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CONSUMING: HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

The twentieth century has been termed ‘The American Century’ (Luce, 1941; Evans, 1998). This designation seems especially appropriate in respect of contemporary consumer culture and associated consumer lifestyles, for as the twentieth century developed the global reach and influence of American consumerism increased markedly. With the growth of American economic and cultural influence, particularly in the latter half of the century, American consumer brands, culture, and lifestyles increasingly were being exported to and adopted by the rest of the world, albeit inflected in various ways by local customs and practices (Ritzer, 2005; Brewer and Trentman, 2006). American corporations, consumer goods, cultural forms, and styles exerted an increasing influence over people’s lives and corporate brands, commodities, and services associated with the likes of Ford, Coca-Cola, Disney, McDonalds, Nike, MTV, Microsoft, Starbucks, and numerous other commercial enterprises became cultural universals, immediately recognizable features of the consumer landscapes of a growing number of people around the world. If consumerism had its initial roots in Europe in the seventeenth century, as the fruits of conquest and colonization gave rise to increasing material wealth and a growth in the range of products available for consumption (McKendrick et al., 1983; Brewer and Porter, 1993), the ‘imitation’ that quickly took hold in the American colonies, and then in an independent USA, became from the late nineteenth century the ‘real thing’, a way of life to which, in due course, more and more people around the world have aspired, albeit while also at times attaching local

meanings and values to the commodities and services purchased and consumed (Glickman, 1999; Beck et al., 2003; Breen, 2004; Brewer and Trentmann, 2006).

In the closing decades of the twentieth century there were accumulating signs that America was no longer the manufacturing powerhouse that it once had been and the growing economic prowess of Japan and the 'Asian Tigers' led observers at the time to speculate on America's relative decline, as in the early twenty-first century did the emergence of China and India as economic powers. However, if American manufacturing is no longer the driving force that it was early in the twentieth century, and especially in the immediate aftermath of World War II, America has sustained its place at the epicenter of global consumer culture. In 2006, consumer purchases accounted for 70% of US gross domestic product (GDP) the closest competitors in the GDP consumer stakes being the UK (61%), Italy (59%) followed by other EU member states France and Germany and then Japan (approximately 55%) (Meyerson, 2008). From being a leading exporter of manufactured goods in the first half of the twentieth century America increasingly has become an importer, a 'nation of shoppers', buying goods produced predominantly overseas, a significant number of which are 'outsourced' by American corporations that have abandoned a commitment to manufacture and 'heavy capitalism' in favor of brand enhancement, product promotion, and the mobility, flexibility, and financial benefits of 'light, consumer-friendly capitalism' (Bauman, 2000: 63; Klein, 2001; Arvidsson, 2006).

As the twentieth century drew to a close 'the emergence of China, as the new workshop of the world' (Anderson, 2007: 6), began to be a focus of growing interest, increasing expectation, and rising concern. As China's production and consumption of commodities, goods, and services rapidly rose, so speculation grew that it would soon overtake America as the primary catalyst for global economic growth, its anticipated annual growth rate, combined with its projected level of consumer expenditure, being expected within decades to contribute more to global economic expansion than that of America (Bin Zhao, 1997; Shenkar, 2005). India, Asia's fourth largest economy in the early years of the twenty-first century, was also developing rapidly, its economic growth rate, second only to China, averaged 8% for the period 2003–2006 and the signs of a burgeoning consumer culture, catering for a rapidly expanding middle class with increasing disposable incomes, were becoming ever more apparent. A report in *The New York Times* in 2003 described consumers inside an Indian shopping mall, young people at Barista Coffee, the Starbucks of India, families wandering through department stores, shopping at Marks & Spencer, Lacoste, and Reebok, dining with their children at McDonald's, or buying food at the Subway sandwich shop. While poverty continues to be a big and serious problem in India with around 80% of the 1.1 billion population living

on 25 rupees (30p) a day or less (Warner, 2007), following the opening up of the economy another increasingly prosperous India has emerged, one that is 'based on strong industry and agriculture, rising Indian and foreign investment and American-style consumer spending by a growing middle class [between 250 and 300 million in number], including the people under age 25 who now make up half the country's population' (Waldman, 2003; see also Farrell, 2007).

What appears to be occurring in Asia has been described not as the emergence of China but its re-emergence. Before 1800, Europe and America were not the driving forces of a developing world economy, rather the dominant regions were in Asia and it has been suggested that if 'any economy had a "central" position and role ... it was China' (Frank, A.G. 1998: 5). In addition, in this period the Indian subcontinent was itself 'highly developed and already dominant in the world textile industry' and this contributed to its very significant 'balance of trade surplus with Europe' (Frank, A.G. 1998: 85). In consequence, the recent rapid economic growth of China and India, and their increasingly influential participation in global consumer culture, may signify the beginning of an historic process of reorientation of the global economy away from the West and towards Asia, perhaps a restoration of Asia as the epicenter of the global economy, or the development of a bipolar or tripolar global economy (Chen and Wolf, 2001; Virmani, 2005).

One illustration of the growth of American or Western-style consumer activity in China and India is the increase in private car ownership. In 2004, in China the requirement to register bicycles ended and cycling became increasingly equated with the poor, with those unable to afford car ownership, those largely excluded from a growing consumer culture. In Beijing, the annual cycle tax was cancelled, bicycle lanes converted into car lanes, and 2 million cars given priority over around 4 million bikes. Between 1978 and 2006 the number of cars and vans on China's roads increased more than 20 fold to 27 million and in Beijing alone in 2006 car ownership was increasing at a rate of 1000 every day (Watts, 2009; BBC Asia-Pacific News, 2008). In India, a comparable pattern is emerging as a growing middle class aspire to car ownership and car manufacturers move in to nurture and satisfy the demand for auto-mobility, the best example of which is the production by Tata of a 'people's car', the four-seater 625 cc Nano, the world's cheapest car (Madslie, 2008). Given that 'a large Indian middle class ... has internalized Western consumer and celebrity culture even more avidly than its Chinese counterpart' (Anderson, 2007: 8) it is no surprise to find observers projecting that the consumer market in India may in due course exceed that of China (Engardio, 2005).

A consumer lifestyle – consumerism – that initially emerged in Europe, in England, in the seventeenth century, developed and achieved maturity in America, has subsequently become in the course of the twentieth century

the most persuasive and pervasive globally extensive form of cultural life, one to which more and more people around the world continue to aspire. Before giving consideration to broad aspects of the historical trajectory leading from seventeenth century England through twentieth century America and, with the globalization of economic life, on to the growing number of other locations around the world that have embraced Western consumer lifestyles, including centers of development in China and India (Kalish, 2005, 2007; Shenkar, 2005; Farrell, 2007), brief clarification of key terms and consideration of the pivotal relationship between production and consumption is warranted.

CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMERISM

Consumption is a cultural universal, a necessary aspect of human existence, a practice that has constituted a prominent part of social life in all societies throughout human history (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979). Mundane consumption is a necessary and routine part of people's lives, as is the exercise of choice in respect of a variety of relatively inconspicuous or ordinary products and services intrinsic to the maintenance of everyday life (Bevir and Trentmann, 2008). Consumption is closely articulated with another culturally universal and no-less essential practice, production, and to achieve an effective understanding of consumption analysis has to take production into account. As two radical critics of nineteenth-century political economy observed, consumption is a necessary corollary of 'the existence of living human individuals' and production for consumption is synonymous with material life itself:

the first premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history ... [is] that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to "make history." But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, housing, clothing and various other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. (Marx and Engels, 1976 [1845]: 41-

The relationship between consumption and production, alluded to in this statement, is complex and varied, has changed over time and undoubtedly will continue to do so. Production and consumption continue to be articulated in a number of ways. The very process of production itself involves consumption, 'is immediately consumption' (Marx 1973: 90), in the sense that, of necessity, materials and resources are used and energy and other capacities are expended in the course of making things and/or providing services. But where things are made and services are located

is also subject to change. With the globalization of forms of economic production, manufacturing of consumer goods, and provision of consumer services have been increasingly outsourced or off-shored from wealthier, more developed, 'consumer' societies to less wealthy, less developed, 'producer' societies, creating distance between producers and consumers (Klein, 2001).

In a parallel manner the process of consumption can also be seen to be productive in so far as the act of consuming produces a range of effects and consequences, as in the mundane senses referred to above where the consumption of foodstuffs produces life, maintains and develops the body, reproduces energy and other bodily capacities, or where the consumption of a service may produce an ability, or an extension or development of the same, as in sports training and coaching, or in educational courses. While on the 'supply side' production creates the things, the objects, the services that are integral to the act of consuming, on the 'demand side' the process of consumption 'creates for the products the subject for whom they are products' (Marx, 1973: 90). The implication being that it is only in the act or process of consumption that a product truly achieves realization – 'a garment becomes a real garment only in the act of being worn ... the product ... *becomes* a product only through consumption' (Marx, 1973: 91). A further respect in which Marx considers consumption to promote production is that through use, through the act of consuming, 'consumption creates the need for *new* production' (1973: 91), creates the motive by reproducing the need, not only for products, which have been used up or consumed and need to be replaced, but also for other related new products offering additional and/or complimentary functions as, for example, is the case with accessories for mobile phones, computers, and many other commodities.

In addition to producing objects and/or services for consumption, production, in the broadest of senses, also stimulates consumption by generating needs, wishes, desires, and fantasies in respect of goods and services, effectively creating the consumer, and powerfully influencing, if not determining, how a particular good and/or service is to be consumed (Marx, 1973: 92–3). It is here at the nodal point of the articulation of production and consumption that a particularly distinctive modern way of life – *consumerism* – a way of life that is perpetually preoccupied with the pursuit, possession, rapid displacement, and replacement of a seemingly inexhaustible supply of things, first emerged, rapidly developed, and subsequently has grown to become global in scope and influence. It is a way of living that revolves around the wanting of things, the longing for things, the purchasing of things, a way of life in which having, desiring, and wishing for more and more things have become significant preoccupations for late modern subjects whose identities are increasingly bound up with what and how they consume. As critics have commented,

consumerism represents 'the crass elevation of material acquisition to the status of a dominant social paradigm' (Princen et al., 2002: 3).

Analysts of modern consumer activity and the development of consumerism as a way of life have drawn a number of distinctions between 'consumption' on the one hand and 'consumerism' or 'consumer culture' on the other (Slater, 1997; Miles, 1998; Gabriel and Lang, 2006; Bauman, 2007b). While consumption has been present throughout all human history, and necessarily so, 'consumerism' or 'consumer culture' is argued to be a more modern phenomenon and is considered to have developed initially in the West in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Braudel, 1974; McKendrick et al., 1983; Slater, 1997). For example, in France through the course of the seventeenth century markets, especially at fairs and carnivals, were becoming an increasingly prominent source of consumer activity and historians have noted that in England early in the eighteenth century there were increasing signs of a growing propensity to consume and traces of a developing commercial interest in the value of advertising, marketing, and sales techniques (McKendrick, 1983).

There is a considerable body of historical evidence that reveals a steady growth in the range of goods being consumed in the West *before* the advent of the Industrial Revolution, in particular commodities obtained through overseas voyages of discovery and 'colonial exploitation', such as 'coffee, tea, tobacco, imported cloths and dyes, new foods (potatoes, tomatoes), fruits', commodities that demonstrate that the 'west was a master consumer of imperially expropriated commodities before it was a consumer of goods it produced itself' (Slater, 1997: 18–19). The appearance in this period of a growing variety of consumer goods, including different forms of clothing and materials, crockery, decorative or non-essential manufactured items such as broaches, buckles, and pins, as well as cards, toys, and puppets constitutes evidence of changing preferences and tastes on the part of consumers and households to obtain goods through the market by becoming more productive and dependable workers and signifies the early development of consumer culture, the emergence of consumerism as a way of life (Vries, 1993:117; see also Campbell, 1987). The increasing proliferation and purchase of such commodities from the eighteenth century onwards has led analysts to refer to a 'consumer revolution', which along with the Industrial Revolution is considered to have inaugurated a process of transformation in and through which consumer activity has been accorded a critical economic significance and a prominent, if not central, position in contemporary social life, leading in due course to contemporary society being designated a 'consumer society' (McKendrick et al., 1983: 9; Miles, 1998: 6).

Although consumer culture has a history that extends back into the eighteenth century, if not earlier, it is only with developments from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that those early traces began to be given a more substantial and coherent form and through the subsequent growth of mass production and mass consumption came to be recognized as constitutive of a distinctive way of life – ‘consumerism’ – that has continued to grow in influence to become, from the late twentieth century, truly global in scope and extent.

ON CONSUMERISM

It is developments from the period 1880–1930 that have been identified as particularly influential in promoting the growth of consumer culture, as inaugurating a series of qualitative changes that might be said to have ushered in a new age of consumption, to have given birth to consumerism as a distinctive way of living to which more and more people have aspired, initially in Europe and North America but subsequently across the rest of the world (Slater, 1997; Miles, 1998; Gabriel and Lang, 2006).

In drawing a series of distinctions between different possible meanings of consumerism Gabriel and Lang comment that it was from the 1920s in America ‘that the meaning of consumption ... broadened ... to resonate pleasure, enjoyment and freedom ... [moving] from a means towards an end – living – to being an end in its own right’ (2006: 8), to being that is not just a way of life, but in effect increasingly synonymous with the primary purpose of modern life, providing meaning to social existence. Consumerism is represented by Gabriel and Lang (2006: 8–9) as:

- (1) A moral doctrine in developed countries.
- (2) The ideology of conspicuous consumption.
- (3) An economic ideology for global development.
- (4) A political ideology.
- (5) A social movement promoting and protecting consumer rights.

With the exception of the last category all of the ‘distinct uses’ listed are closely interrelated aspects of an ethos of consumerism that gathered momentum throughout the twentieth century with the accelerating global diffusion of the economic logic of modern capitalism. The identification of consumer activity, the pursuit and purchase of commodities and services as constituting a virtual duty, as embodying a ‘moral doctrine’, as articulated with ‘freedom, power, and happiness’, and as signifying ‘the good life’, is integral to the political economy of a form of life that

requires a continual cultivation of new markets and a parallel perpetual (re)generation of consumer demand. The several 'meanings' distinguished are the inextricably inter-connected moral, social, economic, and political dimensions of consumer culture, of consumerism as a way of life that has become global, 'natural', quite simply the way the world is thought to be and cannot be imagined otherwise.

The final meaning of consumerism distinguished represents a response to a number of different consequences of a way of life that revolves around increasing consumption of goods and services, and represents far more than merely a social movement operating to promote and protect consumer rights, as Gabriel and Lang indicate by drawing attention to the growing concern about 'unbridled consumption in a world of finite resources and a fragile natural environment' (2006: 9). Concerns about the consequences of consumer culture, the impact of a way of life that is predicated upon the increasing use of what are in many instances finite resources and materials, and that leads to the production of growing volumes of waste, as well as potentially irreversible climate changes, are matters to be considered at length below.

The rapid growth and expansion of consumerism through the course of the twentieth century was the product of a number of factors. Technological and organizational innovations in production raised output significantly and reduced unit costs. In the early decades of the century the benefit was initially experienced in reductions in working hours, as well as relatively modest increases in consumption, from the early 1940s, rather than having more free time, people were inclined, encouraged, indeed exhorted, to continually consume more goods and services and more, it seems, was never enough (Schor, 1992; Siegel, 2008). Commercial corporations following an economic logic of market expansion and market creation, extending their operations to become transnational enterprises producing and/or promoting global brands, have contributed significantly to the global diffusion of consumerism, as have the growing number of advertising agencies, marketing organizations, and communications media that have become the creators and bearers of commodity sign values and promoters of brand identities (Ewen, 2001; Klein, 2001; Dawson, 2005; Barber, 2007). Global brands have successfully penetrated local cultures and enticed people around the world to consume this or that commodity by generating persuasive and appealing promotional lines and marketing messages, for example, 'It's the real thing' (Coca-Cola), 'Just do it' (Nike), 'Impossible is nothing' (Adidas), or the zeitgeist defining, 'because you're worth it' (L'Oreal), which effectively exemplifies the narcissistic individualism central to late-modern, materially acquisitive consumer culture.

MASS PRODUCTION AND MASS CONSUMPTION: FORDISM

In respect of innovations in production that raised output significantly while simultaneously reducing unit costs of consumer goods, Fordism, a term which derives from Henry Ford's early twentieth-century, radically engineered Model T automobile assembly production line, warrants a prominent place insofar as it is widely acknowledged to have 'signaled the transformation of consumerism from an elite to a mass phenomenon in the 20th century in advanced capitalist societies' (Gabriel and Lang, 2006: 10; see also Miles, 1998: 6–7). Fordism describes the introduction in industry of particular production practices, including a detail division of labor that radically simplified tasks, standardized components, and sequentially organized machinery to facilitate a coordinated productive flow in the form of an assembly line (Harvey, 1989).

With Fordism there was a significant transformation of the organization of production, a rationalization of the labor process that simultaneously led to a loss of worker control, an increase in the productivity of labor and a reduction in unit costs, a relative shift in the balance of production from producer to consumer goods, and an absolute increase in the volume of commodities produced. The increased output of standardized goods – mass production – made possible and necessary a parallel growth in consumer demand. The prospect of increasing living standards and the provision of 'mass consumption' have been regarded as compensation for a deterioration in the work experience associated with Fordist rationalization, with consumerism being described as a 'bribe ... for accepting intensive rationalization, alienation and utter lack of control over ... work life' (Slater, 1997: 188) and as 'reward for accepting potentially alienating work' (Gabriel and Lang, 2006: 189). This is perhaps best exemplified by Henry Ford's decision in January 1914 to respond to high labor turnover associated with the imposition of rationalized production by offering his workers the incentive of a doubling of their pay to become more efficient, harder working, and more productive (Raff and Summers, 1987).

The proliferation of goods produced through the adoption and deployment of Fordist rationalization led not only to the cultivation of 'local' or 'national' consumer markets, but also to increased international trade and an accelerated pursuit of global consumer markets for the burgeoning quantities of goods being manufactured. As one perceptive observer remarked at the time on the impact of increasing productive capacity:

Production has played many parts in history; it has taken various forms. The form which it takes in this, the Machine Age, is strange and new. Consumptionism is a new necessity ... Through the centuries the problem has been how to produce enough of the things men wanted ... *the new necessity is to make men want the things which machinery must turn out if this civilization is not to perish.* (Strauss, 1924: 578–9, emphasis added)

For this observer of a rapidly developing mass production/mass consumption American society it is advertising that constitutes ‘the circulatory system of twentieth century industry’, that influences and shapes consumption (Strauss, 1924: 583). Consumers may not directly engage with advertising copy, they may not stop to focus on advertisements in the news paper, on the billboard/hoarding, and/or, as has become increasingly the case of late, on the screen, but Strauss remarks that advertisements are ‘doing their work just the same ... bringing about the desired result’, namely stimulating ‘the appetite for more things of every kind’, and creating a world which is ‘dominated by things’, a world in which all relationships are increasingly being reduced to the commodity form, effectively treated as thing-like (1924: 586, 581, 587).

However, advertising was merely one, albeit important, factor recognized by Ford when he reflected on the consumer market benefits of worker productivity schemes that improved workers’ wages. If mass production commodities were to be actualized then there had to be a mass of consumers. Ford had recognized that it was in his interest for his producers to be able to be consumers and for that a combination of an appropriate level of income and availability of credit would be necessary (Harvey, 1989). This period extending from the late nineteenth century through to the 1920s might be considered the ‘take-off phase’ for mass consumerism (Robertson, 1990). What changed with mass production was the requirement, the necessity, for an increase in the scale of consumption, an increase in both the number of goods being consumed and the speed or rate at which things needed to be consumed (Ewen, 2001). With the growth of mass production, and the necessary cultivation of mass consumption, consumer activity began to occupy an increasingly prominent place in social life (Bauman, 2007b).

Fordism was more than a system of mass production, it has been described as ‘a total way of life’ one which, of necessity, included relatively standardized forms of mass consumption, and one which held relatively firm until the economic recession of the mid-1970s led to forms of economic restructuring and rationalization, promoting alternatives to large-scale, relatively rigid mass production systems that took advantage of innovations in information technology to introduce ‘labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption’, which have been

described as 'flexible', 'post-industrial' or 'knowledge-intensive', and in respect of work and employment aspects in particular, 'insecure' (Harvey, 1989: 135, 147; see also Lash and Urry, 1994; Beck, 2000). The more flexible, post-industrial or knowledge-intensive economic order which developed from the mid-1970s gave, as Harvey notes, 'much more autonomy to the banking and financial system relative to corporate, state, and personal financing' and in making significant improvements in 'communication and information flow' and distribution techniques it presided over a dramatic increase in the velocity of circulation of 'commodities through the market system' and the volume of consumer activity (1989: 164, 285)

FLEXIBLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

Mass production and mass consumption have not disappeared, but the deployment of information technologies and other organizational innovations in production, distribution, and retailing have promoted greater manufacturing and marketing flexibility, and commodity choice, by making shorter production runs for niche or micro-markets and tastes, or provision for specialized forms of consumption, economically viable and profitable. The increases in product ranges and product turnover as durability has been diminished by acceleration in engineered obsolescence, alongside increased segmentation of the consumer market and the prospect of 'greater volatility' in respect of consumer preferences, has led some analysts to designate new forms of consumption 'post-Fordist' (Lash and Urry, 1994: 274). Taking stock of some of the more significant developments in consumption that have accompanied the emergence of greater flexibility, Harvey describes two particular trends. First, how increasingly fashion, styling, and design have been deployed beyond luxury or elite markets 'to accelerate the pace of consumption not only in clothing, ornament, and decoration, but also across a wide swathe of lifestyles and recreational activities (leisure and sporting habits, pop music styles, video and children's games, and the like)' (Harvey, 1989: 285). Second, an increase in the consumption of a range of services, including 'personal, business, educational and health services', as well as entertainment, leisure, recreation, sport, and other ephemeral services, the reduced lifetimes of which increase turnover and promote an acceleration in capital accumulation compared to more durable material goods. A major consequence of the developments identified by Harvey in respect of production has been an increased emphasis being placed on 'the values and virtues of instantaneity', insofar as instant, fast, and disposable goods promote acceleration in both 'the turnover of goods in consumption' and capital accumulation (1989: 286).

A flexible and faster-paced 'society of consumers'

In one analysis of the transformations to which modern forms of life have been subject as work has been displaced from its 'linchpin role' and consumer activity and associated 'wants, desires and longings' have grown in significance to become, in the course of the latter part of the twentieth century, the 'principal propelling and operating force of society', a contrast is drawn between what is represented as an earlier 'solid' phase of modernity and a later 'liquid' phase (Bauman, 2007b: 28). The solid phase of modernity is exemplified by the 'society of producers', a form of social life in which goods are sought and desired for the 'comfort and esteem' they can deliver, where emphasis is placed upon stability, permanence, and reliability, and pursuit of security through orderly, durable, and long-term forms and arrangements is favored. It is permanence or stability and continuous reliability that are identified as foundational values in the 'solid modern society of producers' (Bauman, 2007b: 31). This form of social life is contrasted with the ways of living, the preoccupations, preferences, and values that emerged with and developed out of the 'consumerist revolution' and that subsequently have come to predominate in contemporary social life (Campbell, 1987).

In the 'light' or 'liquid' modern society of consumers it is argued that stability, permanence, and durability are no longer assets but liabilities, obstructions to be swept away by the relentless torrent of innovation, the endlessly meandering tributaries of fashion, styling, and design, and the 'ever rising volume and intensity of desires ... and speedy replacement of the objects intended and hoped to gratify them' (Bauman, 2007b: 31). The solid, stable, more secure and, by implication, 'heavy' and slower society of producers is overtaken, surpassed, by the lighter, more mobile and flexible, and faster-paced 'society of consumers'. Bauman argues that the promotion, nurturing, and continual regeneration of 'wants, desires and longings' associated with the 'advent of consumerism augurs the *era of "inbuilt obsolescence" of goods offered on the market* and signals a spectacular rise in the waste disposal industry' (2007b: 31, emphasis added).

While the contrast drawn between the two 'ideal types' – a 'solid' phase of modernity/'heavy' capitalism/'society of producers' and a 'liquid' phase of modernity/'light' capitalism/'society of consumers' – is illuminating there are important underlying continuities that have contributed significantly to the particular transformations identified. Underlying a relative shift in emphasis from a society of production with traditional imperatives to labor and produce, to a society of consumption with a social logic that revolves around consumer activity, a view initially introduced by Baudrillard (1998) and elaborated and extended by Bauman,

it is the persisting pursuit of increases in economic growth and capital accumulation that has promoted the relative shift of emphasis in social and economic life from production to consumption (Sklair, 2002).

Writing in the mid-nineteenth century before the advent of mass production methods and the generation of a mass market for consumer goods, Marx and Engels identified the distinctive transformative logic of the modern capitalist mode of production, emphasizing the need for a 'constant revolutionizing of production ... [and] constantly expanding market for its products ... over the whole surface of the globe' (1968[1848]: 83). They drew attention to the relentless character of the processes of transformation, which are intrinsic to such a competitive economic system, one which has as its primary objective continual capital accumulation and, its necessary corollary, an ever expanding global consumer market for the continually increasing volume and range of goods being produced. 'All that is solid', fixed, and stable has indeed been rendered fluid as production and consumption have been subjected to relentless transformation, leading to the development of a more mobile, flexible, and faster-paced 'consumer society' and 'uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions' (Marx and Engels, 1968: 83).

Approaching the mid-twentieth century Schumpeter introduced a notion of 'creative destruction' to conceptualize the processes earlier identified by Marx and Engels, describing it as the 'essential fact about capitalism', as a 'process of industrial mutation ... that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one' (1975[1942]: 82). Schumpeter presented creative destruction as a defining feature of capitalist economic life and described it as a 'fundamental impulse that sets and keeps the capitalist engine in motion [that] comes from the new consumers, goods, the new methods of production or transportation, the new markets, the new forms of industrial organization that capitalist enterprise creates' (1975[1942]: 82). A 'perennial gale of creative destruction' leads to new consumers, commodities, technologies, sources of supply, and types of organization and it is around these, rather than in respect of price, that competition becomes increasingly orientated. Moreover, as will be considered later, products and/or by-products of complex processes of creative destruction may, in turn, prove to be 'destructive', inviting, if not warranting, the designation 'destructive creations' Calvano, 2007; see also Beck, 1992.

The economic system Marx and Engels and Schumpeter analyzed has of course changed in a number of important respects, but it remains firmly wedded to 'creative destruction' for precisely the reasons they outlined and from the late nineteenth century 'consumerism' became an increasingly essential cultural corollary, vital for engendering continual increases in consumer demand, which became more and more necessary as productivity grew rapidly through the twentieth century.

However, in the course of the late twentieth century the consequences of rising consumption and associated developments in consumer lifestyles became a focus of increasing concern as evidence indicating a variety of undesirable outcomes began to accumulate. The technical, social, and aesthetic engineering of product obsolescence, the production of commodities deemed unnecessary, wasteful, and/or damaging to the health, well-being, and welfare of users and their communities, and broader, frequently less-detectable, indirect, and delayed detrimental effects on the environment attracted increasing analytic attention and criticism (Gorz, 1983; Bahro, 1984; Princen et al., 2002; Gardner et al., 2004; Gardner and Prugh, 2008; Jackson, 2009).

Increasing turnover of commodities, aided by advertising images, marketing narratives, and the cultivation of brand loyalties that promote the idea that consumer activity – pursuing, purchasing, using, having, and more importantly *being seen to have* a particular product – produces satisfaction and promotes happiness, is an essential part of modern social life and constitutes the foundation of our consumerist economy. Happiness, as Baudrillard notes, ‘is the absolute reference of the consumer society’ (1998: 49), but this ‘happiness’ is not to be confused with ‘inner enjoyment’, rather it is bound up with the *visible* attainment of consumer goods and directly or indirectly, discursively, and vicariously shared experience of consumer services; it is associated with a display of consumer activity and its proceeds; with a presentation of signs or evidence of consuming achieved. This is a happiness that is signified by and invested in the world of consumer objects. It is an ‘enforced happiness’, a diminished happiness, a market contrived simulation, not happiness ‘in the full sense of the term’ (Baudrillard, 1998: 50). Elaborating on this theme Baudrillard adds that:

There is no question for the consumer ... of evading this enforced happiness and enjoyment, which is the equivalent in the new ethics of the traditional imperative to labor and produce. Modern man spends less and less of his life in production within work and more and more of it in the production and continual innovation of his own needs and well-being. He must constantly see to it that all his potentialities, all his consumer capacities are mobilized. If he forgets to do so, he will be gently and insistently reminded that he has no right not to be happy. (1998: 80, emphasis added)

The issue of happiness is a matter to which I will return in a wider discussion of consumer choice and the consequences of consumerism, but it is worth noting at this juncture that the reduced time spent in production referred to by Baudrillard only applies to *some* modern men and women, primarily in wealthier countries, but also in privileged locations secured in metropolitan environments in less wealthy and less developed countries,

and to a substantial degree has been made possible by the globalization of economic production and the increasing amount of time other men and women in poorer parts of the world spend in manufacturing activity, working under very difficult and often dangerous conditions for low wages, with little if any employment, safety, and health legislation to protect them (Klein, 2001; *Labour Behind the Label* 1 n.d.). It is also appropriate to add at this point that in the USA in the period from the 1950s to the present although productivity rose 400% the hours worked by many Americans steadily increased as well (Rauch, 2000). As a study of the growth in working hours in America demonstrates, it is precisely in the cause of mobilizing an essential consumer demand for rising productive capacity, ensuring workers have the rising income required to retain a place on the consumer treadmill, that working hours have increased (Schor, 1992). Certainly in the homeland of consumer culture, the USA, the contrast originally developed by Baudrillard in the late 1960s now appears radically overdrawn, for the pursuit of consumer happiness has subsequently required a growing number of Americans to spend more and more of their lives in production within work and if this fact is coupled with the increasing levels of indebtedness that have been a corollary of the pursuit of the consumer dream then it is clear that there are very good grounds for *not* being happy with a way of life that costs so much yet arguably ultimately delivers very little of what it appears to promise.

There are interesting comparisons to be explored between American, the UK, and continental European experiences of the consequences of consumerism and the 'work-and-spend' cycle. For example, towards the end of the twentieth century it was noted that manufacturing employees in the USA were working 320 more hours a year than their equivalents in some European countries (Schor, 1992). Working hours began to increase significantly in America from the early 1970s, a period that is synonymous with the pursuit of flexible accumulation, deregulation, and restructuring of labor markets, erosion of trades union influence, and a reduction in wage rates (Harvey, 1989; Schor, 1992; Castells, 1996: 274–5; Luttwak, 1999: 205). The UK pattern parallels American experience rather than that of other European countries, with reports suggesting that its labor force has the second-longest working hours in the developed world, just behind the USA. Full-time workers in the UK put in the longest hours in Europe, 43.6 a week, compared with an EU average of 40.3. Furthermore, since 1998 the number of people working over 48 hours a week has increased from 10% to 26% and one in six of all workers is working more than 60 hours a week (Bunting, 2004). The UK has emulated the USA in respect of the other side of the work-and-spend cycle, with consumer expenditure reported in 2006 to represent 61% of GDP, second only to the figure of 70% recorded in the USA (Meyerson, 2008). The data on the consumption of materials in the USA over the

period 1900–1995 provide further confirmation of the accelerating growth of consumption from 1970. While over this period as a whole the consumption of materials in America increased from 161 million metric tons to 2.8 billion metric tons, over 50% of the materials were consumed in the period from 1970. Moreover, while in 1900 approximately 50% of the materials consumed were from renewable resources (e.g. wood, fibers, and agricultural products) this had declined to 8% of total consumption by 1995 (Matos and Wagner, 1998).

In Europe from 1970, in some quarters at least, people were being exhorted to ‘work less, live more’ (Gorz, 1982: 134) and legislative moves were being made to reduce the length of the working week to enable modern *citizens* to enjoy the fruits of greater economic productivity by spending less and less of their lives engaged in production within workplaces. But in America the emphasis increasingly was being placed on modern *consumers* working more in order to be able to spend more, buy more, have more (Schor, 1992; Luttwak, 1999; Bunting, 2004). However, by the beginning of the twenty-first century concerns that had been articulated at various moments in the course of the previous century by analysts critical of the consequences of modern industrial civilization (Penty, 1922; Roszak, 1972; Schumacher, 1973) were being given greater credence by the accumulation of scientific evidence confirming the damaging impact of modern consumer lifestyles on the environment (Princen et al., 2002; Starke, 2004, 2008, 2009; Giddens, 2009) and people were being exhorted to ‘consume less, live better’, ‘consume less, live more’, and to recognize that institutional complacency was making worst-case climate change scenarios increasingly likely (Porritt, 2007; DiCaprio, 2008; Armstrong, 2009).

ON THE SEPARATION OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

Population growth, increasing industrialization, and rising manufacturing productivity in the course of the nineteenth century, along with enhanced mobility associated with developments in transportation, and rapid urbanization that transformed many market towns into developing cosmopolitan cities, provided the context for the emergence of a distinctive consumer culture. Through the nineteenth century the availability of ready-made goods increased steadily, especially as ‘ready-made clothing and pre-processed convenience foods’ became cheaper and more abundant (Schlereth, 1989: 343). Markets were displaced by small stores and streets of shops, and later in the century mail order catalogues emerged,

department stores began to be established, and increasing attention was given to the display and presentation of goods and the decoration of retail premises to further entice consumers. As towns grew and the space to grow fruits and vegetables and raise livestock disappeared populations of wage earners became increasingly dependent on the purchase of ready made goods. Towards the close of the century even those living in rural environments were purchasing 'more of the goods and services that they had once either produced for themselves or simply had done without' (Schlereth, 1989: 341) and as the purchase of ready-made and convenience goods increased so 'the distance between producer and consumer grew' (Bronner, 1989: 42).

Reflecting on the factors that contributed to the development of consumerism and, in particular, the formation of America as a mass consumer society, William Leach observes that:

Before 1880, consumption and production were, for large numbers of people, bound together, with men and women, and children living and toiling closely with one another ... in local or regional economies ... Most Americans knew where the goods and wealth came from, because they themselves produced them, knew their value, and understood the costs and sufferings required to bring them into existence ... After 1890 the institutions of production and consumption were, in effect, taken over by corporate businesses. Business, not ordinary men and women, did most to establish the value and the cultural character of the goods – in this case the new machine-made goods. At the same time, merchants, brokers, and manufacturers did everything they could ... to separate the world of production from the world of consumption. (1993: 147, emphasis in original)

The historical transformations identified by Leach led to an increasingly distinctive and seemingly separate consumer world in which women were mainly responsible for shopping and where in the absence of any involvement in the production of goods the "true" value ... meaning or worth of any commodity' became difficult to determine beyond the problematic measure of price and the enticing images conveyed through advertising copy (Leach, 1993: 148). It was in this context that consumer conduct began to be equated with freedom. Consumption was considered to offer an attractive and appealing opportunity for self-expression, was deemed to constitute a vital source of fulfillment, and represented for many people compensation for the drudgery, erosion of control, and loss of meaning encountered in their workplaces. Whereas work was increasingly experienced as alienating, the world of consumption appeared to offer self-realization, fulfillment, even liberation. The production of a seemingly limitless range of new goods appeared to

offer the prospect of new possibilities, new meanings, and new forms of human expression and being.

While industrial capitalism promoted a separation of the life-worlds of production and consumption, and increasingly with the globalization of production distanced 'producers' from 'consumers', consumption has remained closely articulated with and dependent upon the logic of capitalist economic production (Klein, 2001). As Marx observed, 'production produces consumption (i) by creating the material for it; (ii) by determining the manner of consumption; and (iii) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption, and the motive of consumption' (1973: 92). The separateness of the world of consumption has been an outcome of the way in which the capitalist economy has developed, the ways in which economic production has been reorganized. As distance developed between production and consumption, between producers and consumers, so the contribution made by workers, the conditions under which they labored, and the treatment and remuneration they received were increasingly obscured from view. As Leach notes:

By 1910 more and more people were less and less aware about how things were made and who made them. Besides, who would want to know these things in a culture already disposed to encourage self-indulgence, self-gratification, and self-pleasure? To acknowledge suffering caused by capitalism under these new conditions would be to arouse one's own guilt and to cause one's own distress. But the separateness of consumption made it easy to deny the suffering. The outcome was a greater tendency toward selfishness and a corrosive moral indifference. (1993: 150).

The developments in question occurred within a period identified as one dominated by the promotion of market forces and relations, the implication being that it was the 'market view of society ... which "fragmented" life into the producers' sector that ended when his product reached the market, and the sector of the consumer for whom all goods sprang from the market' (Polanyi, 2001[1944]: 266). The market view of society, the idea of the self-regulating market, of social relations being embedded within the economic system, and 'the running of society as an adjunct to the market' (2001: 60) are defining statements of economic liberalism. By the 1940s, increasing awareness of the damage to the social fabric inflicted by the self-regulating market had largely discredited economic liberalism and greater regulation and control was being exercised over economic life. The primacy of society over the economic system seemed to have been secured according to Polanyi who commented that 'the

market system will no longer be self-regulating', that society would not in future be 'constricted by economics' and that the 'passing of market-economy can become the beginning of an era of unprecedented freedom' (2001: 259, 260, 265).

While the 'market utopia' lost some of its appeal for a time after 1945, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, in response to problems of reduced levels of capital accumulation and economic 'stagflation', there was a return to economic policies promoting market forces, what was termed 'free-trade', and the idea of market self-regulation. With the turn to 'neo-liberal' economic policies in the mid-1970s the idea of freedom was once again diminished by being equated with 'advocacy of free enterprise', exercise of consumer sovereignty, and expression of consumer choice. As had been the case in the earlier 'liberal' manifestation of the market-economy analyzed by Polanyi, 'No society built on other foundations ... [was] said to deserve to be called free' and, in turn, 'freedom that regulation creates ... [was frequently] denounced as unfreedom' (2001: 265).

Neo-liberalism advocated unbridled entrepreneurial freedom, free markets, free trade, and a radically reduced state, and vigorously promoted consumerism. Deregulation, privatization, market forces, and consumer choice became the watchwords of neo-liberalized states as they extolled the virtues of economic globalization and sought to provide the appropriate institutional setting within which economic growth could be maintained and corporations could significantly increase rates of profit by generating increasing consumption of goods and services (Gorz, 1985; Bourdieu, 1998; Harvey, 2005). With increasing economic globalization there has been an erosion of the economic sovereignty of nation-states, as well as a transformation of the relationship between national economies, and between 'sovereign' states and international corporations. The promotion of 'free trade' and the formation of a global marketplace has served to further increase the distances between producers and consumers, as Klein (2001) documents in her discussion of the off-shoring of manufacturing industry from the consumer heartlands of North America, Europe, and Japan to contractors in distant locations. Many companies have closed down their factories in preference for overseas sourcing of product lines and the redirection of resources to innovative product research and development activity, and marketing and branding campaigns to cultivate consumer demand. Klein refers to the running shoe company Vans closing their factory in California and 'contracting production in South Korea' and describes how adidas 'closed down everything' and retained only one small factory as a 'global technology centre ... [making] about 1 percent of total output' (Klein, 2001: 198–9).

Economic globalization has not only extended the distance between producers and consumers it has virtually severed any evident connection between the two in that ‘many of today’s brand-based multinationals now maintain that the location of their production operations is a “trade secret” to be guarded at all costs’ (Klein, 2001: 201). The reason frequently given for such secrecy is to prevent competitors ‘taking advantage’, but it is also apparent that the global disconnection that now exists between producers and consumers is necessary to preserve the appeal, desire, and carefully cultivated sign value and artfully contrived enchantment of branded consumer goods manufactured, in some instances at least, under conditions that consumers certainly would not contemplate accepting in their own workplaces and awareness of which might well lead to a consumer boycott. Increasingly consumer goods are manufactured in low-wage cost locations, in ‘free trade zones’ or ‘export processing zones’, in countries such as Bangladesh, China, El Salvador, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. It is in these locations that goods are manufactured for multinational corporations, including the likes of Nike, Gap, IBM, Levi’s, Reebok, and Walmart. Within specially designated production zones there are frequently ‘no import or export duties and often no income or property taxes either’, no unions, long working days, low wages, and little if any concern is shown for the health or welfare of workers (Klein, 2001: 205, 210–26). In addition, evidence from Asia and the Indian sub-continent has revealed that child-labor is routinely being used by sub-contractors employed by suppliers to produce low cost fast-fashion commodities for high street retail stores in wealthy countries (Hawkes, S., 2008; McDougall, 2008; Labour Behind the Label, n.d.).

Workers in export processing zones, located primarily in the southern hemisphere, generally will not be consumers of the goods they produce for there is a huge discrepancy between their minimal, at times barely subsistence, rates of pay and the inflated prices attached to the goods that they have made when they go on sale in shops and stores, primarily but no longer exclusively in northern hemisphere countries. The one world forged through economic globalization is very heavily stratified, marked by wealth and riven with income inequalities that are increasing, and ‘remains sharply divided between producers and consumers ... [moreover] the enormous profits raked in by the superbrands are premised upon these worlds remaining as separate from each other as possible’ (Klein, 2001: 346–7). The increased distances opened up between producers and consumers through economic globalization serve to conceal the inflated market value of manufactured commodities, ‘the riches of the branded world’, from producers, the corollary of which is that the attention of consumers needs to be drawn away from any serious reflection

on the exploitative conditions of production, 'the squalor of production', by investment of resources in marketing and branding and cultivation of enchanting and spectacular retail displays and environments (Klein, 2001: 347; Dawson, 2005). As Klein observes:

for the system to function smoothly, workers must know little of the marketed lives of the products they produce and consumers must remain sheltered from the production lives of the brands they buy. (2001: 347)

The 'out-sourcing' of manufactured goods has become an increasingly prominent feature of the global economy and has served to increase the distance between the respective life-worlds inhabited by producers and consumers (Luttwak, 1999; Harvey, 2005).

Fusion of production and consumption

The increased distancing of production from consumption and producers from consumers, which has been a consequence of the development of the capitalist market economy and its globalization in particular, does not quite tell the whole story. In a few, relatively exceptional, information technology constituted environments production and consumption have become at times more difficult to distinguish. For example, within the knowledge-intensive software environment of Web 2.0 it is suggested that creativity is often collaborative and that the distinction between production and consumption does not hold. Rather than producers and consumers Alex Bruns (2007) refers to 'the rise of the informed or active ... user' or to 'user-as-contributor', exemplified by forms of citizen journalism such as Indymedia and Slashdot, as well as 'user-led content creation' in respect of multi-user online gaming. The implication is that the practice of making, constructing, or creating in the Web 2.0 environment is of a different 'productive' and 'consumptive' order and this leads Bruns to refer to a 'participatory mode' in which those involved are both users and producers of information and knowledge.¹

In some respects this may appear to represent a return to an earlier idea introduced by Alvin Toffler in *The Third Wave* (1983). Toffler argued that the information technology revolution, computers, and telecommunications would radically transform the nature of production and promote a transfer of productive activity from the workplace to the home. To a limited degree his perception of the potential impact of information technology has been borne out by the subsequent transformation of productive activity, but his expectation that the end of the market economy was in

prospect and that a return to production for self-consumption, or 'prosumption' as he termed it, would replace exchange has not transpired in practice, to the contrary there has been an increasing encroachment of the market into more and more areas of people's lives as the scale of commodity consumption has grown and the pace has accelerated (Smart, 1992: 78–81; Bruns, 2007: 2).

In some specific instances the transformation of production through deployment of information technology has allowed consumers to be able to exercise a degree of influence, albeit within a predetermined or edited range of design and performance options, and thereby become more involved in determining the specification of products which they order and purchase. Such products can be considered 'customized', but this represents merely an extension to a larger number of commodities of a relatively longstanding consumer goods industry practice, 'made to measure' or made to customer specification, in which colors, shapes, designs, and other features of particular commodities, including clothing, furniture, and now other goods such as computers, may be determined by consumer choice from within a range of possibilities. It represents a qualification of mass production, if not a movement away from it to smaller batch, niche, or more personalized production, but it does not represent a radical transformation of either the logic of the economic system, or the respects in which production and consumption are articulated, and it does not warrant a confusing conceptual conflation of the terms production and consumption any more than does the proliferation of forms of 'self-service' in which consumers take on tasks which in the past 'were done for them' (Ritzer, 2005: 37). The fact that customers can determine, within option ranges prescribed by commercial corporations, some of the specifications of the products they elect to purchase, or that self-service has become a more common feature of a number of industries (e.g. ATM banking, supermarket food shopping, fast food 'restaurants', etc.) are developments that reflect the necessity of continuing to innovate in a competitive economic marketplace in order to generate increasing consumer interest and sales, reduce staffing costs, and raise turnover.

Where there do seem to be grounds for recognizing a significant transformation in respect of the articulation of production and consumption, as well as the relevance of the designated roles of producer and consumer, is in respect of an at present relatively restricted range of goods and services which are 'of an intangible, informational nature', it is here that a 'shift away from ... industrial, and towards postindustrial or informational economic models can be observed' (Bruns, 2007: 3). But once again there is no necessity for the introduction of terms which serve simply to obfuscate rather than clarify the exceptional form of articulation between acts of creation and use concerned. Reference to

the collaborative and participatory nature of Web 2.0 content creation and development is sufficient and helpful, introducing notions of 'produser' and 'produsage' less so (Brun, 2007: 3).

A CONSUMER AGE

The major transformations associated with the emergence of a consumer age led not only to an increasing distance between producers and consumers, but also to much greater significance being accorded to consumption. What has been identified by social analysts as a transition from a producer to a consumer society in the late twentieth century is firmly rooted in a series of transformations that were taking place from at least the late nineteenth century. Indeed, a consumer culture was forming throughout the nineteenth century as wage earners increased in number and ready-made goods became more widely available, market buildings were replaced by streets of smaller shops, department stores were established, increasing consideration was given to the display of goods, advertising grew in scope and intensity, and mail order purchase came on stream allowing those out of town consumers to achieve inclusion in the emerging consumer society. As one critical observer has noted, this 'transformation requires a subtler conceptual framework than simply the notion of a shift from a Protestant "producer culture" to a secular "consumer culture"' (Lears, 1989: 77 n8). The persuasive idea of a 'passage from producer to consumer society' along with the notion that 'the aesthetics of consumption ... now rules where the work ethic once ruled' (Bauman, 1998: 24, 32) has inadvertently served to encourage analytic attention to be focused on consumerism, choice, lifestyling, and identity matters to the all too frequent neglect of significant continuing complex articulations with production and in particular the continuing influence exerted by an overarching economic logic directed to the achievement of rising rates of capital accumulation through the generation of increasing economic growth and rising levels of consumption of goods and services (Warde, 1997; Harvey, 2005).

The development of an institutional basis for a consumer society, particularly in the USA in the period from the late nineteenth century through to the 1920s, was a necessary corollary of the rapid increase in productivity following the growth of industrial manufacturing. As manufacturing capacity increased and the economic environment became increasingly more competitive worries began to be expressed that production might outstrip 'available markets' and in consequence consumption began to be accorded an 'independent character' and the economic significance it warranted (Leach, 1993: 162, 147). Increasingly there was

recognition that the problem was no longer how to produce enough of the things people needed and wanted but how to get people to want to purchase the increasing number and range of things which were being produced with the development of industrial manufacturing (Strauss, 1924). Commercial corporations began to recognize 'that they would have to develop methods to entice the public to consume those products that were ... [becoming] available in abundance' (Renouard, 2007: 55). As one observer noted:

The first condition of our civilization ... is that we must turn out ever larger quantities of things, more this year than last, more next year than this ... The problem before us today is not how to produce the goods, but how to produce the customers. Consumptionism is the science of compelling men to use more and more things. Consumptionism is bringing it about that *the American citizen's first importance to his country is no longer that of citizen but that of consumer.* (Strauss 1924: 578–9, emphasis added)

The great 'abundance of commodities', a product of the growth of industrial manufacturing, created a requirement for an extensive retail and distributive network, which in turn led to the development of a range of new stores and purchasing possibilities and to commercial organizations devoting increasing attention to lifting 'constraints on the expression of consumer desire' and devoting resources to 'expanding that desire' (Leach, 1989: 101).

From the early nineteenth century America changed from being the 'Land of Comfort', in which the majority of men were self-employed, property owners, producing 'foodstuffs and raw materials', enjoying a degree of prosperity and 'relaxed work habits', to become the 'Land of Desire', in which a growing number of men and women were employees engaged in disciplined labor working in 'factories and ... big corporate bureaucracies' (Leach, 1989: 101). As the increase in productivity associated with the growth of industrial manufacturing raised fears about the prospect of overproduction, so distribution, and marketing became matters of concern and increasing attention was directed towards the need to produce a 'new consumer consciousness' and promote a diffusion of desire for consumer goods and services beyond an already privileged 'leisure class' to the population as a whole through 'advertising, display and decoration, fashion, style, design and consumer service' (Leach, 193: 37).

In this period it was not just in America that there were growing signs of an emerging consumer society. In the UK in the course of the nineteenth century the beneficial impact of new industrial technologies was evidenced by the greater availability of mass produced goods and, as a result of developments in transport that improved the distribution of goods, coupled

with the growth of advertising and innovations in retailing, 'a seemingly endless stream of things ... could be acquired by the consumer' (Flanders, 2006: xvi). Technological innovations transformed not only how things were being produced, the methods employed in production, but also what it was possible to produce. For example, with the development of machinery to rivet soles to shoes men's footwear with their heavier soles became easier to produce and between 1863 and 1893 the lines produced by Clark's more than doubled, rising from 334 to 720 (Flanders, 2006).

Through the eighteenth century there had been a steady increase in material possessions, in the 'acquisition of things', among all classes in England and between 1785 and 1800 'the rate of consumption of what had been considered luxuries and were now regarded as ... necessities ... increased at more than twice the rate of population growth' (Flanders, 2006: 26). By the middle of the nineteenth century, as living standard was being equated with possessions owned and goods consumed, across Europe and America arcades and department stores, and a variety of other means of consumption, were being established at an increasing rate and the signs of a burgeoning consumer culture were becoming increasingly evident.²

DEPARTMENT STORES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSUMER SOCIETY

The department store as a site of consumption can be considered a modern equivalent to the Greek agora or the medieval marketplace. From the mid-nineteenth century the department store has developed into a truly transnational institution and in many respects exemplifies the 'global development of consumer society' (Sedlmaier, 2005: 9). The first department store is widely considered to be Le Bon Marche in Paris, originally established in 1838 and which by 1852 had a range of departments selling a variety of consumer goods. However, a less well known enterprise, Bainbridges, founded in 1838 in Newcastle upon Tyne, was sorting its goods and receipts into 'departments' as early as 1849, a few years before the Paris store, and might therefore legitimately claim to be the original department store, but other contenders for the title have also been identified, including one store in London, W Hitchcock & Co (Westcott, 2007; Ross, 2008).

The establishment from the mid-nineteenth century of department stores in England has been described as a product of the development and convergence of two retailing transformations, specifically the increasing prominence of larger, 'middle-class haberdasheries and drapery shops' with plate-glass windows and gas lighting and the 'expansion of working-class



Figure 1.1 Macy's in Herald Square, New York City (photo Jess Powell)

purchasing power' signifying a growing market for ready-to-wear clothing which served to encourage 'the development of mass-production methods' (Flanders, 2006: 85). What is particularly worthy of note is the change in scale that was occurring at this time. Ready-made clothing had been available at a price from the late eighteenth century as had an interest in clothing and fashion, but with the emergence of department stores in the late nineteenth century consumer goods were displayed in great abundance. Such stores 'stressed the quantity and quality of the goods they stocked, their wide variety, and the level of expertise of their staff in both acquiring these goods and selling them, as well as the design and layout of their shops' (Flanders, 2006: 110–11).

However, by 1880 the primary source of innovation in department store development and design and the principal catalyst for the growth of consumer culture was America.

The first department store to emerge in America was Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institute (ZCMI), established in 1868 in Salt Lake City (Mencimer, 2001). Macy's, the better known American establishment, was originally founded in 1858 as a dry goods store but by 1877 had become a department store 'occupying the ground space of eleven adjacent buildings'. In 1902, it

moved to its current location, Herald Square on Broadway and 34th Street and with expansion in 1924 'became the "World's Largest Store," with over 1 million square feet of retail space' (Macy's Inc., n.d.). Department stores rapidly developed across America and with their extensive range of consumer goods, imaginative displays, persuasive advertising, fashionable merchandising, and promotion of style and service they successfully enticed consumers and dominated the retail marketplace from the late nineteenth century.

Reflecting on the wide-ranging transformations which accompanied the development of America's new industrial mass production capitalist economy and mass consumer culture, Leach remarks that the 'impulse toward expansion, concentration, and even incorporation that overtook the rest of the economy' had no less of an impact on merchandising as chain stores, mail order catalogues, and department stores in particular eliminated smaller competitors in 'the retail wars of the 1890s' (1993: 19, 16, 26–32). Although there was expression of discontent about the increasing influence and economic advantage accruing to large-scale merchandising and a degree of resistance from small retailers, by the beginning of the twentieth century department stores in America were being commended for turning America into 'a nation of large consumers' (1901 Federal Industrial Commission cited in Leach, 1993: 30). One indication of the rapid growth of consumption and influential part played by department stores in the process is provided by the sales figures recorded by Macy's in 1920 which revealed that 'it was selling each day what it took ... a full year to sell in 1880' (Leach, 1993: 280).

Department stores were established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in a number of countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and China. David Jones was the first purpose built department store to open in Australia in 1877 and in 1890 they began to distribute mail order catalogues; T Eaton & Co established as a dry goods and haberdashery store in 1869 subsequently launched a mail order catalogue in 1884 and in the 1930s became Canada's largest and most successful department store generating 60% of all department store sales, finally succumbing to bankruptcy in 1999.³ Smith & Caughey is the oldest New Zealand department store, originally established by Marianne Smith as a drapery store in 1880. Japan's first Western-style department stores grew out of kimono retailers, Mitsukoshi in 1904 being the first and Matsuzakaya following in 1910. An important later source of department store growth in Japan were the railway companies, which from the 1920s built stores linked to their railway termini, one prominent example being the Mino-Arima Electric Railway Company established in 1907 which became the Hankyu Corporation in 1918 and in 1929 opened the first Hankyu Department store (Hankyu Inc., n.d.). Department stores

were founded in China early in the twentieth century, prominent examples being Wing On (Hong Kong 1907; Shanghai 1918), Sincere (Shanghai 1917), Sun Sun (Shanghai 1926) and The Sun (Shanghai 1936) (Mayhew, 2004; Harper et al., 2005).

The development of department stores, along with a range of other retailing innovations, contributed significantly to the growth of consumerism and expansion of consumer choice. The big department stores with their galaxy of consumer goods, devotion to display and, where appropriate, presentation of spectacular exhibits, and provision of a network of services that ranged from 'new kinds of consumer credit (charge accounts and installment buying)', restrooms, and restaurants, to the employment of staff to 'fuss and fawn over patrons' (Leach, 1993: 112), played a key role in the cultivation of consumerism, the mobilization of consumers, and the promotion of consumer choice. The institution of the department store, as George Ritzer (2005: 94) the American sociologist of consumer culture notes, provided a significant early example of the seductive appeal of spectacular retail displays of a growing range of consumer commodities and it constitutes 'one of the most important and immediate precursors' of later ways of marketing goods and services and enticing consumers to make purchases.

From the mid-nineteenth century department stores have provided impressive architectural structures containing attractively designed spaces and displays of a wide range of desirable goods, structures which a number of analysts have described as cathedral like or designated as 'cathedrals of consumption' because of perceived religious affinities (Corrigan, 1997; Jaumain and Crossick, 1999; Ritzer, 2005[1999]). Whether the metaphor is warranted is debatable, but the global proliferation of department stores and shopping malls, and a growing variety of other ways of retailing goods and services, alongside the increasing volume and accelerating velocity of consumption in the closing decades of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first century, indicated that an increasing number of people around the world had been converted to consumerism, had succumbed to 'the gospel of consumption' (Kaplan, 2008). However, the financial crisis and 'credit crunch', which began in the summer of 2007 in the USA and led, in due course, to global economic recession, falling stock market values and property prices, and rising unemployment, precipitated a dramatic decline in consumer confidence and the resources required to fund consumer expenditure, causing some observers at the time to speculate that credit-driven hyper-consumerism, which from the 1970s had provided the neo-liberal capitalist economy with dynamism and growth and late modern lifestyles with purpose and meaning, might no longer be sustainable (Benady, 2008; Soros, 2008).

Notes

1. Indymedia is the online 'network of individuals, independent and alternative media activists and organisations, offering grassroots, non-corporate, non-commercial coverage of important social and political issues' (<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/>). Slashdot is a comparable but information technology focused news site which describes itself as 'news for nerds, stuff that matters' (<http://slashdot.org/>).
2. Department stores were being established in Europe from the late 1830s and the first store was established in America in the late 1860s a few years after Isaac Singer had established the Singer Sewing Machine Company as a franchise network to sell its sewing machines to the public. The Great American Tea Company, which quickly became the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P), was established in 1859 and provided the template for the development of other chain stores across the country. By the late 1890s '1,200 mail-order concerns were [already] competing for the patronage of more than 6 million customers' across America (Leach, 1993: 57, 44, 26). Shopping centers started to be developed from the 1880s, the first open shopping mall being established in the early 1920s near Kansas City, and the first enclosed mall in 1956 in Edina Minnesota (<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/soc/shoppingcenter.html> 13/3/08).
3. For further details see the 'Story of David Jones', http://www.davidjones.com.au/about/story_of_djs.jsp; 'Smith & Caughey's: About Us', <http://www.smithandcaughey.co.nz/Default.aspx?tabid=88>; 'Eaton's: the history and legacy of a Canadian institution', <http://www.eatons.com/> and McQueen (1998).