineation of a Truth and the imposition of that Truth upon others, despite Horkheimer's best initial qualifications. It also inescapably falls back on an essentialised ontology of origins[33].

The influence of Weber

It is easy now to dismiss the School's account as incomplete. But it is not as though they were not sophisticated thinkers, despite my truncated, partial account. Horkheimer did attempt to qualify his position, and at the time there appeared to be good reasons for the views the School adopted. I mentioned above that during the 1920s and 30s, Marx's influence on the School was still very strong, and they were still committed to his project as a whole. While the School had tried to marry Freud and Marx, there were key differences between their ideas. Ingram for instance, notes how Freud's Hobbesian conception of reason ('reason itself operates through the mechanisms of repression and domination'[34]) did not sit comfortably with Marx's ultimately optimistic stance. For the Critical Theorists, although less sanguine about the demise of capitalism, still took a largely hopeful perspective in the 1920s and 30s, choosing to argue for the beneficent potential of reason:

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[30] Heller 1974, p.67. A further issue is that attempts to determine which needs are 'essential' and which are not can tend to relegate everything 'that exceeds the bare minimal of survival to imaginary' (Heller 1985, p.286). Assuming mass consumption involves new, unprecedented types of 'irrationalist and fantastic desires' is also predicated on, as Miller notes, the assumption of some previous purely utilitarian functional relations to goods, representing 'basic needs and true interests' (1995, p.26).

[31] Heller 1985, p.286

[32] Heller 1985, p.286 check this.

[33] Miller 1995

[34] Ingram 1990, p.48

> Despite their realistic appraisal of the ideological forces preventing revolutionary enlightenment, the members of the Frankfurt School nonetheless believed in the power of reason to enlighten and emancipate. Decisive, in this regard, was their attempt to develop an interdisciplinary research program combining philosophy and social science. Although they harbored no illusions about the capacity of theory to promote the popular dissemination of enlightenment among the working classes, they still believed that its conjunction of theory and practice could help aid progressive forces in combating ideology and pinpointing areas of resistance.[35]

Following their shift to America in the late 1930s, the Critical theorists reacted with aversion to the positivism and instrumental rationality they found dominating the American Academy[36]. Freud's work cohered with their rejection of both, despite his negative view of reason, which they still did not completely adhere to[37]. Kellner argues the Critical Theorists nevertheless felt strongly about their inability to 'formulate an appropriate political response' that could effectively address the societal problems which they so keenly observed and dissected, especially in relation to the growth of Fascism during the 1930s[38]. By the 1940s, he writes, their previous optimism about the emancipatory power of reason and the nature of 'progress' was being seriously undermined[39]. With the growth in fascism (the School even debating as to whether it was the logical corollary of capitalism[40]), the exposure of Stalin's atrocities, and the new horror revealed by the German genocidal program, the School underwent a radical theoretical revision, and found new support for Freud's negative view of reason in Weber's gloomy prognostications about capitalist society.

Weber's attraction to the School is most immediately evident in their mutually unfavorable views of consumption. Simmel and Veblen were also influential in this regard[41], but another strong link between the Frankfurt School and Weber was Lukács, whose arguments about reification and consumption had also had a considerable impact on the Critical Theorists. For Lukács, Kellner writes,

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[35] Ingram 1990, p.48

[36] This was, of course, an extension of their ongoing critique, evident even from Horkheimer's inaugural address to the Institut in 1931 (see Kellner 1989, p.17).

[37] Jay 1996, p.105

[38] Kellner 1989, p.65, p.100, p.107

[39] Kellner 1989, pp.83-5

[40] Kellner 1989, p.97. ' "The fascist order," Horkheimer wrote during the war, "is the reason in which reason reveals itself as irrational"' (Jay 1996, p.121).

[41] As I shall discuss in the following chapter, Adorno published an article on Veblen in 1941, and at this point remained an optimistic enough Marxist to argue Veblen's analysis was lacking only because he did not understand the full dynamic of the capitalist production process.

> capitalism was characterized by an expanding "commodification" of the entirety of social life wherein everything from the worker to culture and sex becomes a commodity in the capitalist market ... "Reification" ... described the process whereby individuals become like things, or more thing-like, and accordingly perceive themselves, other individuals, social processes and history as static, objectified entities detached from social and historical processes and the possibility of social and self-transformation.[42]

Lukács had engaged with Weber in formulating this position[43], and Weber regarded consumption as both tangible evidence and a result of the decline in values and the growing instrumentality of belief and action which stemming from the Protestant Ethic. In the second chapter I briefly mentioned Weber's analysis of the Protestant Ethic in relation to the Protestant religion supplying another discourse which enabled a lessening of hostility towards consumption. For Weber this growing secularisation meant a distorted instrumental rationality would just take the place of religious narratives, supplanting the dominance of all prior 'metaphysical absolutes'[44] with a new all-encompassing imperative for people to become cogs in the wheel of the capitalist system. Where Lukács retained hope that a better society might develop[45], this was not the case with Weber. The penultimate end for his 'specialist without spirit' and 'sensualist without heart', would be to treat everything as useful only insofar as it ensures a particular end[46], that end being the empty, 'meaningless' act of consumption:

> the "iron cage" of modern society consists in the only "rational" calling remaining in a spiritless society - the sacrifice of moral autonomy to the twin Gods of capitalism: the blind necessities of work and consumption.[47]

The Frankfurt School, Kellner writes, had always viewed consumption as responsible for the longevity of capitalism:

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[42] Kellner 1989, pp.52-3. 'The central tenet of reification', Miller writes, 'is that human beings create objects in order to understand themselves, but under capitalism then become separated from them, perceiving the object as having an external reality and an origin separate from themselves. Such products thereby develop an autonomy, deflecting society's attention from critical self-awareness to this mysterious other' (Miller 1994, p.44).

[43] Kellner notes how Lukács's analysis of reification and focus on the commodity as 'the key unit of capitalist society' was instrumental in contributing to the Critical Theorist's views, and how while Lukács drew on Weber to formulate his ideas, his analysis also connected closely with Marx's position about how, under capitalism, 'everything becomes a commodity' (Kellner 1989, pp.52-3).

[44] Ingram 1990, p.54

[45] Kellner 1989, p.131

[46] So that 'everything can be treated as a calculable object rather than as a meaningful, intrinsically valued subject' (Slater 1997, p.117).

[47] Ingram 1990, p.59. And: 'With the decline of religion, individuals cease to think of themselves as moral agents who orient their conduct toward absolute values. What remains, Weber tells us, is a life orientated toward survival, a life of work and consumption ruthlessly organized around the purposive-rational imperatives of efficiency and success' (Ingram 1990, p.58). Also Jay 1996, p.259.

> Following Marx and Lukács, Critical Theory from the beginning characterized capitalist society as a commodity-producing society, and took the commodity as the basic social unit and key to the functioning of capitalism.[48]

The School made few references to consumption during the depression, but Kellner charts how this changed in the 40s and 50s as mass consumer society developed. From this time Adorno and Horkheimer in particular began to strongly represent 'the culture industry as involving administered culture, imposed from above, as an instrument of indoctrination and social control'[49]. With this both found an increasing correspondence between their ideas and Weber's: consumption was an unhealthy and oppressive phenomenon colonising all aspects of life, with an ability to 'lull its victims into passive acceptance'[50]:

> In the new configurations of capitalism, everything – goods and services, art, politics and human life – became a commodity, while commodity exchange became the basic form of relationship in the consumer society.[51]

In this the Critical Theorists' use of Weber supported an analysis of capitalism that Marx also enabled, namely, the view that consumption was a key determinant of what was propping up the enforced, *unnatural* exploitation of capitalism.

Weber's analysis of capitalism was radically different to Marx's, and Weber disagreed with Marx's later stress on the economistic dynamics of capitalism, rejecting the view that ideas were 'mere ideological reflections of economic interest'[52]. Ingram portrays the Critical Theorists as finding a further affinity between Weber's approach and their own through their mutual rejection of 'scientistic' and 'economistic' versions of Marx, and notes that the School began to use Weber's methodology, even though it also purported to offer a 'scientific explanation of social phenomena'[53]. It was this 'scientific' methodology Ingram believes further buoyed the conclusions about false consciousness that the Critical Theorists had drawn from Freud, their growing ascription to the idea that action could be a result of subconscious beliefs[54]. He writes how in developing their

[48] Kellner 1989, p.147
[49] Kellner 1989, pp.130-1
[50] Jay 1996, p.216. Jay notes that Horkheimer had 'always been an interested reader of Weber' (Jay 1996, p.44, p.259), but doesn't mention any particular influence Weber had on the School. Kellner in contrast writes that the Critical theorists had been influenced by Weber from the first (1996, pp.3-4), and notes the similarities between their respective critiques (Kellner 1989, p.100).
[51] Kellner 1989, p.147
[52] Ingram 1990, p.50
[53] Ingram 1990, pp.49-50
[54] Ingram 1990, p.51

'materialist social psychology'[55], Weber enabled the Critical Theorists to conceptualise a firm 'scientific' connection between the material / economic aspects of society which drew Marx's concern, and cultural ideas:

> Weber was sufficiently moved by Marx's critique of idealism to deny that the content of ideas was alone capable of affecting historical change. Ideas prove ineffective unless there exists an *elective affinity*, or correspondence, between them and prior socioeconomic interests. Furthermore, it is not the explicit meaning of ideas that often motivates, but the unintended - and largely unconscious - psychological effects that arise from their affinity with economic interests. In the final analysis, ideas and material interests are mutually interrelated. The pursuit of material interests is selectively governed and legitimated by ideas, but ideas achieve their effect in and through material interests.[56]

In short, in attempting to overcome various tensions between the differing interpretations of Marx, Ingram argues that 'Weber's combined idealist / materialist approach played an important role in the Frankfurt School's attempt to formulate a scientific method of *ideology critique*'[57]:

> First, Weber developed a theory of social action that attempted to show the peculiar psychological nexus linking transcendent cultural ideals, subjective ideas, and concrete material interests. His analysis of the "elective affinity", linking Protestantism and capitalism, exemplified this connection in a way that proved decisive for the school's own attempt to come to grips with the positive and negative elements underlying bourgeois moral idealism. Second, the theory of social action provided Weber with a methodology for both understanding and causally explaining social phenomena. This method helped the school understand how philosophical interpretation of and reflection on cultural meanings could be wedded to scientific explanation of social phenomena. *Above all, it enabled them to conceive ideological false consciousness along a model of a fixed and unfree form of reflex-patterned behavior.*[58]

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[55] As Kellner terms it (1989, p.36).

[56] Ingram 1990, p.50.

[57] Ingram 1990, p.51

[58] Ingram 1990, pp.49-50. *My italics.* Even in his inaugural address to the Institut, Horkheimer had rejected any division between the material and the ideal, arguing both must be overcome by a dialectical fusion (Kellner 1989, p.19). The attractions of Weber's work in this regard becomes evident, especially when considered in relation to Horkheimer's 'programmatic statement' in the first issue of *Zeitschrift* which Kellner summarises as follows: 'social research from various academic fields in the journal would be part of an attempt to develop a "theory of contemporary society as a whole" aiming at "the entirety of the social process. It presupposes that beneath the chaotic surface of events one can grasp and conceptualize a structure of the effective powers." This theory would be based on the results of historical studies and the individual sciences, and would therefore strive for the status of "science"' (Kellner 1989, p.27). Yet in *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology* (1983), Clarke casts strong doubts on Weber's value-neutral claims: 'While he endorsed ... research that was 'value-relevant', that would inform contemporary ethical and political debate, he insisted that the research itself had to be conducted with scrupulous regard for objectivity and that the results of the research could not impose particular ethical or political conclusions. Research could provide only the facts that could inform debate. To reach ethical conclusions it was necessary to judge those facts in accordance with chosen ethical criteria. The argument was extremely disingenuous, however well-intentioned, for

Reason, agency, structure and the challenge to Marx

One other significant aspect of the increased emphasis the School placed on 'ideology', 'false consciousness' and 'false need', was the concomitant stress it came to place on the role of 'structure'. This was in striking opposition to Marx's early and still unpublished work which retained a significant place for the importance of individual agency; it also exhibited a strong parallel to those economic determinist versions of Marx which the School rejected. I have discussed above how, influenced by Weber and Freud in their attempts to account for the longevity of capitalism, in conjunction with their increasingly gloomy prognosis about the possibility for positive change, the School overturned Marx's later *economic* analysis of how capitalism must eventually implode under the cannibalising weight of its internal contradictions and replaced it with a *psychological* explanation which focused on how 'true' and 'false' needs were able to perniciously sustain the capitalist system. As Springborg details in *The Problem of Human Needs and the Critique of Civilisation*:

> the doctrine of true and false needs asserts that capitalism has developed the unique capacity to perpetuate itself by introjecting into the psyche of its subjects those needs that it requires them to have in order for it to survive. It is only by being able to create a demand for new products that keeps pace with the volume at which these commodities are produced that capitalism has been able to stave off the effects of the law of the declining rate of profit, overproduction, and so on which would otherwise have brought about its collapse[59].

And in taking this new tack, the true and false needs theorists came, perhaps unsurprisingly in retrospect, to proffer what effectively was an 'iron cage':

> the doctrine of true and false needs involves a hidden contradiction, a practical antinomy. It makes a judgment on capitalism as a system which does not permit man to realise his latent powers and his full development as an individual, on the tacit assumption that under other conditions or another system these powers can flourish. But to find his way out of the condition of alienation presupposes that man still has the critical judgment and moral capability to transcend the constraints of his condition. And yet it is precisely this critical judgment and moral capability that the doctrine denies by arguing that false needs have been introjected into the psyche of the individual, so that behaviour is predetermined.[60]

Or as Axel Honneth puts it:

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while the facts might never be able to impose a particular judgement, they could certainly be formulated in such a way as to leave little room for serious choice' (Clarke 1983, p.196).

[59] Springborg 1981, p.6

[60] Springborg 1981, p.11

> Adorno had made Marx's critique of fetishism so decisively the point of departure for his critique of society that he could no longer find any trace of an intramundane transcendence in the social culture of everyday life'[61].

Springborg points out that this shift actually transmuted the thrust of Marx's original program altogether, especially insofar as it was a radical revision of and departure from his labour theory of value:

> Now there is no way to explain how the consumer comes to be able to purchase these commodities that is congruent with the labour theory of value and its principle that the disposable income of the worker is being constantly reduced to nil by the necessity of the capitalist to make a profit. The doctrine of true and false needs, to the extent that it offers a theory of exploitation, means by that something entirely different ... By framing a theory of alienation in terms not of deprivation, but of surfeit, the doctrine of true and false needs meets peculiar difficulties. What it really asserts is that men under capitalism are alienated not because their fundamental human needs have not been met, but because the needs they exhibit are not genuine ones. Exploitation then consists not in the failure to meet basic needs so much as in the creation of false needs.[62]

She believes that Marcuse was the strongest adherent of this approach. In *One Dimensional Man* (1972), for instance, Marcuse explicitly refers to false needs 'superimposed upon the individual'[63]:

> products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood.[64]

But Adorno and Horkheimer's mass society essays offer a position just as constricting, and with this, Jay believes,

> the Institut presented a revision of Marxism so substantial that it forfeited the right to be included among its many offshoots. By challenging the actual or even potential existence of a historical subject capable of implementing a rational society, the Institut finally jettisoned that central premise of Marx's work, the unity of theory and *praxis*.[65]

Patricia Springborg observes that the vision of human existence offered by the Frankfurt school is one in which 'the corruption of capitalist man, his willing compliance as an insatiable consumer, produces a more gross form of alienation than that produced by the outright exploitation of capitalism in its earlier phases'[66]. For instance, in terms of degrees of corruption, Adorno himself stated that people were not dupes, but rather saw

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[61] Honneth 1994, pp.256-7
[62] Springborg 1981, pp.7-8
[63] Marcuse 1972, p.19
[64] Marcuse 1972, p.24
[65] Jay 1996, p.296
[66] Springborg 1981, p.6

no alternative, taking a sado-masochistic consolation for their misery and oppression but despising themselves for it:

> they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them. They force their eyes shut and voice approval, in a kind of self-loathing, for what is meted out to them, knowing fully the purpose for which it is manufactured. Without admitting it they sense that their lives would be completely intolerable as soon as they no longer clung to satisfactions which are none at all.[67]

Yet despite people knowing, and choosing its 'satisfactions', Adorno writes that the culture industry still utterly 'impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide for themselves'[68].

Perhaps the most curious aspect of the Frankfurt School's use of this quasi-Weberian 'scientific' method was the strange juxtaposition it formed to the School's attacks on positivism and instrumental rationality. Curious, because while criticising positivism, the Critical Theorists, in effect, also represented themselves as drawing on rigorously 'scientific' techniques to formulate their critique, albeit under the auspices of contrasting their 'critical reason to positivism's instrumental and formal reason'[69]. Yet the extent to which 'critical reason' can gain any special exemption which delivers it from positivism's flaws is highly questionable. For the School's theories of 'true' and 'false' needs, Patricia Springborg avers, really only proffer another brand of crypto-scientism which acts to disguise the value judgments it obtains:

> ... the doctrine of true and false needs turns out to be an ethical theory which (1) does not recognise its status as such, and (2) does not admit of ethical solutions. Dialectical materialism specifically rejects the fact / value distinction, on the grounds that moral imperatives merely reflect the presuppositions and requirements of an economic system. The doctrine of true and false needs is advanced not as an ethical or normative but as a *scientific* theory (my emphasis), whose laws hold with the same necessity as the laws of the physical world. In other words, in so far as it supplants the labour theory of value as an explanation of the underlying mechanisms by which the capitalist system maintains itself, the doctrine of true and false needs is understood as having the same force: as an empirical and not as an ethical theory.[70]

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[67] Adorno 1991b, p.89
[68] Adorno 1991b, p.92 check quote mark
[69] Kellner 1989, p.86
[70] Springborg 1981, pp.9-10. Note how Springborg's conclusions re the fact / value distinction differ from Soper's, while in this section Springborg places more emphasis on the scientific / economic aspects of Marx's work. The position of the Critical Theorists here however, takes on a particular irony when weighed against Adorno and Horkheimer's eventual divergence from Marx. Jay describes how this was so complete that in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1946) they began to comprehensively criticise, rather than just depart from his ideas, and in undertaking a critique of reason itself, they actually displaced class conflict as *the* problem: 'The focus was now on the larger conflict between man

The doctrine of true and false needs and its associated critique of consumption has clear flaws. Critical theory gestures towards there being no one truth, with the theorist being inextricably embedded in the society they are judging, unable to escape socially given determinants of value. It then subsumes this acknowledgment under a totalising theory with claims to a determinate truth, a whole knowledge of what "is", thus bearing an uncanny resemblance to some of the religious, moral and romantic criticisms of consumption outlined in chapters two and three. Springborg certainly notes this similarity to romanticism:

> In its weak form, then, the doctrine of true and false needs is no more than a theory about man's susceptibility to corruption.[71]

And while the historical weight of these hostile attacks on consumption go some way toward explaining modern antipathy, this still does not entirely account for the continuing popularity of the true and false needs doctrine in the face of its obvious flaws. Even Kellner, who places himself in the Critical Theory tradition, acknowledges its shortcomings, while writing that much of this work has been politically ineffectual in terms of achieving reform:

> while Critical Theory's analysis of the consumer society provide illuminating historical and critical perspectives on the development of the consumer culture and the ways in which it has produced social integration, global denunciations of consumption have little political resonance, and provide a very weak basis for political radicalization and struggle today.[72]

He continues,

> we need, I believe, new critical perspectives on the commodities, needs and consumption which contemporary Critical Theory should try to provide if it wishes to be relevant to progressive social transformation in the future, where, among other things, the rigid dichotomy between production and consumption may well be overcome.[73]

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and nature both without and within, a conflict whose origins went back to before capitalism and whose continuation, indeed intensification, appeared likely after capitalism would end' (Jay 1996, p.256). And in this, 'not only did the Frankfurt School leave the vestiges of an orthodox Marxist theory of ideology behind, it also implicitly put Marx in the Enlightenment tradition' (Jay 1996, p.259). See also Ingram (1990, p.45), and Craib (1992, p.214).

[71] Springborg 1981, p.12

[72] Kellner 1989, p.162

[73] Kellner 1989, p.162. Kellner still also unconvincingly attempts to distinguish between consumption and 'consumerism' (1989, p.161). In this he himself maintains a true false needs paradigm – in terms of a kind of truth-in-advertising perspective coupled with consumer satisfaction: 'If a commodity, after critical scrutiny and use, reveals itself to be life-enhancing, truly useful, well constructed and fairly priced, then a need for it can be said to be a "true need". If the commodity fails to offer the satisfactions promised and is not beneficial, life-enhancing and useful, then a perceived need for it can be said to be a "false need". Note the distinction between true and false needs proposed here rests on empirical grounds' (Kellner 1989, p.160). In relation to this, however, note Soper's comment and her

Yet while views such as Kellner's may have leavened the tone of the debate, the influence of the Frankfurt School's critique remains potent. Their attacks on the 'culture industry' read as almost histrionic today, yet their theory of 'true' and 'false' needs has remained one of the most discredited but also resilient and surreptitiously ubiquitous doctrines of modern social analysis. The Frankfurt School's was a predominately 'horizontal' consideration of consumption, that is, a focus only upon the 'illusory' or 'arbitrary' nature of the meaning of goods, rather than a concern about the 'vertical' effects of goods, that is, their origins or consequences. In the following chapters I examine the particular nature and considerable range of this influence upon Marx and the Frankfurt School's theoretical progeny, together with the refutation of this position by other theorists, most of whom while rejecting the thesis of the consumer as 'wholly determined by the monopoly'[74], nevertheless enable arguments focused around identity to fully set the course and parameters of the consumption debates.

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subsequent analysis that effectively responds "So what" ... this approach still disqualifies any investigation into the concept of need itself: 'though sociology shares with economics a positivistic tendency to think of needs in terms of actual consumption, it has also tended to recuperate the concept of need from economic theory precisely in order to designate a demand that is not effective and thus to mark areas of consumption for which there is a 'need' but for which there is no provision – therefore no 'need' in the strict economic sense' (Soper 1981, p.29).

[74] Adorno 1991a, p.73

7

The Identity Debates
part one: changing the subject

> Changing the subject is always hard, because the audience must accept that the new subject is significant. And that is a matter of intellectual culture.
> (McClosky 1994, p.382)

In the previous chapter I noted three issues associated with the Frankfurt School's true / false needs perspective. First, proposing that 'real' needs underlie those imposed by ideology is predicated, as Danial Miller (1995) observes, on an ontology of origins. Yet how can any aspect of our identity be considered timeless or authentic given the extent to which we are shaped by our society, culture and history? Second, given we are 'constituted' in this manner, how can any theorist see through, and so avoid the social determinants informing their views of that which they purport to judge? What makes their judgements about how any one form of identity is more 'authentic' or genuine than another more valid than anyone else's? How are they alone exempt from ideology? And finally, if, as Adorno and Horkheimer maintain, the ability of capitalism to sustain this false process has become so powerful, how then can we theorise the character of human agency, and change?

I summarise these points again here because for a considerable period of time they were not seen as vexed, or even as particularly significant on the part of those advocating any of the multiple twentieth century variations on the Frankfurt School critique. Simmel and Thorstein Veblen were important precursors to the Frankfurt School, and I consider their arguments below. Many later theorists including Raymond Williams, Vance Packard, Roland Barthes, Guy Debord, Stuart Ewen, Lasch, Haug, and many others not writing on consumption directly, made comments that confirmed the existence of a hostile consensus. I outline some of these arguments over the first part of this chapter.

In the previous chapters I provided an overview of some of the more general European debates about consumption, identifying a longstanding hostility which enjoyed wide currency in theory, if not in practice. To what extent did this supply an ethos that informed and helped shape twentieth century accounts of consumption? It is beyond my purview to track direct lines of influence in as much detail as I would like here, but as I outline below, there certainly appear parallels between the earlier antipathetic views of lower class consumption expressed by elites, and twentieth century literary theory, for instance. In the previous chapter I also noted Springborg's point about the similarity between the views of the Frankfurt School and Romanticisms. What *is* very clear however, is that coupled with the earlier hostility, the sheer bulk of antipathetic twentieth century arguments gave them doctrinal weight, no matter how different the respective motivations, or how reductive, class biased, or gendered the analysis. Yet my fourth chapter on economic theory also gives an indication of what increasingly appeared to be at stake in many of the later critical perspectives: as liberal and neoliberal economic discourse fostered the idea of the autonomous individual, this began to enjoy a tenacious hold over Western social thought. And this generic conception of the sovereign individual of capitalism, the supposedly atomistic agent able to choose / consume freely and rationally drew a strong countervailing response. The character and role of consumption was a key point of contention in these debates.

Many of the theorists writing against consumption whom I mentioned above lay stress on the shaping and constraining role of social forces. And as shall be evident below, for a considerable period the standing of these accounts certainly constituted a particular orthodox configuration of its own. A configuration which other theorists eventually complained offered scant space for human agency, and as such, an incomplete account of change. The second half of the chapter considers the slow development of these later perspectives, but also how in relation to consumption the issue was conceived of primarily via questions of identity which then cannibalised most other concerns. As I shall discuss, it was anthropology which first signalled a change, with Mauss's classic essay *The Gift* (1990 [1924]) suggesting consumption involved more a complex and nuanced interplay of interpersonal social dynamics than had previously been allowed for. Mauss' arguments were later taken up and developed in Douglas and Isherwood's *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (1979), which I shall discuss in the following chapter. The latter part of this chapter surveys how in the 1970s the

Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies also came to view consumption as indicative of systems of meaning requiring more considered analytic frameworks than those extant, navigating their way through the many accounts antithetical to consumption by initially formulating a position validating certain modes of subcultural consumption as 'resistant' to various oppressive aspects of capitalism. This enabled the Centre to celebrate popular culture, and to represent those who practiced 'resistant' consumption as demonstrating a degree of 'agency' which had not previously been allowed for. Changing the subject is not easy however, as I shall detail below. Especially when trying to reconcile a number of seemingly incompatible accounts.

"Thorstein Veblen has much to answer for"

In his famous analysis of American elite in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1970 [1899]) Veblen presented the 'conspicuous consumption' and unproductive leisure activities of the elite as principally serving to 'signal' their wealth and status. There are curious similarities as well as differences between his account and the subsequent arguments of the Frankfurt School. Veblen positions the underlying motivation for this American elite as 'emulation' connected with competition for placement in the social hierarchy. Drawing parallels between the behavior of this elite to 'predatory' and 'barbaric' cultures, Veblen represents their behaviour as being so superficial as to crush any claim on their part of cultural refinement or civility. The utilitarian intent and effect of this elite consumption is to simply reinforce the class system, as the need to emulate trickles down the social strata[1]. Veblen cites a plethora of examples to support his thesis, from religious accoutrements and practices[2], to naturalistic gardens and topiary[3]. And off-hand it is very easy to think of many other present day instances that appear to substantiate his critique. Yet in 1941 Adorno dissected Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in an article entitled 'Veblen's Attack on Culture', lyrically referring to Veblen's 'vitriol' and 'spleen', which featured both 'the asceticism of a Lutheran peasant'[4] coupled with a 'Rousseauist ideal of the primitive'[5]. Adorno's principal criticism of Veblen, however, was that his analysis simply fell short, failing to recognise the underlying nature of that which he sought to critically assess, insofar as he mistakenly attacked the symptoms while overlooking the fundamental complaint, that being the 'economic

[1] Campbell 1998, p.141
[2] Veblen 1970, pp.90-???
[3] Veblen 1970, pp.100-102
[4] Adorno 1941, pp.398-9
[5] Adorno 1941, p.405

structure of society'[6]. In this, Adorno characterises Veblen as a pragmatic 'backwoods sectarian'[7], his stasis a mistaken ressentiment, which invokes the kind of 'spite' that 'hypostatizes this situation as an eternal one'[8], and so is unable to take into account the 'objective potentiality' of societal emancipation[9].

When he published his article Adorno still remained an optimistic enough Marxist to argue Veblen's analysis was lacking only because he did not understand the significance of the dynamics of the production process. Moreover, in valorising work while criticising idle leisure, Adorno perceived that Veblen simply failed, Kellner explains, 'to provide adequate critical perspectives on capitalism itself'[10]. Jay also records that Adorno in any case did not approve of aestheticism, believing, as with Marx, that even if the desire for status recognition is 'distorted' it still signals a desire for a 'happiness' that must be social[11] (and this could not be solely a matter of economic well-being). Yet aside from the droll incongruity of Adorno accusing Veblen of so much subsequently directed against himself, Adorno's critique was not a fatal issue for those who otherwise read his position as a support to Veblen's, and vice versa. But apart from whatever theoretical consonance exists between them, Veblen's celebrated account stands on its own merits. Campbell has noted a long sociological tradition of calling on Veblen to denigrate consumption, with such a strong adherence to his model that 'its inadequacies are rarely noted'[12]. Campbell's is merely one account of the many that have drawn attention to and questioned the reductive, one-sided way Veblen portrays human motivations (see also Weatherill 1993, Vickery 1993, Gabriel and Lang 2006, and Slater 1997). Yet these positions are relatively recent. For a considerable period of time, Douglas and Isherwood note, Veblen's undersocialised conception of human motivations was simply taken as given:

> Thorstein Veblen has much to answer for when we consider how widely his analysis of the leisure class is received and how influential has been his unqualified scorn of conspicuous consumption.[13]

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[6] Adorno 1941, p.406. It is possible Veblen drew Adorno's ire with a 1906 article, when he wrote of Marx's theory as having 'a great logical consistency', more than any other theory, but that it was also 'not only not tenable, but it is not even intelligible', Marx's 'disciples' were only 'bent on exegesis and on confirming their fellow-disciples in the faith'.
[7] Adorno 1941, p.406
[8] Adorno 1941, p.412
[9] Adorno 1941, p.413
[10] Kellner 1989, p.150
[11] Jay 1996, p.180
[12] Campbell 1998, p.139
[13] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p. p.vii

Simmel: "an artificial demand that is senseless from the perspective of the subject's culture"

Veblen's German contemporary Simmel's work has been connected to Veblen's, even regarded as extending Veblen's[14], insofar as Simmel is interpreted as arguing consumption involves not only emulation and imitation, but differentiation and individuation also. This too is based broadly around class distinctions, with people continually attempting to distinguish themselves from those who seek to emulate them. As Simmel wrote in his famous essay 'Fashion':

> the fashions of the upper stratum of society are never identical with those of the lower; in fact, they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepares to appropriate them.[15]

Simmel's principal interest, overall, was in identity, individuality and social connections and forms of interactions in the context of the impact of industrialisation, modernisation, rationalisation, and monetarisation, with the concurrent rise of individualism and breakdown of traditional societal rules and norms. Yet while his focus on modernisation incorporated class analysis, Simmel's purview extended beyond a critique of capitalism. He was, actually, quite ambivalent about the effects of the societal changes he analysed[16]. He did view with concern the intensification of alienation and exploitation, facilitated by the

> progressive obscuring of the qualitative values by a merely quantitative one, by an interest in a pure more-or-less, since after all it is only the qualitative values which ultimately satisfy or needs.[17]

Yet Simmel also identified positive aspects to the development of monetary relations, in so far as 'the subject is freed from restrictive commitments'[18], enabling 'a new possibility of development'[19]. And despite Simmel's interest in modernisation, as opposed to capitalism specifically, in *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1994) Danial Miller notes Simmel's 'considerable influence' on Lukács, and through him, 'a certain tradition of Western Marxism'[20]. However, Miller continues,

> Within this tradition, the argument has been that Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* provides an important critique of alienation, which, unfortunately, the author perceived as a condition of modernity itself instead of a specific attribute

[14] Gabriel and Lang 2006, p.49
[15] Simmel 1971 [1904], p.298
[16] See Abercrombie et al 1986, p.22, and Slater 1997, p.118
[17] Simmel 1991a, p.24
[18] Simmel 1991a, p.18
[19] Simmel 1991a, p.19
[20] Miller 1994, p.68

> of capitalism; but, once his philosophy is directed back to its proper object, there is much to be learnt from his examples.[21]

This critique appears to be another version of Adorno's main complaint against Veblen. Habermas has also written of Adorno's more sympathetic reception of Simmel however, while raising various issues with Simmel's work, remarking that 'Horkheimer and Adorno, too, offered with their theory of mass culture only a variation on a Simmelian theme'[22]. And although Simmel's account of modernity represents a far more ambiguous stance than Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of consumer culture, Habermas' ability to draw such parallels is easier to understand, given statements Simmel made such as this:

> vast supplies of products come into existence which call forth an artificial demand that is senseless from the perspective of the subject's culture.[23]

Culture as a synonym for civilisation

As with the Frankfurt School, Simmel and Veblen's arguments connected oddly with the criticisms from a range of social commentators about to the relative merits of high / low culture, despite differences in their respective motivations. Early twentieth century literary theorists such as the Leavis's positioned high culture as a positive aesthetic ideal to be emulated, and popular culture as lesser and coarser. Everyday popular culture was not considered a worthy object for the academic gaze: as Graeme Turner puts it in *British Cultural Studies* (2003), such practices were deemed 'meretricious'[24]. In their Introduction to *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (1991) Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson identify how in 'the eighteenth century, "culture" was a synonym for "civilization", the general process of becoming civilized or cultivated'[25], and popular or mass culture was seen as 'anti-culture'. This particular

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[21] Miller 1994, p.68

[22] Habermas 1996

[23] Simmel cited in Miller 1994, p.77. Yet on 'The Berlin Trade Exhibition' Simmel writes: 'Every fine and sensitive feeling, however, is violated and seems deranged by the mass effect of the merchandise offered, while on the other hand it cannot be denied that the richness and variety of fleeting impressions is well suited to the need for excitement for overstimulated and tired nerves ... The differentiation of the active side of life [on production] is apparently complemented through the extensive diversity of its passive and receiving side. The press of contradictions, the many stimuli and the diversity of consumption and enjoyment are the ways in which the human soul – that otherwise is an impatient flux of forces and denied a complete development by the differentiations in modern work – seeks to come alive. No part of modern life reveals this need as sharply as a large exhibition. Nowhere else is such a richness of different impressions brought together so that overall there seems to be an outward unity, whereas underneath a vigorous interaction produces mutual contrasts, intensification and lack of relatedness' (1991c, p.120).

[24] Turner 2003, p.2

[25] Mukerji and Schudson 1991, p.2

approach can be connected again to the more conservative strains of romanticism, mentioned in chapter two (where such distinctions can be traced back to the eighteenth century romantic notion of the authentic individual - inconsistently envisaged as unpolluted by the detritus of society, but whose authenticity still entails the visible exhibition various cultural signifiers of refinement, sensibility and taste[26]). According to Slater however, Leavisite views also found mutually supportive and sustaining themes in writers as disparate as Nietzsche, Ortega, and Pound. Their 'contempt for the "masses"', Slater comments, was 'not incompatible with a desire to purify them as a *Volk*'[27].

Turner writes of how within the British literary critical tradition the valorisation of high culture was coupled with the view of 'popular culture as a threat to the moral and cultural standards of modern civilisation'[28]. In *Subculture the Meaning of Style* (1998), Dick Hebdige similarly situates theorists such as Arnold, Elliot and Leavis in this tradition. With an almost Evangelical fervour these critics focused on the capacity of literary texts to uplift social and moral standards. Elite bourgeois standards of value were idealised, but neither was 'aping' ones betters deemed appropriate behaviour for the working class. Each class was viewed as having its own validity - in its own '*place*' (despite, or perhaps because of how increasing industrialisation and urbanisation led to traditional stereotypical roles fragmenting). Turner outlines how Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) 'warned of the likely consequences of the spread of this urban, "philistine culture", which was accelerating with the extension of literacy and democracy'[29]. According to Turner, Arnold was concerned about the decline of 'organic' communities, but he also associated 'philistine culture' with the failure of democracy, insofar as he predicted subordinate classes would not having the capacity for judicious judgement.

In the interwar period Leavis and Eliot took up Arnold's concerns, balancing an idealised 'traditional' English cultural past against the shortcomings of the industrialised present. In this critique, popular culture was represented as having no aesthetic value, as

[26] See Campbell 1993

[27] Slater 1997, p.72. Hilton also discusses this literature, and cites Carey's *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) as offering a fuller account, albeit one which 'ignores the discrepancies, contradictions and ambiguities in the opinions of many leading literary and artistic figures' (2004, p.109). See also Thompson (2007) for a good overview of a range of socialist concerns about consumption around the turn of the century.

[28] Turner 2003, p.2

[29] Turner 2003, p.34

well as being morally deficient[30]. Hebdige later cites Orwell and Hoggart as advocating subsequent variations on this position, with modern mass consumer culture envisaged as corroding and cheapening the staunch wholesome 'honesty' of authentic British working class culture[31]. In *Hiding in the Light* (1988) he writes that these views were predicated on distinctions of "good" and "bad" taste and ascriptions of 'culture', with the normative criteria supporting such judgements founded in elite determinations of value, strongly influenced by the late Romanticism of William Morris' Arts and Crafts Movement. Which was itself based on designs and techniques taken from India, whose textiles industry was later casually destroyed by the British East India company[32].

Positioning these debates in the context of the changing material culture of the time is a curious exercise. Hebdige discusses the new 'streamlined' forms in architecture, industrial design and the burgeoning, 'austere, patrician' Modernist aesthetic that was challenging the Romantic aesthetic of the Arts and Crafts Movement. This new Modernist aesthetic, he writes, was 'still 'perfectly compatible with the definitions of "good taste" which were then becoming prevalent in broadcasting circles'[33], and was also associated with 'futurist manifestos and the popular imagery of progress'[34]. Yet when this same Modernist aesthetic when translated to *mass* culture it was depicted in elite representations as simply vulgar:

> aesthetic and the meanings constructed round it were transformed as they passed across from high to low, from the lofty assertions of an artistic avant garde to the context of consumption and use - the domain of the popular.[35]

Hoggart's commentary on the new milk-bars, for instance, refers to 'the nastiness of their modernistic knickknacks, their glaring showiness'[36]. And while Turner views Hoggart's willingness to at least undertake an analysis of range of popular cultural 'texts' as a positive departure, opening 'up culture as a field of forms and practices'[37], he still underscores Hoggart's 'nostalgia', and his reproduction of 'Leavisite aesthetic standards'[38].

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[30] Turner 2003, p.35. See also Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.153, and Inglis 1993, pp.41-6.
[31] Hebdige 1988, pp.51-8
[32] See for instance Burnard 1994
[33] Hebdige 1988, p.61
[34] Hebdige 1988, p.61
[35] Hebdige 1988, p.64
[36] Hoggart cited in Turner 2003, p.40
[37] Turner 2003, p.41
[38] Turner 2003, p.39

Raymond Williams, British Marxism, Humanism

In *British Post-structuralism since 1968* (1991), Antony Easthope writes of Raymond Williams' response, in *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958), to T.S. Eliot's *Notes towards the definition of culture* (1948). Eliot had moved away from earlier elite notions of 'culture', to the extent he began to reconfigure the term around an acceptance of different ways of life[39], and culture as being 'the development "of a *whole society*"'[40]. Williams subsequently accepted that Eliot was writing against 'atomised' and 'individualist' notions of society associated with 'unregulated' industrialism, but he still viewed Eliot as conservative insofar as Eliot's conception of culture remained fossilised around the 'Informal, consumerist, pastoral'[41]. Easthope relates that in this Williams saw Eliot as sustaining a conservative elitism, his notion of culture being predicated on upholding 'precisely that economic system of "free economy" which goes along with the "atomised", individualist view of society Eliot wishes to attack'[42]. For Williams, Easthope relates, Eliot was

> inevitably complicit with traditional liberal notions of the organic unity of society, state and nation in a 'common culture' imagined as transcending class divisions.
>
> Such a domain of transcendence can only be founded in a notion of the individual as somehow constituting an essence and origin finally beyond all structural determinations, economic, social and linguistic.[43]

Yet Easthope points out that while Williams criticised Eliot's essentialism, he too faced a similar conceptual impasse which ensured that, in *Culture and Society* at least, Williams remained 'committed to a fundamental humanism'[44]. In writing from a 'left-culturalist' position, Williams was seeking more of an acceptance of the legitimacy of working class culture. In this, Easthope describes, 'Williams's text criticises explicitly the "Romantic" tradition and works hard to negotiate an opposing stance[45]. However Williams was also trying to balance his arguments against the then dominant strand of doctrinal British Marxism, and successfully navigating a route between these positions proved difficult.

In 'Itinerary of a thought: Stuart Hall, Cultural Studies, and the unresolved problem of the relation of culture to "not culture"', Peck relates how this brand of Marxist

[39] Williams [1958] 1963, p.229, see also Hebdige 1998.
[40] Eliot cited in Easthope 1991, p.3
[41] Easthope 1991, p.3
[42] Easthope 1991, p.3
[43] Easthope 1991, pp.3-4
[44] Easthope 1991, p.4
[45] Easthope 1991, p.4

determinism conceived of the economic base as a 'first cause' which was the seen as shaping everything else in a society, so that everything else was only a 'reflection' of the base. This perspective, she writes,

> identified the "base" with the state of development of the productive forces. All other aspects of existence, including culture, were relegated to the "superstructure" and treated as a reflection of the demands of the base, which was considered autonomous, unconditioned, and self-determining.[46]

I have already outlined in the previous chapter how the Frankfurt School responded to this strain of orthodox Marxism. Easthope charts how Williams' approach was to stress the power of individual agency, which in the context of the creative artistic process, he conceptualised as part of an 'essence' flowing somehow, from within. This is exemplified in a 1960 essay, 'Advertising: the Magic System', when Williams implicitly posits a counterfactual notion of authenticity and a pure human essence, an originary truth underlying that imposed by the system:

> Advertising, in its modern forms, then operates to preserve the consumption ideal from the criticism inexorably made of it by experience. If the consumption of individual goods leaves that whole area of human need unsatisfied, the attempt is made, by magic, to associate this consumption with human desires to which it has no real reference ... The magic obscures the real sources of general satisfaction because their discovery would involve radical change in the whole common way of life.[47]

In this his position was not so different to that of the Frankfurt School. Easthope, Turner, Hebdige and Slater all identify how Williams was open to broader, less elitist conceptions of culture, yet still simultaneously depicted the new mass consumption with negative overtones, as cheap, in the pejorative sense, and in connection with the polluted influence of advertising, as an addiction, manipulation and deformation of 'traditional' ways of life and 'essential' values[48]. Schudson describes Williams in similar term, labelling him as a 'puritan' critic, representing goods as, on some intrinsic level, having purely functional uses, with those uses subverted by the almost irresistible, polluting force of advertising[49].

[46] Culture is thus 'a reflection of a more primordial mental or material process' (Peck 2001, p.202).
[47] Republished in Williams 1982b, p.189).
[48] Hebdige 1998, p.6-7; Slater 1997, p.71; Turner 2003, p.48. Turner observes how William's *The Long Revolution* (1961) 'closely aligns him with Hoggart's pessimistic accounts of popular culture and, in particular, the media' (Turner 2003, p.44).
[49] Schudson 1998, p.254

Slater argues many of the values 'in which modern consumer goods come wrapped' are based upon a belief in 'authenticity' gleaned from the romantic period[50], with romanticism being a key influence in the formulation of these utopian visions of an ideal culture[51]. Schudson concurs:

> Most criticism of consumer culture share a few basic assumptions, which should be questioned at the outset. The critiques of consumer culture all object, as Emerson did, that things are in the saddle and ride us. They all seem to hold that if we could live the simple life, where things satisfy natural, biological needs and little more, we could properly devote attentions to justice or comradeship or aesthetic pleasures. We could then bask in the spiritual satisfactions the natural world can provide.[52]

Resonating with the views of the Frankfurt School, theorists in the above traditions, then, all maintain variations on the view of consumer culture as a lack of culture, the debasement of 'real' culture, and a symptom of a confused and alienated society, holding out a promise doomed to fail. And in this, a range of quite disparate streams of thought come together, proffering a seemingly conclusive intellectual summation of the unwholesome dynamics of consumer culture under capitalism.

Packard: "Large-scale efforts are being made, often with impressive success, to channel our unthinking habits ..."

It was the dangers and persuasive distortions of advertising that was the key concern of many of these accounts, including that of the Frankfurt School. With the mass affluence and production of uniform, inexpensive mass consumption items of the Fordist, post WW2 Western, but more specifically American, 1950s consumer boom, these concerns about advertising were directly addressed by Vance Packard's persuasive, widely consumed and anxiety provoking *Hidden Persuaders* (1957). Like Raymond Williams, Packard represented advertising techniques as having an impact almost impossible to resist. As Packard dramatically put it;

> Large-scale efforts are being made, often with impressive success, to channel our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions, and our thought processes by the use of insights gleaned from psychiatry and the social sciences.[53]

Advertising, in Packard's schema, was imposed on individuals by powerful interests, 'genuine, deeply rooted human needs were being appealed to in unscrupulous ways'[54], with a resultant overwhelming diminution of individual autonomy and agency. Yet

[50] Slater 1997, p.16
[51] Slater 1997, p.66
[52] Schudson 1998, p.251
[53] Packard 1963, p.11
[54] Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1986, p.25

Hebdige depicts Packard's analysis as incorporating a gendered bias remarkably similar to those I referred to earlier. Hebdige views Packard's 'misogynist values' as a dominating motif, his work featuring various

> analogies between the decline of the "real" solid / masculine / functional aspects of American industrial design which symbolise the pioneer spirit, and the complementary rise of the "fantastic" / feminine / decorative elements which symbolise consumer decadence. The fact that terms taken from women's fashion are beginning to infiltrate the language of automobile design is cited as evidence of a more general decline in standards ... [55]

Barthes's *Mythologies*

Roland Barthes' (1915-80) *Mythologies*, also published in 1957, represented consumer items and practices as being redolent with meanings that could be interpreted. Like Packard, Barthes presented this meaning as fraudulent, the obvious meanings denoted by the 'function' of goods obscuring the connotations or other layers of meaning, and thus essentially mystificatory of the 'real' processes and dynamics underlying the consumption act. For Barthes goods contain / transmit ideological myths that serve only to sustain the class system. Because ideology thrives '*beneath consciousness*', and is, in fact, most effective in its operations there[56], these ideological myths present the capitalist status quo as the way things 'should be', class inequality as unremarkable. To this extent then, myths do not hide, but distort. Represented as naturalised, given, wholly acceptable process, the class system thus becomes taken-for-granted, and in this sense 'disappears', with the structure of society thus falling outside the ambit of any need for its basic premise to be questioned:

> The fact of the bourgeoisie becomes absorbed into an amorphous universe, whose sole inhabitant is Eternal Man, who is neither proletarian or bourgeois.[57]

Although Barthes later changed his perspective to take post-structuralist arguments into account, at this point he was writing from a purely structuralist Marxist stance, analysing how the meanings attached to goods could act as ideological tools. Slater argues that at this time, Barthes effectively concurred with 'Veblen's general idea that the only real function of goods is to signify status'[58]. In *Mythologies* (1993), capitalism is sustained through a cycle of negatively ascribed motivations of emulation. For Barthes it is

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[55] Hebdige 1988, p.87. See also Slater 1997, p.73.
[56] Hebdige 1998, p.11
[57],'the further the bourgeois class propagates its representations, the more naturalized they become' Barthes (1993, p.140).
[58] Slater 1997, p.158

> by penetrating the intermediate classes that the bourgeois ideology can most surely lose its name. Petit-bourgeois norms are the residue of bourgeois culture, they are bourgeois truths which have become degraded, impoverished, commercialized, slightly archaic, or shall we say, out of date?[59]

Debord: "our old enemy the commodity"[60]

Barthes and Packard's accounts, although questioning the ability of individuals to combat the structural forces of power sustaining the status quo, and decrying the diminution of individual agency, were both intended as heuristic, assisting their readers to combat the pernicious effects of advertising and dominant societal norms. Guy Debord's fashionably resistant and colourful *Society of the Spectacle*, first published in 1967, was intended to perform, quite literally, a similar function, as a theoretical complement to the street performances of the Situationists, which through their discordant spectacle aimed to jolt people's awareness and awaken them to the more illogical everyday spectacle of capitalism, which they did not see. As with Barthes, consumption for Debord served only to mask and sustain the various oppressions of capitalism. His views thus did not deviate significantly from the orthodox consensus:

> The spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life. It is not just that the relationship to commodities is now plain to see - commodities are now *all* that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity ... social space is continually being blanketed by stratum after stratum of commodities. With the advent of the so-called second industrial revolution, alienated consumption is added to alienated production as an inescapable duty of the masses.[61]

Ewen: "the chasm between surface and reality widens; we experience a growing sense of disorientation"

Cognisant of the work of the Frankfurt School, Packard and Barthes, Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness* (1976) attempts the same heuristic function; on the back cover of Ewen's book *Newsweek* incongruously claims that Ewen 'sharpens our minds and steels our instincts against seductive subliminal appeals' [of advertising]. As with the critics above, for Ewen, the consumption that occurs under industrial capitalism, although offering 'gratification and excitement'[62], once again just acts as consolation for the monotony of modern systems of production, while ensuring people become socially and

[59] Barthes 1993, p.140
[60] Debord 1997, S.35, p.26
[61] Debord 1997, S.42, p.29
[62] Ewen 1976, p.189

politically passive[63]. Personal identity is not determined by work but by possession of goods, whose meaning is manufactured and created by 'commercial propaganda' according to market imperatives[64]. For Ewen, this 'diverts attention' away from attempts to achieve better work conditions. Ewen's subsequent book, *All Consuming Images* (1988), ostensibly an analysis of style, does not deviate substantively from his earlier thesis. Ewen focuses more on how in conjunction with their social networks individuals shape and give expression to their identity through their consumption practices, and in this he does attempt to allow, to some extent, for later more considered accounts of consumption. But identity here is still delimited by the mass media insofar as people's understanding 'of style was linked to consumption, and to the power of the mass media to convey, magnify, refract, and influence popular notion of style'[65].

Ewen's argument as a whole envisages commodification as an abomination, as stripping the meaning from other, more intrinsically human relationships. For Ewen, consumption ultimately can only be seen as waste, and in fact he does discuss the consequences of consumption in terms of the impact of physical waste on the environment, but this is only a by-product of his main attack on consumption. Theoretically Ewen offers no advance on the culture industry thesis, and does not attempt to address the criticisms raised against it. Effectively paraphrasing, he writes

> The ability to stylize anything – toothpaste, clothing, roach spray, dog food, violence, other cultures around the world, ideas, and so on – encourages a comprehension of the world that focuses on its easily manipulable surfaces, while other meanings vanish to all but the critical eye.[66]

Consumption can thus only ever be a facade, the meanings invested in goods masking an underlying, more honest reality. The consequences of this process are grim, and increasingly difficult to escape because as

> the chasm between surface and reality widens; we experience a growing sense of disorientation.[67]

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[63] As Schudson notes, people come to expect 'political life to be prefabricated and expect to participate in it simply by making a choice between predetermined alternatives' (1998, p.258).
[64] Ewen 1976, p.109
[65] Ewen 1988, p.10
[66] Ewen 1988, p.262
[67] Ewen 1988, p.271

Giddens, Lasch, and Haug: "artificially framed styles of life ... a substitute for the genuine development of self"

Giddens and Lasch are noted for offering similar views: consumption is again a 'compensatory bribe' which merely relieves the exploitation of capitalism, that has so alienated people from their labour[68] it has resulted in the complete distortion and the decline of 'authentic' society[69]. For as Giddens states:

> The project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life ... The consumption of ever-novel goods becomes in some part a substitute for the genuine development of self.[70]

Gabriel and Lang point out how Lasch similarly represents consumers as 'dupes', and Schudson too notes his argument that consumption 'merely reinforces the discontents for which it promises consolations'[71]. Lasch, Schudson writes, views consumption as an 'opiate' for consumers who are 'perpetually unsatisfied, restless, anxious, and bored'[72]. Consumption becomes 'a compulsion, an addiction, a sickness linked intrinsically to consumer capitalism'[73]. Advertising distorts desires in a manner that results in 'unappeasable appetites'[74], and consumer culture only offers an endless, perpetual cycle of dissatisfaction that fails to fulfil, while warping other, more intrinsically 'real' human needs. Meanwhile, as with the many other critical accounts, for Lasch consumer culture only results in a developing political passivity, with consumption becoming a facile 'alternative to protest or rebellion'[75], serving to sustain capitalist excess and inequality. For Lasch more 'authentic' human needs can never be fulfilled by goods - these merely take on false, quasi-reified meanings. As Schudson outlines, the only meaning goods can

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[68] Slater (1997, pp.92-4, p.107) and Fowles (1996, pp.62-3) both note the similarities between Giddens and Lasch. See also Schudson (1998), Fowles (1996), Gabriel and Lang (2006), Corrigan 1997, p.1.
[69] Slater 1997, p.71
[70] Giddens cited in Slater 1997, p.87. In a recent interview Giddens reiterated this view of consumers as manipulated; 'Anyone who starts from an idea of hegemony, or from Foucault's governance, still has that kind of idea. There is the claim to know that, behind what people are thinking, is a symbolic system which is robbing them of some aspects of their subjectivity and will. Perhaps in media and cultural studies there's more stress on the interactive, but theoretically I would have thought that anyone influenced by Foucault or Gramsci is still fairly deeply into that kind of thing. There's a kind of traditional Leftism associated with it in which you somehow *want* to hold a view that people are manipulated so that you can rescue them from the manipulations of the wider culture or of the economy and capitalism' (Giddens 2003, pp.391-2, pp.397-8).
[71] Gabriel and Lang 2006, p.91, p.109
[72] Lasch cited in Schudson 1998, p.254
[73] Schudson 1998, p.254. Slater similarly states that Lasch views of consumption as a 'pathology', where capitalism only 'reduces individuals to interchangable objects that relate to each other as pure objects (things that can potentially gratify the needs of the self' (Slater 1997, p.94).
[74] Lasch cited in Fowles, 1996, p.62
[75] Schudson 1998, p.261

safely and legitimately contain in Lasch's vision are those stripped of ascribed human meaning and given value for the functional, utilitarian, 'puritan' purposes they obtain[76]: 'The concept of needs', Schudson states, 'here seems to be very limited'[77]. This imposition of what can be viewed as acceptable types of consumption 'is suspicious of the aesthetic dimension of human experience and has no place for someone who takes pleasure in the feel or look of a consumer good'[78]. Yet Lasch validates his position, privileging hand crafted products over the mass produced, indifferent or unaware of Veblen's sharp critique re this[79], instead arguing that hand crafted products deliver improved individual psychological development, helping, as Schudson puts it, to 'bridge the gap between the individual's inner self and the social world'[80]. Refuting Lasch's position on hand crafted products, Schudson refers to the change in housewives' labour – do labour saving devices, he asks, represent 'progress and liberation? Or must we conclude this represents the underspiritualization of food and clothing?'[81]

Other theorists offering variations on the Frankfurt School attacks on consumption include Haug[82] and Baudrillard[83]. But the monochromatic schematics of these accounts dull with continual repetition. Schudson's response to Lasch is nevertheless just one of many more recent approaches stressing the acute limitations of this generic brand of

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[76] Schudson writes that Lasch only has a 'utilitarian valuation of goods. Goods should serve practical human needs (or human social relationships, in Lasch's view). They should be valued for their capacity to fulfil human needs but they should not be ends of desire in themselves. The concept of needs here seems to be very limited' (Schudson 1998, p.254).
[77] Schudson 1998, p.254
[78] Schudson 1998, p.254
[79] Veblen 1970, pp.94-5
[80] Schudson 1998, p.254
[81] Schudson 1998, p.255
[82] Haug believes products are now consciously manufactured and marketed to take maximum value of the 'reified' aesthetic. He writes: 'The people, as in monopoly capitalist society, are faced with a commodity world of attractive and seductive illusion and here, despite the outrageous deception, something very strange occurs, the dynamics of which are greatly underestimated. An innumerable series of images are forced upon the individual, like mirrors, seemingly empathetic and totally credible, which bring their secrets to the surface and display them there. In these images, people are continually shown the unfulfilled aspects of their existence. The illusion ingratiates itself, promising satisfaction: it reads desires in one's eyes, and brings them to the surface of the commodity. While the illusion with which commodities present themselves to the gaze gives the people a sense of meaningfulness, it provides them with a language to interpret their existence and the world. Any other world, different from that provided by the commodities, is almost no longer accessible to them' (Haug 1994, p.69).
[83] Slater argues that Barthes and Baudrillard both view consumption as motivated primarily according to how status is signified by goods. They 'generalize this to all classes and translate it into semiotic terms. Baudrillard takes this furthest, to the point of arguing that we no longer consume things but only signs. As in Veblen and Barthes, the putative function or utility of a consumer good is unmasked as merely a rationalization, an "alibi": the good is really valuable because it marks a social position. Even its economic value or price is important only as a signifier' (1997, p.158).

criticism proffering an extraordinary vision of the power of the 'system', coupled with a tacit, or not so tacit humanism, an implicit, or not so implicit conception of some kind of counterfactual authenticity, a Truth underlying that imposed by ideology. For as Kellner writes, there is clearly

> a latent Manichaeism and puritanism in this perspective. Commodities and consumption are negatively presented, simply as means of class domination, and the model also assumes a magical, diabolical power on the part of capital to create unreal false needs which it is then able to manipulate in its own interest.[84]

Mauss: "consumption as a system of reciprocity in which the honour of giver and recipient are engaged"

The growing acknowledgement of these problems arose in the context of a theoretical revisioning of consumption via a number of disparate intellectual skeins which came together towards the middle of last century which, over time, began to take into account the rich degree of human complexity and creativity involved in consumption practices. One of the first of these accounts was not directed at reappraising the worth of consumption within modern capitalist societies per se. Mauss's *The Gift*, first published in 1925 (in English in 1954), was concerned with Northwest Coast American Alaskan, Melanesian, Polynesian, and Australian Aboriginal communities and their social patterns and reciprocal connections involving elaborate consumption rituals and exchanges of 'gifts', the selection of which was determined according to the subtle gradations and degrees of value those gifts were deemed to represent. As the anthropologist Mary Douglas describes in her 1990 introduction to Mauss's book, Mauss portrayed these forms of gift giving as 'part of a system of reciprocity in which the honour of giver and recipient are engaged. It is a total system in that every item of status or of spiritual or material possession is implicated for everyone in the whole community'[85]. For Mauss, these gift giving regimes involved sophisticated and complex understandings of honour, etiquette and obligation, incorporating rules operating with varying degrees of 'informal' social cognisance[86]. There were valid systems of meaning associated with consumption which called into question assumptions of the primitive character of these 'so-called primitive societies'[87]. Although these systems involved,

[84] Kellner 1989, pp.158-9
[85] Douglas 1990, p.viii
[86] In Alaska for instance, 'the juridical and economic concepts possess less clarity and less conscious precision. However, in practice, the principals are positive and sufficiently clear-cut' (Mauss 1990, p.35).
[87] Mauss 1990, p.3

albeit not exclusively, 'Competition, rivalry, ostentatiousness, the seeking after the grandiose, and the simulation of interest'[88], they also featured social rules and norms disproving notions of the isolated individual, who, using a rationality which inheres solely within themselves, coldly calculates and maximises their utility. So while resonating with aspects of Veblen's arguments, in Mauss's conceptual schema consumption was theoretically transformed. It became a possible expression of human sociability, a means of bonding and joining, a legitimate way of maintaining social relations, and, most importantly, a valid and civil way of expressing care and concern. As Slater writes, for Mauss,

> goods are consumed and exchanged as part of the construction of social bonds and moral obligations. The flow of goods maps out along the ley lines of social relationships and simultaneously reproduces and represents those relationships.[89]

The Gift (1990) became a classic anthropological text, although in subsequent years the nuances of Mauss's representation of consumption as a legitimate expression of human sociability was marginalised by the emphatic negativity toward consumption that was compounded by the theoretical repute (and echolalia) of each successive critic. I mentioned above that this was ameliorated somewhat with Barthes. Earlier I discussed Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957) as an illustration of one of these hostile accounts resonant with overtones of the influence of Veblen, Marx and the Frankfurt School. Barthes's thinking subsequently went through various transmutations, yet even prior to this point, the lyricism of his prose and engaging semiotic analysis of the social meaning he saw accruing to goods had enabled and provoked further intellectual consideration, as opposed to a dismissal, of consumption across a range of disciplinary arenas. Moreover, while the overall thrust of Barthes's early account was antipathetic, Barthes's semiotics, as Hebdige put it in his *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1998),

> promised nothing less than the reconciliation of the two conflicting definitions of culture upon which cultural studies was so ambiguously posited - a marriage of moral conviction (in this case, Barthes' Marxist beliefs) and popular themes: the study of a societies total way of life.[90]

[88] Mauss 1990, p.28
[89] Slater 1997, p.149
[90] Hebdige 1998, p.10

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and structuralist Marxism

Hebdige suggests Barthes' early, decisive influence within cultural studies[91]. But the trends which Hebdige refers to were also nested within other debates in the British social sciences. I have already discussed how early/mid-twentieth century orthodox British Marxism's promotion of economic determinism and denegation of agency influenced Raymond Williams's implicit humanism. In giving pre-eminence to the directing role of the economic base, traditional British Marxism also dismissed the importance of theory in effecting change. This brand of Marxism had developed through the Second International, and was rejected also by a range of European theorists including Lukács and the Frankfurt School. Yet as Hall notes in his formative essay 'Cultural Studies: two paradigms', much of that work was not available in Britain when Williams first started writing[92]. But following the English translation of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in 1959, William's own work 'drew theoretical sustenance' from Marx's early, more humanist ideas[93].

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies developed steeped in Williams's 'left-culturalism'. Yet despite these early humanist inclinations, Peck notes that from the late 1960s structuralism came to be perceived as capable of providing solutions to the problems connected to the reflection theory of culture[94]. Easthope relates how in engaging with structuralist thought the Birmingham School's principal focus still centred around 'the way economic forces were mediated on the terrain of culture'[95], and in this, the concordance with the Marxist themes running through Barthes' work, to which Hebdige refers, is clear. But Peck also writes of how under Stuart Hall's directorship (from 1969[96]) structuralist accounts were diffused through Saussure, Levi-Strauss and Althusser, to the extent that structuralism achieved a 'paradigmatic status'[97].

[91] See also Peck 2001, p.206, and Olsen 1990, pp.163-205
[92] Hall 1980, p.23
[93] Peck 2001, p.207
[94] Hall 1980. Peck 2001, p.206-11
[95] Easthope 1991, p.71. Although Peck has written of how the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson, in a review of William's book, *The Long Revolution* (1961), accuses Williams of collapsing culture into society while excising the impact of economic and political forces from the cultural terrain (Peck 2001, p.201)
[96] Although Hall was closely involved with the centre from its inception.
[97] Peck 2001, p.208. Peck notes how Hall, in his 1980 article "Cultural studies: two paradigms", 'sides with structuralism's view of "experience" as an effect of structure, favors its notion of "the necessary complexity of the unity of a structure" over culturalism's "complex simplicity of an expressive causality" and grants it methodological superiority owing to its "concepts with which to cut into the complexity of the real"' (2001, p.212). She continues: 'For Hall, structuralism's value for building a

Hall has referred to the influence of many 'structuralisms' upon the Centre[98], however both Peck and Easthope stress that it was the primarily the work of Althusser which the 'New Left' in Britain, from 1958, utilised to resuscitate the role of theory within the Marxist tradition:

> Although Lévi-Strauss had aspired to "a theory of the superstructures" and Barthes had turned the lens of semiotics on ideology, it was Althusser who would tie the knot of Marxism and structuralism within cultural studies.[99]

Althusser's structuralist Marxism still conceived of the economic base as determining 'in the last instance', yet the arguments of the New Left also centred on a vigorous defence of the cultural superstructure as having a degree of 'relative autonomy' from the economic base[100]. Yet even here, due to the temporal differentiation and distanciation of these structures "the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes"[101]. It was this account which seemed to bypass the base / superstructure problem of reflection and the economic determinism of orthodox British Marxism; while still rejecting humanism, Althusser's structuralist Marxism also offered, as Easthope outlines, the conclusion that theory mattered after all[102].

The introduction of Althusserian ideas in Britain was not straightforward. The ensuing debates were intense, but also enormously generative. From 1964 through the *New Left Review* (established in 1960[103]), then the multidisciplinary influence of the film journal *Screen* (from 1971[104]), Althusser was utilised to argue everyday cultural products could regarded as 'texts' that could be scientifically 'read' as a study of how various 'audiences' were constructed. In formulating this position Althusser had drawn on Lacanian

"non-reductionist" cultural theory was its method for "studying the systems of signs and ... representations"; its "emphasis on the specificity, the irreducibility, of the cultural" and its break with "theoretical humanism"' (2001, pp.212-13).

[98] See, for instance, 'Cultural studies: two paradigms' (Hall 1980), and 'The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies' (Hall 1982).

[99] Peck 2001, p.213

[100] Easthope 1991, p.10, pp.16-22, and pp.38-42. Peck also disccusses how the 'social totality' for Althusser consists of the '"economic infrastructure, the politico-juridical superstructure, and the ideological superstructure" . . . each level possessed a degree of autonomy and efficacy, it was also determined by the totality of practices of all three instances . . . A social formation was not, however, simply "an equality of interaction between all instances" (Dew, 113), but "a structure articulated in dominance" (Althusser, *For Marx*, 202)' (Peck 2001, p.214).

[101] Althusser cited in Easthope 1991, p.17

[102] Easthope 1991, p.10. See also During's interesting article 'Socialist ends: the British New Left, cultural studies and the emergence of academic 'theory'' on the call for a need for theory within the British academic sphere.

[103] With Stuart Hall as editor, then Perry Anderson from 1962.

[104] Easthope 1991, p.34

psychoanalysis to conceptualise ideology as constituting or 'interpellating' the subject[105], texts operating to shape their reader's identities in a particular way, while simultaneously giving them a false sense of autonomy, so in this

> they misrecognise themselves as free individuals, [the texts] returning to them an apparently coherent and full identity.[106]

Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements*

Peck notes that 'Hall has insisted that Althusserianism in its "fully orthodox form ... never really existed for the Centre"', but she also records Hall's acknowledgement of its 'formative intervention'[107]. Judith Williamson, who was associated with the Centre, is one of those who made exemplary use of Althusser. In the conceptual panorama offered by her *Decoding Advertisements* (1978), Easthope explains,

> The advertisement acts to anneal the gap it has opened up – between the perfect self and you – by inviting the viewer to merge with the image in the represented mirror ... [108]

Despite the Althusserian inspired use of Lacanian psychoanalysis (and the reference to Lacan's so-called 'mirror phase'), the similarity to the accounts discussed earlier is evident. Unsurprisingly, because as Easthope notes, for Lacan, desire

> is socially and historically discovered ... under the system of commodity production ... "needs are reduced to exchange values" ... and objects of desire provided for the subject in the form of capitalist consumption.[109]

Williamson by extension argues advertisements speak to a 'real need ... falsely fulfilled', this being predicated on a system of 'perpetual unfulfillment'[110]. Advertisements act primarily yet again to

> obscure and avoid the real issues of society, those relating to work: to jobs and wages and who works for whom. They create systems of social differentiation which are a veneer on the basic class structure of our society.[111]

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[105]As Easthope describes 'Social construction is internalised through a process of *interpellation* or hailing, exemplified when someone calls out "Hey, you there!" and the individual addressed turns round recognising that it really is him or her who is meant by the hailing. Through this process subjects are pulled into a position, a social identity they thus support' (Easthope 1991, p.40).

[106] Easthope 1991, p.41

[107] Peck 2001, p.220

[108] Easthope 1991, p.73

[109] Easthope 1991, p.21. Citation is from Lacan's *Ecrits: a selection* (1977, p.252)

[110] Williamson 1978, p.9

[111] Williamson 1978, p.47. Subsequently, in *Consuming Passions* ([1980] 1987), arguing for the continuing vital importance of the influence of the economic sphere, she writes, 'Of course, the great irony is that it is precisely the *illusion* of autonomy which makes consumerism such an effective diversion from the lack of other kinds of power in people's lives. At a time when such power in the

Althusser's account did enable the value of theory to be reconstituted in Britain, but as this usage suggests, questions of agency and change remained problematic, because within the Althusserian conceptual schema, Peck points out

> meaning (more accurately, signification) was seen as arising not from subjective experience, but from within the operation of objective signifying systems that preceded and determined individual experience[112].

Ideology was again conceived of, Easthope notes, as generating and

> producing submissive subjects, subjects who submit precisely in misrecognising their subordination as freedom.[113]

Although Williamson remained optimistic, believing that advertising could be 'decoded' and its pernicious influence 'reversed'[114] (with the aid of judicious theoretical analysis), others began to raise points of concern regarding the extent to which questions of agency were occluded within the Althusserian problematic. Both Peck and Easthope relate how it was argued readers of a text were not simply blank slates (upon whom the text was inscribed[115]): neither could any implicit positing of a truth underlying ideology (which the theorist somehow standing 'apart from the structure' could determine[116]) be sensibly sustained.

Althusser's ideas were vitally important in generating positions and questions that facilitated the development of post-structuralism in Britain, although Peck and Easthope both also note how this was complicated by the British intellectual milieu. Yet even though ideology was still viewed as a central concept, it was at this time that many cultural studies theorists attached to the Birmingham Centre began to argue that the disparagement of popular culture and attacks on mass consumption was elitist. It was seen, Micheal Schudson relates, that 'the attack on mass-produced goods is often a thinly veiled attack on the masses themselves'[117]. In 1979, at the Oxford History Workshop, Stuart Hall felt moved enough to offer similar sentiments. In 'Notes on deconstructing

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political and economic spheres seems very distant, the realm of the "superstructure" is, for consumers and Marxists alike, a much more fun place to be' (1987, p.233).

[112] Peck 2001, p.203

[113] Easthope 1991, p.42

[114] Williamson 1978, p.9

[115] Easthope 1991, pp.68-70. Easthope also notes Hirst's argument in *Law and Ideology* (1979) that in Lacanian psychoanalysis the subject somehow still has the capacity to recognise themselves in the first place: "the dual-mirror relation only works if the subject ... who recognises already has the attributes of a knowing subject" for recognition "presupposes a point of cognition prior to the recognition" (Hirst cited in Easthope 1991, p.40).

[116] Peck 2001, p.218

[117] Schudson 1998, p.261

"the popular"', his contribution to the resultant Workshop publication, Hall declared that although mass consumption / culture is

> quite rightly associated with the manipulation and debasement of the people ... if the forms and relationships, on which participation in this sort of commercially provided 'culture' depend, are purely manipulative and debased, then the people who consume and enjoy them must either be themselves debased by these activities or else living in a permanent state of 'false consciousness'. They must be 'cultural dopes' who can't tell that what they are being fed is an up-dated form of the opium of the people. That judgement may make us feel right, decent and self-satisfied about our denunciations of the agents of mass manipulation and deception - the capitalist cultural industries: but I don't know that it is a view which can survive for long as an adequate account of cultural relationships; and even less as a socialist perspective on the culture and nature of the working class. Ultimately, the notion of the people as a purely *passive*, outline force is a deeply unsocialist perspective.[118]

Hall's Gramsci qua Althusser

Hall was in a curious position in advocating this new perspective: he was effectively attempting to theorise agency while at the same ratifying structuralism over culturalism[119]. Although seemingly incompatible, Hall and others affiliated with the Birmingham Centre had come to believe they could reconcile these disparate accounts by using Gramsci's ideas to represent relations between the bourgeoisie and the ruling class as *negotiated* (via ideological struggle). This shift was indicated in Hall's 'Notes on deconstructing "the popular"'[120] article, and laid out in various other programmatic statements, such as 'The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies'[121], 'Encoding / decoding'[122], and as Janice Peck records, most definitively in Hall's seminal 1980 article, 'Cultural studies: two paradigms'[123].

How meaning was negotiated was the key element in this new conflation. Facilitated also by Barthes's foray into post-structuralism signalled by his 1967 'The Death of the Author' essay and *S/Z* (1974)[124], Hall's 'Encoding / Decoding' forms a departure here: readers of cultural 'texts' are no longer simply inscribed (or 'interpellated'). For Hall,

[118] Hall 1981, pp.231-2
[119] Easthope notes how at this same conference Hall criticised Thompson's *Poverty of Theory* for its attack on Althusser (Easthope 1991, p.104).
[120] Hall 1981
[121] Hall 1982
[122] Hall [1980] 2000
[123] Peck 2001, p.221
[124])'... writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin' (Barthes [1967] 1984, p.142). Barthes [1970] 1974).

although 'the discursive form of the message has a privileged position'[125] and 'inscription' is still possible, so too are *negotiated* and *oppositional* readings. In texts such as 'The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies' and 'Cultural studies: two paradigms', Hall then connects this new acceptance of different interpretations to a *political* struggle over meaning via Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*, with *hegemony* used to account for working class consent to unequal power relations. Here consent is seen as obtained not through force, but through accommodation and co-option of commonsensical working class values, with the working class thus persuaded it is in their interest not to challenge or alter the status-quo[126]. And with this, Peck writes, ideology came to be perceived as a *struggle* over meaning: 'an activity of social subjects engaged in ideological struggle'[127].

Hebdige: subculture, autonomy, resistance

Concerned with theorising popular cultural resistance and change, in 1979 Dick Hebdige's engaging *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* neatly punctuates this changing approach. But Hebdige's account is also important in so far as it became one of the better known more positive revisionings of consumption practices since Mauss. Utilising Barthes's *Mythologies* (1993), Hebdige argued that modes of consumption could be regarded symbolically, and in this, like Barthes, he also drew on anthropological perspectives, in particular Claude Lévi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage*. The 'bricoleur', Lévi-Strauss wrote in *The Savage Mind* (1966),

> 'speaks' not only *with* things ... but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities. The 'bricoleur' may not ever complete his purpose but he always puts something of himself into it[128]

Translating the concept of *bricolage* to the subcultural groups he analysed, Hebdige argued that through heterodox consumption practices these groups transformed the

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[125] Hall 2000, p.124

[126] In his introduction to *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (1986) Tony Bennett also outlines this development, and depicts Gramsci as enabling an escape from the structuralist / culturalist 'impasse': '... Gramsci argues that the bourgoisie can become a hegemonic, leading class only to the degree that bourgeois ideology is able to accommodate, to find some space for opposing class cultures and values. A bourgeois hegemony is secured not via the obliteration of working class culture, but via its *articulation to* bourgeois culture and ideology so that, in being associated with and expressed in the forms of the latter, its political affiliations are altered in the process' (Bennett 1986a, pp.xiv-xv. Cited also in Easthope 1991, p.75). As Peck details, 'Just as "theoretical practice" was the Althusserian key to unmasking ideologies, Gramsci seemed to imply that radical intellectuals could denaturalize "common sense" through the application of "systematic thought"' (Peck 2001, p.220).

[127] Peck 2001, p.222

[128] Lévi-Strauss 1966, p.21

dominant definitions of meanings attached to goods, subverting and replacing those meanings with their own, in a manner resonating of "semiotic guerilla warfare"[129]. This signalled a 'self-imposed exile' from and resistance to dominant societal norms[130]. And in portraying the subordinate subcultural groups he studied as effectively 'refusing' dominant societal definitions of value (which included what Barthes had referred to as 'intentional' values transmitted by advertising), Hebdige located agency as evident in a political opposition to the dominant structures of capitalism. In contrast to previously dominant functionalist accounts which viewed society as a well ordered consensus (marred only by relatively small groups of disturbed and aberrant deviants), Hebdige vindicated subcultural modes of consumption, positioning them as acceptable, even commendable. Yet although he was careful to depict subcultural groups as embedded, and their identities constituted, Hebdige's argument could also be read as containing an uneasy tension; the view of subcultural expressions of identity as legitimate also intimates an authenticity that arising 'organically' within those groups[131].

Apprehending agency

Both Hebdige and Hall were attempting to locate resistance to dominant ideological norms while theorising a stronger account of agency: Hall and Jefferson's edited *Resistance through Rituals* (1975) (which Hebdige contributed to), and Hebdige's *Subcultures* (1998 [1979]) were both exemplary in contributing to the development of a new focus on the resistant, often 'ungovernable' and transgressive character of usually working class subcultural groups[132]. Yet while agency exists in Hebdige's *Subculture* (1998), it exists *only insofar as it reveals itself as resistance.* In his introduction to the second edition of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1980) Stanley Cohen raises this focus on resistance as a serious shortcoming in relation to the accounts of both Hebdige and Hall specifically, as well as the outlook of British cultural studies more broadly. I will return to this point shortly.

I note here that Hall has positioned his attempt to navigate between culturalism and structuralism via Gramsci as successful insofar as 'some of the best concrete work has

[129] Eco cited in Hebdige 1998, p.105
[130] Hebdige 1998, p.2
[131] In 'Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies' Hall discusses how one of the aims of cultural studies was to produce 'organic' intellectuals, and while what this comprised was unclear Hall also admits that 'we were prepared to imagine or model or stimulate such a relationship in its absence' (Hall 1996c, p.267).
[132] Hall discusses how *Resistance through Rituals* (1975) became 'quite influential' in 'For Allon White: metaphors of transformation' (1996d, p.294)

flowed from the efforts to set one or other of these paradigms to work on particular problems and materials'[133]. While he acknowledges the inadequacy of both culturalism and structuralism alone, as well as the problems associated with drawing on both simultaneously[134], Hall has labelled it crudely reductionist, an unproductive 'prison-house of thought' to 'over-polarise' these positions, or to challenge the possibility of a segue between them:

> the arguments and debates have most frequently been over-polarized into their extremes. At these extremities, they frequently appear only as mirror-reflections or inversions of one another. Here the broad typologies we have been working with - for the sake of convenient exposition - become the prison-house of thought.[135]

Hall's *oeuvre* has been extraordinarily productive, but no matter how many careful nuances and 'convenient expositions' he appeals to, structuralism and culturalism are incompatible.

What is particularly questionable in Hall's structuralist / culturalist, and later poststructuralist confection is his attempt to theorise agency. And in his contribution to *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996) Hall does, if implicitly, suggest the partial character of his own account. In the course of a discussion about the different stages in Foucault's engagement with subjects and subjectivity, Hall discusses how late in his career Foucault came to realise that he could not maintain an account of how subjects are governed without a corresponding account of how subjects choose and shape their subjectivity, that is, how and why they occupy one subject position rather than another:

> through a series of conceptual shifts at different stages in his work, [Foucault realised] that since the decentring of the subject is not the destruction of the subject, and since the 'centring' of discursive practice cannot work without the constitution of subjects, the theoretical work cannot be fully accomplished without complementing the account of the discursive and disciplinary regulation with an account of the practices of subjective self-constitution.[136]

Hall argues Foucault never resolved this issue, and while he suggests Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993) with her synthesis of Foucault and psychoanalysis offers a possible solution[137], overall he positions the issue as remaining

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[133] Hall 1980, p.30

[134] 'Without suggesting there can be any easy synthesis between them, it might usefully be said at this point that neither 'culturalism' nor 'structuralism' is, in its present manifestation, adequate to the task of constructing the study of culture as a conceptually clarified and theoretically informed domain of study' (Hall 1980, p.30).

[135] Hall 1980, p.30

[136] Hall 1996b, p.13

[137] Hall 1996b, p.14-6

'tangled and unconcluded'[138]. In itself, this statement is revealing - Hall is effectively owning his own inability, even via Gramsci, to theorise a choosing, constitutive subject: the issue *remains* 'tangled and unconcluded'[139].

What implications does this have for Hall's arguments overall? What happens when a theorist promotes a model of both structure and agency without any means of cogently theorising the latter? *Inevitably they make arbitrary decisions, value judgements about where and how agency is instantiated, 'reading' and 'decoding' the motivations and views of their target subcultural groups.* Cohen positions this need to interpret an underlying resistance to capitalism, and /or protest about the decline of community / tradition as a feature of British cultural studies more generally:

> Above all else, the new theories about British post war youth cultures are massive exercises of decoding, reading, deciphering and interrogating.[140]

Cohen also notes how often Hebdige presents subcultural resistance taking place 'at a level beneath the consciousness of the individual members'[141].

Easthope observes similar themes in relation to how cultural studies was taught in the widely attended Open University cultural studies course on "Popular Culture", run collaboratively by Hall, Bennett, Williams and Eagleton between 1982-87[142]. He traces how the course claimed to enable participants to appreciate and critically interpret popular culture, with its central theoretical paradigms formulated through the usual synthesis of Althusser's notion of interpellation and Gramsci's concept of hegemony. In this the course was represented as 'post-structuralist', with popular culture theorised

> *both* as active and passive, both an expression of the creative impulses of people and a consumption over which the broad mass of people have little control ... [143]

[138] Hall 1996b, p.16
[139] Hall 1996b, p.16. In 'Cultural Studies and its theoretical legacies' Hall writes of how Gramsci addressed certain question but did not resolve them (Hall 1996c, pp.266-67).
[140] Cohen 1980, p.ix
[141] Cohen 1980, p.xiv
[142] According to Easthope this course had student numbers of over 5000 'More than graduated in that period from all the other media and cultural studies courses in the country . . . [it also provided] a re-education for several hundred teachers besides an uncounted number of the general public who eavesdropped on its television transmissions (Easthope 1991, p.73).
[143] Here 'the ruling bloc rules by winning consent rather than using force, admitting dissent so long as it is expressed on the grounds of consensus defined according to the interests of the ruling bloc' (Easthope 1991, p.74).

While gesturing to post-structuralism via Hall's new emphasis on the *decentred* subject[144], and the recognition of 'subjects of desire', the course's version of post-structuralism was also distinguished from structuralism due to its 'dynamic' character:

> Although it would object to the notion of the human subject as transcendent (that is, existing outside the structure and operating it), post-structuralism marks itself off from its classical forerunner by its dynamic rather than static character. More precisely, it does not just see the subject as existing within the structure and dependent on it, but rather sees the subject as produced by the structure, the play of signifiers.[145]

In the course anthologies Hall's belief in the didactic function of cultural studies also becomes apparent: 'organic' cultural studies intellectuals can deliver positive political interventions by contributing to the struggle over meaning[146].

Yet in this contribution to the 'struggle over meaning', Easthope also argues that the various course anthologies privileged, even attempted to fix determinate readings of various cultural 'texts', while on a theoretical level at the same time drew the notion of fixed readings into question:

> Texts come to be dematerialised, treated as merely transparent vehicles between a historical intention and an historical reading. Contemporary readings are privileged as original - and originary (though the capacity of the texts to be re-read without final end is demonstrated by the analytic texts themselves, the course units and notes, as they advance this reading of those texts, a reading from the early 1980s hardly possible for the 'original' audience).[147]

In short, the course promotes a certain vision of 'the real'[148] underlying any interpretation, one which cultural studies theorists can determine. Once again, the

[144] In 'The Meaning of New Times' for instance, Hall writes that 'our models of 'the subject' have altered. We can no longer conceive of 'the individual' in terms of a whole, centred, stable and completed Ego or autonomous, rational 'self'. The 'self' is conceptualised as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit, something with a history, 'produced', in process' (Hall, S. 1996a, p.226). See also Hall 1996b.

[145] Easthope 1991, p.76

[146] See, for instance, Hall's 'Cultural Studies and its theoretical legacies' (1996b, p.268), 'Cultural studies: two paradigms' (Hall 1980), and 'The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies' (Hall 1982).

[147] Easthope 1991, pp.77-8

[148] As Hall puts it in 'Cultural studies: two paradigms': '... to think about or to analyse the complexity of the real, the act of practice of thinking is required; and this necessitates the use of the power of abstraction and analysis, the formation of *concepts with which to cut into the complexity of the real, in order precisely to reveal and bring to light relationships and structures which cannot be visible to the naïve naked eye ...*' (Hall 1980, p.31). My italics. Peck too argues 'Hall requires a "truth" that precedes any particular articulation. That truth resides in what he has variously construed as "the real conditions of existence," the "social formation," "social relations," "the prevailing system," "structures," and "the economic," which he holds to exist independently of symbolic representation or subjective experience' (Peck 2001, p.229).

notion that agents can step outside the structure and determine Truth. And in this Easthope views the course as in fact 'ultimately' prescriptive, relegating

> popular culture ... to the category of a false consciousness which betrays the revolution ...[149]

I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis my concern lay ultimately with the theoretical hegemony of identity and how discussions about consumption have been dominated to date by questions of structure and agency. In responding to this thematic I have spent the whole chapter trying to demonstrate, *ad nauseam*, the internal contradictions and aporias associated with accounts which do just this. The following chapter also focuses on the issue, but from the perspective of theorists other than those associated with the Birmingham Centre, who from the 1970s began to promote far more positive ideas about consumption while at the same time appearing to suggest some overt or implicit notion of agency. And I note that in such accounts, ideas about consumption still remain wholly centred around the issue of identity.

[149] Easthope 1991, p.80. For support on this Easthope refers to John Thompson's categorisation of the course as being part of a 'traditional, moralising and puritanical left dismissal of popular culture as the opium of the masses, a capitalist con, ignoring the fact that many of the products of popular culture are deeply pleasurable' (Easthope 1991, p.78).

8

The Identity Debates
(part two) the hegemony of identity

Neither falsehood nor truth is an attainable epistemic ideal.
(Harre 1986, p.19, cited in McClosky 1994, p.95).

As a range of theorists attempted to promote stronger accounts of agency in the 1970s, ideas about consumption became entangled in structuralist / poststructuralist, modernist and postmodernist debates. Discussions about the character of contemporary change and the extent to which it could be considered as representative of a distinctive new epoch instantiated through 'post-fordism', new technology, the deregulation of markets, globalisation, and so on, only added to the complexity and controversy of such debates. Questions around identity also played a crucial role, with subjectivity increasingly being positioned as dislocated and decentred, identity as fragmented, and identifications multiple and shifting. Academic interest in the proliferation of new social movements based around a 'politics of difference' sharpened.

New accounts of consumption positioned it as a complex and integral aspect of human sociability, and an intrinsic part of human identity. This led to subsequent theorists analysing particular consumption practices as indicative of some aspect of identity and identifications, which shortly after fed into a new focus on the body, pleasure, desire, curiosity, novelty, creativity and play[1]. Authoritative and influential accounts which facilitated this new approach included Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1979), anthropologist Mary Douglas, and economist, Baron Isherwood's *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (1979), Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), and John Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989) and *Reading the Popular* (1989). I

[1] Crocker and Linden (1998), Gabriel and Lang (2006), Anderson (1995), Featherstone (1991)

consider the arguments of these five theorists in this chapter, for with Hebdige and others associated with the Birmingham Centre, they played a pre-eminent role in ensuring questions around consumption remained centred on identity and agency.

The World of Goods: Goods are "arranged in vistas and hierarchies that can give play to the full range of discrimination of which the human mind is capable"

Published in 1979, the same year as Hebdige's *Subculture*, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (1996) formed an intriguing support to the key aspects of the British cultural studies arguments, despite several also crucial differences. Hebdige and Hall focused on reassessing and validating the value of subcultural consumption, Douglas and Isherwood sought to validate consumption per se. *The World of Goods* (1996) was an extraordinary departure in this respect; it did not attack consumption or represent it as something false or lacking authenticity, as with many accounts derived from or associated with Marxism. In contrast, Douglas and Isherwood argued that tastes derived 'from the social structure'[2] and, as such, goods could be regarded as constituting a legitimate and valid language with symbolic significance:

> It is standard ethnographic practice to assume that all material possessions carry social meanings and to concentrate a main part of cultural analysis upon their use as communicators'[3].

In this formulation goods, both individually and in combination, carry multiple meanings which 'constitute an intelligible universe'[4]:

> Rituals are conventions that set up visible public definitions ... consumption is a ritual process whose primary function is to make sense of the inchoate flux of events ... The most general objective of the consumer can only be to construct an intelligible universe with the goods he chooses.[5]

Consumption here is thus presented as an intrinsic part of social solidarity:

> What we call consumption rituals are the normal marks of friendship. The patterned flow of consumption goods would show a map of social integration. The community that involves its members in most social commitments would have the most consumption rituals, and at times of crisis information and support would flow there more freely. Members of another

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[2] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.xxvii
[3] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.38. See also Slater 1997, p.150.
[4] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.ix
[5] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.43

> kind of community, less engaged in ritual exchanges, would be more vulnerable to shocks, economic or other.[6]

The arguments of Douglas and Isherwood differ to Hebdige's in part because of their different disciplinary orientations. Baron Isherwood was an economist, and Mary Douglas was writing from an anthropological Durkheimian structural-functionalist tradition. In this Douglas was informed by Mauss's more positive reappraissal of consumption in *The Gift* (1990) and, like Mauss, and Durkheim before him, Douglas and Isherwood also wrote against utility theory and its conception of atomised sovereign, rational consumers[7]. Yet while drawing on 'traditional' anthropological research concerned with non-Western cultures, unlike Mauss, Douglas and Isherwood clearly directed their analysis toward modern consumer culture, and in depicting modern consumption as part and parcel of normal social integration, Veblen's censorious ascription of consumer motivations became another target, with Douglas and Isherwood arguing that the 'intelligible universe' of meaning expressed via consumer goods deserved far more considered analysis than that offered by Veblen (and those influenced by him[8]). Motivations associated with the act of consumption could not be reduced to status competition. While not precluding status competition, contra Veblen, they viewed consumption as subject to a far wider range of meanings and conceptions of value. Goods are

> arranged in vistas and hierarchies that can give play to the full range of discrimination of which the human mind is capable. The vistas are *not fixed: nor are they randomly arranged in a kaleidoscope.* Ultimately, their structures are anchored to human social purposes.[9]

Accordingly, where Hebdige and the Birmingham Centre validated popular culture and consumption insofar as it could be interpreted as resistant, Douglas and Isherwood recognised consumption as an expression of human sociality more generally. In this, any lingering essentialism and notions of authenticity became obsolete. By extension, neither is there any tacit perception of a somehow more wholesome, quasi-functionalist

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[6] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.xxii

[7] In the preface to their 1996 edition they wrote that utility theory 'supposes that wants come out of individuals' own private perceptions of their needs, so it is not auspicious for an idea about consumption that puts social interaction first' (Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.xxv).

[8] In the preface to the 1996 edition, Douglas and Isherwood clearly state that 'Sociologists were all too ready to believe that emulation, envy, and striving to do better than the Jones are the intentions which fuel consumption' (Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.xxi).

[9] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.44

conception of a human relationship with goods untainted by consumer capitalism. Consumption in itself is not responsible for utility theory, or capitalism per se. As with both the Birmingham Centre and Veblen consumption contains meaning that can still be 'read' and 'interpreted', but that meaning is now more directly connected to conscious, sometimes semi-conscious intent on the part of the person(s) using the good(s), what that good means to them, and their understanding of what that good communicates to others:

> Goods assembled together in ownership make physical, visible statements about the hierarchy of values to which their chooser subscribes.[10]

These ideas are an extraordinary amalgam, however the language used elides, but also suggests questions of agency very carefully. The consumer chooses, but from within the social structure[11]. Yet 'vistas are not fixed'[12]. Choice takes places within a social *system*, reflects values, and reproduces the social order from specific subject positions, but choice is somehow not quite 'fixed'.

The structure / agency problematic is neither fully addressed nor resolved here. Yet the interpretation of human motivations is also more direct, less obscure and speculative than that carried out by Hebdige and the Birmingham Centre: there seems greater scope for ethnographic research focusing more directly on how consumers perceive, understand and use goods in their daily lives. In this, *The World of Goods* (1996) provides an authoritative and influential account of consumption; in a recent obituary for Mary Douglas, Daniel Miller noted the 'impact' it had on his own interest in meanings attached to material culture[13]. However one notable absence in the text is any discussion of class relations. As Michael Schudson notes, here 'there is no room for politics and no standards for judging the place of goods in society'[14]. Other questions raised but not answered are how, if goods have / are given meaning(s) and value(s), how do those meanings and values come to change? Douglas just follows the Durkheimiam tradition in perceiving social judgement as supplying a positive, stabilising, and supporting social fabric, and it is this, with its lack of consideration of class relations that led Slater in *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997) to argue that Douglas and Isherwood

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[10] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.ix

[11] As Slater states, 'the classification systems that govern the meanings of things reflect the social order itself and are central to its reproduction as a moral order' (Slater 1997, pp.150-1)

[12] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.44

[13] Miller 2007

[14] Schudson 1993, p.161

simply did not fully take into account the dynamics of how power relations impact on the meanings associated with consumer goods, leading them to gloss over the significance of power differentials:

> as an information flow, public consumption meanings are not the prerogative of social networks but are increasingly managed by vested commercial interests with public technologies of design, marketing and advertising. The desire for 'cognitive order' like any other need is increasingly merely a means to the end of profit. Integration in this context is a matter of socio-economic power as well as of intelligibility ...[15]

While this disjunction in power throughout society is still a *social* phenomenon, Slater's point is astute.

Bourdieu and "the infinitely varied art of marking distances"[16]

Douglas and Isherwood elide any discussion of class, but this was definitely addressed by another text published in 1979, French theorist Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (2000)[17]. In David Swartz's lucid introduction to Bourdieu's work, *Culture and Power* (1997), Swartz refers to Bourdieu as a prolific writer with 'a substantial *corpus* of work spanning many intellectual disciplines'[18]. It is through *Distinction* (2000) that Bourdieu's thinking has particular resonance for this thesis however: the book is relevant not just for its celebrated analysis of consumption practices, but also for its subsequent authority. For *Distinction* (2000) Bourdieu carried out extensive surveys and interviews across a number of classes about a wide range of consumption practices, interpreting the data to argue there is a 'significant statistical relationship' between individuals' dispositions and social locations[19], with specific class positions, 'upbringing and education'[20], generating particular ways of viewing the world, and shaping the skills individuals bring to bear in all their interactions and activities. Bourdieu termed these capacities, and concomitant outlook *habitus*. In *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1991) Mike Featherstone refers to *habitus* as manifest in all of an individual's practices, interactions with, and use of material culture:

> By habitus Bourdieu is referring to the unconscious dispositions, the classificatory schemes, taken-for granted preferences which are evident in the individual's sense of the appropriateness and validity of his taste for cultural

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[15] Slater 1997, p.152
[16] Proust cited in Bourdieu 2000a, p.66
[17] translated into English in 1984
[18] See also Robbins (2000, p.viii) on the number and range of Bourdieu's publications.
[19] Bourdieu 2000b, p150
[20] Bourdieu 2000a, p.1

> goods and practices - art, food, holidays, hobbies, etc. It is important to stress that habitus not only operates on the level of everyday knowledgeability, but is inscribed onto the body, being revealed in body size, volume, shape, posture, way of walking, sitting, ways of eating, drinking, amount of social space and time an individual feels entitled to claim, degree of esteem for the body, pitch, tone of voice, accent, complexity of speech patterns, body gestures, facial expression, sense of ease with one's body - these all betray the habitus of one's origins. In short the body is the materialization of class taste: class taste is *embodied.* Each group, class and class fraction has a different habitus, hence the set of differences, the source of the distinctions and vulgarities of taste, can be mapped onto a social field which should in effect form a third grid to be superimposed onto the space of lifestyles and class / occupational capital ... [21]

For Bourdieu then, *habitus* is a key to understanding how goods and practices can be positioned in a social hierarchy, as

> Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make ...[22]

It is in the context of their socio-cultural circumstances that individuals internalise and reproduce socially structured determinants of value and classification. Patterns of behaviour, capacities, awareness of cultural codes and ways of conceptualizing the world are transmitted across generations. Specific socio-economic class locations thus play a crucial role in informing and shaping *habitus,* which in turn shapes consumption practices.

While Distinction (2000) obviously reflects Bourdieu's concern with the intergenerational impact of socio-economic inequality, in the preface to the English translation, he writes that the motivation for his research was actually to critique the Kantian hierarchy of taste, and he refers to his

> perhaps immoderate ambition of giving a scientific answer to the old questions of Kant's critique of judgment, by seeking in the structure of social classes the basis of the systems of classification which structure perception in the social world and designate the objects of aesthetic enjoyment.[23]

I briefly mentioned Bourdieu's attack on the Kantian aesthetic in chapter two: elite judgments of value and beauty represent elite taste as universally applicable, while concealing the class based normative criteria which shapes that elite aesthetic. Yet that same judgement also gave good taste moral connotations; it is 'pleasure', Bourdieu writes ...

[21] Featherstone 1991, p.90
[22] Bourdieu 2000a, p.6
[23] Bourdieu 2000a, pp.xiii-iv

> purified of pleasure, which is predisposed to become a symbol of moral excellence and a measure of the capacity for sublimation which defines the truly human man.[24]

The 'capacity for sublimation' is the key here, for with Kant, as Jukka Gronow observes in *The Sociology of Taste* (1997),

> the 'near' senses, taste and smell, were treated with suspicion because they were thought to be capable of serving only lower sensual pleasures, whereas hearing and sight, in particular, were held up as the senses capable of mediating pure, and therefore more noble, aesthetic pleasures.[25]

Following Kant elite taste was thus represented as superior and refined; working class taste coarse, common, déclassé, and lacking proper *sensibility*. As Slater outlines:

> Bourgeois cultural consumption is defined in terms of a Kantian aesthetic in which the audience calmly and knowledgeably *contemplates* the art-work; popular consumption is characterized by emotional and bodily immersion in an event.[26]

In *Distinction* (2000) Bourdieu dismissed the Kantian aesthetic, labelling it merely a pretext which acts as 'an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested'[27]. Taste, he argued, masks, legitimates, maintains and justifies existing socio-economic hierarchies. It does not serve as 'proof' for an inherently class-based *natural* superiority of judgement, or discernment:

> The ideology of natural taste owes its plausibility and its efficacy to the fact that, like all ideological strategies generated in the everyday class struggle, it *naturalizes* real differences, converting differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature; it only recognizes as legitimate the relation to culture (or language) which at least bears the visible marks of its genesis, which has nothing "academic", "scholastic", "bookish", "affected", or "studied" about it, but manifests by its ease and naturalness that true culture is nature - a new mystery of immaculate conception.[28]

Elite taste may present itself as a universally applicable 'pure aesthetic', but this 'pure aesthetic' taste is only possible for those less subject to 'the necessities of the natural and social world'[29]. In other words, people were only able to indulge in elite cultural practices if they had the luxury of income and time in which to do so. So while the elite aesthetic forms its own key discourse through which a hierarchy of valuation is sustained, elite practices are not in fact 'consecrated' activities undertaken by those with special

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[24] Bourdieu 2000a, p.6
[25] Gronow 1997, p.ix
[26] Slater 1997, p.57
[27] Bourdieu 2000a, p.7
[28] Bourdieu 2000a, p.68
[29] Bourdieu 2000a, p.5. See also p.54.

access to a superior aesthetic sensibility. These activities are simply class-based markers of social distinction intended to validate and sustain the same socio-economic hierarchy that generated and enabled them in the first place:

> This affirmation of power over a dominated necessity always implies a claim to a legitimate superiority over those who, because they cannot assert the same contempt for contingencies in gratuitous luxury and conspicuous consumption, remain dominated by ordinary interests and urgencies. The tastes of freedom can only assert themselves as such in relation to the tastes of necessity, which are thereby brought to the level of the aesthetic and so defined as vulgar.[30]

Bourdieu's study has the tone of a 'measured' and 'scientific' analysis, appeared to depart from the censorious attacks on consumption discussed in the previous chapter, and represented a radical intervention in cultural politics in the context of the period it was written. His ruthless delineation of the pretensions of aesthetic elites, placed against a seemingly less hostile analysis of subordinate consumption per se was also perceived as having a clear affiliation with the new tack taken by the Birmingham Centre, and *Distinction* (2000) was ratified by Raymond Williams and Nick Garnham in a 1980 article, 'Pierre Bourdieu and the sociology of culture: an introduction', where they applaud the perspicuity of Bourdieu's analysis of how elite forms of consumption are only available to those with the means to partake in it[31].

With its nuanced layers of analysis *Distinction* (2000) represents a far more considered and sophisticated account than any examined thus far. But it has also drawn criticisms. Some of these see Bourdieu's class boundaries as too rigid[32], his analysis of consumer taste in terms of class alone as an essentialist reductionism[33], others argue he reduces human motivations solely to 'interest'[34], and yet others argue he imposes his own

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[30] Bourdieu 2000a, p.56. Moreover, 'It is no accident that, when one sets about reconstructing its logic', the popular "aesthetic" appears as the negative opposite of the Kantian aesthetic, and that the popular ethos implicitly answers each proposition of the "Analytic of the Beautiful" with a thesis contradicting it. In order to apprehend what makes the specificity of aesthetic judgment, Kant ingeniously distinguished "that which pleases" from "that which gratifies", and, more generally, strove to separate "disinterestedness", the sole guarantee of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation, from "the interest of the senses", which defines "the Good".' (2000a, p.41)

[31] 'the post-Kantian aesthetics of "pure" form and "disinterestedness"', they write 'are an expression of and objectively actually depend upon the relative distance from economic necessity provided by the bourgeois possession of economic capital' (Garnham and Williams 1980, p.217).

[32] Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999, Douglas 1981.

[33] Frow 1995, Gronow 1997.

[34] In *The Sociology of Taste* (1997) Gronow argues that Bourdieu reduces human motivations to 'interest' and the struggles that entails. In *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (1995) John Frow similarly views Bourdieu as conflating all motivations to a singular one - that concerned with social hierarchy (1995,

understanding of consumer motivations[35]. These issues merit debate, however the two substantive criticisms raised here relate principally to concerns raised in previous chapters. The first regards Bourdieu's stance of measured objectivity; the second, the degree to which Bourdieu's use of *habitus* to attribute agency actually does take agency into account.

Whereof judgement?

In *The Sociology of Taste* (1997) Jukka Gronow connects Bourdieu to Simmel, Veblen and the 'general theoretical problems associated with this type of approach'[36], arguing it is Bourdieu's apprehension over a 'new' kind of petite bourgeoisie consumer that directs and motivates key features of his account. Gronow cites Bourdieu as stating that the new petite bourgeoisie represent 'perfect consumers whom the economic theory has always dreamed of'[37], as this new petite bourgeoisie is anxious to partake in any signifier of value, not necessarily due to any desire to emulate, but because of 'a morality of pleasure as duty ... pleasure is not only permitted but demanded, on ethical as much as on scientific grounds'[38]. Gronow interprets Bourdieu as believing that 'This new ethic of

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pp.45-6). Yet Bourdieu claims various qualifications in this respect. While an important component of his argument in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (2002 [1972]) is the view that all human relations involve power strategies and relations of struggle, beyond 'the dichotomy of the economic and non-economic', in the same text Bourdieu states that practices need to be studied in economic terms:

> a *general science of the economy of practices*, capable of treating all practices, including those purporting to be disinterested or gratuitous, and hence non-economic, as economic practices directed towards the maximizing of material or symbolic profit ... (2002, p.183)

Despite such ambiguity, reduction to calculations of interest is a charge Bourdieu has consistently denied (See for instance Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, pp.115-7). For Bourdieu, agents *do* utilise the resources they have access to, and using cultural competencies enabled by their habitus, develop strategies to maximise their goals in 'competitions' of interest between and within various arenas, or 'fields', 'within which human agents are engaged in specific struggles to maximize their control over the social resources specific to that field' (Garnham and Williams 1980, p.215). But noting the danger of 'partial', 'fragmentary' interpretations of Bourdieu's *oeuvre* (Swartz 1997, p.3-4), Swartz takes care to observe that

> By *strategy*, Bourdieu (1987b: 76, 78, 127) does not mean conscious choice or rational calculation ... choices do not derive directly from the objective situations in which they occur or from transcending rules, norms, patterns, and constraints that govern social life; rather, they stem from *practical dispositions* that incorporate ambiguities and uncertainties that emerge from acting *through time and space.*' (Swartz 1997, p.100. The text referred to is *Choses Dites.*)

Bourdieu too writes that 'habitus, field, and capital can be defined, but only within the theoretical system they constitute, not in isolation' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, p.96). So in this sense, habitus, with all the homologous non-interest based influences and motivations that entails, can be interpreted as guiding interest.

[35] Campbell 1993

[36] Gronow 1997, p.20

[37] Bourdieu cited in Gronow 1997, p.22. As Featherstone also writes, this 'new petite bourgeoisie may well be in the process of creating *the perfect consumer*' (1991, p.91).

[38] Bourdieu cited in Gronow 1997, p.22-3

hedonism is also functional to the economic system'[39], because these are 'consumers whose demands are not constrained any more by any traditional moral order'[40]. This new class is 'outside all formal hierarchies'[41], 'opposed to the old middle class morality of duty'[42], as well as the 'repressive morality of the declining petite bourgeoisie'[43]. So despite Bourdieu's claim to an objective, measured and 'scientific' stance, for Gronow it is Bourdieu's bias in relation to this new class that guides his analysis.

To what extent do Gronow charges hold up? On one hand, while maintaining a focus on socio-economic inequality (unlike Douglas and Isherwood), Bourdieu seems to shed the negative ascriptions of *false* value ascribed to consumption associated with earlier critiques, and appears to depart from representing the value of particular goods as *false*. Goods for Bourdieu, have no *essential* value or merits as such[44]. By extension, functionalist conceptualisations of goods - whether expressly stated or counterfactually implied - are also misguided. So like Douglas and Isherwood, and like the Birmingham Centre, Bourdieu gestures strongly toward goods as having a rich *social* meaning:

> the consumer helps produce the product he consumes, by a labour of identification and decoding ... [45]

Yet with this affirmation of the social character of goods, Bourdieu also establishes that character as constructed. Now of course this is the case, as Douglas and Isherwood recognise also, but Bourdieu's argument has a somewhat different tone and slant. What Bourdieu does in effect is position his subjects as misrecognising[46] the effect that power relations have on all their interests and activities; the values they themselves place on the practices they undertake do not tell the whole story. In this Bourdieu positions the subject's class position vis-à-vis their comprehension and capacity to grasp and manage various social distinctions as the key issue in analysing consumption practices, even

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[39] Gronow 1997, p.22
[40] Gronow 1997, p.23
[41] Gronow 1997, p.24
[42] Gronow 1997, p.23
[43] Bourdieu cited in Gronow 1997, p.22
[44] See Bourdieu 2000a, p.11. Garnham and Williams also stress how Bourdieu identifies the fallacy behind Kantian ascriptions of value, so fatally undermining 'all essential theories of cultural appropriation (taste) and cultural production (creativity), upon all notions of absolute, universal cultural value ...' (1980, p.210)
[45] Bourdieu 2000a, p.100
[46] In *Culture and Power* (1997), Swartz details Bourdieu's belief that 'the task of sociology is to unveil this hidden dimension of power relations' (1997, pp.9-10), here the societal 'misrecognition' of power relations (as opposed to 'false consciousness') becomes a problem intellectuals can hope to correct.

though those distinctions are positioned as effectively arbitrary[47] and thus ultimately without any real value unless the subject recognises just how such mechanisms of distinction serve to maintain, validate and naturalise unequal socio-economic relations under capitalism[48]. Bourdieu himself rectifies a lack in this regard, supplying a text which stands above and beyond the class position of all its subjects, a guide to and arbiter of class distinctions and valuations, but most importantly, as the panoptic deliverer of the Truth about how socio-economic class differentials under capitalism shape and construct consumption practices. Consumption, in other words, is ultimately reduced to the question of how it instantiates capitalism.

In Bourdieu's formulation blame is apportioned and directed most strongly against those who fail to appreciate the key role strategies of distinction via consumption play in maintaining the capitalist status quo. For in addition to undermining the pretensions of elite aesthetics Bourdieu's characterisation of that new class of 'perfect consumers', the petite bourgeoisie, can be read as utterly derisory:

> Guided by their anti-institutional temperament and the concern to escape everything redolent of competitions, hierarchies of knowledge, theoretical abstractions or technical competences, *these new intellectuals are inventing an art of living which provides them with the gratifications and prestige of the intellectual at the least cost*: in the name of the fight against "taboos" and the liquidation of "complexes" they adopt *the most external and most easily borrowed* aspects of the intellectual lifestyle, liberated manners, cosmetic or sartorial outrages, emancipated poses and postures ...[49]

Yet although this class is superficial and lazy, ultimately this is only due to 'changes in the mode of domination ... substituting seduction for repression'[50]. It is the 'seduction' of 'imposed needs' which has created the petite bourgeoisie *modus operandi*:

> the emergence of the new petite bourgeoisie, which employs new means of manipulation to perform its role as an intermediary between the classes and which by its very existence brings about a transformation of the position and

[47] Swartz 1997, p.86. See also Slater who specifies that in this, meaning is *culturally*, not *socially* arbitrary (1997, p.160).

[48] Frow cites Rabinow as stating that 'Fundamentally there are only two types of subjects for Bourdieu: those who act in the social world and those who don't. Those who do, do so on condition that fundamentally they are blind to what they are doing, they live in a state of *illusio*.... The other possible subject position is the sociologist who studies those who act, those beings who take their lives seriously, those who have "interests". The scientist, through the application of a rigorous method preceded and made possible through the techniques of asceticism applied to the self, frees himself from the embodied practices and organized spaces that produce the *illusio* and sees without illusion what everyone else is doing (they are maximizing their symbolic capital, while mistakenly believing they are leading meaningful lives' (cited in Frow 2003, pp.25-6).

[49] Bourdieu 2000a, p.370-71. Cited also in Gronow 1997, p.23-4, Featherstone 1991, p.91. *My italics.*

[50] Bourdieu 2000a, pp.153-4

> dispositions of the old petite bourgeoisie, can itself be understood only in terms of changes in the mode of domination, which, substituting seduction for repression, public relations for policing, advertising for authority, the velvet glove for the iron fist, pursues the symbolic integration of the dominated classes *by imposing needs rather than inculcating norms*.[51]

While Bourdieu has consistently maintained his stance of objectivity is an 'artificial' heuristic device that is modified by a considered 'reflexivity'[52], with all *Distinction's* tables and graphs, when does a pinch of 'reflexivity' become only a gesture sublimated to Truth?[53] In *The Practice of Everyday Life (Vol One)* (1984) Michel de Certeau notes a similar inconsistency in Bourdieu's *The Logic of Practice* in relation to how he represents practices and 'strategies' among "petit-bourgeois" and 'housewives' as impoverished, and contrasts this to Bourdieu's more general ratification of strategies in 'traditional' societies'[54]. de Certeau also charges Bourdieu with presenting 'culture as *coherent* and *unconscious*'[55], and argues that Bourdieu implicitly represents himself as having a 'superior' knowledge to that which 'the society had of itself'[56]. Against criticisms, Bourdieu has repeatedly qualified his qualifications, and consistently dismissed questions about his approach as misconstruals and misinterpretations[57]. Yet that criticisms and doubts about the efficacy of this, as well as other aspects of his account exist, suggests, at the least, that his arguments are not as compelling as they might be.

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[51] Bourdieu 2000a, pp.153-4. *My italics*. He also writes: 'The *allodoxia* which the new system encourages in innumerable ways is the reason why relegated agents collaborate in their own relegation by overestimating the studies on which they embark, overvaluing their qualifications, and banking on possible futures which do not really exist for them; but it is also the reason why they do not truly accept the objective reality of their position and qualifications' (Bourdieu 2000a, p.155).

[52] Swartz also stresses Bourdieu believes 'sociology' cannot achieve objectivity, noting Bourdieu's argument that 'it is *only* through a reflexive practice of social inquiry that one can hope to achieve a desirable degree of objectivity on the social world' (Swartz 1997, p.11). As Derek Robbins likewise states in the introduction to his mammoth four volume edited collection, *Pierre Bourdieu* (2000): 'The social phenomena which are observed are themselves the products of the intellectual construction of agents involved in everyday social exchange and communication. The processes of reciprocal or mutual observation and understanding are inherent within the phenomenal situational that the social scientist seeks to observe. The social scientist only has something to say as a result of constructing an artificial locus of detachment within social space ... ' (Robbins 2000, p.xxviii)

[53] In *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992) Bourdieu writes of how 'Like any social universe, the academic world is the site of struggle over the truth of the academic world and of the social world in general' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.70).

[54] de Certeau 1988, pp.54-5

[55] de Certeau 1988, p.56

[56] de Certeau 1988, p.56

[57] See also Robbins 2000, pp.9-10.

Bourdieu's agency

The second particular concern I have regarding Bourdieu's portrayal of consumption relates to how he theorises agency. My conclusions are obviously suggested by the section above, but Bourdieu's *oeuvre*, along with his claims and arguments about agency are somewhat labyrinthine, and he has consistently argued *habitus* allows for a more 'fluid' conception of agency insofar as while habitus is set and determined by experience, this shaping of habitus also enables each individual's capacity for action:

> The habitus, the durably installed generative principal of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus.[58]

In this, as Swartz explains, Bourdieu views societal structures as constituted by agents as well as constitutive of them:

> *practices are constitutive of structures* as well as determined by them ... structures are themselves socially constructed through everyday practices of agents.[59]

Although structures *are* constituted by agents there seems a danger here that conceptualising structures simply in terms of the practices of other agents collapses the power of larger societal forces altogether. However the primary aim of this formulation is to draw out how *habitus* as a concept transcends the subjective / objective dichotomy, which Bourdieu acknowledges, but dismisses in *Pascalian Meditations* (2000) as part of Kant's 'transcendental anthropology'[60]. What he is referring to here is Kant's dictum in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that

> though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience.[61]

For Kant, sensory impressions supply the 'raw material', but this material is made intelligible only as it is processed through concepts and categories our own minds supply:

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[58] Bourdieu 2002, p.78. As Swartz explains; 'Habitus results from early socialization experiences in which external structures are internalised. As a result, internalised dispositions of broad parameters and boundaries of what is possible or unlikely for a particular group in a stratified social world develop through socialization. Thus, on the one hand, habitus sets structural limits for action. On the other hand, habitus generates perceptions, aspirations, and practices that correspond to the structuring properties of earlier socialization' (Swartz 1997, p.103).
[59] Swartz 1997, p.58 b
[60] Bourdieu 2000b, p.147
[61] Kant 1970, p.41

> understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise.[62]

With this, the notion of a physical barrier between things in the world became conceptually entrenched; we can never know the 'thing in itself' as bit actually is, we can never be it. We can only 'know' it in so far as we perceive it: this is the division between the *appearance* of the 'thing in itself' (phenomenon), and the 'thing as it actually is' (noumenon) - a material / transcendental division which set in place a rigid theoretical divide between things in the world.

Bourdieu views Kant's phenomenal / noumenal divide with its incognizable 'thing-in-itself' as setting in place and preserving a transcendental subjective individualism, 'ahistorical and antigenetic'[63]. A consciousness above and beyond, or, as Bernstein puts it in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (1983), 'completely independent of the ways in which we condition and constitute experience'[64]. For Bourdieu the subject is inextricably embedded in and given by their experience, as he states in an *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (2002 [1972]):

> The construction of the world of objects is clearly not the sovereign operation of consciousness which the neo-Kantian tradition conceives of; the mental structures which construct the world of objects are constructed in the practice of a world of objects constructed according to the same structures. The mind born of the world of objects does not rise as a subjectivity confronting an objectivity: the objective universe is made up of objects which are the product of objectifying operations structured according to the very structures which the mind applies to it. The mind is a metaphor of the world of objects which is itself but an endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors.[65]

In *Pascalian Meditations* (2000) Bourdieu further refers to how he believes *habitus* escapes the subject / object dichotomy, yet also stresses how the 'agency' of *habitus* is 'generative':

> the notion of habitus, which restores to the agent a generating, unifying, constructing, classifying power, while recalling that this capacity to construct social reality, itself socially constructed, is not that of a transcendental subject but of a socialized body, investing in its practice socially constructed organizing principles that are acquired in the course of a situated and dated social experience.[66]

The question this raises however is where precisely, does Bourdieu's subject, the choosing '*I*', which selects one option, rather than another, come from? While the mind

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[62] Kant 1970, p.41
[63] Bourdieu 2000b, p.147
[64] Bernstein 1983, p.10
[65] Bourdieu 2002, p.91
[66] Bourdieu 2000b, pp.136-7

may be 'a metaphor of the world of objects which is itself but an endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors'[67] it is still not clear exactly *how* Bourdieu theorized the agency he wanted to acknowledge.

In *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), arguing for an understanding of the world through a *bodily* knowledge, Bourdieu writes:

> The world encompasses me, comprehends me as a thing among things, but I, as a thing for which there are things, comprehend this world ... The 'I' that practically comprehends physical space and social space (through the subject of the verb *comprehend*, it is not necessarily a 'subject' in the sense of the philosophies of mind, but rather a habitus, a system of dispositions) is comprehended in a different sense, encompassed, inscribed, implicated in that space.[68]

This bodily,

> *corporeal knowledge* ... provides a practical comprehension of the world quite different from the intentional act of conscious decoding that is normally designated by the idea of comprehension. In other words, if the agent has an immediate understanding of the familiar world, this is because the cognitive structures that he implements are the product of incorporation of the structures of the world in which he acts; the instruments of construction that he uses to know the world are constructed by the world. The practical principles of organization of the given are constructed from the experience of frequently encountered situations and can be revised and rejected in the event of frequent failure.[69]

Despite the introjection of this rather diffuse conception of 'bodily knowledge' (the body just chooses, habitually, instinctively) the extent to which Bourdieu's formulations fully account for agency is still moot. His argument contains a welter of logical inconsistencies which the typical appeal to 'subtleties' and 'nuances' does not offset. Jenkins for one, argues Bourdieu's account is really a case of determinism in the 'last instance':

> although Bourdieu starts out by rejecting the necessity of making 'false' choices between objectivism and subjectivism, the relationship he eventually posits between 'objective structures', the habitus and social practice becomes one of determination. The analytical emphasis falls upon causes rather than reasons. Structures produce the habitus, which generates practice, which reproduces the structures, and so on.[70]

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[67] Bourdieu 2002, p.91

[68] Bourdieu 2000b, p.130. See also *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 2002 [1972], p.91

[69] Bourdieu 2000b, p.135-6

[70] Jenkins 2000, p.152. While Garnham and Williams offer Bourdieu as a theorist who 'confronts and dialectically supersedes' the debates between Althussian Marxism and the views of an 'older Marxist tradition' they also state they 'feel' Bourdieu still maintains 'a functionalist / determinist residue in ... [his] conception of reproduction' (Garnham and Williams 1980, p.222).

As with Jenkins, de Certeau also regards habitus as static, only able to *respond* to changing circumstances, when through practices habitus is revealed as 'achievements'. For de Certeau, the agency in Bourdieu's habitus is 'a false departure, a textual "strategy"'[71]. Habitus is an 'interiorization' of structures, and in 'the last instance', wholly determined by structures:

> structures can change and thus become a principle of social mobility (and even the only one). Achievements cannot. They have no movement of their own. They are the place in which structures are inscribed, the marble on which their history is engraved. Nothing happens in them that is not the result of their exteriority.[72]

In *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (2002) Bourdieu attempts to address such interpretations, writing that 'arguments and expressions' in his work enable 'systematic misreadings'[73]. He dismisses these as 'superficial criticisms', restating he believes there exist 'dispositions to resist'[74]. Yet here, as with Hebdige, agency once again appears evident only in acts of resistance, and Bourdieu still does not clearly delineate how he theorises the processes from whence agency develops.

Distinction (2000) has been enormously influential. Even responses arguing Bourdieu's analysis is flawed or incomplete in various ways ensure the text maintains its status. It remains a 'primary definer'[75] that requires a response. This ensures that any discussion of consumption formulated in terms of the text remains ossified around the dynamics of taste and the formation of taste, rather than a consideration of the origin or consequences of goods. In other words, identity remains a point of focus to the exclusion of other concerns. And although Bourdieu purports to represent the meaning attached to goods and practices as *culturally* arbitrary, thus avoiding essentialism, he still presents this cultural meaning as essentially mystificatory, as mistaken, and responsible for concealing the underlying forces behind the operation of capitalism. The final issue is that despite Bourdieu's rejection of Althussian Marxism[76], in *Distinction* (2000) he too ultimately positions the economy as determining in the final instance: change is only

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[71] de Certeau 1988, p.60

[72] de Certeau 1988, p.57

[73] Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, p.79

[74] Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, p.81, p.82

[75] As Hall, Chritcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts put it in their contribution to *The Manufacture of News*, here a primary interpretation is positioned as predominant; 'This interpretation then "commands the field" in all subsequent treatment and sets the terms of reference within which all further coverage or debate takes place' (1981, p.342).

[76] Swartz notes how Bourdieu rejects Althusserian Marxism as 'rooted' in a materialist / idealist division 'that must be transcended' (Swartz 1997, p.39)

possible when conditions degenerate to the extent that agents finally realise the objective impossibility of achieving their 'subjective aspirations'[77]. It is only this that delivers 'agency', enabling a positive change to, or 'genuine inversion' of objective conditions and potentialities.

Goods vis-à-vis identity

Despite its inconsistencies the breadth of Bourdieu's study was perceived as so theoretically sophisticated it strongly augmented the credibility of accounts focusing on consumption as a phenomenon meriting further analysis. In *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1991), Featherstone refers to Bourdieu, among others, when pointing to a range of new studies identifying how goods 'are used to demarcate social relationships'[78]. He himself attempted to validate the substantive reasons underlying the consumption act, arguing that we should attach more importance to 'interpreting the everyday':

> we can take a wider definition of culture which will focus not only on formal religious institutions and movements but also those social processes and practices which generate and regenerate sacred symbols, be it the ceremonies of the state, rock concerts or the little sacred rituals which convey solidarity in small groups, or between friends and lovers. Hence we need to move away from approaches which read off consumption as a derivative of production and seek to dismiss it as "mass" consumption. Instead we have to acknowledge that while consumerism results in an inflation in the quantity of goods in circulation, this does not result in a general eclipse of the sacred, something which is evident if we focus on the symbolism which goods have in practice.[79]

In this Featherstone is primarily refuting Daniel Bell's arguments in relation to societal problems which he viewed as connected to a loss of belief and a loss of the sacred (both epitomised through the brash disconnectedness of consumer culture), but the arguments of Lukács, Marx and the Frankfurt School are other obvious targets. Featherstone in fact claims the Frankfurt School 'are no longer accorded great significance'[80], and cites a number of studies by Swingewood, Bennett (et al from *The Study of Culture* 1977), Gellner, Strauth and Turner[81], interpreting the Frankfurt School as 'elitist', and unable 'to examine actual processes of consumption which reveal complex differentiated audience responses and uses of goods'[82].

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[77] Bourdieu 2000a, p.168. Citing Caille, even Swartz agrees Bourdieu 'nonetheless makes claims that are suggestive of some degree of reduction in this direction ...' (Swartz 1997, p.80)
[78] Featherstone 1991, p.16-17
[79] Featherstone 1991, p.122
[80] Featherstone 1991, p.vii
[81] Featherstone 1991, p.15
[82] Featherstone 1991, p.15

The very existence of such arguments is indicative of how from the 1980s many theorists began to reassess both the worth of studying consumption and the notions of agency associated with it. As Kim Humphrey notes in *Shelf Life: supermarkets and the changing cultures of consumption* (1998):

> By the early to mid-1980s the consumption of goods and services in contemporary Western societies had been embraced by many writers within cultural studies and other disciplinary areas as a potential arena of personal empowerment, cultural subversion, and even political resistance. Within this analytical framework the 'consumer' was positioned as active, rather than passive, as the 'producer' of *usages* and *meanings* that the marketplace may not have assigned to a particular commodity or consumer space, and which potentially undermined or evaded consumerist ideologies.[83]

In their introduction to the *Ethics of Consumption: the Good Life, Justice, and Global Stewardship* (1998) Crocker and Linden outline how in radical contrast to the culture industry thesis 'new scholars'[84] began to focus on the importance of creativity and play[85] and the role of consumption in this process. In *The Truth About the Truth* (1995) Anderson likewise relates how many began to regard the expression of identity through consumption as a genuine expression of identity accurately reflecting the messy disorder and diversity of the socio-cultural world[86]. Different 'identities' (that could be expressed via consumption) were celebrated as legitimate expressions of people's difference.

Michel de Certeau, and the hungry search for resistance

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life (Vol One)* (1988)[87], anticipated, and perhaps even initiated many of the more 'postmodern' accounts. de Certeau positioned his argument as largely a response to Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972) and Foucault's account in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) of the 'microphysics of power'. Although granting studies which focus on structures and apparatuses of power a 'fundamental' importance[88], de Certeau argued Foucault, in privileging only the 'coherence' of a dominant colonising discourse[89], overlooked practices which escape, or seep through

[83] Humphreys 1998, pp.7-8
[84] Crocker & Linden 1998, p.7
[85] Crocker & Linden 1998, p.12
[86] Anderson 1995
[87] First published as *L'invention du quotidien. Vol. 1, Arts de faire* (1974)
[88] de Certeau 1988, p.41
[89] He writes, 'Beneath what one might call the "monotheistic" privilege that panoptic apparatuses have won for themselves, a *"polytheism" of scattered practices* survives, dominated but not erased by the triumphal success of one of their number' (de Certeau 1988, p.48).

structures and apparatuses of power, moving through and beyond 'technocratic' and 'functionalist rationality' via 'unreadable paths'[90]:

> They circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain, like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in and among rocks and defiles of an establishes order.[91]

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) consumption is one of de Certeau's principle concerns, and he has a lyrical, but also quite nebulous 'take' on the resistant nature of 'everyday' consumption practices:

> a rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production is confronted by an entirely different kind of production, called "consumption" and characterized by its own ruses, its fragmentation (the result of the circumstances), its poaching, its clandestine nature, its tireless but quiet activity, in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products (where would it place them) but in an art of using those imposed on it.[92]

In this de Certeau is clearly proposing that speakers (re)appropriate language[93], in a similar manner to Hebdige's use of *bricolage*, Stuart Hall's 'Encoding / Decoding', and also Barthes's later work, which de Certeau cites when he discusses the readerly appropriation of texts, and how users don't necessarily 'receive', or make use of meaning in the manner intended[94]. For de Certeau, the 'clandestine' improvisation, and makeshift 'tactics' of everyday practices have 'legitimacy', and a 'creativity that flourishes'[95], so that

> users make (*bricolent*) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules.[96]

Consumers, he writes, by using 'tactics' of their own, become 'poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungles of functionalist rationality'[97]. Yet his use of the term 'tactics' is extraordinarily diffuse; 'tactics' are described only as 'the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong' through a 'surreptitious and guileful "movement," that is, the very activity of "making do"'[98]. So what exactly constitute the 'tactics' that draw de Certeau's interest?

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[90] de Certeau 1988, p.xviii.
[91] de Certeau 1988, p.34
[92] de Certeau 1988, p.31. See also pp.xii-iii.
[93] de Certeau 1988, p.xiii, p.xviii, p.33
[94] de Certeau 1988, pp.xxi-ii, p.33, p.44
[95] de Certeau 1988, p.xvii
[96] de Certeau 1988, pp.xiii-iv
[97] de Certeau 1988, p.34. See also p.xviii.
[98] de Certeau 1988, , p.xvii, p.34-5. For a discussion of 'tactics' such as "*la perruque*" see pp.24-8.

In order to clarify his understanding of 'tactics', de Certeau differentiates 'tactics' from 'strategies'. Reminiscent of Foucault's popular military metaphors, 'strategies' are 'the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated'[99]. Tactics, in contrast, belong, he writes, somewhat glibly, to 'the space of the other'[100]. But how do we determine what constitutes a 'resistant' 'tactic'? Precisely what makes one practice fall into the category 'tactic', as opposed to 'strategy'? Do people who practice 'strategies' (structural impositions involving a control of time / place, wherein '*a certain power is the precondition of this knowledge*'[101]), ever practice 'tactics' ('the absence of a proper locus'[102])? Conversely, do people who practice 'tactics' practice 'strategies'? And if not, are these categories then just distinguished by a quantifiable differentiation of power? de Certeau expresses a concern with the disjunction in power relations when he states that tactics are only ever utilised by the weak[103]. But weak in relation to what *specifically*?

If tactics are determined by 'the *absence of power*' alone[104] de Certeau is still operating in the old framework of power as a 'top down', 'quantifiable', structural operation of force. He has, consequently, not only failed to have fully grasped the radical nature of Foucault's *capillary* conception of power, but has grounded his own stylistically lyrical schema on evocative, but concomitantly weak distinguishing criteria. Simultaneously, with the reification of everything which comprises an undifferentiated 'resistant' 'everyday' as moving through and beyond technocratic and 'functionalist reality' via 'unreadable paths', in a sense he appropriates Foucault's conception of capillary power, while imparting this 'everyday' with the glamorously iconic status of an ineffable sublime simply by virtue of its being:

> The practices of consumption are the ghosts of the society that carries their name. Like the "spirits" of former times, they constitute the multiform and occult postulate of productive activity.[105]

Although camouflaged by his expressive poeticism, this internal incoherence ultimately emerges as an awkward, carping circularity in his work:

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[99] de Certeau 1988, pp.35-6. See also p.xix.
[100] 'The space of the tactic is the space of the other' (de Certeau 1988, p.37. Also p.xix.)
[101] de Certeau 1988, p.36
[102] de Certeau 1988, p.37
[103] de Certeau 1988, pp.36-8
[104] de Certeau 1988, p.38
[105] de Certeau 1988, p.35

> Tactics are more and more frequently going off their tracks. Cut loose from the traditional communities that circumscribed their functioning, they have begun to wander everywhere in a space which is becoming at once more homogeneous and extensive. Consumers are transformed into immigrants. The system in which they move about is too vast to be able to fix them in one place, but too constraining for them to ever to be able to escape from it and go into exile elsewhere. There is no longer an elsewhere. Because of this, the "strategic" model is also transformed, as if defeated by its own success: it was by definition based on the definition of a "proper" distinct from everything else; but now that "proper" has become the whole.[106]

How does de Certeau actually conceive the subject in all this? I noted earlier how he criticised Bourdieu's determinism. One important issue Frow notes, is that with de Certeau, the person is always fully constituted prior to the text, 'in a space of social allegiances that is therefore deemed to be pre-textual'[107]. Yet de Certeau at the same time rejects any taint of essentialism - he is not theorising isolated individuality:

> each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of ... relational determinations interact.[108]

de Certeau nevertheless glosses over his elisions in relation to 'the subject' by claiming that structures are constructed theoretical representations[109], with tactics / practices being his concern. But while de Certeau's agents are not passive, they 'transgress', and move through structural impositions, as with Bourdieu he never specifies exactly *how* this can be the case, and *where* the choices his agents make are derived from. But even in this, his 'tactics' bear an uncanny resemblance to Bourdieu's 'logic of practice', and although he often refers to Bourdieu's 'practical sense'[110], de Certeau only distinguishes his approach by labelling it an 'art of practice'[111]. In light of this, de Certeau's criticisms of both Foucault and Bourdieu seem often derivative, with the concomitant elisions and absences of his own account particularly limited.

The evocative language of de Certeau's account was well received and contributed markedly to a more open, positive and interesting approach to consumption. However his text raised as many criticisms as it generated acclaim. For instance in the introduction to *Acknowledging Consumption; a review of new studies* (1995), Danial Miller notes

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[106] de Certeau 1988, p.40
[107] Frow 1995, p.64
[108] de Certeau 1988, p.xi
[109] de Certeau 1988, p.57
[110] de Certeau 1988, p.19, p.
[111] de Certeau 1988, p.24

that de Certeau presents cultural resistance as more effective than it in fact, really is; yet at the same time still notes his intellectual affiliation to it:

> Absurdly, consumption becomes 'the transgressive tactics of the weak' (de Certeau 1984: xviii -xx). My own work is properly subject to critique in as much as it may have favoured this tendency.[112]

As Miller states, often this type of work

> ignores any negative impact of consumption itself.[113]

The connection of consumption, agency and resistance is just as powerful with de Certeau as it is with Hebdige, Hall and Bourdieu. This has resulted in a plethora of accounts focusing on how the disenfranchised resist the system. But while such approaches generate a range of investigations into the 'identities' of interesting and usually stylistically fashionable subcultural groups there has been much less attention paid to how powerful informal networks facilitate and '*deregulate*' exchange, with far fewer direct investigative accounts of how elites use power to bypass the system and successfully accomplish their aims. This now has the unfashionable, uncomfortable whiff of conspiracy theory.

Fiske

In *Market Society* (2001) Don Slater and Fran Tonkiss expressed concern about

> uncanny convergences between neo-liberals and postmodernists, both of whom regard people's engagement with commercially produced culture not as a sell-out or impurity, but rather as a basis for real pleasures, real autonomy and real assaults on cultural and social elites ... [114]

Slater and Tonkiss claim British cultural studies facilitated the development of postmodern approaches, citing Paul Willis's *Common Culture* (1990) as a text fitting the category of a postmodern account 'consonant' with a 'modified and qualified market populism'[115]. In this Slater argues, in his earlier *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997), perspectives such as Willis's tend to represent 'consumption as a rather unconstrained sphere of interpretive freedom', with consumption always assumed to represent

> a site of *political* struggle, [and] that consumer acts of interpretation and appropriation automatically have political significance or consequences.[116]

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[112] Miller 1995, p.29
[113] Miller 1995, p.29
[114] Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.167
[115] Slater and Tonkiss 2001, pp.168-9
[116] Slater 1997, p.168

Yet as he and Fran Tonkiss point out in *Market Society* (2001), this kind of theorising tends to excise 'economic analysis entirely'[117].

Slater locates John Fiske's *Reading the Popular* (1989) as another text advocating a market populism which assumes *political* resistance occurs simply through the act of consuming[118], and Slater believes Fiske draws on de Certeau in a far less cautious manner than de Certeau's work actually permits. Fiske has been rather influential in the development of Australian cultural studies, and pursuant to the influence of the Birmingham Centre, cultural studies in Australia has taken up the theme of resistance vis-à-vis consumption largely through Fiske's arguments and his reading of de Certeau, which was 'as widely contested', John Frow records, 'as it was influential'[119]. In an overview of communications research in Australia Terry Flew refers to Fiske as one of a 'significant transnational *milieu* of cultural studies practitioners based in Australia in the 1980s'[120]. In *Contemporary Cultural Theory* (1991) Andrew Milner similarly notes how Fiske's influence spread through the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 'internationalised as the new journal *Cultural Studies* in 1987'[121], which Fiske also edited. Fiske's principal arguments were further disseminated through *Myths of OZ* (1987) (with Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner), *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989), and *Reading the Popular* (1989). All reiterate similar themes. For instance in *Reading the Popular* (1989). Fiske argues subordinate cultural groups, motivated by pleasure, use popular culture to 'resist' and 'evade' the impositions of 'the social system that disempowers them'[122]. The book as a whole examines a range of popular cultural 'texts' - shopping, beach culture, video arcades, rock videos, the singer Madonna, television quiz shows, dating programs, and television news, in the process representing popular culture as 'the culture of the subordinate who resent their subordination ...' [123]

Fiske uses a curious amalgam of theorists, including de Certeau, but also Barthes, Gramsci, Hall, Althusser, Bourdieu and Foucault. As will become evident below, his

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117 Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p.170
118 Slater 1997, p.168
119 Frow 2005
120 Flew 2004, p.37
121 Milner 1991, p.78
122 Fiske 1989, p.2
123 Fiske 1989, p.7

interpretation of all of them is rather questionable. He describes, for instance, notions of 'improvement' as bourgeois idealisations. Popular culture by way of contrast is proudly

> tasteless and vulgar, for taste is social control and class interest masquerading as a naturally finer sensibility.[124]

Recognising the subjective character of previous high cultural ascriptions of value, Fiske opines that few now advocate such views[125]. Yet despite feeling able to invoke Bourdieu, while simultaneously questioning the effectivity (as opposed to validity) of ascriptions of value, Fiske concludes the desire for popular culture is not imposed from above, 'as mass cultural theorists propose'[126]. In his schema it comes from 'within' subordinate groups, in the context of the power disparities of the socio-economic system they exist in. In *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989) he writes

> Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry. All the culture industries do is produce a repertoire of texts or cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use or reject in the ongoing process of producing their popular culture.[127]

In this he definitively rejects the Frankfurt School thesis as implausible, and in *Reading the Popular* (1989) concludes

> the people are unlikely to choose any commodity that serves only the economic and ideological interests of the dominant.[128]

Arguments representing popular culture as a controlled 'safety valve' sustaining capitalism, or an ineffective 'fantasy', simply do not take into account the connection between socio-political resistance and the 'politics of everyday life'[129]. Currently, against a patronising, 'pessimistic elitism'[130],

> The desire to investigate the practices of making do, wherein can be found the cunning, the creativity, and the power of the subordinate, has been part of a shift in academia that has transformed much of academic theory and research over the past few years.[131]

In this, as with Hebdige and de Certeau, Fiske tends to valorise popular culture simply by virtue of the subordinate, disenfranchised class based socio-economic status of those

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[124] Fiske 1989, p.6
[125] Fiske 1989, p.7
[126] Fiske 1989, p.7
[127] Fiske 1989a, p.24
[128] Fiske 1989, p.5
[129] Fiske 1989, p.9, also p.32. Popular culture he writes, 'often centers on the body and its sensations rather than on the mind and its sense, for the bodily pleasures offer carnivalesque, evasive, liberating practices - they constitute the popular terrain where hegemony is weakest, a terrain that may possibly lie beyond its reach' (Fiske 1989, p.6)
[130] Fiske 1989, p.33
[131] Fiske 1989, p.32

whom partake in and shape it, especially insofar as this is connected to what he regards as that class's potential to bring about emancipatory change:

> Shopping malls and cultural practices, the variety of shoppings that take place within them, are key arenas of struggle, at both economic and ideological levels, between those with the power of ideological practice (Althusser), hegemony (Gramsci), or strategy (de Certeau) and those whose construction as subjects in ideology is never complete, whose resistances means that hegemony can never finally relax in victory, and whose tactics inflict a running series of wounds upon the strategic power. Shopping is the crisis of consumerism: it is where the art and tricks of the weak can inflict most damage on, and exert most power over, the strategic interests of the powerful. [132]

This emancipatory change however, is not *radical* change, which Fiske positions in *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989) as a 'utopian' ideal. Hoping for 'progressive' change alone is more realistic[133]. Yet in a curious Althusserian moment in *Reading the Popular* (1989) he also overturns the thrust of his own arguments entirely and appears to situate 'the economy' as determining in the last instance:

> It is material historical conditions that produce radical reform; evasive and semiotic resistances can maintain a popular consciousness that can fertilize the growth of those conditions and be ready to exploit them when they arise, but they cannot in themselves produce such conditions. But the resistances of popular culture are not just evasive or semiotic: they do have a social dimension at the micro level. And at this micro level they may well act as a constant erosive force upon the macro, weakening the system from within so that it is more amenable to change at the structural level.[134]

To the extent Fiske attempts to counteract the negative, one-sided depictions of consumption discussed in the previous chapter his arguments are appealing. Yet as with de Certeau, his account features strange inconsistencies and contradictions, as well as notable elisions in relation to 'the subject'. His arguments do not focus on *individual* agency, but with his attention to resistance, he skirts very close to ascribing an authenticity / essentialism to various cultural groups. Neither does he provide a clear statement regarding how he reconciles the tension between the general *social* character of consumer culture, and from whence the resistant capacity of subordinate groups arises; or how meaning comes to be associated with various consumer objects and activities.

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[132] Fiske 1989, p.14. Yet he also later contradicts himself, writing that shopping 'is more a bourgeois act; it appears to support, rather than threaten, bourgeois values . . . Shopping can never be a radical subversive act; it can never change the system of a capitalist-consumerist economy. Equally, however, it cannot be adequately explained as a mere capitulation to the system' (Fiske 1989, p.27).
[133] Fiske 1989a, p.188
[134] Fiske 1989, p.11

This becomes particularly vexed given the ramifications of Fiske's most contentious chapterin *Reading the Popular* (1989), 'News, History, and Undisciplined Events'. In this chapter his principal aim is to argue 'news *is* watched for pleasure', and he utilises first Gramsci (*as per* Stuart Hall), and then his own version of Foucault[135], to sketch out two very different ways of interpreting popular reception of television news. The Gramscian 'method' is ultimately seen as inferior to the Foucauldian. For Fiske, Gramsci facilitates an understanding of 'the hegemonic recruitment of this narrative into the service of the dominant classes'[136]. Fiske wants to 'emphazise news' discursive energy'[137], and how although there *is* a 'heteroglossia', or a 'weave of voices' in news programming, this is not intended to 'deconstruct this textuality and call it into question, but ... authenticate it by reference to an apparent "truth" that is located in reality itself'[138]. For Fiske, a Gramscian model would explain this aspect of news programming by viewing it as subordinate knowledge that is subsumed, although never quite repressed[139]. Attempts to impose order and narrative are, moreover, continually challenged by the messy disunity of events themselves. It is with reference to this messy disunity Fiske writes that the Gramscian model cannot fully account for 'contradictions and the discontinuities of events' which are still evident in the news and 'resist its attempts to write a coherent history out of them'[140]. In contrast to the Gramscian model, focused on class concerns, a Foucauldian approach would interpret news programming as a more generalised 'discourse of power'[141]:

> the coherence of the news is discursive power at work, rather than more narrowly defined socio-political power. This does not mean the two are unconnected, clearly they are not, but rather that power is not to be explained by a model of a "grand narrative," whether it be Marxist, neo-Marxist, capitalist, or liberal-pluralist in inflection. Rather, power must be understood discursively in terms of its ability to impose a particular knowledge over resisting, competing knowledges.[142]

It is relatively straightforward to interpret Foucault in this way. What Fiske does next however, is translate Foucault's conception of 'a will to knowledge' to read *any* position

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[135] 'I not only draw on Foucault, I take liberties with him - but what the hell, that's what ideas are for, aren't they?' (Fiske 1989, p.180)
[136] Fiske 1989, p.152
[137] Fiske 1989, p.152
[138] Fiske 1989, p.153
[139] Fiske 1989, p.161
[140] Fiske 1989, p.152
[141] Fiske 1989, p.159
[142] Fiske 1989, p.162

as representing 'a will to knowledge'. He then invokes Foucault in relation to news 'discourse' to argue that

> Because of our "will to knowledge," the production of a truth is inherently pleasurable, whether that truth be a dominating or resisting one[143]

Ergo, even if we dispute the dominant propositions put forward by news programmes, we still get pleasure from disagreeing with them[144]. And for Fiske, agency is extant here, because despite the expedient, and inconsistent character of his token acknowledgment of a struggle over meaning 'more tilted in favour of the top'[145], he still represents consumers of news programmes as able to comprehensively make meaning of these programmes in relation to of the events of their own lives, facilitated by the 'resistance' of events[146]:

> The traces of undisciplined events that history represses but genealogy recovers not only allow us to produce resisting knowledges, but gives us access to the process of producing knowledge. The pleasure in this is a double-voiced pleasure, for it lies not only in the production of a knowledge-truth, but also in the recognition that this knowledge-truth is a subjugated truth playing a resisting, scandalizing role in the "hazardous play of domination" by which men govern.[147]

In addition to his (mis)use of 'resistant pleasure', Fiske then writes that Foucault's radical reconceptualisation of power foregrounds the impossibility of the realisation of any one overriding *Truth*:

> News's struggle to subjugate unruly events to its own rules can never be won, and can never produce a hegemonically smooth surface.[148]

So despite Foucault's extensive body of work on governmental rationalities and just how comprehensively subjectivity is shaped[149], in a remarkable reversal Fiske suggests we need not give wholehearted consideration to systems of domination associated with popular news media, simply because of the inevitability of power disparities:

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[143] Fiske 1989, p.161

[144] 'They talk, they think, they joke, and all the time they are making *their* sense of their particular form of subordination, they are exploiting their power to use discourse differently, resistingly. And the indisciplinarity of events gives them points of purchase, weak spots in the discourse of domination, at which they can exercise this power' (Fiske 1989, p.179).

[145] Fiske 1989, p.149

[146] The implication of a 'natural' resistance of events is later qualified: 'The undisciplinarity of events, their unruliness, stems not from their nature or essence, but from their potential to be mobilized in other discursive formations: they can be made to mean differently by being taken up by different discourses' (Fiske 1989, p.178).

[147] Fiske 1989, p.173

[148] Fiske 1989, p.174

[149] Foucault 1977, Rose 1990, and Hindess 1997.

> there is no necessity in history, no grand narrative of the oppressed and powerless overthrowing the systems that oppress and disempower them.[150]

Seemingly unconscious of his incongruous teleological acrobatics, Fiske then indulges a whimsical expectation that the 'truth' of events will out, assuming (eventual?) access to a more comprehensive knowledge on the part of television viewers:

> There would be no need for a governing knowledge that capitalist democracies are good if there were not a multitude of contradictory events that challenge and resist it.[151]

All of this is vexed. Aside from his extremely selective use of various aspects of Foucault's work, Fiske simply doesn't explore the stratiform inconsistencies of his own arguments. While supplying his television viewers a 'pleasurable' agency, from whence, exactly, do subcultures acquire their 'resistant' meanings? Fiske writes:

> people use the discursive resources of a society quite differently from the way that the dominant forces do. They talk, they think, they joke, and all the time they are making *their* sense of their particular form of subordination, they are exploiting their power to use discourse differently, resistingly.[152]

Facilitated by the intransigence of events, Fiske suggests this is the wellspring of social change[153]. But what if these meanings / understandings happen to be socially / politically conservative? Thinking of the ascendency of neo-liberal politics, we might ask about subcultures who *don't* 'resent their subordination'...[154] And, if still arguing resistant 'agency' exists to the extent people are not wholly determined, how is it logically possible to account for *exactly how* each agent / subculture *makes* choices, drawing a clear distinction pertaining to this 'agency', and the extent to which each agent / subculture is written on by their social / cultural / historical milieu? By logical extension, if 'popular forces' have the capacity to transform the cultural commodity[155], how then is it conceptually possible to account for this 'agency' without imputing some kind of authenticity / essentialism / humanism to these groups?

As an epistemological issue these questions have no ready, clear-cut solution. But Fiske does not acknowledge this. His arguments are interesting insofar as they attempt to

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[150] Fiske 1989, p.173
[151] Fiske 1989, p.173
[152] Fiske 1989, p.179
[153] Fiske 1989, p.179. Earlier he promotes a curious combination of economist, structuralist Marxism.
[154] Fiske 1989, p.7
[155] '... the meanings of commodities do not lie in themselves as objects, and are not determined by their conditions of production or distribution, but are produced finally by the way they are consumed' (Fiske 1989, p.28).

reverse the previous assumptions about consumption being merely an imposition of 'top down' power which creates 'false needs', but in this Fiske just dismisses how 'top down' power relations *can* have a significant impact on the production and expression of what is popular[156], and thus what is consumed. With Fiske, popular culture remains simply 'what the people want'. Once again expounding, if implicitly, the notion of an autonomous human actor, with endogenous needs only waiting to be uncovered.

Aside from this, arguing that everyone, even disenfranchised groups, can express identity through consumption implicitly furnishes a 'level-playing field' between those who have access to different 'identities' that can be expressed via consumption, implicitly promotes the notion of 'purchase votes' and elides the disparities in wealth between those who can and cannot afford to 'express' identity in whichever way they choose. Further, theories about acts of 'resistance' such as '*la perruque*' and '*bricolage*', where workers take small liberties with employers time or property, or where different subcultural groups challenge the prevailing cultural norms, seem to offer small consolation or challenge in the face of the abusive and exploitative relations of power in society. Accounts such as Fiske's then, that focus diffusely on concepts such as meaning, identity, pleasure and choice, and represent consumption as a liberating manifestation of the 'bottom-up' power of an 'authentic' consumer, do, as Slater points out, form a strange parallel with the neo-liberalism paradigm of the primacy of autonomous individual choice, 'sovereign' consumers, 'uninfected' by social 'prejudices'.

Agency and Epistemology

My aim in this chapter has been to locate key arguments about consumption, agency and identity in the latter part of the twentieth century as exemplified through the work of Douglas and Isherwood, Pierre Bourdieu, De Certeau and Fiske. Each of these theorists have in a range of different ways, attempted to offer a more fluid account of agency and a more complex, richer and appreciative conceptualisation of consumption than previously promoted by others offering variations on the arguments of the Frankfurt School. As I have discussed however, these accounts also contain gaps and / or inconsistencies. Douglas and Isherwood position consumption as central to social integration and legitimate it as a significant means of expressing human social identity.

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[156] Bennett (1986, p.xi) and Hall (1981, p.232) have noted how power relations are often ignored by culturalism, and this criticism is also valid in relation to certain 'postmodern' accounts.

Yet in this, they avoid theorising the interplay of the structure and agency, determinism and freedom, tacitly positing, while also glossing over the crucial importance of class differentials (even as they argue 'no serious consumption theory can avoid the responsibility of social criticism'[157]). As with Douglas and Isherwood, Bourdieu too positions consumption as a key reflection and expression of human sociality, yet while he makes class an intrinsic factor of his analysis, he ultimately subsumes the value of any study of consumption as dependent on its ability to analyse the part consumption plays in maintaining socio-economic stratification. In this, the way he posits agency in terms of *habitus* forms a creative attempt to surmount problems associated with the Frankfurt School tradition, but his account still appears more, as de Certeau and Jenkins both aver, as a case of determinism 'in the last instance'. In contrast to Bourdieu, de Certeau celebrates everyday consumption practices (reassessing the worth of what Mark Poster refers to as traditionally 'nonhistoric spaces, of empty time and waste'[158]), attempting in the process to advance a stronger conception of agency by stressing the efficacy of resistant consumption practices. In this agency is yet again theorised as extant only through the prism of resistance; neither does de Certeau flesh out, or delineate precisely from whence the agency he perceives derives. And with Fiske the problems associated with these issues are magnified considerably.

Despite these limitations, my intent in this chapter is not to wholly disparage the contributions of these theorists, each of whom has re-defined what is involved in studying consumption and stressed the complexities of consumption as a phenomenon. I do wish to highlight however, how, in conjunction with the Birmingham Centre, their arguments have had the tendency to structure the pattern and questions of contemporary debate. Questions about identity vis-à-vis consumption have been a predominant concern, and these *are* important, not least in terms of their connections with identity politics. What I have aimed to demonstrate here, however, is that arguments about identity and agency, (even those as elaborate and convincing as Bourdieu's, with his appeal to subtleties and nuances and so on), actually rest on epistemological issues which I believe currently have no resolution. Meanwhile, the dominance of debates about identity (especially in terms of how it is either produced by

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[157] Douglas and Isherwood 1996, p.62-3
[158] Poster 1992, p.101

societal forces or is resistant of those forces) has had the strong tendency to displace or minimise the importance of arguments about the origin and consequences of goods.

Conclusion

Formulating a more 'productive' approach

> Arguments *against* a primary interpretation are forced to insert themselves into *its* definition of 'what is at issue' - they must begin from this framework of interpretation as their starting point. This initial interpretative framework ... is extremely difficult to alter, fundamentally, once established.
>
> (Hall, Chritcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts 1981, p.342)

> ... the consumer as activist seems to be the great absentee from many celebrations of contemporary consumer culture. This absence has left discussions on the subject seriously impoverished.
>
> (Lang and Gabriel 2005, p.52)

At the beginning of this thesis I argued that the lack of a more detailed and nuanced consideration of consumption in general and ethical consumption in particular is due to longstanding academic habits and tastes. Throughout the thesis I have attempted to delineate and map the trajectory of these habits and tastes while exploring the rigor of their normative foundations. My aim here has been to highlight internal inconsistencies that call into question the received status of each of these thematic accounts; for within the Western academic social sciences certain arguments have been taken as given and have been drawn on time and time again to support positions which are eerily similar. Ethical consumption as an emancipatory possibility (whether that 'emancipatory possibility' might be for something as seemingly insignificant as the eradication of battery farming due to an increased demand for free range eggs, the development of cars that do not run on fossil fuels, or for better conditions for workers involved in the production of clothing) simply had no space in this theoretical terrain.

In the initial chapters I traced an intense hostility expressed by European writers toward consumption, lower class consumption in particular, from the Middle Ages up to the early nineteenth century. In subsequent chapters I outlined how this critical opprobrium

was still evident in the early twentieth century: a particularly clear example is Leavisite literary criticism which regarded consumption with distaste. While Smith and Hume in the eighteenth century took a more positive approach toward consumption, the neoclassical economists of the nineteenth century transmuted this stance, resting economics' scientific status on its disciplinary concern with 'means' as opposed to 'values'. Although the consumer is still envisaged as 'sovereign', in neoclassical / neoliberal doctrine any consideration of the values represented by consumption, conscious or otherwise, became heterodox to economics as a discipline. Values are dismissed as the province of other disciplines, tacitly positioned as irrational, perhaps even deluded, and, often feminised, are usually set against the pure rationality of an imaginary idealised 'economic man', the clean *motivar* of modern capitalism.

Economic theory perceives consumption with mixed regard; Leavisite literary criticism viewed mass consumption with disdain. So too did the Frankfurt School and others following in that tradition. Drawing on Marx while eliminating his more careful qualifications, the Frankfurt School did not valorise high culture in the same way or with the same motivations as the Leavisites, but mass consumption was also represented as reprehensible insofar as it played a key role in sustaining capitalism. In this, the Frankfurt School, as with the large number of theorists reiterating similar themes, treated consumption as false and mistaken, and simultaneously, as essentially lacking in values. This meant that although the motivations of those bruiting this brand of argument appear diametrically opposed to the stance taken by neoclassical / neoliberal economic doctrine, ethical consumption *has no point, real purpose, or space in either schema.*

In the 1970s and 80s a number of accounts began to question the depiction of consumers as wholly determined. But attempts to amend this portrayal demonstrated, in turn, a striking similarity to the neoliberal celebration of consumer sovereignty. As I discussed in the previous chapter Fiske was one of the more notable culprits here. His account of agency is un-theorised. Yet none of the positions I have examined in this thesis has synthesised structure and agency in a wholly convincing manner. Evident, instead, is a range of creatively intricate formulations featuring either an unacknowledged essentialism or a fuller bodied determinism. In relation to consumption the more direct ripostes between these positions has tended to repetitive, circuitous argument. For, as Slater has stressed, this has been

> the least productive side of debates on consumer culture: the opposition between characterising needs as determined by social powers and regarding them as arising from autonomous individual self-determination, needs as slavery or as freedom.[1]

In my initial chapter I mentioned how in recent years there has been a tremendous increase on the amount of research on consumption, particularly in the UK. A new consensus appears to be emerging in consumption studies as to how to manage the structure / agency issue via a theory of 'practices'[2]. I discuss this below. These accounts in general are far more complex and considerably less reductionist than what has gone before. Yet in the Australian social sciences discussions focusing on consumption directly have a propensity to outline and respond to older perspectives (as with my study here), and to a certain degree this has tended to sustain the more traditional hostility, and the focus on identity. Yet it is because so much of the new research on ethical consumption was not published when I began the thesis I felt re-examining issues with the older accounts to be necessary. So many approaches along the lines of older perspectives remain current in Australia, especially insofar as they remain implicit within more general 'critical' social theory. These seemed so resilient, and have been drawn on to reiterate similar arguments, time after time again setting the terms of any debate.

Throughout the thesis I referred to a number of relatively recent and more productive accounts of consumption which developed through the 1990s. These included Brewer and Porter's richly layered and elaborate edited collection *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993); Daniel Miller's various contributions; and not least, Don Slater, to whom I am particularly indebted. His *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997) provided me with an important template for a number of ideas I have attempted to cover, though my own approach differs from Slater's in several key respects. (Principally in regard to Hobbes and Locke's 'ratification' of consumption, my fuller discussion of Marx and the Frankfurt School, as well as my arguments around the issue of structure and agency in relation to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, de Certeau, and Bourdieu.) An important gap in my argument however, is the lack of in-depth analysis of the trajectory of consumption studies over the last ten years, where there has been an explosion in the literature. New journals include the *Journal of Consumer Culture* (2001-),

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[1] Slater 1998

[2] Warde 2005, Miller and Slater 2007.

Journal of Material Culture (1996-), the *International Journal of Consumer Studies* (2001-), *Consumption, Markets and Culture* (1998-), the *Journal of Research for Consumers* (2001-), and the *Journal of Cultural Economy* (2008-). The number of books focusing specifically on consumption has also grown to an extraordinary degree.

In discussing aspects of this new trajectory let me again note again that it has been driven by new research in the UK. I have not surveyed the North American literature on consumption in any detail, but Wilk (2001) argues that over-consumption in America is so evident that 'On this side of the Atlantic it is easier to take concepts like "overconsumption" and "affluenza" seriously'[3]. Yet even as he takes a stance against moralist critics of consumption, he writes 'that consumption is in essence a moral matter'[4]. Nevertheless, in relation to ethical consumption specifically, Micheletti notes that American social scientists commonly 'condemn the phenomenon of political consumerism as a right-wing, left-wing, or inconsequential political activity'[5]. She believes this is 'surprising' given the extent of political consumption in America, 'and the richness of the phenomenon as an area of study for the social sciences'[6]. To what extent then, not just in America, but in the social sciences more generally, has the wariness with moralism on the part of consumption theorists prevented a richer consideration of the effects and consequences of various consumption activities?

What I have called for in this thesis is a reconsideration of the impact of consumption in the world, a new awareness of, discussion about and shifts in habits in response to that awareness of what consumption *means* in terms of its effects and consequences. Yet in Australia, as I mentioned above, consumption as an overall category still remains on the margins, and within the larger domain of 'critical' social theory consumption as a stand-

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[3] Wilk 2001, p.245. Wilk is responding here to Miller's positioning of certain American theorists as having an 'extraordinarily conservative' view of consumption (Miller 2001, p.227). Expanding on his position Miller writes that 'it seems to me that research on consumption, especially that within the USA, derives from something completely different than the desire to study actual consumption or consumers, something far removed from this commitment to ethnographic or equivalent experience based on an empathetic encounter with consumers. Rather, I see an astonishing continuity between the most recent discussions of consumption and the foundational work of Veblen and those that preceded him' (Miller 2001, p.232).

[4] Wilk 2001, p.246

[5] Micheletti 2003, p.158. See for instance, Carducci (2006) who from a 'left' perspective positions culture jamming as only serving to 'help rehabilitate the market system'.

[6] Micheletti 2003, p.158. Just one instance of this interest is suggested in Binkley's discussion of the import of countercultural publications featured in *Whole Earth Catalog* (2003). Another is offered in Thompson and Coskuner-Balli's account of Community Supported Agriculture (2007).

alone phenomenon worthy of analysis does not rate[7]. Unusually, in 2007 consumption was promised as a Australian Sociological Association's (TASA) annual conference keynote address, but Barry Smart's paper was not delivered. His previous work in any case suggests the theme. Smart is based in the UK, but his view of consumption is 'critical'[8], and his recent *Economy, Culture and Society: A Sociological Critique of Neo-Liberalism* (2003) appears to mirror the current sociological state of play in relation to consumption in Australia generally[9]. It would take at least another chapter, more likely another thesis to analyse the background which has shaped the intellectual factions, specific research influences and programs of individuals and sociology schools within the Australian academy vis-à-vis consumption. A chapter in Humphrey's *Shelf Life* (1998) provides an overview of relatively recent themes, over the last forty or so years. More recently, there has been some discussion of consumption in the *Journal of Sociology* acknowledging the richness of meaning people attach to goods from a 'cultural sociology' perspective, drawing on Bourdieu's *Distinction* (2000) to consider how effectively his account 'speaks' to class-based analyses of identity, while thinking through the dynamics of social and political change. Otherwise, however, while within the literature on consumption delineation and denunciation of Frankfurt School style arguments is commonplace now, the sociological high ground still appears to remain with arguments such as Bauman's, and more crudely, the Clive Hamiltons and Ritzers. It seems community interest in

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[7] See for instance *Thesis Eleven*. More 'classical' accounts are the focus here, those which usually view consumption with antipathy. Connell notes Australian sociology's tendency to adhere to 'classic texts', while dealing with 'them in an essentially religious way, as timeless objects of exegesis and commentary' (2005, p.4). Pertinent also is Buttel, Dickens, Dunlap and Gijswijt's observation of a range of recent literature identifying how 'nineteenth century social thought has had the effect of steering the discipline of sociology in the direction of ignoring resources, nature and the environment' (2002, p.5). What elements there were in nineteenth century theory open to environmental concerns were not taken up by mid-twentieth century proponents of the discipline (2002, p.12). One example of this is how in a recent interview Giddens positioned consumption as belonging 'within the individual sphere of autonomy'. Consumer culture, he argued, has little relevance to ecological politics (Giddens 2003, p.395).

[8] The proposed paper was titled 'Confronting the Consequences of Consumption - A Critical View of Consumer Society'.

[9] Citing other 'critical' accounts (such as Bauman's) with approbation, Smart writes that 'The consumer is not "sovereign", but more like a "postmodern" serf' (2003, p.77) ... 'the possibility of finding fulfilment and meaning in consumption is far from guaranteed, and is likely to be at best partial and transitory' (2003, p.60). Meanwhile, 'a common hybribized consumer identity ... overrides distinctive local cultural identities' (2003, p.76). See also Smart (2007, p.171): 'What the rhetoric equating consumer choice with freedom neglects to do is to give any critical consideration to the complex processes in play that attempt to stimulate a compulsion or craving to consume, a compulsion that is increasingly represented, if not lived, as an exercise of free-will, and simultaneously work to shape, influence and direct the expression of consumer choice'.

ethical and sustainable consumption continues to grow, still largely unremarked by the discipline.

In my opening chapter I noted Humphrey's observation of how in Australian cultural studies consumption has been theorised via a consideration of popular culture, as with British cultural studies[10]. He also mentions that questions and qualms about arguments along the lines of Fiske's have been extant for some time[11]. He writes that

> Disdain for everyday participation in consumer cultures now seems entirely unacceptable and outright celebration positively naive. The one mode left is a critical ambivalence in the face of the complexities and political ambiguities of everyday life.[12]

Ambivalence has its issues, as I suggested in my opening chapter in relation to Probyn's critical distancing of the ethical concerns associated with various aspects of consumption practices. It nevertheless still remains part and parcel of cultural studies' wide ranging disciplinary orientation to focus on the complexity and ambiguity of the 'everyday', the 'aesthetic', the 'social', the personal and subjective, subcultures, identity, power and resistance. However perspectives connected more closely and directly to sustainable consumption have also recently begun to emerge, largely driven by concerns of environmental crisis[13]. This is perhaps best indicated by two 2007 conferences. The first, the Cultural Studies Association's annual conference titled 'Sustaining Culture', demonstrated a new clear attention to sustainability. As usual, the conference theme was open to interpretation, but as per practice, many papers of course just incorporated the word 'sustaining' (as a present progressive verb i.e. as to 'hold up', 'maintain' or 'support') in relation to each author's current research interests. With these, sustaining discussions of 'culture' and more specifically, discussions of 'identities' in relation to culture appeared of more concern. However a number of papers subsequently published on-line upheld the promise of the conference theme[14]. The second conference, 'In the Pipeline: New Directions in Cultural Research on Water' held in July, 2007, exercised a far more concerted interest in the impact of water consumption.

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[10] Humphrey 1998, p.171

[11] Humphrey 1998, p. 173

[12] Humphrey 1998, p.176. Humphrey writes that an issue with 'an attention to specificity, complexity, contradiction and ambiguity' is that it 'can undercut any attempt to move beyond a partial or fragmentary view' (1998, p.176).

[13] See for instance, Giblett and Lester 2008, Rose and Robin 2004

[14] On-line papers from the Sustaining Cultures Conference are available at: http://www.unisa.edu.au/com/minisites/csaa/onlineproceedings.htm

Importantly, the keynote address was given by Elizabeth Shove from Lancaster University in the UK, whose work on consumption, convention and habit I will discuss below.

A small number of research groups concerned with issues relating to consumption has developed over the last few years. *Continuum*, the Australian media and cultural studies journal, has also featured a special issue which addressed consumption, largely from an ecological / sustainability perspective[15]. But in the UK, by way of contrast, stand-alone research programs on consumption are far more established. This is seen in an escalating number of publications, as well as increased research funding. Most notable is the £5 million *Cultures of Consumption* program, which ran between 2002 - 2007. This project was funded by the *Economic and Social Research Council* (ESRC) and the *Arts and Humanities Research Council*, and involved 26 separate research groups. The 26 projects are diverse, ranging from a historical analysis of water politics / use in Britain, to the role of the British Council of Industrial Design in twentieth century consumer politics, to various qualitative analyses of national and international socio-demographic patterns of consumption in terms of age, gender and status. Despite this last, the focus on identity appears much diminished, replaced by a concern with general practices.

In addition to de-prioritising this previously predominant theoretical concern, many of the 26 research teams challenged a number of more traditional criticisms of consumption. In program director Frank Trentmann's brief summary of the most significant issues highlighted by the projects overall, for instance, he stresses four key points which became apparent:

1. multinational global patterns of consumption do not equate with a lack of diversity. (Here he refers to several projects which draw into question key aspects of arguments along the lines of Ritzer's 'McDonaldization' thesis.)
2. consumption should not be automatically opposed to political citizenship. Neither should consumers be conceived of as 'self-centred individualists', focused wholly on their own interests. (Here again, Trentmann references a number of projects discounting arguments such as Bauman's, as well as the traditionally conceived rational, sovereign individual of economic theory.)

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[15] *Continuum* 2008 Vol.22, Issue 2. The *Australian Humanities Review* also incorporated an 'Eco Humanities Corner' from 2004.

3. a lot of consumption is carried out with the care of others in mind, especially in relation to food and home. More consumers are also becoming concerned about how and what they consume. Ethical consumption *can* act 'as a pathway to a broader political engagement', but 'as individuals, people feel easily overwhelmed by appeals to save the planet'. And here Trentmann also emphasises the inadequacy of accounts such as that of the Frankfurt School, as well as their political ineffectiveness:

> Conventional attacks on consumerism backfire if they assume consumers are manipulated and have "false needs" or if they imagine a return to some mythical "natural" way of life ... Homogeneous models of 'consumer society' or 'mass consumption' have passed their sell-by date.[16]

4. consumption is socially embedded, and much consumption is habitual and routine. Focusing on individual choice 'is of limited value'.

Once again, while consumption is represented as 'socially embedded', questions of structure and agency have clearly been given lesser priority here. Also notable is how one of the 26 projects actually focuses specifically on ethical consumption: 'Governing the Subjects and Spaces of Ethical Consumption', led by Clive Barnett, from the Open University. I cited this report in my introductory chapter. Again, one of the main project findings is that while ethical consumption has the potential to achieve positive change, 'informational strategies' are not particularly effective in further supporting and encouraging individuals to adopt ethical and sustainable consumption behaviour. How does any discussion of manipulated consumers and false needs fit in here? It doesn't. The question is displaced altogether. Barnett simply argues it is essential to transform 'policies and infrastructures of collective provision'[17] in order 'to *practically re-articulate* the ordinary moral dispositions of everyday consumption'[18] and supply more effective operative frameworks through which people can act on their concerns. Ideally such frameworks could deal with how people commonly 'find themselves "locked into" certain patterns of consumption'[19].

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[16] Trentmann 2007, p.3
[17] Barnett 2007b, p.3
[18] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass 2005, p.47. *My italics.*
[19] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass 2005, p.47

Barnett's project was the one most directly concerned with ethics and sustainability, but both issues featured prominently in several other projects[20]. One of these, Moya Kneafsey's 'Reconnecting consumers, food and producers: exploring 'alternative' networks' was intriguing, with research investigating how a quite diverse and growing range of smaller, usually independent 'alternative' food networks in the UK form a way for consumers to develop 'a sense of connection with ... people, places and processes'[21]. Her project findings concluded that 'often consumers identify increasingly with the ethical aims of the scheme in which they participate'. Such concerns can, moreover, extend into awareness of and feelings of responsibility for the ramifications of those individuals' more general consumption activity, leading to yet further changes in behaviour.

Kneafsey writes that individual motivations for participating in the 'alternative' food networks are diverse, but often relate to ethical concerns and also general ideas about what constitutes the 'good life'. In this, her research is complemented by Kate Soper's ESRC project 'Alternative hedonism: a theory and politics of consumption' which expanded on Kneafney's area of interest, alternative food networks, to investigate a broader, 'emerging dissatisfaction with 'consumerist' consumption ... seen to function not just in alternative or marginal spaces but in a wide range of contexts'. Soper's study included a media analysis and this identified an increasing focus on this issue in both 'lifestyle television and magazines', as well as news media:

> News media, particularly radio and television, now contain significant coverage of concerns about the environment, work-life balance, health and quality of food, and global and national social inequalities.[22]

These issues, along with the desire for 'connection' Kneafsey identifies, appear analogous to concerns in Australia that Clive Hamilton attempts to tap into with his arguments against 'commodification' and ideas about developing social connections and downsizing. Yet Soper's arguments diverge drastically from Hamilton's. First, in a recent essay Soper points to a difference between 'merely downsizing' consumers and

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[20] These include Redclift (2007), and Jackson (2007).

[21] Kneafsey 2007, p.1

[22] Soper 2007, p.1. In a more detailed 'working paper' Soper and Lyn Thomas discuss a television program with an 'explicit ecological agenda' and write that 'The fact that this type of programme is being made and broadcast on terrestrial television *at all* suggests a growing awareness that the pursuit of individual gratification through ecologically damaging practices is, to say the least, short-sighted, and self-defeating' (Soper and Thomas 2006, p.18).

those who practice a more 'globally' conscious consumption, what she refers to as 'alternative hedonism':

> The 'alternative hedonist' consumer differs from the 'eccentrically' or 'occasionally' alternative or the merely downsizing or relocating consumer in being sensitive to the 'tragedy of the commons' factor in consumerism and keen to adjust individual consumption in the light of it.[23]

Second, contra Hamilton's pathologising of consumption, with his tacit, counterfactual essentialism, Soper rebuffs essentialist conceptions of need, including those which advocate 'voluntary simplicity' and 'downsizing'. She rejects

> the presumption that the 'excesses' of modern consumption can be corrected through a return to a simpler and supposedly more 'natural' way of life. So far from calling for a more cyclical or reduced existence, it [the report] fully recognises that diversity, change and self-development are indispensable features of human fulfilment.[24]

Soper also sees theories of consumer manipulation as reductionist. As for the broader political impact they might have, she strongly positions such ideas as both ineffective and undemocratic:

> Critiques of 'consumerism' cannot be effective or democratically sensitive if based on the idea of consumer manipulation and grounded in an essentialist distinction between 'true' and 'false' or more or less 'natural' needs... [25]

Soper is, however, still ambivalent about the effects of modern consumption. It can be, she argues,

> hedonistically repressive. It creates environments that blunt sensibility to sensual delight itself. It generates forms of alienating tolerance that ought to be more readily recognized as sources of deprivation.[26]

To address this, she writes,

> we need a new political imaginary that dwells explicitly on the satisfactions to be had from consuming differently.[27]

Soper is nevertheless positive about the broader concern expressed in the media about the general quality of life and the environment; she notes how such concerns are

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[23] Soper 2007b, p.215. "Alternative hedonism' points ... to the way in which affluent consumption may itself prompt revisions in thinking about the 'good life' as a result of its less enjoyable byproducts (noise, pollution, danger, stress, health risks, excessive waste and aesthetic impact on the environment). One is talking here of a response that may in part derive from altruistic concern for the global ecological and social consequences of the consumerist lifestyle, but is also reflecting an altered – or now changing – conception of self-interest. In this conception, the individual acts with an eye to the collective impact of aggregated individual acts of affluent consumption for consumers themselves, and takes measures to avoid contributing to it' (Soper 2007b, p.211).

[24] Soper 2007, p.2

[25] Soper 2007, p.1.).

[26] Soper 2007, p.221

'acquiring a broad cultural resonance, beyond marginal and alternative sites'. This new mood, she believes, provides a key opportunity for policy advocates to facilitate the development of more proactive sustainable consumption policies:

> This 'mainstreaming' of concern about the quality of the 'good life' provides a democratic grounding for those seeking to implement more sustainable policies on consumption.[28]

Another ESRC project taking a markedly different approach to standard academic accounts was led by Elizabeth Shove from Lancaster University; 'Designing and Consuming: Objects, Practices and Processes'. This developed from an initial focus on consumption and design[29] to investigate issues around how material culture, habitual practices, design technology conjoin at the interstices of everyday life. Crucially, it focuses on how the connection between design and the social practice of using goods might be rethought so as to enable design practitioners to further encourage the emergence of sustainable consumption practices. On the level of public policy sustainability also became central to one of her project's key recommendations, namely, that

> public sector organizations should pay less attention to the ebb and flow of individual belief and commitment and concentrate instead on basic questions about how more and less sustainable complexes of practice emerge and disappear.[30]

Here the emphasis and thrust of Shove's report is obviously directed toward how government organisations might facilitate / generate 'pathways' to sustainable consumption within the habitual practices of everyday life.

I have argued that whether implicit or explicit the focus on structure and agency has hindered any more concerted consideration of ethical and sustainable consumption within the academy. Clearly this has not been the case for many of the ESRC reports; the issue appears to have been set aside by the UK researchers who participated in the program[31]. Yet while the structure / agency aporia has not cannibalised the ESRC research, sociology as a discipline is based on developing an understanding of the role

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[27] Soper 2007, p.222

[28] Soper 2007, p.3

[29] Shove 2004, Original Project Proposal

[30] Shove 2007, p.3, Shove, Watson and Ingram 2007, p.9

[31] Slater argued this point in his contribution to the earlier European Science Foundation 'Tackling Resource Management Programme' (1997-2001) which focused on consumption, and also featured Shove as one of its principal researchers (Slater 1998).

played by societal forces, thus drawing into question 'commonsensical' notions of individuality. This is clear in Shove's comment above about 'complexes of practice'. Yet when considering how meaning develops and how change occurs, the issue of agency always lingers in the background, and in this way the structure / agency dilemma becomes central to sociology's normative disciplinary matrix. Nevertheless, while the UK researchers have stressed that consumption is socially embedded, they have not let the structure / agency dichotomy consume them.

In one of the most cited articles from the *Journal of Consumer Culture* Alan Warde recently proposed a new 'theory of practices'[32]. In this he drew on Bourdieu and also Reckwitz to offer one possible means of attempting to displace the structure / agency aporia:

> practices contain the seeds of constant change. They are dynamic by virtue of their own internal logic of operation, as people in myriad situations adapt, improvise and experiment.[33]

Understanding *is* situated, but as I discussed in my previous chapter in relation to Bourdieu, this is not wholly sufficient to account for action. The exact *dynamics* of the constitution of subjectivity remains an open question here, as does the exact why and how of its expression. Warde's precise answer to such questions, is, as with Bourdieu, just displaced by reference to 'bodily-mental routines'. And in this respect Warde also draws on Reckwitz for support:

> As carriers of practices, they (agents) are neither autonomous nor the judgemental dopes who conform to norms: They understand the world and themselves, and use know-how and motivational knowledge, according to the particular practice. There is a very precise place for the 'individual' - as distinguished from the agent ... As there are diverse social practices and as every agent carries out a multitude of different social practices, the individual is the unique crossing point of practices, of bodily-mental routines.[34]

On a pragmatic level this general process must be taken as given. As an overarching theoretical formulation however, I believe it remains incomplete[35]. Yet I also believe the issue has to be set aside.

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[32] Warde (2005). 'Consumption and Theories of Practice'.
[33] Warde 2005, p.141
[34] Reckwitz cited in Warde 2005, p.143. As Warde writes, 'Contrasting understandings, levels of practical competence, and degrees of involvement generate behavioural variation' (2005, p.147).
[35] In *Governance, Consumers and Citizens: Agency and Resistance in Contemporary Politics* (2007), Frank Trentmann and Mark Bevir similarly propose a 'situated agency': 'the possibility of local reasoning and situated agency entail a creativity that means rules, norms, and institutional and social trajectories are contingent and contested' (Bevir and Trentmann 2007b) (See also Bevir 2007, and Bevir and Trentmann 2007a). As a guide to a practical analytic approach which attempts to transcend the structure / agency divide this idea is useful. Their arguments still do not, however, address *precisely*

For while older accounts taking a position on one side or another of the structure / agency aporia have done so in order to take a particular stance of either wholeheartedly celebrating or castigating various consumption practices, another difference between the ESRC researchers and other more traditional accounts is the program's far richer, more considered and less reductionist 'take' on consumption[36]. Compare for instance Bauman and Shove: Bauman emphasises how consumption occurs with complete disregard to its effects, where no concern whatsoever for the 'other' is exhibited:

> Thick walls are an indispensable part of consumer society; so is their inobtrusiveness for insiders ... Consumers rarely catch a glimpse of the other side. The squalor of inner cities they pass in the comely and plushy interior of their cars. If they ever visit the 'Third World', it is for its safaris and massage parlours, not for its sweatshops.[37]

I have quite a degree of sympathy with Bauman's point. His observation is important, the issue acute, and it cannot be dismissed. But Bauman is not telling the whole story when he positions consumption in this way[38]. Quite a few of the ESRC program reports stress how much consumption is carried out and undertaken with care for others in mind. Kneafsey and Soper for instance, identify how certain types of consumption occur informed by a growing mood of concern about quality of life, social equity and the environment. As I have already argued, moreover, I believe one of the reasons many consumers do not think more about the ramifications of their actions is because academics and moralists have attacked consumption itself over the years in a manner that has had, in Kellner's terms, 'little political resonance'[39] yet at the same time has contributed to a general, generic perception of consumption as valueless. Bauman himself is perpetuating this narrative.

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how and why individuals have the capacity and come to make *specific* choices within the context of the particular socio-economic circumstances through and within which they are constituted.

[36] Miller notes, for instance, that 'What we learn from the academic study of consumption is not that material culture is good or bad for people. Rather we learn that people have to engage in a constant struggle to create relationships with things and with people, and there is much to be gained from an empathetic documentation of those struggles'. (Miller 2001, p.241).

[37] Bauman 1988, p.92. Also cited in Gabriel and Lang 2006.

[38] Neither does Bauman appear interested in telling the whole story: *Consuming Life* (2007) signals his awareness of other perspectives, but solipsistically just 'silently silences' dissenting views (2007, p.48), instantiating no evidence of wishing to engage with or address how they impact on his own account.

[39] Kellner 1989, p.162. Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm similarly note that 'to cast everyday consumption as unequivocally unethical threatens to alienate ordinary people rather than recruit them' (2005, p.21). In relation to environmentalist discourse Hawkins also writes that 'They can perpetuate the very relation to nature they seek to challenge: alienated distance and disinterest. When the exploitative force of economic power and human destruction is so overcoded why bother contesting it? You may as well just keep shopping.' (Hawkins 2006, p.9).

Compare then, Bauman's position to Shove's, who in *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: the Social Organization of Normality* (2003), stresses the impact of daily, usually household practices, *'inconspicuous'* consumption concerned with everyday 'comfort, cleanliness and convenience'. Focusing on the supposedly mundane, 'barely detectable gridlines of everyday life'[40], Shove argues sociology has disregarded the vital importance of these, 'perhaps to its cost'[41]. (She writes of how, for instance, 'Around half the energy used in the world is used in buildings and much of that is devoted to keeping people comfortable'[42].) Consumption, she argues, is 'a collective enterprise held together by social expectations, cultural conventions, and material constraints'[43]. Most consumption is habitual, and consumers 'do not consume resources ... they consume the services those resources make possible'[44]. Here consumption is not depicted as intrinsically antithetical to social solidarity and social connection. Consumption is just another facet of daily, habitual routines. These routines are subject to the 'creep of convention'[45]; and what is *most* important to investigate is how consumption is grounded and naturalised in social norms, and 'how societal expectations of normality are established'[46]. So where Bauman apportions blame, Shove emphasises ways to facilitate positive change[47].

Bauman's concerns about equity and exploitation are more than legitimate. Neither ethical nor sustainable consumption is a panacea, especially not for the inequality associated with capitalism. But both ethical and sustainable consumption can achieve crucial degrees of positive change throughout a range of different areas. The extent to which this has the potential to result in a movement toward a more sustained, significant societal transformation remains an open question. For this even to begin to occur certainly requires the development of a far greater degree of ethical and sustainable

[40] Shove 2003, p.2
[41] Shove 2003, p.2. The 'realm of inconspicuous consumption', she writes elsewhere, is 'a realm ignored by studies of consumer culture that are enthralled by the significance of immediate visual clues to social meaning' (Shove and Warde 2002, p.247).
[42] Shove 2003, p.3
[43] Shove 2003, p.7
[44] Shove 2003, p.8
[45] Shove 2003, p.2
[46] Shove 2003, p.9
[47] Shove and Warde also note that 'there is a profound disjuncture in our means of understanding, on the one hand, the escalating consumption of glamorous items of an aestheticized consumer culture and, on the other, the inconspicuous mundane products associated with daily reproduction' (Shove and Warde 2002, p.249).

consumption than currently exists. And achieving such change may not be particularly easy, for, as more recent research shows,

> consumers are often effectively 'locked-in' to certain patterns of consumption by the material infrastructures of modern, urban living; and that the commitments that people have to certain consumption behaviours might be deeply held emotional, affective ones that cannot be sloughed-off just like that.[48]

Given this, for the instance of ethical and sustainable consumption to continue to grow requires a major shift in how 'we' regard consumption. Yet the potential is there, despite the habitual facility of many current consumption practices. Here government can support and encourage the changing mood, in the process of responding to it, but in terms of public debate over policy (in the 'struggle over meaning', as Stuart Hall phrases it) it is perhaps almost as important that a reassessment of consumption occur also within the academy.

I have pointed out that the structure / agency debate is an intrinsic aspect of disciplines such as sociology which focus on 'the social', and change. Here, for the 'social' sciences, agency is a shadowy doppelgänger, always just barely there, that won't, can't, just go away. In relation to consumption however, especially in the Australian disciplinary arena it is vital to overcome the extent to which the structure / agency issue tacitly frames and *structures* discussion in a manner which creates a particular moral blindness, in spite of the circumscribed epistemology of the debate. Arguments echoing some affiliation (however distant) to the true / false needs perspective have contributed *nothing* toward positive change. Those who emphasise how dreadful consumption is and that wants / needs are imposed only reiterate a hostility that has been expressed thousands of times before. The perpetuation of this narrative has done nothing substantive to alter consumption practices on a general societal level. History has demonstrated that. It is nonetheless arguable that the negative accounts of consumption from within the academy and from those who claim a province to interpret and comment on society *do* have an influence on people's general outlook. This influence has not changed people's practices en-masse, for how many consumers are persuaded they have false and / or excessive needs? People, including critics themselves, more commonly perceive it is only the needs of *others* which are excessive, false and manipulated[49]. In this schema their own

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[48] Malpass, Barnett, Clarke and Cloke 2007, p.243

[49] Malpass, Barnett, Clarke and Cloke cite research that identifies how 'vocabularies of blame' are used to shift 'responsibility onto other actors' (2007, p.243). See also Miller who notes how the 'bogey

consumption remains generic, the act itself representative of no particular value, meaning or import, divorced from any perhaps distant concerns individuals might feel about larger societal practices of consumption on any more general level.

Clearly those who practice ethical consumption are moving beyond the narrow confines of such a view. Still, how is it possible to encourage an even greater awareness and debate about the ethical ramifications of consumption in terms of the origin and consequences of goods in the face of a longstanding discourse attacking all consumption *tout court* as inimical to human society / sociality? Such a position is not only wrong-headed, but also counter-productive. It does nothing to recognise the human creativity connected to consumption. It does not acknowledge the richness of meaning humans can attach to goods. Such critics may have the best of intentions insofar as they perceive consumption as an *expression* of the inequality associated with the current system of distribution and exchange, but as argued in chapter five, consumption in itself is not responsible for this system. Ethical and sustainable consumption does not have the capacity to address the flaws of this system, it cannot alter the appalling economic inequality endemic to capitalism, yet ethical / sustainable consumption *currently does more to effect positive change than any anti-consumption narrative.* If those critics really do want to achieve any more positive impact they might consider a more politically astute approach: not ceasing to criticising consumption, but beginning to criticise certain *aspects* of it more effectively. Ideally they might do so while supplying constructive, practical (and possibly even realistic) recommendations about how to facilitate positive change.

The previous two chapters discussed how over the last thirty or so years new accounts of consumption - identifying its intimate interrelationship with human sociality and how consumption 'speaks' of / to identity - have been an innovative, important alternative and / or challenge to those more traditional hostile accounts. Consumption clearly is a central category when it comes to understanding identity[50]. And this reassessment has permitted, enabled and contributed to the increasingly positive theoretical reassessment of consumption that has occurred in recent years. Yet so much discussion of

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of a deluded, superficial person who has become the mere mannequin to commodity culture is always someone other than ourselves' (2001, p.229).

[50] Campbell 2004. But neither is consumption the only signifier of identity, 'national, ethic, occupational ... social relations of kinship, friendship and association', for instance, are all also significant ... (Shove and Warde 2002,p.235).

consumption is still focused on 'identity', with 'subcultural' identities being given pre-eminence in many such accounts. Neither has an exploration of the identity / subjectivity and consumption of corporate and government 'subcultures' been a particularly evident feature of such research. And while Stuart Hall once referred to cultural studies as a whole as being motivated by political concerns (as per those accounts of 'subcultural' consumption that traditionally formed an attempt to account for agency as instantiated via some kind of 'resistance' to the exploitation of capitalism), the stress on 'resistance' within cultural studies is increasingly being recognised as flawed[51]. But even with this, the lingering search for agency is still an epistemological dead-end. How do such accounts avoid becoming entangled, enmeshed and ensnared in a tacit essentialism? And where then does this now leave the more recent explicitly poststructuralist deliberations regarding what various consumption practices mean for / about human subjectivity?

In *The Ethics of Waste* (2006) Gay Hawkins writes of the value of Delueze's conception of 'a self without any essential interiority'[52]. She also notes that such accounts, while helpful in understanding what 'constitutes us as governable subjects', are unfortunately 'less able to see ... those forces of ethical life and being - those encounters, visceral movements, and differences - that initiate *other* possibilities for subjectivity and intersubjectivity'[53]. As I mentioned earlier in relation to Warde, the exact *dynamics* of the constitution of subjectivity remains an open question here, as does the exact why and how of its expression. Yet Hawkins's own discussion does attempt to weave a way through the issue, acknowledging '*other* possibilities' of understanding the consequences of consumption in terms of waste, even as she shies away from full bodied moral judgements. So although her discussion is still framed around the issue of subjectivity, given her inclusion of environmental concerns, it suggests a positive new direction: one with less of a tendency to the anthropocentrism apparent in accounts which treat

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[51] Cohen 1980, Gelder 1997, Frith 1997, Stratton 1997, Thornton 1997. Hilton also notes the existence of 'a more widespread trend in consumer studies that constantly speaks of individuals' abilities to appropriate and negotiate, but less frequently examines the political systems that place limits on such actions or the moralities of consumption that tie consumers to wider practices of belief' (Hilton 2004, p.119).

[52] Hawkins 2006, p.36

[53] Hawkins 2006, p.37

consumption as only worthy of consideration to the extent it reveals identity / subjectivity via the dynamics and formation of 'taste'[54].

The focus on the social *is* the province of the *social* sciences. In calling for a greater consideration of the *material* impact of consumption practices I do not wish to denigrate this. As will be clear by now however, my overall concern is how attention paid to identity / taste vis-à-vis consumption can leave much that impacts on 'the social' out. Marx's famous dictum of philosophers only *interpreting* the world where the point is to *change* it[55], is more than relevant here. Academic ideas can inform social debate insofar as strong tropes / doctrines *do* filter through to society at large[56]. In this the academy can contribute to the formation of government policy, in addition to those more obvious regular, formal avenues or channels through which policy recommendations normally take place. What I am arguing here is that in relation to the development of ethical and sustainable consumption the intangible way the academy treats consumption and thus shapes public feelings, beliefs and opinion is vitally important. Public 'ethos' impacts on public policy. And public policy plays a key role in turn. I have noted how theorists such as Naomi Klein, Noreena Hertz, Clive Barnett, as well as Bentley, Fien and Neil, all posit the potential of ethical / sustainable consumption to achieve positive change. All also acknowledge the role government can and should play in enabling this to develop further. In chapter four I discussed the difficulties and limitations on governmental power in the global capitalist marketplace. Yet no matter what changes will be wrought by the fallout from the subprime mortgage crisis, in Australia government still both contributes and responds to public moods, and it is the only institution with the formal capacity to implement 'whole-of-society' frameworks that might facilitate, promote and support ethical and sustainable consumption practices. Hertz suggests it is vitally important such formal frameworks include legislation to strengthen trade regulations in order to impose 'standards of transparency and accountability in business'[57]. Similarly, in a recent submission to the Productivity Commission *Inquiry into Australian Consumer Policy* the Australian Network of Environmental Defender's Offices (ANEDO) drew on the United Nations *Guidelines for*

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[54] Potter 2008
[55] Marx 1974a, p.123
[56] Wilk for instance, acknowledges how academic 'analysis both builds upon and feeds ideological warfare over consumption' (2001, p.246).
[57] Hertz 2003, p.174

Consumer Protection (2003)[58], to recommend that a far more comprehensive labelling system be instituted on all products sold in Australia, and that other measures to support ethical and sustainable consumption be implemented:

> Appropriate measures would include mandatory information on the environmental impacts, including climate change impacts, of products, the impartial environmental testing of products, the encouragement of alternatives to environmentally harmful uses of substances, the strengthening of regulatory mechanisms to ensure sustainable consumption, and the introduction of sustainable operations into government practices.[59]

At one point it seemed possible that the likelihood of this occurring in Australia might be set to increase with the newly elected Labor federal government signalling a shift in attitude toward sustainability / climate change by immediately ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, and offering policies focused on developing renewable and sustainable energy with a promise 'to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050'[60]. This was in marked contrast to the Federal Liberal-National Coalition government, which refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and had no concerted national whole-of-government strategy aimed at fostering sustainability. In September 2007 that government did table the results of an inquiry that recommended developing an *aspirational* 'Sustainability Charter'[61]. The report was titled 'Sustainability for survival: creating a climate for change', yet in a marvellous example of political doublespeak it excluded climate change from its terms of reference. Unhappily, the new Labor government's carbon emissions trading scheme has been deemed as not living up to its rhetoric, with at least sixty environmental and community groups issuing a media release saying the government's emission targets represent a 'total failure of climate change policy', and that in this 'the Rudd government has caved in to pressure from big polluters'[62]. Commenting on the proposed unconditional $9 billion[63] 'compensation' payments to big polluters for

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[58] The United Nations *Guidelines for Consumer Protection* (2003), recommend governments 'develop or encourage the development of general consumer education and information programmes, including information on the environmental impacts of consumer choices and behaviour and the possible implications, including benefits and costs, of changes in consumption'.
[59] Australian Network of Environmental Defender's Offices Submission to Productivity Commission Inquiry into Australia's Consumer Policy Framework, 11 May 2007. Berry and McEachern (2005, p.72) write of an earlier Australian labelling system being 'scrapped'. They also note various issues involved in setting up such schemes, as well as strategies governments have used to bypass them.
[60] Australian Labor Party Media Release, 2007
[61] Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage 2007, p.xiii, pp.23-4
[62] Friends of the Earth 2008
[63] Cubby 2009

supposed future 'loss of asset value', even Ross Garnaut, the author of the government's own climate change review report felt impelled to state outright that

> Never in the history of Australian public finance has so much been given without public policy purpose, by so many, to so few.[64]

When I began this thesis both ethical and sustainable consumption were subject to approximately equal levels of public concern. As the above policy debates indicate, this has obviously changed in the last few years, with sustainability vis-à-vis climate change becoming increasingly the subject of global debate (even as it has become subordinate to the fall out from the subprime mortgage crisis). As a recent editorial in the cultural studies journal *Continuum* also pointed out, environmental sustainability 'has been highlighted as one of four national research priorities'[65]. In this context I must point out that sustainable consumption is only a subset of ethical consumption as a whole. Yet it may be possible that an increasing awareness of the importance of sustainability will have a flow-on effect perhaps encouraging the general public to become more concerned about thinking through the impact of their own, as well as broad based societal consumption practices. Nevertheless, while Bentley, Fien and Neil's report, *Sustainable Consumption: young Australians as agents of change* (2004), suggests that many consumers currently simply do not seem to register the impact of their own consumption behaviour, let alone understand how they might go about altering it[66], they also argue government can play a central role in beginning to change this situation, by

> shaping individual consumer behaviours through institutional, social, cultural and ethical factors ... [67]

Improved consumer information and more stringent regulatory constraints as well as incentives / subsidies for business are important and should facilitate some positive change. Having said this, however, it is vital to recall again Barnett's 'Governing the Subjects and Spaces of Ethical Consumption', which suggests 'informational strategies' targeting individuals are not enough. As with Shove's study, Barnett's report suggests frameworks for enabling action need to be put in place to target 'complexes of practice'.

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[64] Garnaut 2008. Australian Conservation Foundation executive director Don Henry has stated that these payouts will mean that 'every Australian household will be paying an average of $389 a year in 2010 and $558 by 2015 to fund the activities of the companies that are fuelling climate change' (Australian Conservation Foundation media release, 2009).
[65] Allmark 2008
[66] Bentley, Fien and Neil 2004, p.33
[67] Bentley, Fien and Neil 2004, p.3

Ideally people should be 'provided with practical ways of actually making changes to consumption activity which can then become routinised'[68]. The need to determine what these frameworks / practical ways might consist of is becoming increasingly imperative. Consideration of how to contend with regressive corporate interests is also vital here. The overall point however, is that governmental policies to further enable positive industry / corporate and societal change can and should be developed and instituted. The academic social sciences can contribute to facilitating and investigating the possibility of such change or they can impede, hinder and delay it.

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[68] Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, and Malpass 2005, p.47

Appendix A - Jonah Peretti's email exchange with Nike

The below exchange began following Jonah Peretti's take up of Nike's offer to personalise his Nike shoes. The word Peretti chose was 'sweatshop'.

From: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
To: "'Jonah H. Peretti'" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Your NIKE iD order was cancelled for one or more of the following reasons.

1) Your Personal iD contains another party's trademark or other intellectual property.
2) Your Personal iD contains the name of an athlete or team we do not have the legal right to use.
3) Your Personal iD was left blank. Did you not want any personalization?
4) Your Personal iD contains profanity or inappropriate slang, and besides, your mother would slap us.

If you wish to reorder your NIKE iD product with a new personalization please visit us again at www.nike.com
Thank you,
NIKE iD

From: "Jonah H. Peretti" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
To: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Greetings,

My order was canceled but my personal NIKE iD does not violate any of the criteria outlined in your message. The Personal iD on my custom ZOOM XC USA running shoes was the word "sweatshop." Sweatshop is not: 1) another's party's trademark, 2) the name of an athlete, 3) blank, or 4) profanity. I choose the iD because I wanted to remember the toil and labor of the children that made my shoes. Could you please ship them to me immediately.

Thanks and Happy New Year,
Jonah Peretti

From: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
To: "'Jonah H. Peretti'" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Dear NIKE iD Customer,

Your NIKE iD order was cancelled because the iD you have chosen contains, as stated in the previous e-mail correspondence, "inappropriate slang".

If you wish to reorder your NIKE iD product with a new personalization please visit us again at www.nike.com

Thank you,
NIKE iD

From: "Jonah H. Peretti" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
To: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Dear NIKE iD,

Thank you for your quick response to my inquiry about my custom ZOOM XC USA running shoes. Although I commend you for your prompt customer service, I disagree with the claim that my personal iD was inappropriate slang. After consulting Webster's Dictionary, I discovered that "sweatshop" is in fact part of standard English, and not slang. The word means: "a shop or factory in which workers are employed for long hours at low wages and under unhealthy conditions" and its origin dates from 1892. So my personal iD does meet the criteria detailed in your first email.

Your web site advertises that the NIKE iD program is "about freedom to choose and freedom to express who you are." I share Nike's love of freedom and personal expression. The site also says that "If you want it done right...build it yourself." I was thrilled to be able to build my own shoes, and my personal iD was offered as a small token of appreciation for the sweatshop workers poised to help me realize my vision. I hope that you will value my freedom of expression and reconsider your decision to reject my order.

Thank you,
Jonah Peretti

From: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
To: "'Jonah H. Peretti'" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Dear NIKE iD Customer,

Regarding the rules for personalization it also states on the NIKE iD web site that "Nike reserves the right to cancel any Personal iD up to 24 hours after it has been submitted".

In addition it further explains:

"While we honor most personal iDs, we cannot honor every one. Some may be (or contain) others' trademarks, or the names of certain professional sports teams, athletes or celebrities that Nike does not have the right to use. Others may contain material that we consider inappropriate or simply do not want to place on our products.

Unfortunately, at times this obliges us to decline personal iDs that may otherwise seem unobjectionable. In any event, we will let you know if we decline your personal iD, and we will offer you the chance to submit another."

With these rules in mind we cannot accept your order as submitted.

If you wish to reorder your NIKE iD product with a new personalization please visit us again at www.nike.com

Thank you, NIKE iD

From: "Jonah H. Peretti" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
To: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Dear NIKE iD,

Thank you for the time and energy you have spent on my request. I have decided to order the shoes with a different iD, but I would like to make one small request. Could you please send me a color snapshot of the ten-year-old Vietnamese girl who makes my shoes?

Thanks,
Jonah Peretti

{no response}

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