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CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMERISM IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT. *Consumption studies have arguably transformed the study of early modern cultural history in the past three decades, with the championing of previously neglected sources, application of interdisciplinary approaches, and exploration of the mentalities of acquisition, ownership, and use. But does the accumulation of writing about consuming and consumption in this period amount to much more than the historical equivalent of window-shopping? It is argued here that greater attention to the consumers as much as the consumed, to the motivations for consuming rather than the act of consumption alone, offers a way out of the explanatory cul-de-sac reached by over-indulgence in the early modern 'world of goods'.*

I

The historiographical idiom of consumption has achieved enormous precedence in the social, economic, and cultural histories of western societies. In the last three decades, historical studies of consumption have proliferated, seemingly unstoppable. Yet from initially precise uses, primarily in analyses of the Anglo-American 'long' eighteenth century, consumption studies have leached into centuries and cultures far distant from John Brewer's dynamic Enlightenment Britons, searching for multitudinous 'pleasures of the imagination'.[1] From Athenian fishcakes to the mass indulgences of post-war, transatlantic baby boomers, consumption is construed kaleidoscopically: at once atemporal in its purchase, but also culturally and economically specific in its causes and consequences.[2]

What then can be made of such a chameleon analytic tool, one which has carried the baggage of so many societal shifts, not the least of which is the advent of 'modern' culture itself? As Joyce Appleby has implied in her concern for the relative invisibility of consumption as a 'linchpin' *explanans* of 'our modern social system', the shape-shifting nature of consumption discourses does permit a broad, but essentially superficial, deployment.[3] Indeed, as Jean-Christophe Agnew notes in a sobering essay in the same otherwise triumphalist collection, while bliss it was to be young and a historian of consumption in the wake of the publication of what is often cited as the modern seminal text in this literature, *The birth of a consumer society*, the prolific growth of consumption studies within the historical discipline has involved little more than methodological window-shopping.[4] Evading issues of 'periodization, of power and…of principle' has left us frequently no more informed about the processes which transform consumption as a functional act (usually reduced to acquisition), into a complex way of life, where increasing urbanization, anonymity and anomie, are countered by meaningful presentations of the self, both individually and collectively.[5]

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[1] John Brewer, *The pleasures of the imagination* (London, 1997).

[2] Recent examples of the sheer chronological and cultural diversity of historical consumption studies include Daniel Miller, *Mass consumption and material culture* (Oxford, 1987); Craig Clunas, *Superfluous things: material culture and social status in early modern China* (Cambridge, 1991); James Davidson, *Courtesans and fishcakes: the consuming passions of classical Athens* (London, 1997).

[3] Joyce Appleby, 'Consumption in early modern social thought', in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the world of goods* (London, 1993), p. 162.

Not unlike the *fin de siècle* cautions voiced for other conceptual frameworks posited on revolution – notably the conventions of the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions, in the shadows of which the 'consumer revolution' was realized as a necessary, but not always compliant, pendant – the 'lofting trajectory' of consumption studies has lost altitude. Whether such heights should ever have been attained in the first place is now moot, but the future of such studies, especially for the period in which they initially took root, surely rests upon finding a new analytical level which is at once challenging, penetrating, and yet, above all, historically practicable.

II

Certain historiographical chronologies of consumption have been well-anatomized in other review articles.[6] It is nevertheless valuable to outline here three interlinked, but by no means mutually inclusive, fields which have in great part determined the complexion of recent historical consumption research.

Descended from Adam Smith, the classical economic pedigree of consumption as the 'reproduction of production' was mediated both by Karl Marx's materialist realization of bourgeois identities and by sociologists' location of such identities in practices of competitive emulative acquisition determining economic and thus social personae (notably by Anton Weber, Thorstein Veblen, and Werner Sombart). Subsequent, more pessimistic, readings of such 'conspicuous consumption' as the inevitable response of a passive consuming population within the binds of a supply-led socio-economic system (for example, in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer) were the prompt to the authors of *The birth of a consumer society* both to acknowledge and re-write the Smithian inheritance. Economic behaviour was thus construed as reliant upon 'social variables to shift out demand curves'; 'consumer revolution' became 'the necessary convulsion upon the demand side of the equation to match the convulsion upon the supply side' in formulating the Industrial Revolution.[7]

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[4] Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The birth of a consumer society: commercialisation in the eighteenth century* (London, 1982).

[5] Jean-Christophe Agnew, 'Coming up for air: consumer culture in historical perspective', in Brewer and Porter, eds., *Consumption*, p. 34.

[6] In addition to Agnew, see Lisa Tiersten, 'Redefining consumer culture: recent literature on consumption and the bourgeosie in western Europe', *Radical History Review*, 54 (1993), pp. 116–59; Paul Glennie, 'Consumption within historical studies', in Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging consumption: a review of new studies* (London, 1995), pp. 164–203; Jonathan Friedman, 'Introduction', in idem, ed., *Consumption and identity* (Chur, Switzerland, 1994), pp. 1–22.

[7] Tiersten, 'Redefining consumer culture', p. 119; Friedman, 'Introduction', pp. 1–3; Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, 'Consumerism and the Industrial Revolution', *Social History*, 15 (1990), p. 151, cf. Neil McKendrick, 'Commercialisation and the economy', in McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, *Birth*, p. 9.

The quantitative cannot be entirely loosed from the qualitative in such an approach, however. As a corollary of this vaunting of demand, *The birth of a consumer society* validated (if not taking part itself in) a second theme in consumption studies: enumeration of what this commercialization comprised, drawn from probate inventories, shop and household accounts, rather than from trade statistics. Of course, caveats apply to this empirical route, not least in the limited mileage to be gained from partial archival survivals, be they taxation or probate records, household purchasing or export data; and the spotty coverage of the material goods (raw, semi-processed, finished) within such documentation. But the quantitative treatment of ownership and access to possession essayed in the work of pioneering local historians like J. O. Halliwell and F. G. Emmison, and latterly Rachel Garrard, Lorna Weatherill, and Carole Shammas carried with it a curiosity about the qualitative features of possession.[8]

The multi-disciplinary seam tapped into by these authors is also rooted in late Victorian and Edwardian attempts at cultural classification and differentiation, by the sociological scholars noted above, and also interdependently by anthropologists like Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski. Exploration of non-functional stimuli to consumption (albeit usually of the conspicuous variety) within contemporary and traditional cultures has been never less than stimulating and salutary for historians. But complications abound: not least in the apparent ease with which consumption practices can be unharnessed from trajectories of economic 'maturation', notably monetization and commodification. Consequently such practices are seen to exist independently of, and sometimes in distinction to, the conditions for capitalism. The specificity of temporal and spatial environments and ethical context argue against any transcendent theorizing of consumption as a modernizing phenomenon. Indeed, these factors illuminate varieties of cultural conduct which are ultimately difficult to homogenize as 'consumption'.[9]

The third sphere, which might be viewed as the inevitable fall-out from these traditions, embraces the increasing divergence evident within consumption studies. With economically freighted projects on the one hand,[10] and semiotic, attitudinal, even literary readings on the other,[11] the extent of methodological and arguably ideological differences is such that few researchers can claim to treat of both the material and immaterial dimensions of consumption. Tellingly, three of twenty-five essays (those of Jan de Vries, Shammas, and Weatherill) account for the majority of data tables and all the graphs in *Consumption and the world of goods*, and these are undoubtedly the most explicitly quantitative treatments of early modern consumption in the three-volume series derived from the Clark Library seminars on consumption and property.[12] Such divergence, and especially the ascendancy of what Colin Campbell disparages as 'conventional "mono-motive" perspectives' within especially eighteenth-century consumption studies (notably emulation, of which more later),[13] certainly bodes ill for any re-integration of the productive strands of these differing disciplinary routes into consumption.

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[8] J. O. Halliwell, *Ancient inventories of furniture, pictures, tapestry, plate, etc. illustrative of the domestic manners of the English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1854); F. G. Emmison, 'Jacobean household inventories', *Bedfordshire Historical Record Society*, 20 (1938); Rachel Garrard, 'English probate inventories and their use in studying the significance of the domestic interior, 1570–1700', in Ad Van der Woude and Anton Schuurman, eds., *Probate inventories: a new source for the historical study of wealth, material culture and agricultural development*, A. A. G. Bijdragen, 23 (Utrecht, 1980), pp. 55–81; Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour and material culture in Britain, 1660–1760* (London, 1988); Carole Shammas, *The pre-industrial consumer in England and America* (Oxford, 1990).

[9] Friedman, 'Introduction', pp. 4, 15–17; Colin Campbell, 'Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption in eighteenth-century England: a character-action approach', in Brewer and Porter, eds., *Consumption*, p. 48.

[10] A recent example being Joachim Voth, 'Time use in eighteenth-century London: some evidence from the Old Bailey' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1996).

[11] For example see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming subjects: women, shopping and business in the eighteenth century* (New York, 1997).

III

But does this matter? If consumption as an economic phenomenon is treated separately from consumption as a socio-cultural event, shall we do the history we treat of, as well as the memories of pioneer consumption historians, a disservice? Here a little semantic attention to the term itself, 'consumption', and the often indiscriminate, interchangeable usage of it with its associated, but tellingly active, forms, 'consuming' and 'consumerism', is required. This helps dismantle consumption as historiographical portmanteau and shifts attention away from seemingly incommensurable approaches to consumption, to the issue of research needs.

To consider consuming instead of consumption is to re-locate the subject at the nexus of object and subject (one dimension of Ruth Schwarz Cowan's 'consumption junction'), and to recover the contexts which shaped the motives (conscious and unconscious) informing consuming acts. Conditions of access, location, and conjunction are also constituent parts of the achievement of consumption; these provide the where and when, the consummation of consuming.[14] Consumerism (which we must be careful to detach from its prevailing modern sense of knowledge of, and interest in, consumers' rights) delineates the collective conduct of consumers, which can generate shared features and ends. Of course, such semantic attention could be reproached for being a retreat from what is concrete within consumption: its potential for quantification. But enumeration of acts of consumption is a partial history, just as 'consumption', and indeed 'consuming' and 'consumerism', are still only convenient shorthands for actions and accumulations which in the early modern period, as in others, could reside under many different headings.

Nevertheless, paying semantic attention allows reappraisal of some of the traditional tenets of consumption historiography, not least the frequently monolithic treatment of production and demand as binary poles of consumption. As Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold have striven to demonstrate, the circumstances of production, distribution, and supply which entail commodification of an object are so unique that to extrapolate a general characterization of consumption as demand- or supply-fed from a clutch of commodities – for example Birmingham brass 'toys', Staffordshire ceramics, and Indian chintzes in the eighteenth century – is meaningless.[15] Crucial though this is, Fine and Leopold leave unquestioned a further, related assumption; their analysis is dependent upon an understanding of consumed objects as *always being* commodities (so designated by mode of production or of circulation). But Arjun Appadurai is surely right to point out that, while all objects have 'commodity candidacy', the transition is not universal, inevitable, nor, when it does occur, permanent, even in a culture where modernity is supposedly 'branded' by commodification.[16]

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[12] See also John Brewer and Susan Staves, eds., *Early modern conceptions of property* (London, 1994), and Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds., *The consumption of culture, 1600–1800: image, object, text* (London, 1995).

[13] Campbell, 'Character-action approach', pp. 43, 55.

[14] Ruth Schwarz Cowan, 'The consumption junction: a proposal for research strategies in the sociology of technology', in W. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes and Trevor Pinch, eds., *The social construction of technological systems* (London, 1989), p. 263. See also Nigel Thrift and Paul Glennie, 'Modernity, urbanism and modern consumption', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 10 (1992), pp. 423–43.

Another shibboleth ripe for assault locates consumption at the heart of historical constructions of fashionable taste and novelty. Whilst studying 'conspicuous' consumption may be *demodé*, and some prefer to deal in 'semi-luxury' goods rather than full-blow deluxe (although the distinction is seldom elaborated upon),[17] the motivating concerns of aesthetics and aspiration bound the horizons of historians who situate these issues within a world of 'designed' luxury goods. Nevertheless, as John Styles and Marina Bianchi have proposed in their complementary perspectives, 'novelty' is usually a relative, rather than an absolute, attribute of any object. 'Novelty' can be partial, rendered as a known object made up in an unfamiliar material (a spoon carved from rock-crystal), or a familiar commodity encountered in an unexpected context of use (miniature brandy-warming saucepans used with a heater at table rather than the hearth).[18]

Reading consumption as a dynamic which differentiates rather than defines has likewise privileged emulation and imitation, as the motivations of those who have not, and the urge to distinction and distance as that of those who have. In the work of Weatherill, Styles, and Glennie, emulation has arguably slipped from the lofty position once accorded it, but there is a hesitancy about what might stand in its stead. This is rooted in a deeper discomfort about how consumption (with its implications for modern, demotic/democratic practice) and issues of power intersect, if it is not through hierarchic strategies that benefit some but not others. This unease perhaps stems from the historical location of significant consumption practices within societies of fluid status boundaries (notably the long eighteenth century), in which distinction is culturally imperative, but where its achievement or destruction evades both defenders and assailants alike. Moving beyond such a locus and discovering consumption practices which are not erected on mobility, but upon stability, not on imposed asymmetries of access, but upon choice and its exercise, requires us to revisit the relationship between power and desire, as much as that between power and social status.

Anatomies of desire have not been entirely absent within consumption studies, but predictably, they have been almost wholly associated with studies of 'consuming women', or, more inclusively, of 'gendered consumption'.[19] One of the chief paradoxes within early modern consumption studies is the centrality of the feminine characterization of consuming and much that is consumed – mantuas, shoe buckles, tea equipment – and yet also the difficulties raised by such a centrality on examination of issues such as access to power within consumption networks (through patronage, for example). The moral, economic, and political marginality of the majority of women throughout the early modern period surely undermines the pivotal role attributed to a consuming 'feminine mystique'.

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[15] Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, *The world of consumption* (London, 1993), pp. 4–7.

[16] Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: commodities and the politics of value', in idem, ed., *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 6–7, 13–14; cf. Ben Fine, Michael Heasman, and Judith Wright, *Consumption in the age of affluence: the world of food* (London, 1996), pp. 66–9.

[17] For example, Maxine Berg implies but does not specify the differences between the two categories: 'Product innovation in core consumer industries in eighteenth-century Britain', in Berg and Kristine Bruland, eds., *Technological revolutions in Europe: historical perspectives* (Cheltenham, 1998), pp. 138–57; cf. John Styles, 'Manufacturing, consumption and design in eighteenth-century England', in Brewer and Porter, eds., *Consumption*, p. 543.

[18] Marina Bianchi, 'Consuming novelty: strategies for producing novelty in consumption', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 28 (1998), pp. 12–14; Styles, 'Manufacturing', pp. 358–9.

Nevertheless, the conceptual and, perhaps more worryingly, the empirical gap between consuming women and women as the perennial cultural 'other' is regularly bridged with a sleight of hand only partially explicable through evidential gaps. Although anatomies of the consuming predilections and anxieties of a rounded character like Amanda Vickery's Lancashire gentlewoman, Elizabeth Shackleton, or Marcia Pointon's Elizabeth Harley, are important, is it actually useful to move from these individualized experiences to propose a more generalized version of the female experience of consuming and of the goods consumed?[20] Certainly there are conditions which have led these authors – and others – to concur that some sort of societal change occurred to make a female involvement in getting and spending more visible. Such analyses of 'the intricate and often occult relations of women to things' arguably exaggerate the significance of gender upon the nature of consumed goods, in the broader spectrum of consuming.[21] Female possessions may be viewed as conveying intrinsically different ideas about ownership and consumption than the chattels of a man of comparable age and status, but this argument rests on what categories of property are in view, and the lens through which the historian views them. One can argue a very strong case for kitchen equipment comprising goods that are indistinguishable in the inventories of male and female decedents. But such goods have obviously strong connections to women in their deployment, their maintenance, and, ultimately, their disposal. Kitchen chattels were the material components of a predominantly female sphere of operation, items that were invested with personal significance as possessions rather than merely utensils, especially through female to female bequest.[22]

Equally pertinent are those studies stressing the negative consequences of consumption for women, notably in the reorganization of domestic tasks and the re-framing of gender relations within the 'industrial/industrious' household, made by Cowan, Caroline Davidson, and, more circumspectly, by de Vries and de Grazia.[23] Indeed, there are as-yet little-discussed subtleties in domestic organization for the early modern period, not least the urban–rural differentiations in access to services and goods that undoubtedly mediated domestic conditions, and which surely contributed greatly to the complexion of domestic consumption. It is thus in practices, rather than the objects alone, that the ascription of gender, and of gender differences in and through consumption, must be sought.

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[19] Victoria de Grazia, 'Introduction', in idem and Ellen Furlough, eds., *The sex of things: gender and consumption in historical perspective* (London, 1996), pp. 1–10.

[20] Lorna Weatherill, 'A possession of one's own: women and consumer behaviour in England, 1660–1760', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), pp. 131–56; Amanda Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods: a Lancashire consumer and her possessions, 1751–1781', in Brewer and Porter, eds., *Consumption*, pp. 274–301; Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for showing: women, possession and representation in English visual culture, 1665–1800* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 15–17. Cf. de Grazia, 'Introduction'.

[21] De Grazia, 'Changing consumption regimes', in idem and Furlough, eds., *Sex*, p. 21.

[22] Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and property in early modern England* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 222; Vickery, 'World of goods', pp. 283, 292–3; Martha C. Howell, 'Fixing movables: gifts by testament in late medieval Douai', *Past and Present*, 150 (1996), pp. 26–9, 35, 37.

[23] Ruth Schwarz Cowan, *More work for mother: household technology from the open hearth to the washing machine* (London, 1989); Caroline Davidson, *A woman's work is never done: a history of housework in the*

IV

The shadow cast by these traditional tenets of consumption historiography – the supply/demand equation, modish novelty, emulation, and gender – over even recent research may seem worryingly long. Movement beyond them demands not only a re-examination of the teleologies they invoke, but also the limitations of the terminology itself; terminology which, although apparently concerned with the dynamics of (inter-)change (in novelty, supply, and demand) and of appearance (in gender, emulation), has become sedate, if not entirely sedentary. Re-invigoration of consumption depends upon a re-siting, and a re-sighting of the varieties of consumer and consuming.

It is no accident that the languages of geography and spatiality have recurred in this essay, nor that historical geographers are amongst the more adventurous scholars of consumption. Indeed, it is the exploration of physical and imaginary consuming 'spaces' that offers historians of consumption many provocative, productive lines of investigation.[24] The physical locales of consuming encroach on both 'public' and 'private' spheres. Indeed, Tiersten argues a liminal position for consumption, a perspective which should surely hasten the collapse of these discrete, and for the early modern period, inappropriate, spatial constructs.[25] The privatization of the self which consuming practices arguably cultivate meshes intricately but messily with the Habermas-ian 'public sphere' in which consumption practices are disseminated. The early modern bed-chamber was at once a 'venue' for intimacy and for social gathering (at times of lying-in, death, and illness), and the objects amassed to decorate it spoke not only to their owners, but to those privy to such bedside social encounters.[26]

Reiterating spatiality as crucial in the dynamics of consumption does not necessarily marginalize interest in retailing practices and their expansion, gender, and the formation of taste(s). Rather, as Nigel Thrift and Paul Glennie have asserted, it illuminates the vital connections between early modern retailing, urbanization, and consumption.[27] The scope of learning about, if not actually consuming, material goods in the diversifying commercial landscapes of eighteenth-century London, its satellites

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British Isles, 1650–1950 (London, 1986); Jan de Vries, 'The Industrial Revolution and the industrious revolution', *Journal of Economic History*, 54 (1994), pp. 255–62; de Grazia, 'Introduction', pp. 8–9.

[24] Cowan, 'Consumption junction', pp. 261–80.

[25] Tiersten, 'Redefining consumer culture', pp. 138–9.

[26] For early modern notions of intimacy and spatial politics, see Laura Gowing, *Domestic dangers: women, words and sex in early modern London* (Oxford, 1996); cf. Amanda Vickery, 'Sociability and intimacy in genteel culture' (unpublished paper delivered at 'Gender in History', 62nd Anglo-American Conference of Historians, Institute of Historical Research, London, 2 July 1993); Sasha Roberts, 'Lying among the Classics: ritual and motif in elite Elizabethan and Jacobean beds', in L. Gent, ed., *Albion's classicism* (London, 1995), pp. 325–57.

[27] Thrift and Glennie, 'Modernity', and idem, 'Modern consumption: theorising commodities and consumers', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 11 (1993), pp. 603–6.

and even modestly populated urban centres, does not simply re-cycle the conception of the metropolis as engine of consumption, and its hinterlands as its emulators. Instead the spatial components of shopping, browsing, and viewing must be scrutinized, to construct contexts for consumption that might better depict geographical differentiations in ownership of goods. What did it *mean* for the burghers of Kendal in Westmorland (population *c.* 6,000) that by 1695 the town boasted nine tailors, eight barbers, two musicians, and one watchmaker?[28] The mapping of consumption possibilities, the routes available for knowledge of goods to circulate by, and the penetration of such information produces alternative, and not necessarily complementary, geographies. Although Weatherill thinks notable the absence of several of her 'key' consumer goods amongst the yeomanry of early modern Hampshire, such absences do not necessarily signal a lack of knowledge of such goods, where to purchase them and how to use them.[29]

So, while Thrift and Glennie's reappraisal of the retail space as a consumption locus is necessary, there is still neglect of other arenas available for absorbing information about consumption practices. The negotiations of the commercialized urban sphere depicted by Peter Borsay and others obscure the less populated contexts in which 'cultural accessibility' can be seen to operate. The permeability of the early modern household is very much a live subject,[30] but aspects of domestic penetration/incorporation like visiting and commensality around life events have yet to be valued as significant, if modest, scenarios of consuming. Apart from Vickery's work and, more problematically, Karl Westhauser's overly-simplistic study of Samuel Pepys's and Adam Eyre's socializing, the history of early modern visiting and the evolution of both domestic space and its material contents to accommodate and shape the phenomenon of 'company' await critical examination.[31]

Re-discovery of 'the market' as a consumption locus also depends upon considerations of spatiality and access.[32] Harnessing consumption to a revisionary historiography of the market is appropriate and apposite, not merely because of the liminal character perceived for both practice and place.[33] In vindication of E. P. Thompson, recent analyses of the ethos of the market have concentrated as frequently upon evolving symbolic and psychological characteristics as upon the economic, and the identity of the consumer has loomed larger. In a provocative collection of essays edited by Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth, research into the open markets of the eighteenth century vigorously questions what they view as the essentially middle-class preoccupations of consumption historiography. It requires that those engaged in consumption history undertake detailed 'impact' studies that evaluate the position of the marginal consumer as a strategic, even subversive, agent in patterns of consuming.

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[28] J. D. Marshall, 'The rise of the Cumbrian market town, 1660–1900', *Northern History*, 69 (1983), pp. 138–9.

[29] Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*, pp. 56–7.

[30] For example, Jennifer Melville's ongoing Cambridge doctoral study of domestic space in late seventeenth-century London; De Vries, 'Industrial Revolution', pp. 257, 261.

[31] Karl E. Westhauser, 'Friendship and family in early modern England: the sociability of Adam Eyre and Samuel Pepys', *Journal of Social History*, 27 (1994), pp. 517–36; Vickery, 'Sociability and intimacy'.

[32] Thomas L. Haskell and Richard F. Teichgraeber III, 'Introduction: the culture of the market', in Haskell and Teichgraeber, eds., *The culture of the market: historical essays*, pbk edn (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 1–39.

[33] The market's liminal characteristics are explored in Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds apart: the market and the theatre in Anglo-American thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge, 1986).

The 'moral economy of the crowd' is rightly questioned as the preserve of the 'lower orders' alone; as a consequence, the emotional impulses to consume can be explored as being rooted in more than just social status and economic capabilities/constraints. The morality of consumption, to which I shall return, is the property of more than just the middling sorts, or beyond the reach of some ill-defined 'crowd'.[34]

Attention to the spatiality of consuming and the consumer should also alert the historian to the need to revisit the timing of consumption. That qualities of consumer object could be studied through the tempo, or 'periodicities', of their consumption was an important element of Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's examination of modern consumer practices in the 1970s.[35] Yet it is one which has received sparse attention from historians, with the exception of those like Weatherill and Vickery who have had access to the phenomenal detail of archives like Richard Latham's household accounts and Elizabeth Shackleton's diaries.[36] In the absence of such fastidious record-keeping for the majority of those involved in consuming, greater ingenuity is required.

It is surely the contraction in the 'gaps' between moments of significant (if this can be distinguished from the insignificant) consumption of non-necessary goods which is the gauge of what is revolutionary about late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English consuming. Weatherill suggests that it is a move away from infrequent but highly orchestrated occasions of conspicuous consumption which signals a 'new' mode of privatized, more regular consuming. But she construes the act of consuming in such bounded terms, that the shifting tenors of different types of consumption are obscured.[37] Moreover, the ways in which people adapted their attitudes to certain areas of consuming, to accommodate a change in the frequency of consumption of other 'goods', is surely just as crucial to comprehend as a facet of modernization as any retreat from irregular conspicuous consumption. A telling example of this complex negotiation between varieties of consumption over time is provided by a set of funeral accounts from one Westmorland family, the Brownes of Troutbeck, over half a century. From an almost self-sufficient provision of funeral meats and drink to mourners at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the expenditures shift away from charitable doles and tobacco for the mourners to coffin furniture, mourning suits, and food especially purchased (and not home-made) for the wake. The character of George Browne II's funeral in 1767 was thus substantively different from that of his grandfather George Browne I's interment in 1703.[38]

Considering the qualities of consumption (frequency, place, and context) also proves a more appropriate route into understanding the utility of the term 'mass', when applied to consuming and the products consumed in the pre-industrial age. It is a troublesome prefix for pre-1800 historians, especially for those who retreat from overtly economic or technological treatments of consumption. With the exception of Shammas, whose attempts to define early modern mass consumption are thwarted by quantitative gaps, the defining characteristics of early modern 'massification' are commonly skirted around, as Styles pointedly notes.[39] But is this a gross sin of omission, or actually less important? With revisionist doubts hanging over the specificity of an Industrial Revolution, and renewed attention to the chronologies of agricultural 'revolution', the identification of the first mass consumer or mass-consumed product becomes a movable feast within sundry re-locations and eradications.[40] Once again, rather than seeking answers in large-scale aggregation, it is the stages in the conversion of a good from irregularly consumed to regularly consumed, and from home-produced to non-domestically made and purchased that demand exploration. Styles's study of northern textiles and clothing consumption across the eighteenth century valuably maps the points of transition along these axes, but without losing sight that these transitions might be short-term, reversible, and above all voluntarily entered into on the part of the potential consumer.[41]

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[34] Adrian Randall, Andrew Charlesworth, Richard Sheldon, and David Walsh, 'Markets, market culture and popular protest in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland', in Randall and Charlesworth, eds., *Markets, market culture and popular protest in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool, 1996), pp. 8, 20–1.

[35] Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The world of goods: towards an anthropology of consumption*, rev. edn (London, 1996), pp. 82–5.

[36] Lorna Weatherill, ed., *The account book of Richard Latham, 1724–1767*, Records of Social and Economic History, 15 (Oxford, 1990); A. J. Vickery, 'Women of the local elite in Lancashire, 1750–*c.* 1825' (Ph.D. thesis, London, 1991).

[37] Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*, pp. 64–6, 164–5.

[38] For more details of these accounts from the Browne MSS deposited at the Cumbria Record Office (Kendal), see S. M. Pennell, 'The material culture of food in early modern England, circa 1650–1750' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1997), ch. 5.

The myth of the mass consumer turns in part upon the roles that choice, desire, and need play in effecting acts of consumption, and shaping the goods consumed. But as Colin Campbell has repeatedly asserted, if we overlook the temporality of these motives and attempt to work backwards, from the 'item of conduct' to its 'subjective meaning', we are in danger of universalizing relationships between unique motivations and the consumption they inspire.[42] Indeed, to back-project the post-1945 incentives of western consumers on to the eighteenth century is to obscure what is important to study in the relationships created around consuming acts, in favour of atemporal forms – especially the inflexibility of desire.

The evidence for a shift away from the construction of an early modern consumer 'revolution' as an inevitable step on the path to mass commodification, market integration, and globalization is to be found in work developing Campbell's search for historically specific phases in the consuming personality. The long theoretical associations between the emergence of the bourgeoisie and (conspicuous) consumption have taken a provocative turn in explorations of the early modern foundations of the English 'middling sorts', mapping the roots of nineteenth-century western phenomena which Tiersten critiques so ably.[43] The dispositions of the lower 'gentry', both urban and rural, which found itself increasingly distinguished by skill, savings, and social relations from the unskilled and impoverished, suggest a morality of consumption framed around the potential 'evil of things'. What Bernard Mandeville so perceptively described as 'objects of mutability' in *The fable of the bees*, were sources of anxiety as much as of self-confidence for those whose standards of living had risen sufficiently to permit of participation in new consuming worlds, but whose cultural authority over such goods was fluid and incomplete, just as their political and economic status was fragmentary and contested.[44]

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[39] Shammas, *Pre-industrial consumer*, pp. 78, 88–100, 111–12; cf. Styles, 'Manufacturing', pp. 535–42.

[40] Joel Mokyr, 'Technological change, 1700–1830', and Nick Crafts, 'The Industrial Revolution', both in Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey, eds., *The economic history of Britain since 1700*, I: *1700–1860*, rev. edn (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 12–43, 44–59; and Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: the transformation of the agrarian economy, 1500–1850* (Cambridge, 1996).

[41] John Styles, 'Clothing the north: the supply of non-elite clothing in the eighteenth-century north of England', *Textile History*, 25 (1994), pp. 139–66.

[42] Campbell, 'Capitalism', pp. 28–9, 33, 46.

[43] Tiersten, 'Redefining consumer culture'; cf. De Grazia, 'Changing consumer regimes', pp. 18–19.

The moral resonances of material culture are seized upon as a counterpoint of the sort of 'supermarket sweep' effect of collections like *Consumption and the world of goods*. Undermining Joyce Appleby's aggressive definition of consumption as 'the active seeking of personal gratification through material goods', Stana Nenadic's subtle study of the consuming mentalities of mid-eighteenth-century Scottish urban gentry stresses the goals of stability and security sought through the acquisition and curation of property both real and chattel, new and used.[45] The selection of material struts to self-identity was arguably as much about answering 'current needs', indeed about materializing the roots of present status and memorializing the past, as it was about succeeding in a nation of 'change and novelty'.[46] These analyses move beyond consumption as a point-of-purchase phenomenon, and construe desire/need as a motivation which not only precedes the act of first consumption, but which evolves with the ownership of objects. Attitudes to objects during possession and, more crucially still, at the points where ownership is debated or ended are ever more crucial to study. Martha Howell's perceptive discussion of testamentary behaviour amongst the late medieval inhabitants of Douai gives rise to a useful phrase, 'fixing movables', that arguably also fits the consolidating ownership practices of Nenadic's Scots, where heirlooms were 'fixed' as points on the material horizon of both past and present.[47]

Rather than being solely about mobility, to understand status through the sense of standing is to grasp the possibilities of consuming objects as a means of retaining place and face, and consumption as a practice consolidating custom as much as feeding on novelty. 'Custom' itself is of course a collection of mutabilities, but the lens that consumption supplies through which to view the construction of conventions is a valuable one. The metamorphosis of a novel practice like tea-drinking into a genteel custom was a site of contestation of social and economic prerogatives between those who fashioned the conventions of the tea-table and those who sought a place at it. The tensions of entitlement created between accessibility and appropriate-ness raised in eighteenth-century condemnations of tea consumption amongst the labouring sorts, and in a complementary but distinct vein, amongst women, highlight the central role played by moral imperatives in defining collective boundaries of consuming.[48]

The interface of consumption and custom returns us to the marketplace, and to revisions of the roots of modernistic retail practices in burgeoning consumer wants. Craig Muldrew's portrait of the culturally permeating nature of honour-bound credit relations underpinning transactions of every sort in centres like King's Lynn is the necessary balance to a vision of buying and selling, and thus consumption, posited on purely monetized relations.[49] Furthermore, the accommodation of 'just' wants within 'just' means demands examination of involvement in those markets which co-exist alongside those of supposedly 'new' products. Studies of used goods are not unknown, but with growing late-twentieth-century environmental sensitivity, the interaction of consumption processes with those of re-cycling and retention have heightened historical currency.[50] Tracing early modern circulations of used goods also surely provides one route into understanding of how an under-mechanized, 'proto-industrial' nation like the British Isles in the long eighteenth century experienced a standard of living across a broad section of the population not experienced anywhere else in Europe at that time.[51] Once again, close scrutiny of consumption 'periodicities' is crucial.

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[44] Bernard Mandeville, *The fable of the bees* (Harmondsworth, 1970 edn), p. 68; Jonathan Barry, 'Introduction', in idem and Christopher Brooks, eds., *The middling sort of people: culture, society and politics in England, 1550–1800* (London, 1994), pp. 17–27.

[45] Appleby, 'Consumption in early modern social thought', p. 164; cf. Stana Nenadic, 'Middle-rank consumers and domestic culture in Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1720–1840', *Past and Present*, 145 (1994), pp. 122–56.

[46] David Levine, 'Consumer goods and capitalist modernisation', *Journal of Interdisplinary History*, 22 (1991), p. 670.

[47] Howell, 'Fixing movables', pp. 26–9, 35, 37; Nenadic, 'Middle-rank consumers', pp. 125, 132, 135; Pointon, *Strategies of showing*, pp. 48–9.

[48] Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming subjects*, pp. 37–51.

An illustration of just why the worlds of old goods are as important to survey as the new is afforded through Edward Belson, a journeyman distiller of Reading, whose memorandum book for the period *c.* 1707 to 1720 details the domestic purchases made immediately following his marriage in April 1709. The Belsons' furnishing of their bedchamber in 1710 reveals a couple keen to participate in the ownership and enjoyment of 'new' consumer goods, but who also fitted their requirements to their means.[52] Thus, while Belson brought new printed paper hangings for their chamber and new fabric for bedhangings, the bedstead and feather bed they adorned were second-hand purchases.[53]

The Belsons' mingling of consumption strategies speaks eloquently to the need to particularize consuming experiences. To reiterate Campbell, and at the risk of appearing to eject the quantitative from historiographical view altogether, the motivational elements of consuming bring us to the threshold of the consuming imagination. Jonathan Friedman's exhortation that we take account of 'that substrate of human behaviour which is directly implicated in making the choices involved in consumption' does mean a move towards the construction of persons, and away from the construction of 'things'.[54] Yet such a movement might better explain those incongruities of consumption that do not fit conventional trajectories. Bernard Herman's continuing study of economically marginal consumption in port towns of pre-Revolutionary Anglo-America, and Peter King's invaluable exploration of later eighteenth-century Essex pauper inventories reveal ownership 'patterns' that are superficially puzzling – the four forks without accompanying knives, the linen tablecloth unused since there is no table. Here the invocation of the consuming imagination becomes supremely important; the 'ends' of emulation or imitation are clearly inadequate *explanans*. The achievement of dignity and security, within oneself, one's household, one's community – these might be the values with which the tablecloth, without its apparently contextualizing paraphernalia, is invested; but we cannot explore these assumptions if we ignore the imaginative dimensions inherent in consuming.[55]

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[49] Craig Muldrew, 'Interpreting the market: the ethics of credit and community relations in early modern England', *Social History*, 18 (1993), pp. 163–83.

[50] Donald Woodward, '"Swords into ploughshares": recycling in pre-industrial England', *Economic History Review*, 38 (1985), pp. 175–91; Beverley Lemire, *Fashion's favourite: the cotton trade and the consumer in Britain, 1660–1800* (Oxford, 1991); Nenadic, 'Middle-rank consumers'.

[51] Woodward, '"Swords"', p. 176; Lemire, *Fashion's favourite*, pp. 4–5, 61, 75–6.

[52] Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*, pp. 163–4, 196.

[53] Account and memorandum book of Edward Belson, distiller, Berkshire Record Office, D/EX 12/1 and 2, unfoliated.

[54] Friedman, 'Introduction', pp. 13, 21–2; see also Kowaleski–Wallace, *Consuming subjects*, p. 13.

V

Consumption in the mind is perhaps as far removed from the 'conspicuous' as it is possible to travel. Without register in material objects that can be understood as consumed, or in actions that materialize, albeit temporarily, social attitudes and expectations of consumption, we have arguably collapsed consuming fully into the psychology of desires/needs. Can there be a history of consumption without consumables? Surely yes, for with only the consumable to consider, divorced from 'the social system in which they speak', even the traditional tenets of consumption historiography lack substance.[56] The consumption of ephemeral 'goods' is a useful hook for this argument, not least because of the paucity of surviving material culture. The cultural uses of food occupy this area, but it is only recently that they have been perceived by historians as important 'containers' of and for consuming. Food and its uses can involve 'conspicuous' consumption, as anthropologists aplenty have noted; but also routinized consumption, located far from the arena of emulative competition.[57] More crucially for the early modern historian, the substitution of labour time for 'leisure' time in the attempt to generate a monetary surplus with which to purchase *marketed* food staples and food utensils is a phenomenon which arises in the provisioning of many households at an earlier date than it does in the furnishing or clothing of the household.[58] Since many aspects of early modern provisioning and eating cannot be described through raw material production figures or price indices, evading inclusion in the economists' putative 'basket of consumables' as bartered foodstuffs, gifts, bequests of food-related utensils, the consumption of food illuminates varieties of consuming available to a large section of the population, and not just to those enjoying and acting upon cultural authority.

Historical food studies such as facsimile recipe texts and exhaustive single commodity monographs exist in some number.[59] Yet far less common are studies exploring daily and extraordinary food habits as a prism for attitudes to consuming: surprising, given that foodstuffs remained a considerable, if not major, expenditure after housing for the majority of Britons well into the twentieth century. To identify the shifts in dietary preferences and in the classification of food 'necessities' is surely an invaluable route into assessing taste (both practically and figuratively), utility, and (domestic) labour specialization, as factors shaping consumption.[60]

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[55] Bernard L. Herman, '"The poor artisan's lodgings"' (unpublished paper, given at Urban History Group Conference, Lancaster 28–9 March 1996); Peter King, 'Pauper inventories and the material life of the poor in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', in T. Hitchcock, P. King, and P. Sharpe, eds., *Chronicling poverty: voices and strategies of the English poor, 1640–1840* (London, 1997), pp. 155–91.

[56] Friedman, 'Introduction', pp. 21–2.

[57] For a brief summary of anthropological and sociological approaches see Anne Murcott, Stephen Mennell, and Anneke H. van Otterloo, *The sociology of food* (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 1–34.

[58] De Vries, 'Industrial Revolution', p. 259; Fine and Leopold, *World of consumption*, p. 88; Christopher Dyer, *Standards of living in the later middle ages: social change in England, circa 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 157–9, 169–75, 197–9.

[59] Recent examples in these genres include Terence Scully, *The art of cookery in the middle ages* (Woodbridge, 1996), a new facsimile edition of *The closet of the eminently learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Kt. opened* (first published 1669; Totnes, 1997), and Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe, *The true history of chocolate* (London, 1996).

Admittedly there is a large evidential gap to bridge between the absent food 'consumable' and the consumer, but the conventional tools of the consumption historian – account books, inventories, diaries – are usefully supplemented by the increasingly imaginative labour of material cultural historians and archaeologists, who are interrogating earlier quantitative research armed with more qualitatively informed questions. If the stimulating work of archaeologists like Matthew Johnson on early modern English housing and domestic culture, and Mary Beaudry, Anne Yentsch, and Charles Orser on colonial and revolutionary Anglo-America currently reads somewhat schematically as 'history', it is in part the fault of historians who have yet to acknowledge the possibilities of *rapprochement* between the surviving material and documentary traces of the past.[61] In isolation, the prescriptive format of early eighteenth-century recipes for 'soop' and the inventoried and museum presence of flat-bottomed saucepans – used on hearth grates adapted for coal, in contrast to earlier round-bottomed and tripod-footed vessels that were hung or stood over the open flame – might suggest very little, without the consumable product itself. Yet viewed collectively these materials can illuminate a range of technological, economic, and cultural shifts in culinary practices that affected many lives, rather than just the conspicuous few.[62]

Food studies also allow us to move well beyond 'mere enumerations of the accelerating rates at which pots and pans, geegaws and jigsaws were acquired'.[63] Commensalism – whether in the form of daily meals, life event celebrations and commemorations – involves multiple meanings of consumption: the partaking of food as a moral, as well as an oral and visual, event. The interactions of individual consuming with collective consumption ideals and ends emerge at meal-times, and also in commentaries over the suitability or otherwise of participation in certain food events and at certain locations; not only around the eighteenth-century tea-table, but also in London's innumerable extra-domestic eating venues, scathingly depicted in contemporary satires like Ned Ward's *London Spy*.[64]

Conceptions of custom and charity also surface within the communal resonances of food and its consumption. In May 1667 John Jackson and his wife received food 'presents' – from butter to sides of veal – from over forty donors at the construction of their new Westmorland home.[65] In such non-monetary gifts and exchanges of food that accompanied central life-events are the realizations of enduring but evolving attitudes to mutuality which arguably survived the apparent 'death' of hospitality at the close of the seventeenth century.[66] Consumption is thus implicated within that network of actions underpinning communal relations, rather than being merely destructive of them.[67] The metamorphosis of earlier food-related sumptuary legislation into the dietary etiquettes of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially concerning foods appropriate for marginal communities – the impoverished dependent on relief, the imprisoned, and the institutional sick – provides a stimulating frame for studies of consuming practices as structures of moral control.[68] Although this approach smacks of Foucauldian determinism, it can nevertheless move beyond restraints upon the corporeal, exploring the opportunities for escaping dietary limitations through perceptions of entitlement and changing alimentary tastes. Consumption thus becomes the imaginative spur to appetite that is not unbounded, but which is concerned with the betterment *and* preservation of both self and collectivity – perhaps best summarized in the Dickensian imperative 'more'.[69]

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[60] Murcott, Mennell, and van Otterloo, *Sociology*, pp. 54–60, 65–7, 95–111; John Burnett, *Plenty and want: a social history of diet in England from 1815 to the present day*, rev. edn (London, 1979), pp. 336–7.

[61] Matthew Johnson, *Housing culture: traditional architecture in an English landscape* (London, 1993); idem, *An archaeology of capitalism* (Oxford, 1996); Mary C. Beaudry and Anne E. Yentsch, *The art and mystery of historical archaeology* (Boca Raton, FL, 1993), Charles Orser, *A historical archaeology of the modern world* (London, 1996).

[62] See Sara Pennell, 'The material culture of food in early modern England, circa 1650–1750', in Sarah Tarlow and Susie West, eds., *The familiar past? Archaeologies of Britain, 1550–1950* (London, 1999).

[63] Brewer and Porter, 'Introduction', p. 2.

[64] Murcott, Mennell, and van Otterloo, *Sociology*, pp. 115–16; Peter Borsay, *The English urban renaissance: culture and society in the provincial town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 267–83; [Edward (Ned) Ward], *The London-Spy compleat. In eighteen parts* (2 vols., London, [*c.* 1700]).

[65] P. Grainger, 'James Jackson's diary, 1650–1683', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, new series 21 (1921), pp. 113–14.

VI

To end with 'more' suggests that we cannot evade the equation of consumption studies with accumulation; with exceeding prevailing experience with something bigger and better. The proliferation of consumption histories is however surely antidote enough to the idea that in research, onward and 'more' is always synonymous with better. If the early modern historian is usefully to extend the parameters of this subject, movement has (perhaps inevitably) to be crab-like. Revisiting those tenets which offered up consumption practices at the heart of the creation of capitalist materialism suggests this genealogy is neither complete nor inevitable. We cannot ignore that beneath the fluid historiography of consumption lie no less contentious historiographies of early modern domestic organization and sufficiency, and of living standards that impinge upon the construction and experience of modern material life.

Consuming as a strategy for establishing stability and survival does not lead away from its transformative, subversive potential; the maintenance of the status quo is not achieved through stasis. Arguably such an approach does nothing to re-unite the divergent tendencies in consumption studies – separating empirically and figuratively the objects as consumable and consumed, and the individuals and communities who consume – but this may be the emancipatory development this field requires.

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[66] Cf. Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in early modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 189–90, 388.

[67] Cf. Appleby, 'Consumption in early modern social thought'.

[68] William Bernard Rabenn, 'Hospital diets in eighteenth-century England', *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 30 (1954), pp. 1216–21; T. V. Hitchcock, 'The English workhouse: a study in institutional poor relief in selected counties, 1696–1750' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford 1985), pp. 93, 139, 238–9; K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 17, 166–78.

[69] For diets and entitlement, see Brian S. Turner, 'The government of the body: medical regimens and the rationalisation of diet', *British Journal of Sociology*, 33 (1982), pp. 254–69; John Walter, 'the social economy of dearth in early modern England', in Walter and Roger Schofield, eds., *Famine, disease and the social order in early modern society* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 75–128; Fine, Heasman, and Wright, *World of food*, pp. 275–6.

Discovering the mutabilities of the consumer as well as of the consumed is the revolution that could return historical consumption studies to the 'equal but opposite' 'worlds' of imaginative consuming vaunted but rarely visited in previous explorations.[70]

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[70] Cf. Brewer and Porter, eds., *Consumption*, p. 7.