**Consumer Culture and its Futures: Dreams and Consequences**

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**Introduction**

The rise of consumer culture has frequently been presented as evidence of the success of capitalist modernity. Industrialization and technological developments have produced massive transformations of human living space with over half of humanity now living in cities. This urban and industrial revolution, has been accompanied over the last thirty years, by what some herald as a further revolutionary change: the impact of a new set of communications technologies with digital micro-computing mobile devices.[[1]](#footnote-1) We can now instantly interact with distant others in an increasingly integrated global culture. Consumer culture is centrally inscribed into both the urban landscape and the new modes of digital communication such as the internet. Contemporary societies, then, have become increasingly dominated by consumption, which has now become the driving force for the global economy. Yet the very success and extensiveness of consumer culture has more recently made visible problems, risks and doubts about its viability, along with a series of major dilemmas about how to deal with its consequences.

From one perspective this should be no surprise, as production is often seen as intimately linked to consumption. The capacity to produce more necessarily generates more consumption, with improvements in the standards of living and increased capacity to purchase new goods and experiences. At the same time we should be careful not to make the assumption that people are necessarily predisposed to produce or consumer more. Max Weber, for one took exception to this form of naturalization of the entrepreneurial impulse. In his Protestant Ethic thesis he sought to investigate the origins of the propensity for people to want to produce more, to engage in constant work discipline and rational accounting. For Weber traditional societies showed a more direct and immediate relationship between production and consumption; the annual production (especially foodstuffs) was more or less directly consumed with little inclination to continue to work beyond the satisfaction of immediate needs (Weber, 1981). The question of why people continued to work and accumulate when they did not need to, was his central *problemstellung*, and his answer to the question sought to pin down the origins of the unique capitalist spirit which he held had world changing consequences. Yet we could equally apply this mode of problematization to consumption as to production. Indeed, one of the striking dispositions Weber found in the Protestant sects that was transferred to the early American capitalists, was that one should value work highly and not consume indulgently. The focus was on the sober disciplined life dominated by work, with luxuries and worldly pleasures denigrated and frugality praised as the means to salvation. This demanded the methodical life of the monk, but not confined to the monastery, but out in the world, in the marketplace and everyday life.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The followers of the Protestant sects, were not directly interested in consumption as it took people away from work and the ordered life; the pursuit of pleasure and luxury needing to be carefully governed.[[3]](#footnote-3) Rather, consumption needed to be modest, curtailed and well circumscribed, otherwise it threatened both other-worldly salvation and inner-worldly business success. Weber’s own life and academic interests echoed these sentiments and he showed little interest in the governance of consumption, or the problems it opened up for modern societies. Yet one of Weber’s contemporaries, Werner Sombart took a very different view. Sombart (1967) argued that it was not the development of the production side, the capitalist spirit, but rather the stimulus to demand from the consumption side, which was crucial in bringing about the leap into modern capitalism. Crucial here was the demand for luxuries from court societies. Courts brought together nobles, courtiers, clergy and beautiful women in sumptuous setting such as the ‘gilded cage’ of Louis XIV’s Versailles, for ceremonial displays and pageantry (Elias, 1983). Court life involved elaborate prestige contests, in which nobles engaged in ruinous consumption in the chance that they would gain the favour of the king. Courtiers and nobles were obliged to wear fine clothes, jewellery and adornment which stimulated the fashion system, they ate gourmet food with new dishes prepared by skilful chefs, they listened to music performances, watched plays and pageants which stimulated the arts and high culture, they socialized and performed in specially constructed palatial architecture replete with sumptuous interior design, décor and objects of art. As centres of consumption courts stimulated employment and the courtesans, tradesmen, artisans, fashion designers, cooks, architects, financiers involved, not only furnished goods and services, but observed their use by royalty and aristocrats. This stimulated demand in neighbouring capital cities such as Paris and London amongst the middle classes. Cities became centres of innovation in luxury consumption, manufacture and culture (Featherstone, 2007: ch. 11; 2014b; Goody, 2006:144). Courts led to the development of the spice trade, but also silks, fabrics and dyes (indigo being more valuable than gold at one point), which increased the trade between Europe and Asia and led to the opening of the Americas. This stimulated consumption in the middle classes and wider urban life (McCracken, 1988).

Whatever the outcome of historical debates about the role of consumption in the origins of capitalism, it is indisputable that today consumption plays a central role in the global economy. In the case of the United States’ economy, around seventy percent of U.S. GDP (gross domestic product) now comes from consumer spending, indeed personal consumption levels has fluctuated between 60-70 percent in the postwar period (Ivanova, 2011:342).[[4]](#footnote-4) The reaction to the recession following the 2007 financial crisis was to flood the market with cheap credit in an attempt to re-invigorate consumer demand. This contrasts with the strategy of public works and infrastructure investment programmes that followed the Great Depression of the 1930s. One consequence has been the rapid increase in not just sovereign debt, but private debt in the United States and other parts of the world (Graeber, 2011; Lazzarato, 2012). The rise in consumption levels in China, India and other parts of Asia along with the development of the BRICS, and their up and coming rivals the CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa), as well as the more recent term, the MINT economies (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey),[[5]](#footnote-5) is also notable. Consumption then is firmly established as central to the world economy, in effect it is the driving force for the expanding manufacturing sector in the BRIC, CIVET and MINT countries to produce the consumer goods to be consumed in North America, Europe and Japan, but also increasingly by their own consumers whose aspire to the same consumer lifestyles. In the West, Japan and other affluent parts of the world,[[6]](#footnote-6) the strength of the service sector of the economy is a further indication of the importance of consumption.

Since the 1980s there has been a notable expansion of neoliberalism as the major form of governmentality, first in the United States and the United Kingdom and gradually extending to other parts of the world. While neoliberalism has a complex history and is not a unified doctrine, its main characteristics draw on liberalism, with the assumption of the benefits arising from the extension of the market and competition to all corners of the world.[[7]](#footnote-7) Neoliberalism is not anti-state per se, but favours the use of the state to deregulate state industries, monopolies and the state sector in general. This also entails the reduction of welfare support and the promotion of the self-reliant individual: in effect, people who must finance their own investments – in education and the accumulation of social and cultural capital – in order to succeed in life. In effect people need to compete to accumulate property and must become entrepreneurial beings.

This is something Foucault highlights in his biopolitics, in the lectures he gave towards the end of his life at a time when neoliberalism was becoming more evident as a project in the form of Thatcherism and Reaganomic in the 1980s (Foucault, 2008). On the one side this involved financial deregulation, bolstered by the integration of the global markets in the wake of the introduction of 24-hour trading in 1986, which created a new financial infrastructure and form of global governance based on the sovereignty of the markets (Latham, 2000). This not only increased the flows of money, shares, financial instruments and investment, but also led to the expansion of offshore financial services and tax havens which greatly benefitted corporations, the rich and the super-rich and also increased social inequalities (Featherstone, 2013a, 2014b; Urry, 2014a). People were also encouraged to actively invest in their own human capital (Gary Becker, 1993), a form of individualism that was also seen as beneficial in terms of increasing the collective societal wealth (see discussion in Featherstone, 2013a).

One important manifestation here is the blurring of the lines between work and leisure, production and consumption. To gain the rewards that life offers and succeed, people needed to be enterprising and creative in their work (Foucault, 2008:226; McNay, 2009). But this attitude needs to be carried over into their non-work activities. Again, Foucault (2008:226) is instructive here in his suggestion, following Gary Becker that we should think of consumption as enterprise activity too. In effect the consumer should also be seen as a producer, whose activity is geared towards the production of his/her own satisfaction. The consumer needs to be creative and enterprising if they are to maximise their own satisfactions and pleasure. They need to be lifestyle innovators and invest in themselves. Hence the active enterprising attitude is important in this apparently ‘secondary’ level, in terms of generating the right dispositions and orientation to life to make neoliberalism work. To maximise one’s potential one needs to invest in one’s non-work activities: to borrow, buy, sell, accumulate, re-evaluate, in terms of house, consumer goods, vacations etc., and weigh up the levels of short and long-term satisfactions that can be derived. Yet the investment in sustaining this neoliberal consumer culture dream can be risky; it can be a gamble that goes wrong with negative consequences for both individuals and the system.

The 2007 financial crisis and subsequent recession has seen a massive rise in debt – the sovereign debt of government borrowing (also know via the euphemism ‘quantitative easing’ in the UK) and also individual household debt. Referring to the dramatic decline of household ‘net worth’ in the United States, one commentator remarks that ‘the collapse of credit for the working classes signifies the end of debt-driven consumer capitalism’ (Ivanova, 2011:346). The situation is little better in many other countries. Is consumer culture, then, facing endgame with ‘shopped-out’ ‘debt-burdened’ consumers unable to renew their credit rating and move forward? Is this not just the end of the American dream, but the more widespread consumer dreams of the rest of us around the world? It is possible to respond that for some sectors consumption continues to be healthy – the luxury sector and super rich consumption are doing well. But there is a growing groundswell of criticism of the consequences and fairness of the system, raising many questions about the future of neoliberal economies and the consumer way of life. The growing inequalities evident in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries raise questions about the sustainability of democracy, equality and social improvement, seen by many as positive by-products of modernity.

In this paper we will seek to address a range of questions about the dreams and consequences of consumer culture. Firstly, if consumer culture is central to neoliberalism and the maintenance of the global economy, how far can this be seen as a deeper-seated process related to long-standing dreams of abundance and unrestricted consumption? How far were these consumer dreams significant in helping to overcome previous restrictions on consumption (sumptuary laws) and religious prohibitions against luxury, greed and avarice? The birth of economics and the rise of liberalism and utilitarianism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, provided one set of answers which drew on major shifts in the attitude toward the pleasure and consumption and legitimated the desire for material self-improvement of ordinary people (Smith, 1776; Berry, 1994). How do these dreams relate to the American dream, which became a dominant force in the twentieth century? As consumer culture globalizes are these dreams still viable? With the rise of new wealth in the form of the rich, super-rich and celebrities, does the desire for more excessive luxury lifestyles gain further legitimation?

Over two centuries beyond what has been referred to as the birth of the consumer society in eighteenth century England (McKendrick et al al, 1982), what are the consequences of two hundred years of an extensive and sustained consumer culture? Some would argue with increasing climate change and impending planetary disaster, the ecological consequences of a consumer society are evident. There has been an expanding production of machinery and infrastructure for the manufacture of goods, along with the volume of goods themselves, which has also meant a largely uncosted and unknown set of risks, along with the accumulation of excessive waste. We are by now familiar with scenarios that suggest that if everyone in the world consumed like the United States we would need three earth-size planets to resource our consumption. If the unintended consequences of the consumer society now threaten planetary existence of living being, then, what is the potential for thinking beyond a consumer culture anchored in neoliberalism? Could there be a move from material to immaterial consumption, with limited consumption of new goods coupled with a focus on experience and sustaining interpersonal rhythms of life?

In addition there are important questions about the social consequences of consumer culture: how do we evaluate the way it works as a form of social organization? Does consumer culture merely provide an extension of work, in the sense that the rhythms of non-work life involve increasing public and self-surveillance through digital devices that under the guise of increasing sociability, are effectively locking-people into compulsive patterns of behaviour? Is the price of increasing consumption, decreasing free time and does material affluence mean the loss of time-affluence? Are there ways of being together, sharing and joint enterprise (open source, employee benefit trusts) that could reverse the excessive individualism, egoism of the enterprise and consumer cultures? Does continued regular and excessive consumption lead to the constant search for new goods, resulting in diminishing satisfaction? If more people possess more desirable luxury goods, does the prestige value satisfaction diminish too? Would diminishing satisfaction support a scaling down of the impulse to buy? Does consumer culture really lead to the good life and an increase in people’s sense of happiness?

**Dreams of Consumption**

‘We live in dreams like fish in water’ Eugene Halton (1992)

It is possible to identify two dreams of consumption that have been influential in stimulating consumer culture desires. The first is the peasant dream of effortless abundance manifest in luxury food, satiation and fulfilment. The second entails luxury, but closely linked to the dream of splendour, of magnificent luxurious surroundings, the architecture and interiors of the palaces of rulers and nobility. The sumptuous clothes, furnishings and full range of sensory sensations provided to stimulate the sophisticated tastes of refined and powerful people.

***Cockaigne and Peasant Dreams of Abundance***

The well-known overture by Elgar ‘Cockaigne’ composed in 1900-01, subtitled ‘In London Town,’ was intended to provide a musical portrait of London Life. At the time the term ‘Cockaigne’ was used to humorously point to the idleness, gluttony and drunkenness of turn of the century London and it is generally assumed this is the origin of the term ‘Cockney.’ But Cockaigne has a long history and refers to the vision of a ‘land of all delight,’ the land of luxury and idleness.

References to Cockaigne are prominent in numerous European societies, especially in medieval folklore and peasant culture. It refers to a dream-like mythical land of plenty replete with rivers of wine, houses built of cakes and barley sugar, streets paved with pastries. According to Herman Pleij in *Dreaming of Cockaigne: Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life* (2003)

Roasted pigs wander about with knives in their backs to making carving easy, where grilled geese fly directly into one’s mouth, where cooked fish jump out of the water and land at one’s feet. The weather is always mild, the wine flows freely, sex is readily available, and all people enjoy eternal youth.

The etymology of the term is thought to derive from a word meaning cake. But it also suggested more than special food, luxury and ease, for it also played of the logic of a land of contraries, where not only food was plentiful (skies that rain cheese), but also social restrictions were reversed (sexual liberties freely taken, authority figures humiliated by their juniors etc.)[[8]](#footnote-8) There are clear resonances between Cockaigne and carnival in the ways in which the annual medieval Christian carnival offered an inversion of conventional everyday life: with expensive and luxurious things made cheap and abundant, with normal sexual restrictions waved (see Featherstone, 2007:ch 5; Bakhtin, 1968).

***Court Society Dreams of Splendour and Luxury***

The realities of medieval peasants lives with austerity, shortages and under-employment with sumptuary laws in place to restrict consumption, can be contrasted to the court society of the monarchs, princes and nobility. Yet there was one important sense in which court life was very much the opposite of the dreams of excessive consumption found in the depictions of Cockaigne, or its carnival version. Court consumption was highly ordered and ritualised through careful ceremonials in which good manners, correct etiquette and social rules dominated and consumption could not be seen as only directed at the satisfaction of bodily appetites, pleasures and desires (Elias, 1983). Nobles and courtiers were highly visible in the carefully orchestrated ceremonial displays, which necessitated a high level of self-control, careful presentation and performance skills, confidence and wit.

The splendour of palaces such as Versailles built by Louis XIV, the lavish interiors with the finest materials, the large windows, hall of mirrors, carefully controlled ornamental gardens were designed as a setting for displays of monarchical power and wealth. This pattern was found across Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The English Stuart (James 1 and Charles 1) staged magnificent processions or pageants called masques, sometimes involving thousands of people in Roman or Greek costumes to depict heroic episodes from the ancient world in their full splendour (Peck, 2005). The provision of such elaborate staged spectacles involving actors, animals, music, fireworks, in pageants and masques, were prohibitively expensive. But such was the power of kings that it was impossible to avoid the royal request and lords and courtiers were obliged to engage in the provision of competitive display and entertainments to the point of ruin.

According to Sombart (1967) Louis XIV embarked on a phase of ruinous expenditure to impress his mistresses, building numerous chateaux, including Versailles. Mistresses and coquettes gained great prestige and power and set trends in fashion and style through wearing fine silks and the latest fashions. Cuisine involved attention to the creation of new dishes and tastes by specially appointed cooks, who attained power and influence under the patronage system. Yet there were also backstage areas, in private quarters, or visits to the city to explore the greater informalities of the *demimonde*.[[9]](#footnote-9) The life of the noble and courtiers, then, involved careful ordered consumption with swings to excess, but it also involved the choosing and sampling new goods in the latest styles - be it furniture, or clothes designed in the finest silk fabrics and carefully finished and coloured in the latest dyes. Men and women wore elaborate make-up, coiffeur and wigs. The fashion system first developed in court society through the overland Silk Road and eventually the regular sea routes to Asia. This search for luxuries and new tastes, such as rare spices, exotic fruit and vegetables for elaborate banquets, along with fine fabrics and dyes (silk, indigo)[[10]](#footnote-10) being highly valued and helped usher in the race for colonies and greater competition between European powers.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Court life stimulated its own sets of dreams and desires in the rest of the population, via the servants who prepared and catered along with the merchants and tradesmen who furnished the goods, settings and architecture. Courts and nobles needed financiers, bankers, merchants and the market, even if the noble and courtier despised the pedantry, caution and lack of style of the middle classes. But the middle classes and inhabitants of the expanding cities were by no means passive observers of the court. The competition for trade after the opening up of the Americas made new fortunes for the middle classes and led to a greater circulation of global trade after the flood of Spanish silver from the Potosí mines in Bolivia from the mid-sixteenth century onwards made its way to China across the Pacific (Pomeranz, 2000, 2009). Wealth accumulated in the middle classes and they developed a taste for luxury goods. The expansion of the luxury trade between Europe and Asia not only linked cities together, it stimulated broader occupational specialism and the expansion of middle class cultural and knowledge occupations: lawyers, bankers, accountants, along with teachers, scholars and doctors.

Cities, then, became centres of innovation in luxury and learning, consumption and culture (Featherstone, 2007: ch. 11; Goody, 2006: 144). The court society opened up the visions of splendour and elaborate ritual for the middle classes. They observed the fine dress, fashionable clothes and demeanour of the nobles and courtiers, the way they ate elaborate banquets and haute cuisine involving the latest spices and ingredients. Courts were centres of fashion and cultural innovation, but they were also centres of pleasure and enjoyment, where beautiful women engaged in love and romance. This dream of refined stylish sociability in attractive sumptuous surroundings, together with refined, witty people who displayed good manners, elegance and fashionable demeanour, provided a powerful stimulus to their dreams and ambitions of consumption.

***The Birth of a Consumer Culture***

It is now generally accepted that in eighteenth century England there was not just an industrial revolution, but a consumer revolution too, with the provision of a whole range of new exotic goods stimulated by the colonial trade and manufacturing (McKendrick et al, 1982). The development of factories and eventually mass production made a wide range of cheap everyday households and staple goods (pots, pans, iron bedsteads, tinned food, cotton clothes) readily available in the nineteenth century. The department stores which developed in France, England and the United States from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, not only provided new cheaper manufactured goods, they also provided luxuries for the masses, the ‘democratization of luxury,’ with new mass fashions which imitated more exclusive and luxurious goods. A key aspect of the department store was the way in which customers could walk around goods which were carefully displayed and lit, often in themed displays produced by an expanding set of commercial artists and designers which brought elements of fantasy and exotic imagery into window and store interior displays. It is in this sense we can refer to the stores as encouraging aestheticization processes (Miller, 1981; Tamari, 2006; Williams, 1982; Featherstone, 2007).[[12]](#footnote-12)

Goods were presentation and framed in carefully constructed settings designed to encourage the transfer of associations from the painted or increasingly photograph images, mannequins and mythological backgrounds and props. The application of the term ‘dream palaces’ is significant, not only to indicate the plushness and sumptuousness of the settings of the interior and architecture of department stores, but also the way the stores played with imagery from cultural traditions, myths and folk tales to add an extra dimension to the goods. In some cases stores brought in performers and themed a series of spaces in the store to look like stage sets, which added to the illusion and dream-like effect.[[13]](#footnote-13) If department stores can be thought of as central sites of consumer culture that both nurtured and materialised dreams, another equally important site for the production of dream images was the cinema. The Hollywood cinema that developed in the 1920s has been referred to as a ‘dream factory,’ through its capacity to draw on and actualise material taken from a wide range of past cultural traditions, myths and epics, or to graphically depict tales and epics taken from ancient civilizations, the Bible and well-known historical figures. Increasingly from the late 1920s onwards people watched the movies in plush, luxurious settings, and cinemas became ‘picture palaces’ (Hansen, 1991)[[14]](#footnote-14)

***The American Dream***

The cinema reinforced the power of images and it is hard to underestimate the way that images stimulated desires and helped to give form and depth to dreams. Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen (1982) mention the effect of mundane images in stimulating dreams and desires. They recount how a young Czech immigrant girl was powerfully influenced by the image design on an American bale of cotton. Such images, on a can of fruit, packet of cigarettes, bag of flour, can be powerful in fostering the dream of a better life, the dream of abundance and opportunity in a land of plenty.[[15]](#footnote-15) Images opened up the space of possibility: the dream, the desire. The Hollywood movies, like consumer culture advertising, marketing and display played with transcultural and quasi-universal themes such as love, youth, romance, adventure, exotica, luxury, ‘wonder,’ ‘the new.’ These were often linked to a series of themes that include: just reward, ambition, persistence, transformation and success.

The latter themes in particular were central to what became known as ‘The American Dream:’ the United States presented as the land of opportunity in which everyone could rise up to their appropriate station and potential in life and enjoy the fruits of success: the car, the suburban family home crammed full of the latest consumer goods. The American Dream proved to be enormously powerful globally, especially so when harnessed to the Hollywood Cinema. It helped open the horizons of dreams, desires ambitions, scope of what it would like to live in exotic places, amidst stylish, knowledgeable beautiful people in comfortable surroundings. Especially in eras such as the 1920s, the American Dream offer what Scott Fitzgerald noted as ‘the extraordinary gift of hope.’[[16]](#footnote-16) This can be linked to the broader theme of transformation – the hope of self-improvement and betterment. The self-help, ‘pulling yourself up by your own bootlaces’ idiom is particularly strong in the United States. We have the Pygmalion myth, first popularised by George Bernard Shaw as a play, then taken up a stage show in the 1950s, adapted into a 1960s Hollywood movie, *My Fair Lady*, starring Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison, remade and revamped in the 1990s as *`Pretty Woman’* with Richard Gere and Julie Roberts.[[17]](#footnote-17) There is widespread media interest in transformation, in the highs and lows, of stars and celebrities, their permanent adolescence, constant renewal of partners and relationships, opulent lifestyles and consumer goods, along with their constant battle to transform their bodies against the ravages worked by the ageing process. The fall and rise of stars as they battled against drink, drugs, career failure, divorce, abused childhoods, etc. also provided an endless supply of material for novels, feature stories, movies, television documentaries, chat shows and of course more recently the Internet, including social media sites (see Turner, 2004; Featherstone, 1982, 2010).[[18]](#footnote-18)

It is also interesting the way in which the success stories of those who become enormously wealthy are not only central to the American dream, but the various globalized versions. With the extension of neoliberalism since the 1980s, those who are wealthy, especially those who have become so through their own enterprise, tend to be presented as efficient contributors to the economy and social life. The contemporary wave of new rich, the expanding strata of successful millionaires, multi-millionaires and billionaires, who are increasing in China, India, Russia and other parts of the world as well as in the United States and Europe, can be contrasted with the imagery of the traditional aristocracy and ‘idle rich.’ They are immensely confident in their own qualities: that they are self-made persons who have risen to the top through their own talent, hard-work and creative enterprise. They are given increasing prominence with their business successes and failures, relationships and scandals, leisure activities and adventures, are regularly featured and glamorised in the media. In short their wealth and enterprise make them celebrities and featured in the expanding celebrity culture (Turner, 2004). Their lifestyle and excessive luxury consumption, their new ‘toy’ (classic cars, super-yachts, and customised private jets), sumptuous homes full of art treasures, antiques and designer goods, are generally presented with admiration in media features, narratives, advertising and popular culture imagery. In many ways they are presented as the heroes of consumption, the success stories of consumer culture; and they are not slow in proclaiming their own social contribution and justifying their excessive rewards and luxurious consumer lifestyles (see Peretti, 2015; Freeland, 2012; Featherstone, 2013a, 2014b).

**Consumer Rhythms and the Timing of Consumption**

Within consumer culture, then, the consumption of images and looser associations such as dreams, are important. Advertisers are eager to attach experiences to particular goods, so that the consumption of the immaterial aspect, or the cultural experience that they want to become associated with particular goods, becomes dominant. It has been argued that over time there has also been a more general shift from the consumption of goods to the consumption of experiences to the extent that we have references to ‘the experiential society (Schulze, 1992) and ‘experiential economy’ (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). This fits in well with the dreams of consumer culture, the emphasises on the freedom to travel and enjoy a mobile lifestyle, to sample cultures and new experiences, catered for by the expansion of the tourist and leisure sectors. At the same time the basic organization of the rhythms of consumer culture point not just to escape from routine through tourist vacation breaks, but also to the intensification of regular consumption patterns by increasing the amount of time available to consume, not only in extending the hours of stores and malls, but also through Internet shopping, which offers the potential for around the clock consumption. Two observations can be made here in relation to time and the rhythms of everyday life. The first relates to the discouragement of people wasting time. The second relates to the extension of biopolitical regimes by which populations are regulated through consumption.

The ways in which workers were subject to capitalist discipline not just in the factory, but outside the workplace too, was noted in a book by Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy* (orig.1883). Lafargue (2011) argued that the working class had to overcome their passion for work, which he saw as leading to the exhaustion of their vital energies and creativity. Lafargue’s concerns about the spread of work discipline chime with the evidence provided by EP Thompson (1976) in an important essay ‘Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,’ which points to the difficulties in establishing the work discipline and punctuality necessary for the factory system in eighteenth century England.[[19]](#footnote-19) Eventually clock-time became internalized with the workers engaging in self-surveillance and displaying a high degree of time consciousness. While EP Thompson sketched out the implications for the sphere of work, Michel Foucault addressed more fully in developing his theory of biopolitics.[[20]](#footnote-20) Foucault identified two distinctive technologies of power: one technique is disciplinary; it centres on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body to make it useful and docile. The second technology is centred not upon the body but upon social life and brings endeavours to control and predict the series of random events that can occur in a living mass (Foucault 2008:249).[[21]](#footnote-21) We will return to the discussion of how to gain productive statistical knowledge of population sets shortly, as this has become central to consumer culture data analysis and marketing and in particular Internet consumption. For the moment the important point is how these general changes in work and social life laid the basis for the development of a particular rhythms of everyday life and how our consumption practices became readily fitted into the larger disciplinary, surveillance and biopolitical social matrix, albeit still seeking to incorporate consumer culture dreams of abundance, excess and the yearning for a better life.

***Consume productively 24/7***

Contemporary consumer culture encourages even more disciplined and intensive rhythms of consumption. In his book *24/7* Jonathan Crary (2013) addresses the shift towards a life with no respite, in which consumers are expected to live to the full every minute of the week. The term 24/7 also conjures up machinic performance, a world in which it is impossible to hide, or expect time out, where the machine clocks abstract time, rather than the rhythms of day and night or the annual seasons, dictate. Crary (2013:11) mentions that North Americans now sleep on average six and a half hours a night, down from eight hours a generation ago and down from ten hours in the early twentieth century. The problem is that you can’t consume when you sleep, and this brings with it the consumer culture corollary that sleep is wasted time, bereft of efficiency or enjoyment. The tendency in many of the affluent parts of the world is one of dissolving the boundaries between work and professional time, between work and consumption with the accent always on productive tasking. The hours city centre shops, stores and malls are open are progressively extended. There is a constant cycle of new goods, new advertisements and refurbished store designs to entice customers. This is something which Hannah Arendt detected in the 1950s when she remarked, if ‘we were truly nothing but members of a consumer society we would no longer live in a world at all, we would simply be driven by a process in whose ever-recurring cycles things appear and disappear’ (1958:134, cited in Crary, 2013:22). We will turn to examine things and material commodities shortly, but first it is useful to add examine more closely the rhythms of consumption.

Increasingly the pressure is to make our lives follow the financial benefits of maximum use of resources and become 24/7 consumers. Extended shopping hours in the malls, the 24-hour city of entertainment with clubs, bars, cafes and other leisure facilities open all night. The city permanently illuminated, serviced and provisioned with transport and infrastructure. Round the clock television, radio and cable channels. Accompanied by the Internet that never sleeps, forever updating itself, constantly accessible from the widening range of mobile devices such as smart phones, tablets and laptops. This leads to the 24-hour city with extensive Wi-Fi coverage overhead, but also cabled and wired below the streets and in buildings. The digital networks provide information for whatever desires or whim springs to mind: the nearest Japanese sushi restaurant, bar with Belgian beer, pancake café, designer perfume shop, fashion boutique, etc. Yet, this is the city not just furnishing information for us, but the city tracking us and gathering our information.

The digital networks and informational infrastructures along with the constant stream of innovative mobile machines are altering the rhythms, speeds and formats of an increasingly accelerated and intensive consumer culture. They are also helping to reshape the nature of experience and perception, which is increasingly mediated through a screen culture. Currently we are familiar with people on public transport gazing at miniature screens (reading emails, newspapers, playing computer games, reading books, learning languages, window-shopping online stores). Some have headphones and are listening to music, books, sporting events, newscasts or language programmes. Yet the hand-held screen plus audio device, is itself vulnerable and could well be displaced by newer display formats and technological innovations[[22]](#footnote-22). There is a massive R&D investment into technologies that speed up and reduce decision-making time and hence eliminate reflection and contemplation (Crary, 2013:40). Large transnational corporations such as Microsoft, Apple, Google, Facebook, are constantly seeking to innovate and produce new information technologies which offer consumers greater strategic empowerment, save time, capture and control experience, enhance personal security and comfort too.

The new digital communicative technologies offer forms of empowerment and multi-tasking; always holding out something enticing in the endless stock of aps and entertainment content just a download away. The worry or hope is that there will always be something online that is more interesting, amusing or impressive that the everyday life around you. As the gaze turns to the screen, many things in the immediate surroundings go unnoticed, and there is an atrophy of shared experience and attentiveness to others and traditional forms of sociality. This is captured by those people we see walking down the street who are highly animated and gesture dramatically while talking on a mobile phone headset, who are totally indifferent to passers-by. Everyday life until recently amounted to the bits left over, after work, consumerism and the dictates of the state administration – it was relatively free and eventless time. But as critics such as Lefebvre (1971), Debord (1970) and others suggest, the accent has been on the intensive colonisation of this time by the market and administration.

These tendencies have also been noted by Deleuze (1992) with his concept of ‘societies of control,’ which he saw as replacing and filling in the gaps between the institutions and sites Foucault described in terms of ‘disciplinary societies:’ prisons, hospitals, barracks, schools, clinics, asylums etc. But it has also been ratcheted up more with the move to financial capitalism since the 1980s and the institution of less visible forms of digital control. There is certainly greater camera surveillance and monitoring, plus swipe cards, coded and biometric access to restricted areas, along with monitoring of phone and internet traffic. But what is interesting is the convergence and overlap between consumer culture and the control society (see discussion in Crary, 2013:71ff). Of course, it may seem that time spent looking at Facebook, checking favourite sites, reading blogs, downloading free music is enjoyable free leisure time. Yet, whatever we do is increasingly trackable and traceable - our movements by foot or car in the city, or our browsing and purchasing in the internet (Crandall, 2010). The browsing, the click and pointing, the tasking, the searching points to an attentive economy one of whose data indicators is to record the number of ‘eyeballs’ (looks or glances at a webpage). Facebook, Google and associated internet corporations make money through high use of their platforms, so they want to achieve as near continuous involvement with content through computers and mobile devices as possible. The screens engage us and demand responses; they track us and harvest our data. Increasingly people check devices for emails before they go to bed and when they wake-up, with some persons even waking several times in the night to check for messages. In the 24/7 screen culture sleep, the time or remission, the pause, the waiting time, becomes increasingly seen as unproductive and even wasteful. It becomes a luxury to seek release, to sleep, to forego and forgive.

***Profiling, Tracking and Data Harvesting***

Consumption invariably leaves traces. Traditionally purchasing goods involved coins passed from hand to hand and was generally not receipted. Today it is more and more common to buy things with debit and credit cards, which are near instantaneously linked electronically to bank accounts along with credit-worthiness checks.[[23]](#footnote-23) Increasingly consumers are encouraged to use credit or debit cards for all purchases, including small items via ‘touch and debit’ for small items or metro and bus travel. Larger items, which include practically everything from department store durable goods, motorcars, package holidays and air flights and health insurance, can be now purchased via the smart phones which can potentially replace credit and bank cards in the future, given their host of additional functions, which include internet banking access the details of multiple sets of purchases. The specialist information services agencies that are rapidly gaining global extent, such as Experian (originating in the UK, but now a leading transnational corporation), mediate between banks and consumers to make credit checks.

In doing this they amass a massive amount of data not only on credit-worthiness, but the purchasing habits and preferences of customers. Once this is coupled with other personal data, people’s address, age, occupation, salary, other deductions can be made about the person. This accumulated geo-demographic data, compounds the assumption that people with similar occupation and age characteristics often have similar consumer tastes, which includes choice of housing – in effect as the old adage goes ‘birds of a feather live together,’ meaning university professors and lecturers tend to be found in the same type of areas of cities and decorate their houses in similar ways, dress in similar clothes and drive similar types of cars (cf. here the type of analysis Bourdieu (1984) used in *Distinction*).*[[24]](#footnote-24)* Such databases and the value of the information they provide will increase in significance if current trends continue. E-commerce is currently the fastest growing retail market in Europe with sales in the leading countries expected to grow by 18.4 percent to 185.39bn euros in 2015. The sales in the US are expected to amount to $398.78bn for 2015.[[25]](#footnote-25) While the UK online percentage share of the total consumer retail market is estimated to be 15.2% in 2015, it is suggested that this percentage will be sustained or increase to the expense of conventional stores.[[26]](#footnote-26)

It is important to see this as not just a consumer culture business opportunity, but also an advantageous accumulation of data, with money to be made from the digital data traces, not just the actual goods sold. Indeed, in many ways the data side is providing highly lucrative, given that companies constantly seek more precise market information about their customers.[[27]](#footnote-27) The financial and business deregulation accompanying the move to neoliberalism has worked well in tandem with the digital communications revolution. This has dramatically increased the capacity to gather information on the part of internet corporations, especially the growing number of web analytics firms, who trawl data in real time to constantly update information on internet website usage via computer algorithms.[[28]](#footnote-28) Through the use of software algorithms, commonalities between data patterns can be identified to enable real-time access and matching (Cheney-Lippold, 2011; Beer, 2009). Users’ profiles can be continually updated as with each piece of information on new preferences or changing tastes and the set of recommended purchases altered accordingly. This is the typical pattern we experience on Amazon Books: ‘if you liked this book you could like this other one,’ and ‘people who bought this book, also bought….’ This type of profiling and targeting is increasingly becoming standardized across sites and internet providers. If one browses for cosmetics, or a holiday in Paris on one site, mysteriously a range of relevant margin advertisements spring up on other provider’s sites.[[29]](#footnote-29) In effect we are tracked, we are monitored, we are profiled, we are enticed, we are trained to be productive by the corporations. It is in this sense that we can understand the massive corporate investment in the internet which has taken place since the dot.com boom.[[30]](#footnote-30)

This is a long way from the dreams of the World Wide Web in the 1990s with the efforts of its founder Tim Berners Lee and others to create a free web where people could find easy access to data across different cultural and informational domains. The internet today increasingly entails data harvesting, tracking and online purchasing. Some people might see the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook as a counter-move against this tendency. Yet the high floatation value of Facebook which was valued at $114bn in May 2014, is one sound indicator of the financial market’s estimation of the value embodied in the product and the returns expected to be realised. With Facebook it is not just the capacity of algorithms to filter, sort and extend the networks of people we can meet online, and hence the usable data for profiling. Rather, it is also the visibility of other people or particular sites, which seem attractive to browse through, to perhaps leave a like ‘tick’ or ‘swoosh’ next to a particular image which endorses them. The activity of people relating to other people, searching, looking, adding photographs, adding news, and updating their profiles is what creates value. Inscribed into the algorithm logic of the Facebook News Feed is the idea that greater visibility functions as a reward for providing the type of news items favoured and relates to having a large number of friends commenting that the like a particular post. In effect there is a disciplining process that encourages users to be attentive, to monitor their own behaviour and train themselves to perform as required. From the Facebook perspective a useful individual is one who ‘participates, communicates and interacts,’ with the big danger being the threat of invisibility (Bucher, 2012: 1175).

High visibility can also brings a range of commercial rewards. Take the case of Zoella, who in 2015 had over 5m following her YouTube channel with more than 2.3m watching her vlog (video-blog) episode ‘Chopping Off My Hair’ (February 2015). Zoella, now aged twenty-four started her blog six years ago as a teenager in her bedroom. She allegedly commands some £20,000 a month from advertisers and recently bought a £1 million five-bedroom mansion in Brighton (*Daily Mail*, 17 February 2015). Zoella provides beauty, fashion and relationship advice. She is proving to be an ideal vehicle for brands that want to reach young consumers. Zoella has also learnt to diversify, having just written her first novel *Girl Online* (Zoe Sugg, 2014).[[31]](#footnote-31) YouTube is more dialogical than television, offering more direct connection with audiences who can offer immediate feedback by commenting on videos and blogs, and it is in process of establishing its own superstars for a younger generation attuned to screen culture and mobile devices. Yet while there is potential stardom for some and the possibilities to post material on YouTube or Facebook for many, and the potential that others could see, comment and potentially admire your efforts, the chances of becoming another Zoella, are very limited. In many ways the logic of YouTube and Facebook, fits well with that of the talent contest, which has undergone a revival over the last decade or so, through television shows such as ‘America’s Got Talent,’ X-Factor,’ ‘Come Dancing’ along with the reality television programmes such as ‘I’m a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here,’ where stars and ordinary people are seen to mix and engage in potentially dramatic and humerous ordeals, or put up with mundane boredom in a confined environment designed to induce pressure and bitchiness. The talent and skill required to be a good performer, along with the ambition to become famous, a proto-celebrity, persona and perhaps a star, very much reflects the competitive individualism central to neoliberalism. The assumption of talent, that those who win possess it and the corollary, that those who fail do not, is central to the philosophy of success of the rich and super-rich often presented as a justification for their incredible wealth (see Featherstone, 2013a, 2014b).

**Immaterial and Informational Lifestyle Construction**

Consumer culture for some is associated with a crass materialism, with the unregulated desire for objects, things, possessions, to hoard and amass for one’s own purposes and exclusive pleasure. This connects to one meaning of the term consume: to exhaust and destroy like a fire (see Featherstone, 2007; Williams, 1976). Clearly the person who greedily consumes expensive and prestigious food and drink, or constantly buys new clothes and goods fits this stereotype. As Durkheim (2014) indicated in the late nineteenth century this behaviour carries the danger that the consumers themselves will be consumed, as the pursuit of the new, of the latest nameless sensations carries with it the danger of psychological disorders, anomie and social deregulation. Yet this does not apply to all purchases as, there are many goods that have different lifespans and functions. The purchase of a house as a space to dwell and display possessions is a very different type of consumption from buying a meal, bottle of wine, or music download. The materiality of a house or apartment seemingly contrasts with the immateriality of internet consumption. The latter doesn’t involve consumption of an object, but use of a means, or medium for information. It encourages searching, researching, browsing, checking, and learning. It encourages, sampling, planning, monitoring, rehearsing and testing. The internet is interactive and offers feedback.

This raises the question of the different durability, consumability and life history of things, along with their shifting relationships to other objects and people (Appadurai, 198). There are major differences in the timing and duration of purchase and consumption time, between, for example luxury and everyday consumer goods. The symbolic significance of special social occasions or ceremonies often requires high value luxury goods to be used or consumed.[[32]](#footnote-32) Means of transports, such as automobiles are not only complex things in terms of their intricate machinery and computer technologies, but to drive the car, is not merely to put in motion an object, it is more than a vehicle. It is part of a complex material and information assemblage, which includes not only the management of the car’s own performance and safety, but includes the highway traffic management systems, refuelling stations, automated e-toll payment systems, etc. (Featherstone, 2004). Latour (2003:37) has discussed the shift from objects to quasi-objects, to suggest the difficulty of gauging the boundaries and extent of objects, the difficulty of definition given their embeddeness in networks of externalities, relationships and objects.[[33]](#footnote-33)

This moves attention away from the materiality of the object to wider material, informational and immaterial networks. Indeed, it is possible to see what has been happening to the motorcar as symptomatic of wider changes in the nature of the commodity within capitalism. Increasingly, it has been argued we have seen a shift not just from use-value to exchange value, as Marx and others emphasised in pointing to how the useful qualities things have becomes subordinated to their monetary value as commodities to be bought and sold. Rather, it is argued there has been a further displacement from both use-value and exchange-value to sign-value (Baudrillard, 1983; see discussion in Featherstone, 2007). This has also been characterised as a shift to post-Fordism, involving a much greater informational and cultural input into branded commodities (Lash and Urry, 1993; Lash and Lury, 2007). Jean Baudrillard (1983) in particular, has drawn attention to the shift from things to signs and images within contemporary consumer culture. It is assumed we no longer are confronted by goods with fixed meanings, because the rapid flow of signs and images through advertising and consumer culture manage to elide new meanings onto things. The surfeit of floating images and signs saturates the fabric of everyday life to produce an unstable field in which secure meanings are lost. In effect the proliferation of signs and images have effaced the distinction between reality and images, to the extent that we now ‘live in an aesthetic hallucination of reality’ (Baudrillard, 1983:248); Featherstone, 2007).

While Baudrillard’s language may be unduly hyperbolic, it does point us to a significant shift in the volume and intensity of images and signs. Baudrillard prime concern is in documenting this sign-overload and new simulational world, it is not his concern to ask how this world is made, but following Bourdieu (1984), we can point to the expansion of the cultural and information sectors and with it the rise in the numbers of cultural specialists and intermediaries. Many of these work in culture and creative industries which have flourished on the back of the increasing salience of cultural, artistic, fashion design and consumer activities in contemporary societies, an expanding sector of the economy to deal with the informational aspect of goods and the wider cultural matrix within which goods are increasingly encountered. A further important aspect of the new cultural sector is the significance of emotional and affective labour (Hochschild, 1983; Neilson and Rossiter, 2005).[[34]](#footnote-34) The attractions of working in the cultural sector, in fashion, design, television, film, music, theatre, advertising occupations and the increasing numbers has led to an over-supply.[[35]](#footnote-35)

If the expansion of the cultural sector is considered alongside the rise of YouTube Superstars and the mass of cultural production and interactivity entailed, we can see that internet consumption is opening up new dimensions for consumer culture. The act of purchase no longer stands alone as a simple task: it is only one moment in a wider set of activities, involving searching, researching, updating, communicating and blogging which can no longer be easily separated, or considered as ancillary or peripheral. To buy a product endorsed by Zoella, is very different from a traditional star product endorsement in a 30 second television advertisement clip. It is also different from accustomed consumer culture ‘research’ which could involve checking newspapers, consumer magazines, women’s magazines or occasional ‘window shopping’ trips to city centres. The type of knowledge building and the levels of interactivity between the followers and stars on the internet can be seen to break new ground. But even to engage in internet purchase from Shiseido, Estee Lauder, or other major cosmetic companies on the internet, now contains an experiential dimension and is increasingly to enter a world. A world in which the major brands have invested in high value designed complex sites with beautiful images, detailed information and multiform advice.

In addition, there has sprung up masses of beauty blogs with varying degrees of independence. They tend to have their own Facebook pages along with links to other sites, plus product reviews, posts and comments; everything is liberally sprinkled with high definition arty or professional-shoot style colour photographs of models or would-be models. This suggests that consumers who enter into the internet tend to be drawn into a good deal of systematic work, planning and knowledge accumulation. They are encouraged to become enterprising and engage in endless self-improvement and become conscious of the importance of their image, personal style and the need to be fashionable and innovative. There are also endless possibilities for self-monitoring and archiving of one’s own photographs on social media website’s like Facebook, or the development of blogs with similar-minded people, or in the endeavour to reach out to the widest audience possible and gain acknowledgement of one’s talent in order to become famous and make money as in the case of Zoella et al.[[36]](#footnote-36)

In addition there are those companies that seek to forge stronger links with their customers. Not by traditional modes of brand identification, but by involving their followers, fans and customers as co-producers in product design by opening sites which ask for suggestions on new products, or engage in blue-sky open thinking about the nature of their sector. Car manufacturer designers who encounter a particular problem in say engine design, my now eschew secrecy and put the problem onto a website to invite followers to make suggestions. The latter could no doubt be flattered or thrilled to be involved and are aware of the career advantage of having something in their portfolio; but they are also effectively providing a free consultancy (cf. the practice of interns working for leading politicians and others).

***Consumption Experiences, Prosumption and Curating Lifestyles***

It has often been observed that there has been a shift in consumer culture from the consumption of goods to the consumption of experiences. Activities such as watching a music concert, play, movie, football match, or having a special dinner, visiting a museum, a foreign country, enjoying a weekend break, short course to learn a new sport or hobby, or ‘once in a lifetime vacation,’ all promise in varying degrees to be an experience. In some cases this could be classed as ‘mere entertainment,’ but in others the premium is on the eventfulness of the experience, the payment is made in the expectation of something vital and memorable. Consumer culture industries, with novels, adventure stories, travel guides, movies and documentaries, and more recently the internet with its mixture of text and images, but also blog feedback provides a major outlet. With the expansion of education in modernity, especially within the middle classes, there has been a premium placed upon experience, with the eventful and creative life often contrasted to the boredom and routines of everyday life (Featherstone, 1992, 2007). The potency of this repertoire of experiential themes means that they are constantly reworked and repackaged within consumer culture marketing and become associated with a wider range of goods (Schulze, 1992,1997; Pine and Gilmore, 2011). It has also been argued that brands have undergone a series of changes and should be thought of more as ‘emerging potentials,’ a developing unstable field of associated characteristics than a fixed object (Lash and Lury, 2007). As mentioned above, brands are also increasingly interactive in asking consumers to engage with the total experience of goods and offer a wide range of ancillary expertise, seductive imagery and pleasurable browsing via their websites. Consumers are therefore increasingly asked to not just use goods blindly, or to purchase impulsively, but to study, research and work at capturing the full range of capabilities and pleasures a product and its ancillary field of information and experience can supply over time. In short, to adopt a learning mode to life.

All this suggests consumers can no longer be conceived as passive and manipulated behind their backs by advertising. Rather, the consumer is drawn into working the array of material that exists alongside goods: in effect the consumer is encouraged to be productive. As mentioned earlier, this was one of the points made by Foucault with reference to neoliberalism and consumption: people are encouraged to be enterprising and self-reliant, to increase their human capital through a range of investment strategies; but also to see consumption as an extension of these activities, by addressing consumer culture with a similar orientation: ‘how can I maximise my satisfaction and pleasure?’ As the boundaries between production and consumption blur, it is not surprising that people talk about productive consumption and the term ‘prosumer’ (Toffler, 1980; Ritzer, 2014) has been invented to capture this. The prosumer points to the way in which consumption ceases to be a largely passive activity of reception, but becomes one in which consumer businesses manage to externalize some of their costs: we return our trays, leftovers and rubbish in McDonalds and Starbucks, we buy a flat-pack wardrobe from Ikea which we assemble at home, etc.

More recently Ritzer (2014) has discussed smart-machines in terms of prosumption, with examples such as mobile phones passing location data to providers, or e-tolls allowing data on car journeys to be figured automatically by electronic devices and deducted from bank accounts. Likewise wearable monitoring devices can automatically communicate blood pressure, pulse, glucose levels and other data to hospitals and clinics. The potential of this area has been noted for some time and increasingly barcodes and RFIDs (radio frequency identification devices) mean objects can be tagged and coded and can send data back to home server databases, or exchange data with mobile phones with code readers (Hayles, 2009).[[37]](#footnote-37) Effectively an enchanted world opens up, a ‘disneyfied world’ in which things not only speak back to customers, but are able to exchange information, perform set information repertoires and hold limited conversations. This points to the upsurge of interest in smart houses, smart cars, home robots and a host of smart devices. The material fabric of the urban world, shopping centres, theme parks and resorts begins to talk back to consumers. Things carry embedded information, but increasingly can display it with an affective charge. There are two further points, relevant to briefly mention here, the first relates to customization and mass consumption, the second to lifestyle.

One of the key dynamics within consumer culture has been that of mass and luxury. The age of mass consumption opened up in the nineteenth and twentieth offered the availability of cheap mass-produced goods. At the same the department stores were quick so promote luxuries, and the availability of cheaper versions of luxuries gave rise to the notion of the democratization of luxury (Williams, 1982). While mass goods were often disposable or incorporated ‘built-in obsolescence,’ luxuries were crafted and singular, with the emphasis upon enduring quality, they would continue to retain their value both economically and culturally.[[38]](#footnote-38) The potential of new technologies such as 3-D printers, offers an intermediate category, goods which can be machine-produced, but which are singular and can be produced on demand at home. In addition to customization, consumer culture seeks to persuade people that the research and careful accumulation of knowledge of consumer goods will result in greater satisfaction. The full set of goods and services which promise new or valid experiences should be chosen with care as they amount to a lifestyle. That is, they need to be deliberately pursued and given due consideration for their overall style and level of appropriate compatibility; within consumer culture advice and publicity lifestyle is generally presented as an active transformative term, and not a set of characteristics people gradually and unknowingly accumulate over time (see Featherstone, 2007).

Consumer culture therefore demands the careful purchase, assemblage and care of sets of goods and services selected on the assumption that they will yield maximum satisfaction and care. Yet the goods also demand curating, they can become obsolete or outmoded (*démodé*), they need to be periodically assessed and evaluated with some relegated to the attic or the rubbish bin. At the same time, the turnover of goods is essential to keep the neoliberal global economy functioning. To this end, despite the risk of debt, consumers must be persuaded to continue actively consuming, to become aware of the range of new options and possibilities available, then make new purchases to maximise their satisfaction - a form of ‘calculating hedonism’ (Featherstone, 2007: ch. 2). In some ways this activity is similar to that of a curator; but more of a lifestyle curator. Like the museum or gallery curator, each assemblage or show, disturbs the previous classification. Assembling and presenting collections and curating lifestyles need careful work, along with continual research and evaluation.

**The Consequences of Consumption**

What are the consequences of the opening up of new forms of consumption? It can be argued that the shift towards 24/7 internet consumption is helping to change the rhythms of everyday life and producing new forms of social behaviour. There are numerous social consequences in terms of interacting with screens on a regular individual basis, and also the consequences of handling, selecting and digesting the vast quantities of information now available. What effect do these new modes have on existing forms of sociality and sociability? Secondly, there is the question how far the integration of internet and other forms of immaterial consumption into the activities of purchasing, researching and using goods, is really immaterial? What are the energy consequences and levels of waste generated by the new digital technologies?

In terms of the first question, the internet provides a massive increase in the scope and volume of information available, it opens up a vast archive of material. This can be conceived in terms of the problem that Georg Simmel referred to over a century ago in terms of the build up of objective culture (knowledge of the past, and the range of cultural media and forms such as novels, books, newspapers, magazines, scientific and art objects, image and data banks, etc., beyond the capacity of assimilation into individual subjectivity (Simmel, 1997a. 1997b, 1997c; Featherstone, 2000, 2006; see also Bell, 1973). It is impossible to read or be aware of the parameters of the archive and database the internet opens up, amounting to a veritable Borghesian Library of Babel. On the subjective level it is not just a question of how to navigate a sea of data, but also how to handle ‘the over-optioned life,’ with too many choices, raising the problem of selectivity and value choice. In addition there is the fateful wager our life paths, chosen or unchosen open up: the fact that our chosen path amounts to a bet on a particular course of life, which given the finitude of human life, necessarily eliminates the remaining time available for sampling alternatives. One of the aporias of consumer culture is that however much one searches and researches in order to make an informed choice, this eats into the time to live out the choice or try alternatives when a particular becomes deemed unsatisfying or boring. The new screen culture and mobile devices opens up the myriad of possibilities on a mundane daily basis.

There are further consequences of the internet screen culture in the way that it trains us to be attentive. We are encouraged to regularly check mobile devices anytime and anywhere. Checking devices for new messages, or aimlessly flicking through various windows, and refusing to shut down can become a compulsion. Indeed, it has been remarked that like television, which has been linked to autism and depression, internet viewing may produce similar disorders.[[39]](#footnote-39) A related consequence is the impoverishment of the capacity to daydream or engage in absent-minded introspective reflection. The tempo of reverie, of idly succumbing to random or loosely associative thought-chains or images, does not sit easily with 24/7 screen culture. This in turn can lead to a deterioration of memory and failing in the capacity to imagine or dream of another time.[[40]](#footnote-40) If we are seeking a forceful critique of the consequences of consumer culture and its dreams, then, for Crary (2013) one of the worst consequences is the elimination of dreams and wishes, of day-dreaming and musing, which leaves little space to creatively think beyond the performative repertoires, the repetitive cycles, of the internet screen culture.

A further consequence is diminishing of sociality. Computer screens tend to be individualised, they are designed for one person and their personal habits and preferences become incorporated into the device set-up and way of operating.[[41]](#footnote-41) Communication increasingly works through seriality, the transmission of individual tailored messages into the aggregate, conceived as an inchoate mass of isolated consumers with only a limited need for, or potential for, collective encounters or forms of sociality, with the dangers of increased loneliness and ‘generalized autism’ (Crary, 2013:120). It can be added that this seriality is increasingly tempered by profiling: the collection of individual data on subjects to enable marketing to match individual taste profiles (see discussion earlier section above).

In terms of the second question, the consequences of the shift from material to immaterial consumption, it could seem that the new information technologies such as the internet and the range of related mobile devices, is shifting the balance towards immaterial things and the ‘knowledge economy.’ Yet this ignores the material infrastructures and maintenance activities, which sustain the electronic networks ( Graham and Thrift, 2007).[[42]](#footnote-42) This means there are substantial quantities of ‘e-waste’ that is often exported from the Global North to the South with the recycle process involving toxic hazards. A desktop computer or mobile device often appears to be an efficient and stylish device incorporating a high level of design input. Yet the amount of energy expended to manufacture such devices can be surprisingly large, with a few microchips able to have as much embodied energy as a car (De Decker, 2009).[[43]](#footnote-43) Consumer culture, therefore, generates a massive amount of waste from so-called immaterial consumption. The rapid turnover of goods and the continuing throwaway mind-set within contemporary consumer culture means that we are only beginning to consider the implications of the accumulation of discarded things and their by-products.[[44]](#footnote-44) The drive for technological innovation decreases the half-life of products. Yet, the increasing embedding of microchips into an expanding number of objects and environments, means that the complexity of waste and the subsequent difficulties of recycling will grow.[[45]](#footnote-45)

In contradistinction to social theories of modernity, which apart from Marx hardly considered energy, or if they did, saw it as effectively an infinite resource, we currently have entered a phase of global life in which we have to relinquish the modernist Faustian view of nature as an endless resource (Urry, 2014). In short in the face of an expanding global population, over-exploitation of natural resources and climate change, we have to contemplate the transition to a post-carbon society that relies on renewable energy and recycled materials too. This suggests a profound social, economic and political challenge for humankind with planetary consequences for all life forms (Clark and Yusoff, 2017). Yet there are few current signs that this has been digested. Consumer culture as mentioned earlier is central to the global economy and held up by the vast majority of nation-state governments as the incentive and reward for economic growth, which is still part of the implicit social contract, which legitimates governance and furthers social integration.

Despite intermittent acknowledgement of the mounting scientific evidence about the need to heed climate change and curb carbon emissions, there are still many powerful nation-states who argue they have exceptional circumstances. Others too are committed to delivering the long-cherished consumer culture dreams to their populations. A life full of the latest goods, fashions and gadgets, remains powerfully seductive. In addition, the heroes and role models of consumer culture, the stars, celebrities and super-rich, enjoy unlimited consumption of luxuries, along with a high mobility lifestyle (private jet travel).[[46]](#footnote-46) Few politicians today, want to dismantle this system, one which they tend to benefit from. Yet the consequences of the consumer culture dream has been under attack since the 1960s counter culture, and the criticisms and the warning reports on the lack of sustainability of global resources (Club of Rome *Limits to Growth Report*) alongside the 1973 oil crisis. One of the voices at this time, Andre Gorz, presciently suggested: ‘“Better” may now mean “less”: creating as few needs as possible, satisfying them with the smallest possible expenditure of materials, energy, and work, and imposing the least burden on the environment’ (1980: 27; cited in Urry, 2014a). The inability to implement, a low expenditure and limited consumption society, in the intervening forty years of so, has been marked. Indeed, the problems of dealing with waste, carbon accumulations and climate change, have accumulated to a level that would have been impossible to imagine in the early 1970s.

It is now argued that the changes that face us, which are now becoming acknowledged result from irresponsible human intervention, which is of sufficient magnitude to amount to a new geological epoch. The tern Anthropocene, a period of human history which follows after the Holocene era, was developed by Paul Crutzen in 2002, to point to the way in which human activity had interfered with the geophysical forces of the planet, with the extraction of fossil fuels in the industrial revolution the significant marker event. Crutzen now locate the start of the Anthropocene era to a key event: the Trinity detonation of July 16 1945: the first nuclear explosion, which released invisible radioactive decay into the atmosphere. The new era is marked by the release of waste, in the form of nuclear fallout. It can, therefore, be argued that waste has become the most enduring and abundant trace of the human (Hird, 2017). In one sense the beginning of the Anthropocene era and the build up of waste are premised on human’s capacity to burn fossil fuels, in effect to turn rocks back into gases, to generate energy, which is now producing significant climate change (Dalby, 2017).

In short this is one of the consequences of consumer culture: the dreams end in waste, in the accumulation of planetary depletion and toxicity, which defines a certain narrowed-down limited future for humanity and the planet, which is far from the earlier optimism dreams of a modernity harnessed to an unlimited bountiful nature coupled with complete faith in the human capacity for mastery and the delivery of ingenious technological solutions. But now we face the possibility that our waste will be the end of us. At this juncture it could be useful to outline briefly a number of possible futures for consumer culture.

**Consumer Culture Futures**

1. *Continue Consuming, Scenario Planning and Business as Usual*

Firstly, it would seem to be very difficult to turn around, or alter the course of contemporary consumer capitalist societies. Some critics such as Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman have used metaphors such as a juggernaut out of control to attempt to depict a world recklessly accumulating global risks (Beck, 1993, 1996, 2010, Beck and Levy, 2013; Giddens, 2011; Bauman, 2000). This is also a phase in which the state has retreated from direct involvement in a number of areas of social life; in part to reduce budget expenditure and in part to open up domains for private business competition under the banner of efficiency.[[47]](#footnote-47) Attempts to rely on the business community to deal with waste and climate change, or the carbon trading schemes, in which excessive carbon expenditure in the Global North is offset through financing ecological schemes in the Global South, have met with very limited success. Indeed, there are many voices arising now, which bemoan the lack of a single institution to cover and manage the various ecological issues, which preoccupy us (Latour, 2017). Despite the evidence, the implementation of this type of institution, or a concerted international response, continues to be denied for a range of pragmatic reasons. Instead, we are offered limited short-term contingency planning.[[48]](#footnote-48)

2. *The Search for Alternatives: Reduced Consumption, Conservation and Environmentalism*

In the wake of the collapse of state socialist regimes after 1989 in many parts of the world, socialism and communism as viable alternatives to capitalism became discredited. A particular western triumphalist interpretation of global history that had culminated in ‘the end of history,’ was proclaimed.[[49]](#footnote-49) The logic of history had delivered the victory of the superior market philosophy of free trade and competition. For some this may not necessarily be linked to universal peace. A more Darwinist view of powerful nation-states locked in international competitive struggles for limited resources, in some cases through the use of force still held sway for those of a more Weberian persuasion. A counter-view to both these positions entails the creation of an active global public. It is difficult to envisage the generation of global public opinion, given the limited opportunities for people to interact and develop common agendas. But some would follow the logical of the Habermasian public sphere scaled up from the nation-state level (Featherstone, 2001) and the development of a form of global opinion capable of forcing governments to acknowledge climate change and face up to the need for radical resource and energy depletion along with a more conservationist way of life. One of the main proponents of this view is Ulrich Beck who argues that a process of cosmopolitanization from below is emerging globally (Beck, 2002, 2010; Beck and Levy, 2013; Featherstone, 2002, Hulme, 2010; Mythen, 2013).[[50]](#footnote-50) Public opinion shifts will take place, with wealth redefined and new forms of freedom, power, creativity and the invention of new institutions, new ways of production and ways of consumption sensitive to the globalization of waste (Beck, 2010:262).[[51]](#footnote-51) Beck has painted a big vision based on the assumption that we are moving into a second modernity, the risk society, which will generate new institutions and transformations to take us out of the old industrial modernization framework, but the question is how might this work on the everyday level?

There are others who if not following the word of Beck, certainly write in the spirit of Beck, and see a shift to more restricted forms of consumption and self-limitation based on a simpler and more frugal post-consumerist lifestyle entailing new ethical modes of conduct and responsibility (Featherstone, 2010c). Zygmunt Bauman, for example, asks the question in the title of one of his books: *Does Ethics have Chance in a World of Consumers?* (2008). For Bauman the danger is we pursue our selfish consumer lifestyles and dreams to the detriment of our capacity to empathise, to engage in sociability, dialogue and care for others. In short the excesses of consumer culture need to be anchored in new forms of ethical conduct. Currently this could be seen as a predominantly idealistic dream generated in fractions of the middle classes. To date it has had minimal electoral impact, with only limited inroads in countries like Germany, Sweden or New Zealand where the environmental and green political support is stronger. The problem of implementing new forms of ethical conduct, which involves commitment to care for the other, for other life forms, nature and objects, entails major shifts in values. It is not easy to change values, or implement an ethic, even with a strong education programme. After the failed experiments at engineering or creating new values, over the last two centuries, few today would wish to follow Saint-Simon, one of the founders of sociology’s optimism that one can build a new religion or ethics, like one can build a bridge. In addition to the powerful effects of consumer individualization, suggests that new technological developments such as the internet and other mobile technologies are difficult to contain. They offer forms of empowerment and independence, which have widespread appeal, but increase the volume of information in circulation, including ‘false news,’ making the faith in the ‘power of the better argument’ difficult to uphold.[[52]](#footnote-52)

3. *Global governance and the emergence of a global state.*

The possibility of global governance in which sovereignty is vested in some form of supra-nation-state entity which would have the power and resources to disciple business, organizations and nation-states which did not cut back on carbon emissions and implement low emission consumption lifestyles. In its ultimate form this would be a global state, most likely based on a federation. Governance would occur through the essentials of statehood identified by Max Weber and Norbert Elias: the monopoly of the means of violence and the monopoly of taxation.[[53]](#footnote-53) Historically states have tended to emerge in a figuration of competing nation-states with nationalism, the sense of common belonging as an ‘imagined community,’ central to the state formation process. As many have pointed out, it would be hard to scale this up to the global level.[[54]](#footnote-54)

4. *Beyond neoliberalism*

We have mentioned the ways in which neoliberalism is tightly linked to consumer culture with a large proportion of the GDP of the most advanced economies dependent on consumer spending. To reduce consumption would be exceedingly difficult, not least in terms of people’s belief in their right to spend their money on whatever they want as one of their entitlements and rewards for work. Restricting consumption, say in terms of taxes on transportation or high carbon goods, could be seen as increasing austerity and unfairly targeting those in the lower regions of society who have limited ability to cope. Restrictions on purchasing, or any form of rationing could further threaten the legitimacy of the system, especially if the rich and super-rich were seen to continue consuming without limit. Today the rich sometimes justify their excessive wealth in terms of their superior ability and talent: the just rewards for the winners in a society that vaunts competition, enterprise and creativity. As yet there is only limited critique of their lifestyles, although there is a good deal of scepticism that their excessive financial rewards are deserved.[[55]](#footnote-55) In short the rich and super-rich seem to enjoy a high degree of immunity from laws, which apply to ordinary people. Avoiding taxation has become a specialist art for the superrich, through the intricate web of offshore tax havens. The response of many governments around the world has often been not to condemn this, but to openly compete to welcome in the rich for their alleged economic advantages in their capacity to make deals, mergers and stimulate innovation and creative growth.[[56]](#footnote-56) The super-rich’s lack of allegiance, mobility and familiarity with a variety of cultures, then, can make them ‘the true cosmopolitans,’ (Bauman, 2008), who are welcome in practically any country.

The rich and the super-rich are often presented as obsessed with time, especially saving time (cf. Linder, 1970). In contrast to the unemployed urban poor who often have to waste time, queuing for benefit payments or charity handouts, the rich seldom have to wait. In effect they are locked into the 24/7 capitalist rhythm of life that does not provide time to pause. Or indeed, time to look around and see if there are others who need helping or are suffering misfortune (Crary, 1013:125). It leads to a lifestyle in which the care of others is minimized or impossible. This tight schedule with every moment purposefully employed, the high-tech friendly spaces, the latest communication and surveillance devices, contrasts with the portraits of ‘time affluent societies’ which encourage sociability, reciprocity, care and a certain amount of unregulated drift (see Baudrillard, 1998:151; Featherstone, 2007). Indeed, it can be argued that the super-rich no longer live in society in any meaningful sense.[[57]](#footnote-57) But today’s elites do not need the equivalent of court society, to being confined to a tightly-knit social world with its rivalries and suspicions, forever open to gossip and surveillance, engaged in a complex set of strategies to maintain their prestige and status, under the gaze of the powerful figure of the monarch or sovereign. Rather, they have the private jet fuelled and ready to take off to a wide range of destinations around the world. While there may be a certain amount of philanthropy, or ‘philanthrocapitalism’ (Bishop and Green, 2008) engaged in through setting up private foundations, it is on their own terms and in tune with their own priorities and involves little sense of obligation to others’ agendas.

5. *Generosity, Gifts and General Economics*

There seems to be little way to recycle their financial advantages for more general benefit: rather it stays within their own chosen priorities, be it their charitable foundation, ownership of arts or sporting bodies, or family dynasty’s agenda. It is in this context that the quest for radically alternative notions of finance becomes popular. One alternative is Bataille’s formulation of a general economy. At one point he pointedly remarks: ‘it is not necessity but its contrary, “luxury,” that presents living matter and mankind with their fundamental problems’ (Bataille 1988: 12; McGoey, 2018). The display of luxury, the accumulation of wealth and the exclusive use of property, along with the assumptions that somehow it is a just reward for talent and hard work, should not be seen as the legitimation of a fairer social order based on equality of opportunity, but rather, the persistence of wealth itself can create and sustains lasting social inequalities and a range of social problems.[[58]](#footnote-58) Bataille refers to the latter economy (what we today understand as neoliberalism) as a restricted economy. Against this restricted economy with its utilitarian mind-set and accumulation of economic value, property and waste, a general economy is premised upon generosity, upon the expenditure of the accumulated surplus. Often this can take the form of festivals, where the surplus is collectively consumed and then a whole new cycle of accumulation initiated. This destruction of the unproductive value that has been stockpiled, Bataille (1991) held was a way of getting rid of the ‘accursed share’ (la part maudite). In some societies, this can lead to destructive prestige contests as in potlatch, but it can also lead to positive aspects of gift giving.[[59]](#footnote-59)

In modern societies the restricted economy can result in stockpiling and massive accumulations of surplus with the excess used in catastrophic outpourings of energy as in warfare. A more benign alternative would be to expend the surplus in festivals, or the arts. For Bataille that the concentration and distribution of economic surplus was central to economic thought and it is interesting to see that after relatively isolated voices like Veblen, JM Keynes, C Wright Mills, and Galbraith in the past, there has been a return to issues of wealth distribution and inequality as we find around the work of Thomas Piketty (2014) and the growing interest in the contribution of the super-rich (Featherstone, 2013a, 2014b). Bataille can also be located in this tradition with his interest in in the Marshall Plan n the wake of the Second World War, which brought him very close to liberal thinkers such as Keynes (see Bataille, 1991; McGoey, 2018). For Bataille the Second World War concluded with the United States becoming the richest nation-state in the world, yet for it to prosper it needed to sacrifice its own riches to get rid of the potential negative consequences of the accumulated wealth. The Marshall Plan for Bataille was an ideal vehicle for this and could reverse some of the negative consequences of the 1944 Bretton Woods agreements which furthered the global restricted economy and in particular the self-interest and domination of the United States. In effect economic surpluses would be recycled in the form of gifts, to the benefit of all globally, and of course this would feedback for the benefit of the United States too through the increased volume of trade. In this context it is interesting to note that Naomi Klein (2015) in her new book argues we need a response which is ‘a Marshall Plan for the Earth’ to deal with climate change.

Bataille’s thinking here chimes with recent discussions of a debt jubilee and the emergence of various Jubilee Debt coalitions (Graeber, 2011), as well as the new social movements such as Occupy and the Indignados, which target the financial and banking system and advocate a very different form of economy. Currently financiers, bankers and the super rich enjoy a privileged status and high level of immunity from prosecution (see Lorey, 2014; Papastergiadis and Esche, 2014).[[60]](#footnote-60) The argument is that the periodic dispensation with the massively accumulating levels of national sovereign debt and personal debts, that sustain our current neoliberal economy, could open up another space for a different type of economy with different priorities (see also Lazzarato, 2012). The problem is that the shift towards greater inequalities and the predilection of the super-rich and rich to preserve and expand their wealth and ensure the continuity of the existing global consumer capitalist system, only encourages further social discontent and waste of talent, as well as increasing the chances of planetary climate change disaster.[[61]](#footnote-61)

6. The Pursuit of *Happiness*

A life lived around the accumulation of wealth misses the ephemeral nature of wealth and its inevitable dissipation. Bataille (1979) reminds us that all wealth, like all matter will inevitably decay. The avoidance of coming to terms with death and the concern to extend the lifespan through longevity technologies, including cryonics and nanotechnology, in the quest to overcome mortality and live forever, is currently fascinating the super-rich and is the source of major investment.[[62]](#footnote-62) Death is seemingly pushed away and no longer hangs over life.[[63]](#footnote-63) Images of gruesome deaths abound in the media and popular culture with the level of graphic realism increasingly heightened; but although they have a certain fascination, they are generally distanced from the everyday experience of most people in which we rarely encounter death, or see a dead body, or minister to the dying (Elias, 1985; Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991). Certainly there is little that would seem to make the rich give up their fortunes to the poor and focus on saving their own souls, as has been the case in some previous historical eras. Here we think of the fellow feeling, which can be generated by the sense of contingency and fate which propels some up and others down the social scale, which can lead to a sense of contingency and solidarity with others that manifests itself in care. This is a sentiment that in some cases was extended beyond the human to all living beings (St. Francis of Assisi, being a good example).

Some people may of course not be impressed by the call to give up their riches and lead a simple life of austerity and faith in God, even though this is a powerful message from the New Testament and lives of Christian saints and martyrs, with strong resonances in other traditions such as Buddhism and Islam. It does not sit easily with consumer culture. Yet there are also good social reasons for curbing wealth and increasing taxation on the rich. Higher levels of social inequality have been shown to actually impede economic growth.[[64]](#footnote-64) The expanding levels of inequalities since the 1970s is taking us back to levels found in the late 19th and early 20th century (the Gilded Age in the United States and Belle Époque in France) an earlier phase in what has been referred to as ‘incredible rise of the one percent’ (Piketty, 2014). In addition people’s sense of well-being tends often to be higher when levels of inequality are lower.[[65]](#footnote-65)

There is a basic assumption within neoliberal consumer economies, that the more income, wealth and purchasing power people achieve the more things they can buy and the happier they will be.[[66]](#footnote-66) Nevertheless, there is a good deal of controversy over the sources of happiness and a good deal of counter-evidence (see Freeland, 2012) and more recently there has been the construction of various ‘happiness indexes’[[67]](#footnote-67) as well as the United Nations adopting a non-binding resolution in 2011 that happiness should be included in development indicators (Buncombe, 2012). Happiness may well be ephemeral, but it is a persistent aura hanging over consumer culture leisure activities, practices and the use of goods. Yet the promise of valid experience, of encountering something eventful and absorbing, which generates strong affective sensations and feelings that stimulate recollection and memories, can also be intangible and difficult to actualise via the consumer culture modalities of life.[[68]](#footnote-68)

# Two final comments on this are in order. Firstly, there would seem to be a trend among the rich and those possessing lesser amounts of wealth, to preferring the purchase of experience to goods or possessions. The once in a lifetime type of vacation to Machu Picchu, or Bhutan is within their reach, and available on a regular basis. There are those gurus who argue strongly that the purpose of accumulating wealth should be to enjoy experiences, with work cut down to a minimum as is the case in the bestselling book *The 4-Hour Work Week: Escape the 9-5, Live Anywhere and Join the New Rich* by Timothy Ferris (2011). In one way this offers to go beyond the harried leisure class idea of status orientated, other-directed consumers amassing goods and prestige. It holds out the promise of a certain degree of ‘time affluence.’ On the other hand, it still involves various forms of consumer purchasing: air travel, equipment, hotel stays, restaurant meals, local transport etc., all involve service labour and goods; there are carbon costs and planetary consequences of the desire to leave home and experience the world. Of course not all travel and vacations need to be luxurious and high carbon jet travel. It is possible to walk, or move by local buses or trains: slower forms of travel provide a different rhythm of life and give more latitude for experiences.

# Secondly, this takes us into the great outdoors. One of the many significant points in the genealogies of consumer culture was the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was moved from Hyde Park to Crystal Place, South London. It housed the latest technologies along with simulations and representative elements from all the world’s cultures, starting a trend followed by the spate of subsequent exhibitions in the nineteenth century and later taken up in the second half of the twentieth century in Walt Disney World, Orlando’s ‘World Showcase of Cultures.’ For Peter Sloterdijk (2013) in his book *In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalization* he argues that we now live in the interior, with the glass and steel great exhibition, being a first opening to this new era. This is seen as highly detrimental to our sense of creativity and adventure and weakening the capacity to live as men. A further book, *You Must Change Your Life* (Sloterdijk, 2014), takes these sentiments further with the stark message that we must constantly quest for new experiences and ring the changes at regular intervals. The quest for experience then is part of the urgent critique of consumer culture and seen as the way towards a meaningful valid life. Yet it is also something easily marketed, packaged, and rolled out surrounded by advice books, simulations and the constant flow of images of digital screen culture. It is non too easy to find a way beyond or out of consumer culture.

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1. Some would see the communications revolution as a second industrial revolution, or even a third industrial revolution with the second being the phase from 1870-1914 dependent on the increasing use of technology. For advocacy of the internet as stimulating a new bottom-up industrial revolution in manufacturing (3D printers etc.) see Anderson (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As Weber (2001:154) remarked ‘Christian asceticism... strode into the market-place of life, slammed the door of the monastery behind it, and undertook to penetrate just that daily routine of life with its methodicalness, to fashion it into a life in the world, but neither of nor for this world.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a critique of the Weberian position see Colin Campbell (1987) the *Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In May 2017 it stood at 69.45 per cent - see US Personal Consumption Expenditure in *Y charts* <http://ycharts.com/indicators/personal_consumption_gdp> accessed 7.7.17. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See ‘The Mint Countries: Next economic giants?’ *BBC Magazine* 6 Jan 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25548060> accessed 5.4.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It is increasingly difficult to continue to use terminology such as ‘the West,’ the Global North, Global South etc. The rich and super-rich are now in all countries, not just the West, leading to a focus on inequalities within, not necessarily between countries. The additional problem is the mobility of the rich and super-rich and difficulty in establishing their residence patterns. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For discussions of neoliberalism see Davies, 2014a, 2014b; Gane, 2013, 2015. There has also been a good deal of discussion about the extent to which Foucault sympathised with or opposed neoliberalism (see Gane, 2015; Davis 2014b). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Encyclopaedia Britannica entries for Cockaigne. See also the satirical Kildare ‘The Land of Cockaygne’ (circa 1330) critical of the local Cistercian abbey. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Elias (1983) suggests one of the powerful dreams in court societies was to escape the formality and elaborate consumption rituals for the simple virtues of peasant life – a theme taken up in romantic novels and plays about shepherds and shepherdesses. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The valuable blue dye, indigo, tended to be more valuable than gold (Taussig, 2008), pointing to the importance placed on fashion and appearance in early modern times. See also Braudel (1981) on the emergence of the fashion system. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. If European haute cuisine originated in the French court of Louis XIV, it had occurred earlier in China in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Ming was an era of governmental reform, social improvement and trade with the rest of the world in which China almost industrialized. Court life boosted by the building of the Beijing Forbidden City, involved display, splendour and finery. It is said that one of the Ming Emperors never ate the same dish twice in his life. Certainly the opening up of trade under Admiral He facilitated the scouring of the empire and South East Asia for exotic fruit and vegetables and invention of new dishes such as bird-nest soup (allegedly originally from swifts’ nests from Borneo). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The ability to make the themed image seem real, or to actualise the imaginary, is something which was developed in world fairs and international exhibitions in the second half of the nineteenth century with national pavilions designed to replicate key elements of particular cultures. This became more developed in twentieth century themes parks such as Disney World, in which fictional entities such as the Swiss Robinson family house could be replicated or simulated, so that the public could step inside and explore full-scale hyperreal versions (Simmel, 1991; Baudrillard, 1983; Bryman, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Mica Nava’s (2002) description of the London store Selfridges use of the Ballet Russes’ performance of Sheherazade just before World War One, to produce in-store themed spectacles which also encouraged women customers to enthusiastically purchase turbans and harem trousers and play out the dream. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For a discussion of the ‘Hollywood ideal’ with its images of youth, fitness and beauty along with the growth of fan magazines based on the wide interest in the backstage and off-duty lives of the stars: their grooming, fitness and beauty tips (see Featherstone, 1982; Hepworth and Featherstone, 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This was especially the case in the Long Depression of 1873-96, and not just the United States proved attractive: migrants from the Ukraine, Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe were attracted to Brazil via handbills distributed in many parts of Eastern Europe to the extent that the phenomenon became known as ‘Brazil fever.’ For discussions of the US as a land of plenty and abundance and how this impacted on advertising see (Leach, 1993; Jackson Lears, 1994, 1998). It also occurred *within* the US, in the 1930s Great Depression with the banks foreclosure of farms, Oklahoma farmers were lured to California, by handbills depicting succulent peaches and the good life in the land of plenty (see John Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath).*  [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is how Scott Fitzgerald describes Gatsby, the central character in *The Great Gatsby* (p6] and most of the people in the novel are full of hope. Yet Gatsby sacrificed himself to fulfil the dream and get into the upper class, but ultimately fails. See the synopsis of *The Great Gatsby* [www.ovtg.de/3\_arbeit/englisch/gatsby/**dream**.html](http://www.ovtg.de/3_arbeit/englisch/gatsby/dream.html) - accessed 6.2.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The opposite case to the achievement success stories would be movies like *Dawn of the Dead*, (1978, director George Romero) set in an mundane suburban shopping centre taken over by zombies, with the consumers endlessly circulating, unable to escape. Repetition, closure and consumer nightmare. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. American dreams were also very important on European youth culture, especially the Sixties Generation (see discussion in Frith, 1983). See also Rosen (1972) on movies and the American dream. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Prior to the factory system, families working at home in the pre-industrial putting out system, receiving yarn to weave on a weekly basis and were paid for completed work only, so that

    work, leisure and everyday life were not strongly differentiated. This casual attitude carried over into the early factory system with high absenteeism (many workers observed ‘Saint Monday’ and ‘Saint Tuesday’ – i.e. they were not motivated or too drunk to turn up to work after the weekend. It proved difficult to convert a rural workforce who had enjoyed long periods of non-work, chatting or day-dreaming. Clocks came in very gradually, initially only showing the hour hand and started to proliferate with the industrial system. By the nineteenth century many workingmen had internalized the time rhythms to the extent that they possessed pocket-watches. The introduction of the factory system meant people living close to the workplace responded to the sound of the factory hooter, which encouraged new habits. The old tradition did not decline uniformly, and in some areas it continued and flourished. The various bohemian (artists and fellow-travellers who had irregular work patterns and often worked at night and slept by day) and counter culture movements (1960s hippies) also attacked conventional work and time-discipline, seeking alternative work rhythms and time structures (see Siegel, 1986; Pels and Crebas, 1988 ; Abrams and McCulloch, 1975). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Foucault noted the systematic application of disciplinary techniques in a range of sites: the prison, the hospital, the school and the barracks, which were based on a new architecture of visibility, along with the differentiation and documentation of bodies. In effect the undifferentiated mass of the people became increasingly confined, regulated and controlled through the disciplinary and normalizing techniques of state power. In addition to this set of disciplinary technologies to order and control the body, Foucault identified a second ‘regulative technology of life,’ in which people were analysed on the population level (see Featherstone, 2014a). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Modern governance took the population as its primary object, and through statistical knowledge was able to analyse and conceptualise the constituent parts: birth rates, death rates forecasting and estimates. This newly analysed collective body of the population became made productive through the development of the science of economics in the eighteenth century, with the subsequent successful arguments of liberalism, Adam Smith and laissez-faire and utilitarianism (see Featherstone, 2013a, 2014b). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. One example being the see-through interface, as occurs with Google glasses. There is also the development of gesture-based computing where a nod of the head or blink of the eye serves as the command. Screens with voice commands and touch-screen devices could well be rendered obsolete. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. According to CredCards.com United Kingdom, 75% of all spending in the UK retail sector was made using plastic cards at the end of November 2013 (UK Cards Association Annual Report 2014). Payment card spending amounted to £141.9bn during Q3 2014, representing an annual growth rate of 6.6% <http://uk.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/uk-britain-credit-debit-card-statistics-international.php> accessed 21.2.2015. People in the UK owed £1.463tn in total personal debt at the end of November 2014. This is up from £1.43tn at the end of November 2013 -- an extra £591 per UK adult. The average total debt per household -- including mortgages -- was £55,384 in November 2014. Total lending to individuals increased by £3.3bn in November 2014, compared to the average monthly increase of £3bn over the previous six months. The 3-month annualised and 12-month growth rates were both 2.4%. At the end of 2013, credit card debt accounted for 4% of total personal borrowing; mortgages accounted for 89%.Total outstanding credit card debt averaged £57.4b a month. Unsecured consumer debt, which is mostly made up of credit card debt, almost tripled between 1993 and 2013, reaching nearly £160bn in November 2013. The UK is the biggest card payments market in the European Union, accounting for more than 30% of all EU card spending, and 73% of the EU credit card market. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Richard Webber has been a central figure in the development of geodemographics (see Burrows and Gane, 2006; Beer and Burrows. 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. According to the Centre for Retail Research, sales in the UK, Germany, France, Sweden, The Netherlands, Italy, Poland and Spain are expected to grow from £132.05 bn [€156.28 bn] in 2014 to £156.67 bn [(€185.39 bn] in 2015 (+18.4%), reaching £185.44 bn (€219.44 bn) in 2016. In 2015, overall online sales are expected to grow by 18.4% (same as 2014), but 13.8% in the U.S. on a much larger total. These figures relate only to *retail spending*, defined as sales of merchandise to the final consumer. In the US, online sales are expected to rise from $306.85 bn [£189.26] in 2014 to $349.20 bn [£215.39 bn] in 2015 and $398.78 bn [£245.96 bn] a year later. This independent study for 2015-16 has been funded by RetailMeNot, Inc., the world's largest digital coupon marketplace with 655 mn customer visits to its sites in 2014. The RetailMeNot, Inc. portfolio of coupon and deal websites includes RetailMeNot.com, VoucherCodes.co.uk, Deals.com, Bons-de-Reduction.com, Deals2Buy.com and Poulpeo.com. Within the EU market the UK is expected to grow to £52.25bn sales in 2015 an increase of 16%, followed by Germany with £44.61bn, a growth of 23%. Poland’s growth 2015 is estimated to be £4.33bn, an increase of 21%. <http://www.retailresearch.org/onlineretailing.php> accessed 19.2.2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Some conventional stores are fighting back and trying to utilize digital technologies within the stores and also encourage customers to interface with online material and their own website pages on Facebook and other sites for an enhanced consumer experience. Within the stores digital devices in the form of screen/mirrors in changing cubicles enable women to see not only the dress they are wearing, but their previous saved collection of items on the stores website, with an additional Facebook link to enable them to post the composite digital images to solicit the views of friends and family (Coleman, 2012). This response to the expansion of internet shopping is an attempt to create a new hybrid enhanced shopping experience and younger customers in particular seem enthusiastic. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In our earlier discussion we emphasised Foucault’s (2008; see discussion in Featherstone, 2013b) focus was not just on panopticism (disciplinary control of bodies), but also Biopolitics, governing the population aggregate, with the state utilizing demographic data to increase its populations’ productivity (increasing the birth rate through better maternal and infant care etc.). Importantly, the statistical information was not just about people, but also about goods, the movement of commodities (the shiploads of corn arriving at the ports, the number of cartloads being ferried to cities, etc.), which furnished highly useful data, which lead to the birth of economics. Indeed, the two became connected when in eighteenth century Europe through the Physiocrats in France (Quesnay et al) and especially liberalism and then Utilitarianism in England (Adam Smith, Mandeville, Bentham et al), it was assumed that the most efficient form of governance involved laissez-faire, let the market work itself and encourage competition and minimal state interference. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The sophistication of the data sets is impressive and puts into shade the traditional social research methods with sample surveys, and also the type of data accumulated by governments in their population census gathering exercises, that occur each decade. Now there is a new social life of methods outside the academy, with social science quantitate data techniques such as sampling and census surveys seen as far inferior in terms of energy expended, completeness of data sets and a host of other factors (Ruppert et al, 2013). Many of these new databases are now vastly superior to those constructed by social science research in terms of their extent, scope and real-time updating, and provide much more fine-grained information about the consumption, lifestyle and cultural values of different groups (Burrows and Gane, 2006; Beer and Burrows, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. If, for example, I email a colleague in Sofia using Google gmail, I will notice out of the corner of my eye a series of small advertisements for hotels and flights to Sofia have popped up. Apparently the internet providers bid against each other in terms of fractions of a pence in real time to be able to place the appropriate advert in the margin of my internet pages, based upon data analytics which not only reveal my profile and buying habits, but set of tastes which enables them to make a decision (or rather one of their machines to make a decision) on the probability that I will at some point make a purchase. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The fact that Facebook was valued at $104bn just before floatation and Mark Zuckerberg in his late 20s rapidly accumulated a personal fortune of some $35bn. Or the fact that Google paid $1.65bn for YouTube. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See Wendy Marr ‘Zoella, Tanya Burr and the UK’s YouTube Superstars,’ *Telegraph,* 16 August 2014; Alice Audley ‘Social Media Sensations: Top UK Beauty YouTubers,’ *Telegraph* 3 April 2014. There are also articles on the internet such as ’12 Social Media Secrets from World’s Top Superstars, Tia Dobi, *Social Media Examiner*, April 6 2010 full of tips to ‘take your social media marketing to max.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Some things are immediately consumed on purchase (an ice-cream in the park on a hot summer’s day demands immediate consumption), other objects may be put away for years before being brought out to consumer (the bottle of Chateau Lafite 2005 Bordeaux wine may last 50 years before it is opened). Valuable paintings may be carefully displayed and protected by security systems to be gazed at with reverence along with the comforting expectation that they are constantly gaining in value. Other things have more mundane uses (see Miller, 2008) . The internet encourages researching and comparison of things in terms of value and price. But other items may be defined as special luxury presents to oneself so that price is less relevant and the time spent learning how to use the good is not seen as wasted (e.g. the new Porsche sports-car may need extra driving lessons to learn how to handle it). Some goods, then, may open up a prestigious learning process, which brings with it numerous social and psychological benefits (Boscagli, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The term quasi-object was initially developed by Michel Serres (1982, 1995); see also discussion in Brown, 2002; Schiermer, 2011). Latour also refers to the impact of quasi-objects on subjects and raises the question whether subjects are becoming quasi-subjects. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Affective strategies are evident in department store, boutique, restaurant and café interior design (with attention give to lighting, music, mood to create atmosphere and ambience), but also evident in advertisements, especially television, cinema and online (attention to imagery, colour, text layout and choice of language, music, voice and mood). Major transnational corporations in the cosmetic industry for example, engage in careful attention to the affective dimensions of their products in terms of in-house department store make-up bars, the shape and materials of products, the uniforms of assistants, the advertising imagery, use of celebrity endorsement and choice of leading film-makers to produce advertisements etc. (see Oyama, 2011). For a discussion of affect and body image in consumer culture see Featherstone (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. This in turn has diminished job security and remuneration leading to more part-time, flexible and temporary work along with a range of hybrid employer/employee statuses on the part of a group of people who are ‘neither wage-earners, nor entrepreneurs nor employees,’ but share greater insecurity and ‘precarity’ (Gill and Pratt 2008; Lazzarato, 2012:53, McRobbie 2011). A ‘winner takes all’ total mobilisation and unsustainable level of self-belief, sacrifice and entrepreneurialism is demanded of workers in this sector who increasingly have to put up with a quasi-proletarianization and forms of flexible home-working as the internet becomes the increasing means of work-connectivity. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. The increased capacity to record experiences and post material on the internet has opened up new forms of blogs, social media sites and archives (Featherstone, 2006; Beer and Burrows, 2013). High street stores also are keen to use the new technologies such as ‘digital mirrors’ (a combination of a real mirror and digital screen in changing rooms to enable women to upload images of themselves to Facebook websites in order to get opinions of their friends and family about the suitability of potential purchases. (see Coleman, 2013). There is also a darker side via phone-camera filming, sharing and eve internet posting video clips of violent assaults or sexual offences (Schwarz, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Biometric devices, embedded chips in people, pets are also one aspect of the internet of things. along with wearable computing (smart clothes which can also adapt to environmental conditions or wearer’s mood) will produce a network that will enable greater monitoring and interactivity of things as they move around. But also greater sensory enhancement devices – cf the new 4HD cameras which have twice the capacity of human vision in the dark. Google glasses, fulfilling some of the science fiction speculations of William Gibson’s cyberspace, also point in this direction. (see Kuchler, 2008; Anderson and Lee, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. A Savile Row suit is a good example of a customized luxury good. It is not just a fine piece of tailoring, but also meant to instil confidence in its wearer and the tailors make every effort to educate their customers (who can pay £10-20,000 for the suit) into knowledge of every aspect of the quality product they are getting. Indeed, many customers, especially the nouveau riche do report that the magic confidence does actually occur (personal comment from Javier Caletrio). This is also the case with high-end luxury fashion brands, which seek to present their clothes as art and enhance the charisma of the designers (Dion and Arnould, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. As Crary (2013: 87) comments ‘Even the quasi-addictiveness associated with internet pornography and violent computer games seems to lead quickly to a flattening of response and the replacement of pleasure with the need for repetition.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Indeed, the internet can be seen as an enhancement of a process which gathered pace from the 1840s onwards, which tightened the associative relationship between image production machines and consumer goods. The new image making industries sought to replicate and replace the human capacity to retain retinal after-images – to retain after images or bring visions into focus with one’s eyes closed (Crary, 2013:106). The new image making technologies went through a series of shifts, in terms of quality of images with the production of high quality chromolithographs a significant step (Ewen, 1988:37ff), as well as the development of collective spaces for spectators to view images, the series of form: panoramas, dioramas, etc that preceded cinema; (Crary, 1990, 2001; Schivelbusch, 1986; Friedberg, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See discussion in Cubitt (1998) on the ways computer screens or terminals could have been designed for more collective viewing. Collective viewing of sports programmes or national or global events in collective situations, in offices, student halls, bars etc.,’ tends to provide a totally different viewing experience and in some situations it is possible for a quasi-religious sense of the sacred to be generated (see discussion of Katz’s work in Featherstone, 2007: ch. 8). But in many everyday public and quasi-public situations, people tend to be absorbed with their mobile devices, and interpersonal sensitivities tend to be switched low. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The internet depends on a surprising amount of hardware such as cabling – the transoceanic cables, for example, are vital for not only the internet, but the also the financial markets (Toscano, 2013). In addition, there is the turnover of computer hardware, the constant need to purchase new upgrade models, with companies like Apple bringing out new models or upgrades on an annual basis. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. It is difficult to get reliable data about the energy used in the production phase to make a desktop pc or mobile phone. De Decker (2009) remarks the ‘embodied energy of the memory chip alone already exceeds the energy consumption of a laptop during its life expectancy of 3 years.’ There is also the energy and Wi-Fi needed to make the devices functional. If we add in constant upgrading performance costs, energy use costs and safe ecological disposal costs, then we get the total carbon footprint of internet devices (see Walsh, 2013). In addition, cars nowadays contain increasing numbers of computer chips and it has been estimated that around 40 percent of the cost of a vehicle now comes from the electronic components (Hedge et al, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. In some sectors such as home design and furnishings it may be possible to encourage small-scale artisanal sustainable forms of production, but for the moment this looks to be something for a minor sector of the middle classes. See discussion of ethical consumption below. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. One solution would be more biodegradable materials and recycling. Currently in the UK we have to separate household rubbish, yet around a third of recycle waste is shipped abroad to China, Korea, Indonesia and other places. An estimated 250,000 tonnes a year of used electronic and electrical products is sent to Ghana, Nigeria, India, Pakistan and China, generally dismantled by unprotected workers, often children under the guise that these used goods are ‘charitable donations’ which allows them to elude safety laws (Moses, 2013). China is the leading importer of waste, including plastic waste and also is the leading country that allows plastic waste to reach the oceans. The infamous Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a floating mass of non-biodegradable plastic, is a small part of the estimated 5 trillion pieces of plastic floating in the world’s oceans -anticipated to double over the next decade (Sample, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. This is a lifestyle based on not only efficient forms of wealth generation, but also tax avoidance through offshore tax havens) (Caletrio & Birtchnell, 2013; Featherstone, 2013a, 2014b; Urry, 2014b). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The calls for reduction of the state role is not new - US president Calvin Coolidge remarked back in 1925 ‘the business of America is business.’ The birth of neoliberalism from the 1930s onwards can be seen as partly motivated by the desire to counter the expansion of centralised planning by governments along with various forms of keynsianism, socialism and totalitarianism, which were significant in the 1930s and immediate postwar era up to the 1970s (Gane, 2013; Peck, 2012, Mirowski and Plehwe, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. In the late 20th and 21st centuries, there has been an increasing reject of long-term planning in the light of the complexities, turbulence and unexpected events, on the increase around the planet. On one level this could be said to arise from the difficulty of managing a divided and fractious configuration of interests, as the number of significant participants in global politics, international finance and business grow: the larger the number of players involved in a game, the greater the possibility of unstable alliances, shifts of opinion and power, which can potentially create more uncertainty. This is especially the case as the world moved from a bipolar system (the Cold War and ‘the American Century,’ to a multipolar system, leading to a more unstable geopolitics more difficult to govern. The ecological shifts arising from the accumulation of waste and climate change we have already spoken of, are generating more unpredictable and volatile weather, whose ramifications on state action are uncertain and difficult to predict, or plan for in the long-term (Urry, 2010). The response, has been the growth of ‘scenario planning’ the emphasis is upon flexibility and the capacity to strategically plan in an unstable environment, which better fits the business and financial mentality with limited objectives and strategic horizons. Scenario planning is based on games theory and involves the construction of numerous simulational models, which are designed to better further decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and unknowable contingencies (Cooper, 2010). It has been influential in business, but also on the US government and military thinking about responding in a post-equilibrium world with greater risk of natural disasters, food and water shortages, one in which environmental manipulation of resources along with geoengineering could become weapons of war. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Books like Francis Fukuyama (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*, J.M.Roberts *Triumph of the West* (1985) and earlier Landes *Prometheus Unbounded* (1969) put forward a particular Westerncentric view of world history. One which has been strongly contested by postcolonialism (Venn, 2001; 2006, Featherstone and Venn, 2006) and comparative history (Goody, (1996, 2006, 2009; Featherstone, 2006, 2009b; Pieterse, 2006). There is now wider acknowledgement of the Chinese contribution to global history in many quarters accompanied by a rewriting of the archive, in the light of the expansion of Chinese global power along with the oft-voiced predictions that the 21st century could well be a Chinese century. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Beck envisages a world public generated by the awareness that the nation-state system is undermined by the global risks such as climate change, which bind all nations, developed and underdeveloped together. This releases a ‘cosmopolitan moment,’ an opportunity for greater interconnectedness through media events such as environmental disasters with their globalized images of shared suffering. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Beck (1993) in his major work *Risk Society* sees a move from concerns with wealth in first modernity, to a concern with risk in second modernity. But the dynamics of neoliberalism, the emergence of the super-rich and the return to levels of inequalities prevalent around a century ago (Featherstone, 2013a, 2014b; Piketty, 2014) would throw some doubt on this claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. George Steiner (1971) wrote about the difficulties of reversing or holding back technological development once the genie is out of the bottle. Cf. here Virilio’s (2006) discussion of ‘the museum of accidents’ and other accounts about how we embrace new technologies without fully testing their dangers and consequences. The same can be said in not only forms of transportation, living space and urban infrastructure, but also alleged modes of body care and health cure through drugs. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The monopoly of taxation, which Norbert Elias (1987) drew attention to, refers to the need from early civilizational times to raise revenue through taxation. Elias (1987) refers to how in Ancient Egypt drawings show peasants having to pay taxation to tax collectors accompanied by soldiers, with scribes recording the payment details on a scroll. In terms of taxation beyond the nation-state, there has been interest in ‘Tobin tax’ proposals - a small tax of 0.01% on financial taxations. The idea was taken up in the EU, and despite opposition is still being discussed with some experimental implementation in France and Italy. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Unless we imagine an invasion from interplanetary or interstellar invaders – as in H G Wells novel *War of the Worlds*. Such threatening events could potentially generate the in-group/out-group solidarities, to bind people together into a global culture (Featherstone, 1990,1995). Yet, whether the threat of planetary disaster through global warming and climate change, without humanoid enemies, is an equivalent event that could force nation-states to suspend their competitive national interest, is a moot point. Many, Max Weber included, would have been negative about overcoming the Darwinist elimination contest between nation-states. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Likewise in the fallout from the 2007 financial crisis, scarcely any bankers or financial specialists faced legal proceedings or prison - See economist . Currently in the run up to the UK National Election the Labour Party is talking about reversing the immunity of foreign domiciled rich people living in London from taxation on their foreign earnings. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See Kirkup (2013) ‘New VIP visa service for wealthy foreigners,’ who tells us that home secretary Teresa May was about to announce that ‘wealthy foreign business executives will get a new “VIP” visa service to speed their entry to the UK.’ Foreign domiciles and their families, provided they have sufficient funds (i.e. are rich or very rich and can deposit a large sum such as £1 million) can live in London tax-free and also obtain extended visas. Currently foreign domiciles and their families, provided they have sufficient funds (i.e. are rich or very rich and can deposit a large sum such as £1 million) can live in London tax-free and also obtain extended visas. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. The term society, which is central to the emergence of sociology, not only refers to society in the abstract sense as we have come to know it (French society), but also indicated the emergence of a sphere with forms of sociability dating back to the eighteenth century. In England as Raymond Williams (1976) has shown the term society also refers to the upper class sense of its own bounded community and world, as in ‘polite society,’ or ’good society,’ with its round of mandatory sociability and annual ‘season.’ The rich may choose to met or socialise at annual or periodic events such as the December in the Caribbean, January at the World Economic Forum in Davos, June in Cannes or Wimbledon, the Olympic Games and other festivals. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. It is a point emphasised in many of the books on the super-rich that large income inequalities can be dispiriting for those in the middle and lower levels. The dramatic rise in the ratio of top to bottom salaries occurs not only in banks, but in many business and other organizations since the 1980s. This itself was then used to justify the increase in the salaries of public sector managers. A stark contrast to the situation in 1950s United States where the differentials were far less and apparently people experienced higher levels of satisfaction (see Featherstone, 2013a, 2014b). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Bataille suggested that in potlatch societies gift-giving could be used to increase one’s status and power through the wasteful extravagant squandering of accumulated gifts and wealth. The gift for Bataille was an amazing device by which the gift-giver “enriches himself with a contempt for riches” (Bataille 1991: 69; McGoey, forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Roberto Esposito (2011) unfolds the various meanings of immunity and focuses on the Latin term *munus*, the term which implies gift giving and is at the heart of community as well as immunitas. It also opens up the whole question of the inside and outside in terms of species, and our varying capacities to live with and generate co-responsibilities with other non-human entities, including not only the glamorous animals, but bacteria and viruses (see discussion in Featherstone, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. A problem with the Bataille (1988) approach in terms of climate change is that it involves a very different mindset, with the inversion of the conventional neoliberal and consumer culture logics and attitude towards saving and debt. It is also based on an energy expenditure model, which although assumed to be more socially efficient by sacrificing the accumulated surpluses in excessive festivals, potlatch etc., involves its own form of destruction. This involves a very different indeterminate relationship to excess to that found in consumer culture restricted economies with their utilitarianism. But to show how a general economics could work as a better option to cope with the specifics of climate change would be an exceedingly difficult option to actualise. Doubtless many would find the crises of impending climate change demands strategic action and clearly workable policies. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Silicon Valley hedge fund manager Joon Yun says, the probability of a 25-year-old dying before their 26th birthday is 0.1%; if it were possible to keep that risk constant throughout life instead of it rising due to age-related disease, the average person would – statistically speaking – live 1,000 years. In 2014 Yun launched a $1m prize challenging scientists to “hack the code of life” and push human lifespan past its apparent maximum of about 120 years. Ultimately he believes it is possible to “solve ageing” and get people to live, healthily, more or less indefinitely. He says our society face growing numbers of loved ones lost to age-related disease and suffering extended periods of decrepitude, which is costly to economies. Yun’s quest is part of the wave of enthusiasm to disrupt death, engulfing Silicon Valley. Billionaires and companies are bullish about what they can achieve (Corbyn, 2015: for a discussion of ageing and longevity see Featherstone, 2017; Featherstone and Hepworth, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Google co-founder Sergey Brin has talked of ‘curing death’ one day. Head of Google’s investments, Bill Maris, says it will be possible to live to 500. ‘Solving ageing’ becomes another investment project, which also promises massive financial returns on investment for any success’ (Leonard, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. According to a recent OECD report ‘Inequality hurts economic growth, finds OECD research,’ ([**http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/inequality-hurts-economic-growth.htm**](http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/inequality-hurts-economic-growth.htm) 09/12/2014), countries where income inequality is decreasing grow faster than those with rising inequality with the key factor being investment in education. “This compelling evidence proves that addressing high and growing inequality is critical to promote strong and sustained growth and needs to be at the centre of the policy debate,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría.  The paper finds new evidence that inequality affects growth by undermining education opportunities for children from poor socio-economic backgrounds, lowering social mobility and hampering skills development.   [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. The disparity in remuneration between average workers and CEO’s stood at around 30 to 1 in 1970. It now is well above 300 to 1 - in the case of MacDonalds about 1200 to 1 (Harvey, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. There are of course many attempts to show money can lead to happiness with one recent one being from the British Prime Minister’s Downing Street's "Nudge Unit" – the Behavioural Insights Team. They draw on research incorporated into a book by American psychologists *Happy Money* (2014). The authors Elizabeth W Dunn and Michael Norton suggest, that the secret to everlasting happiness is to eschew rampant consumerism by paying for experiences over possessions, helping others instead of yourself, and delaying gratification. In addition it is suggested that philanthropy, giving to charity brings positive results in terms of self-age (see Cooper, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. One of the countries which tends to regularly come top is Bhutan, a small landlocked country in the Himalayas which until the last ten years or so has had few travellers and only recently got television. The vast majority of the 700,000 population is Buddhist. The Bhutan government advocated a ‘gross national happiness’ index as an alternative to stand alongside GDP. Incidentally in 2011, the United Nations adopted a non-binding resolution that happiness should be included in development indicators. Buncombe (2012) remarks "It's not just about happiness as it is understood in the West," he explained, saying that a more accurate translation of the king's original concept might be 'gross national contentment'. "Bhutanese people are generally content. In the Buddhist tradition, wherever you are in this life is because of your previous life. Contentment leads to happiness." [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. The arresting subtitle of Francois Jullien’s (2007) book *Vital Nourishment*, is ‘Departing from Happiness.’ Jullien want to encourage us to take seriously the Chinese tradition, with its very different approach to happiness from the West. In China the focus was not on pursuing experiences which will allegedly bring happiness, rather the focus is on the cultivation of the ground, the accumulation of ‘vital capital,’ which involves a systematic approach to body care (diet, food, exercise, longevity etc.), effectively nourishing the life capacity potential, remaining open to change, which will create the conditions of sustainability within which happiness could appear. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)