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0521831296 - Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement

Matthew Hilton

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## Introduction: luxury's shadow

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Consumption, consumerism, consuming, price and material culture are all crucial to our understandings of twentieth-century history. They must be accorded the same historical significance as notions of production, work, the wage and perhaps all the ideologies associated with a productivist mentality. In the final analysis, they are perhaps more important: as one recent historian of twentieth-century American commercialism put it, 'consumerism was the "ism" that won'.<sup>1</sup> We are all consumers now. Yet to herald the triumph and all-pervasive nature of consumer society is not to deny the diversity of consumerist visions of society and culture, as well as of the economy, the state, politics and government. Smith's adage that 'consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production' is oft repeated to remind us of the centrality of the commodity to modern life, but it actually misses its true significance.<sup>2</sup> Consumption has been one of the most recurring means by which citizens have moulded their political consciousness and shaped their political organisations, as well as being one of the main acts around which governments have focussed their policies and interventions. In twentieth-century Britain, the politics of consumption has offered itself as a persistent 'middle' or 'third way' solution to a party political system dominated by the interests of manufacturers and workers. This is what unites all the individuals, groups and institutions to be covered within this book, most of whom can be located under the admittedly large umbrella of social democracy and democratic socialism. Consumption has inspired an important socio-political movement over the last one hundred years, though it has not followed the same shape or trajectory as those usually associated with labour and capital.

Consumerism therefore does not simply involve the story of the success of one culture, one economy or one way of life. Consumerism is a mobilising force at the heart of twentieth-century social and political history.

<sup>1</sup> G. Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (NY, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776; Chicago, 1976), vol. 2, p. 179.

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## 2 Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain

Ideas about consumption and knowledge of prices shaped much early socialist thought. The demand for reasonably priced and good quality household necessities was central to the co-operative and labour movements. Consumer activism manifested itself in the Women's Co-operative Guild, in the Consumers' Council of the First World War, in the critique of profiteering led by the Labour Party, in the struggles for price regulation in Parliament throughout the inter-war period and in the cost-of-living campaigns within the trade union movement. Ideas about consumption and basic needs are crucial to understanding Free Trade and liberal economics, government rationing schemes and food control in two world wars, the fights for a living wage conducted principally by the Independent Labour Party, and the whole range of culturalist critiques of commerce from John Ruskin and William Morris to J. B. Priestley, F. R. Leavis and George Orwell. Though often criticised for being ineffectual, consumer representation has existed within the state infrastructure since the First World War Consumers' Council in institutions such as the Food Council, set up in 1925, and the consumer committees of the Agricultural Marketing Boards in the 1930s. Consumer consultative machinery was also established within the nationalised industries in the 1940s, and since the 1950s a whole range of government-funded consumer bodies have emerged: the Consumer Council of 1963–70, the Office of Fair Trading from 1973 and the National Consumer Council from 1975, together with direct government representation through various Ministers of Consumer Affairs. In its middle-path pragmatism, consumerism has often become the site upon which battles over new forms of citizenship and political expression have been fought. Most obviously, consumption offered the Co-operative movement a socio-political path beyond the formal institutions of the state. For women – socialist and conservative – consumption has often been the means by which they have entered political debate. For the poor, consumption has provided an alternative focus to the wage to understand the day-to-day difficulties of getting and spending. And for ambitious professionals and intellectuals, especially in the 1930s and 1950s, consumption was the point of entry for freeing the state, society and the economy from the supposedly narrow-minded stranglehold of both business and the trade unions.

If the various consumer activists in this book have sought to revise the contours of the political sphere, then so too must their actions force the historian to examine the twentieth century in a new consumerist light. When social history examined the history of the working class through political suffrage organisations and the creation of the Labour Party, it was the trade unions that were located firmly within the dynamism of change. There was good reason for such studies, especially of a movement whose

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membership reached over 10 million in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> But organised consumers saw such membership rates too; slightly earlier, in fact, in the 1940s, as the Co-operative Union reached its zenith. Since that time, the Co-operative movement has fallen into a seemingly irreversible decline, but consumerism changed direction and the Consumers' Association came to spearhead the interests of organised consumers, its own membership peaking at over 1 million in the late 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Qualifications to such statistics are, of course, necessary. The vast majority of co-operators were interested only in the financial return of the dividend payment and not the utopian ideals of the Co-operative Commonwealth,<sup>5</sup> and many hundreds of thousands of mainly middle-class *Which?* readers, committed only to 'Best Buy' purchasing, would no doubt be surprised to learn of some of the political campaigns launched by the Consumers' Association financed by their annual subscriptions. But not all trade unionists have been committed to the lead taken by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and not all have been Labour Party supporters either. Consumerism has its tremendous limitations as a social and political movement, in the immense gulf between the aims of its leaders and the apathy of its rank and file, and this book will cover many of them, but this is not to deny the sheer importance of the politics of purchasing suggested by the membership figures of organised consumer groups alone.

This book is an attempt to write a systematic account of these consumer movements, ideologies and official institutions in Britain. It emphasises that in the early twentieth century, the abstract monetary contents of the pay packet were only made real when they had been transferred to the purse. Wages were thought of in terms of the commodities that they could be used to purchase. The politics of industrial disputes were intricately tied in with the politics of price and the two ought not to be separated, as indeed they were not for many working-class radicals in this period of poverty. In an age of relative affluence after the Second World War, consumerism needs also to be brought centre stage. New social movements, from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to Greenpeace and Amnesty, have received recognition for their tremendous impact on late twentieth-century political culture, but the apparently less radical and the less overtly ideological consumerism of the consumer groups ought also to be included here. Indeed, while its more socially and often politically respectable nature has perhaps made it less attractive to historians, its relative conservatism has enabled many of its leaders and its campaigns

<sup>3</sup> H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (1963; Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 283.

<sup>4</sup> Consumers' Association, *Thirty Years of 'Which?' 1957–1987* (London, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870–1930* (Manchester, 1996).

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to have a direct impact on mainstream politics. Modern consumerism has been largely middle class, but it has also been much more than a ‘minority movement’ both in its impact on specific Acts of legislation and in its contribution to the development of single-issue political campaigning.<sup>6</sup>

### Consumerism: cultural or political phenomenon?

For too long consumerism has been studied separately from politics, an implicit – and often explicit – assumption being that the two are mutually exclusive. While recent studies have shown the inherently political nature of material culture and everyday life, especially on questions of identity and social group dynamics, consumption has still received little attention in terms of its impact on politics in every sense of the term. It must be remembered that the term consumerism has several meanings. On the one hand it invokes the doctrine of continually increasing rates of consumption as the basis for a sound economy, which in turn triggers a series of cultural effects, principal among these being the absorption of social life into the world of commodities. This can be interpreted as either a positive phenomenon, in the sense that it is equated with full participation in modern society, or as a negative expression, such as it was first used in 1960 in Vance Packard’s *The Waste Makers* where it was equated with excessive materialism.<sup>7</sup> This critique was clearly the latest manifestation of a centuries old unease with consumption, especially in its luxurious forms, but another definition of consumerism, specific to the twentieth century, captures the desire for self-empowerment expressed by consumer activists. This definition also originated in the US and refers to the campaigns to protect the interests of consumers through either comparative testing organisations such as the US Consumers’ Union or the aggressive political campaigning of consumer rights advocates such as Ralph Nader, especially as embodied in his original critique of the motor industry in 1965.<sup>8</sup> Initially, it was a term of abuse thrown at consumer advocates by US businessmen. In 1968 Nader wrote in the *New York Review of Books*: “‘Consumerism’ is a term given vogue recently by business spokesmen to describe what they believe is a concerted, disruptive ideology concocted by self-appointed bleeding hearts and politicians who find it pays off to attack the corporations. “Consumerism,” they say,

<sup>6</sup> It is Arthur Marwick who has most recently described such US figures as Ralph Nader and Rachel Carson as the champions of what were really ‘minority movements’: A. Marwick, *The Sixties* (Oxford, 1998), p. 258.

<sup>7</sup> V. Packard, *The Waste Makers* (New York, 1960), p. iii.

<sup>8</sup> R. Nader, *Unsafe at any Speed: The Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile* (NY, 1965).

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undermines public confidence in the business system [and] deprives the consumer of freedom of choice . . .<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, the term came to be used more positively, by the consumer movement itself, as it began to notice a series of campaigning successes in the early 1970s. Today, however, these political and critical elements associated with the campaigning side of consumerism are rarely suggested in the use of the term, perhaps in a classic example of containment at the linguistic level, as consumerism becomes a mere category of description for an increasingly commodified culture, which only suffers a mild sense of rebuke by the employment of the term.

As a history of organised consumer movements and consumer politics, this book is an attempt to re-politicise consumerism, both as a category of analysis and a field of historical study. Consumerism is thus recognised as a movement, a part of consumer society which consumers themselves have been actively involved in making. But the political dimensions of the term need to be expanded to incorporate not only the consumer movements associated with comparative testing in an age of affluence, but also the fight for basic needs in an age of poverty. Consumerism thus includes discussions of bread and butter, as it does assessments of cars and kettles. The two socio-political movements of consumer poverty and consumer affluence may seem worlds apart, but as will be seen, there have been important crossovers between the two which now, in a global political environment, are once again coming together.

The division between politics and consumption manifests itself in the scholarship on late modern Britain, where consumer society is studied according to often arbitrary disciplinary divisions between economic, social and cultural history. There are economic accounts of the mass market, social accounts of class and consumer society and culturalist interpretations of advertising and marketing, studies of the material culture of single commodities and some well-researched but ultimately exaggerated interpretations of the importance of the department store.<sup>10</sup> While these divisions between the sub-specialisms of consumption are now less

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in R. Swagler, 'Evolution and applications of the term consumerism: themes and variations', *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 28:2 (1994), 350. For other definitions see the Oxford English Dictionary; D. A. Aaker and G. S. Day (eds.), *Consumerism: Search for the Consumer Interest*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke, 1978), p. 2; Y. Gabriel and T. Lang, *The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and its Fragmentation* (London, 1995), pp. 7–9.

<sup>10</sup> Contrast, for instance, the approaches found in L. A. Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford, 1994); T. Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (London, 1991); W. H. Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850–1914* (Basingstoke, 1981); J. Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880–1980* (London, 1994); E. Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure* (Princeton, 2000). The literature on department stores is often impressive, though

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apparent, together they share the absence of a sustained and detailed treatment of the interaction of consumption with the political sphere, understood in all its possible meanings. The peculiarity of this situation must be made clear, since work on the eighteenth century does not share this problem. Consumption here has been shown to be central to discussions of gender, to cultural critiques of luxury, the rise of the bourgeoisie, the development of the modern nation state, the emergence of political economy and the commercialised marketplace, the end of both aristocratic clientage and the moral economy, and the development of modern subjectivities through the categorisation of individuals as consumers.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, studies of consumer society in America, perhaps coming out of an academic arena in which the intellectual left does not share quite the same ascetic disdain for commodity culture as its European counterparts, has produced works demonstrating the richness and varied nature of consumerism. In a country where material abundance has frequently been equated with nationhood and citizenship, it is no surprise to discover that labour activists were as concerned with what wages were spent on as to how they were earned.<sup>12</sup> And following such traditions, social historians have perhaps been more willing to see how consumption can become a site for grass-roots political activity. Dana Frank has argued that ‘consumer tactics have been at the core of the labour movement in all periods of US history’, her case study in Seattle showing how trade unions politicised consumption ‘through boycotts, co-operatives, labour-owned businesses and promotion of the union label and shop card’.<sup>13</sup>

even here leading scholars doubt the significance of their own subject: G. Crossick and S. Jaumain (eds.), *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850–1939* (Aldershot, 1999); L. Tiersten, ‘Redefining consuming culture: recent literature on consumption and the bourgeoisie in Western Europe’, *Radical History Review*, 57 (1993), 116–59.

<sup>11</sup> J. Brewer, ‘Commercialisation and politics’, in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982); M. Berg and H. Clifford (eds.), *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650–1850* (Manchester, 1999); J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993); A. Bermingham and J. Brewer (eds.), *The Consumption of Culture 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text* (London, 1995); D. Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996); J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> L. B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca, 1997); L. B. Glickman, ‘Workers of the world, consume: Ira Steward and the origins of labor consumerism’, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 52 (1997), 72–86; C. McGovern, ‘Consumption and citizenship in the United States, 1900–1940’, in S. Strasser, C. McGovern and M. Judt (eds.), *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 37–58.

<sup>13</sup> D. Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organising, Gender, and the Seattle Labour Movement, 1919–1929* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 4–5.

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Likewise, Lizabeth Cohen's inter-war Chicago workers had a far more nuanced relationship with consumption and mass culture than one of denial in the pursuit of the appropriation of the means of production.<sup>14</sup> Studies of ethnicity have demonstrated the varied forms of consumerism, for some immigrant groups consumption enabling assimilation into the American dream, while for others the boycotting of certain goods and stores served as a rallying point for civil rights, such as black Americans' 'Don't buy where you can't work' campaigns.<sup>15</sup> In 1993 Jean-Christophe Agnew called for consumption history to be combined with social and political history, especially since 'a far-reaching ideological redefinition of polity and society did begin to take hold during the 1930s and 1940s: the promotion of the social contract of cold-war liberalism, which is to say a state-sponsored guarantee of private consumption'.<sup>16</sup> Recently, other historians have begun to develop this argument, pointing to the implications for citizenship when politics imagined the consumer interest purely in terms of private, individual or family-based acquisitiveness. At the same time, though, historians have also uncovered consumer-citizenship promoted, for example, during the Progressive and the New Deal eras.<sup>17</sup>

It is through such studies that we can reach a better understanding of both consumer society and consumerism and which embraces both positive and negative attitudes to the world of goods. An older literature, if not always outrightly condemning consumer culture, did believe that the twentieth-century shift from a producer to a consumer mentality resulted in a decline in class politics: 'many who might have chosen the socialist way went instead with the hope of the culture of abundance'.<sup>18</sup> Consumers were not necessarily to blame for this decision, since they

<sup>14</sup> L. Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> A. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption and the Search for American Identity* (NY, 1990); C. Greenberg, *Or Does it Explode? Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> J.-C. Agnew, 'Coming up for air: consumer culture in historical perspective', in Brewer and Porter (eds.), *Consumption*, p. 32. See also W. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (NY, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Cross, *All-Consuming Century*; L. Cohen, 'Citizens and consumers in the United States in the century of mass consumption', and M. Jacobs, 'The politics of plenty: consumerism in the twentieth-century United States', in M. Daunton and M. Hilton (eds.), *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 203–21, 223–39; M. Jacobs, '“How about some meat?”: the Office of Price Administration, consumption politics, and state-building from the bottom up, 1941–1946', *Journal of American History*, 84:3 (1997), 910–41.

<sup>18</sup> W. Susman, quoted in R. W. Edsforth, *Class Conflict and Cultural Consensus: The Making of a Mass Consumer Society in Flint, Michigan* (New Brunswick, 1987), p. 224. See also T. J. Lears, 'From salvation to self-realisation: advertising and the therapeutic roots of the consumer culture, 1880–1930', in R. W. Fox and T. J. Lears (eds.), *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1920* (NY, 1983), pp. 1–38;

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had in any case been manipulated by advertising and the mass media, according to a body of opinion shared by both marxists and the liberal left.<sup>19</sup> If this was seen as too crude a denial of human agency, consumption scholars then began to find everywhere diversity within the mass, and the ability of consumers to appropriate, mediate and reject the dominant meanings of goods: denim jeans became a favourite example of the creative imaginary canvas that had become clothing and material culture.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, an early postmodern scholarship which had pointed to the self-referential 'logic of signs' within which consumers were as embroiled as the commercial images themselves, developed into an emphasis on the *bricoleur*, the consumer who could forever play out, adapt and experiment with the signs and imagery of commodity capitalism.<sup>21</sup> Influential here was the work of Michel de Certeau, whose expression *poiësis* referred to the moment of active re-creation, to the ways of using products, to the strategies and tactics of resistance in which consumption itself becomes a form of cultural production.<sup>22</sup> It is not difficult to see the attraction of such theoretical frameworks. In a modernist scholarship that positions the consumer as either the entirely free agent of the neo-liberal market or the passive dupe of the overly deterministic structures of capitalism, postmodern pastiche and poaching offer a genuine sense of liberation through the exploration of alternative lifestyles and subaltern identities. This has been either through the breaking down of existing boundaries or through the anti-hierarchical values implicit in much consumer appropriation of commodity meanings.<sup>23</sup>

T. J. Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (NY, 1994). And for the seminal Frankfurt School formulation: M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944; London, 1973), pp. 120–67. See also A. Gorz, 'Work and consumption', in P. Anderson and R. Blackburn (eds.), *Towards Socialism* (London, 1965), pp. 317–53.

<sup>19</sup> For two exemplary accounts see V. Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957; Harmondsworth, 1960); S. Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (NY, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> R. Laermans, 'Learning to consume: early department stores and the shaping of modern consumer culture, 1860–1914', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 10 (1993), 79–102; J. Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston, MA, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> J. Baudrillard, 'Consumer society', in M. Poster (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 29–56; J. Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London, 1998); F. Jameson, 'Postmodernism and consumer society', in H. Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London, 1985). For good accounts of these intellectual developments see R. Bocoock, *Consumption* (London, 1993); M. Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London, 1991); C. Lury, *Consumer Culture* (Oxford, 1996); D. Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London, 1984); M. Poster, 'The question of agency: Michel de Certeau and the history of consumerism', *Diacritics* (Summer 1992), 94–107.

<sup>23</sup> S. Lash and J. Urry, *The End of Organised Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 15.

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Two problems with this approach have quickly become apparent. Firstly, many of these consumer strategies are inner-directed: ‘consumption for the presentation of the self has the self as a primary audience in modern times’.<sup>24</sup> Without wishing to deny the importance of constructing self-identities in an increasingly globalised and distant world,<sup>25</sup> for many this focus on the self has resulted only in intellectual exasperation. Naomi Klein has recently argued that her turn towards anti-corporatism and the economics of globalisation was a direct consequence of her frustration with the narrow focus of the identity politics of the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, it has been suggested that in response to the manipulation thesis, academics have come to celebrate any act of appropriation by consumers, even among the most oppressed groups, thereby suggesting that consumer empowerment is available for all: ‘the triumph of the will of the consumer can overcome any scarcity, where budget constraints don’t exist (and where love never dies)’.<sup>27</sup> For Daniel Miller, postmodern critics have performed a similar feat as the neo-liberal economists: that is, they have created a ‘virtual’ consumer who bears little or no relation to the realities of consumers’ everyday lives.<sup>28</sup> The consequence of this can only be that the account of consumer behaviour loses its critical objective, consumption scholars championing the freedom of the creative consumer in a manner similar to that which business leaders and marketing experts have been doing for decades. More generally, Richard Hoggart has bemoaned the fate of cultural studies as it has abandoned many of its founding conceptual frameworks, but Thomas Frank takes the attack much further.<sup>29</sup> He suggests that with both business and cultural studies communities there was ‘a populist celebration of the power and “agency” of audiences and fans, of their ability to evade the grasp of the makers of mass culture, and of their talent for transforming just about any bit of cultural detritus into an implementation of rebellion’.<sup>30</sup> This ideological convergence has enabled many former hippies and counter-cultural innovators to become leading acolytes of the new economy, while some cultural studies scholars, claims Frank, are happy to leave the academic

<sup>24</sup> J. Friedman, ‘Introduction’, in J. Friedman (ed.), *Consumption and Identity* (London, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> N. Klein, *No Logo* (London, 2000), p. xix.

<sup>27</sup> J. de Vries, ‘The industrial revolution and the industrious revolution’, *Journal of Economic History*, 54:2 (1994), 255; Cross, *All-Consuming Century*, p. 240.

<sup>28</sup> D. Miller, ‘Conclusion: a theory of virtualism’, in J. G. Carrier and D. Miller (eds.), *Virtualism: A New Political Economy* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 187–215.

<sup>29</sup> R. Hoggart, *The Way We Live Now* (London, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> T. Frank, *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism and the End of Economic Democracy* (London, 2001), p. 282.

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arena and write for what he sees as business-sponsored neo-liberal publications.<sup>31</sup> Because the personal was political for the 1968 generation, it opened up every aspect of individual behaviour to intellectual scrutiny. While there was a clear radicalism to such an enterprise in the focus on the individual, wider political structures were too often taken for granted or simply ignored.

In terms of the future development of consumption studies, more likely is that there will be a turn away from purely cultural accounts as scholars consider the wider economic and political issues concerned with consumer society – shifts which might be seen as part of a wider ‘institutional turn’ identified within recent scholarship.<sup>32</sup> This implies a turn away from the humanist explorations of ‘the social life of things’, but it is clearly a move which many consumers themselves are demanding. It is significant that one book pilloried as the epitome of the manipulationist school, Stuart Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness*, has now been re-issued twenty-five years after it first came out, its anti-advertising critique perhaps appealing to a new generation of students. Ewen’s publishers must have been encouraged by a new trend to re-question the limits of consumption. Juliet Schor asks *Do Americans Shop Too Much?*, Daniel Miller urges the consumer and the housewife to make ‘consumption the vanguard of history’, artists seek to break down the informational barriers between developing world production and western consumption, while economists and sociologists seek to explore alternative frameworks to control the economy.<sup>33</sup> It is as though the older agendas of J. K. Galbraith, Vance Packard, Rachel Carson and Ralph Nader are enjoying a new fashionability, perhaps spurred on by the anti-corporate exposés of Naomi Klein and George Monbiot, together with the headline-grabbing activities of such organisations as Adbusters.<sup>34</sup>

If not yet in the academic field, consumption is being re-politicised by a new generation of activists who are taking on board conceptual

<sup>31</sup> ‘Agency, that cult-stud staple, was recast by *Reason* into the silver bullet of corporate defence’: *ibid.*, p. 299. Frank’s favourite villain is the anthropologist Grant McCracken, author of *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> B. Jessop, ‘Institutional re(turns) and the strategic-relational approach’, *Environment and Planning A*, 33 (2001), 1213–35.

<sup>33</sup> Schor, J. B., *Do Americans Shop Too Much?*, Boston, MA, 2000; D. Miller, ‘Consumption as the vanguard of history: a polemic by way of an introduction’, in D. Miller (ed.), *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (London, 1995), pp. 1–57; I. Cook, ‘Social sculpture and connective aesthetics: Shelley Sacks’ “Exchange Values”’, *Ecumene: A Journal of Cultural Geographies*, 7:3 (2001), 338–44; N. Goodwin, F. Ackerman and D. Kiron (eds.), *The Consumer Society* (Washington, DC, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Klein, *No Logo*; G. Monbiot, *The Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain* (London, 2000); K. Lasn, *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America* (NY, 1999).