Chapter 20

Consumption

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Cultural Geography and Consumption

Despite the fact that this is a relatively new concern in the social sciences and humanities, a bewildering range of theoretical and empirical studies of consumption have appeared in the last 10 or 15 years. Even more than other topics, it seems that academics studying the topic are not talking to one another or that they are unable to agree on how to approach the subject. This is partly because of the unusually wide range of disciplinary perspectives applied to consumption – economics, sociology, anthropology, cultural and media studies, history, human geography, and more – and partly because everyone already 'knows' what consumption means. Even so, it's hard to think of another 'hot' topic which has received as much attention and as little thought. Even in the 1990s a number of commentators were warning that too much work was based upon unexamined assumptions about consumption (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Miller 1995a). Daniel Miller is especially scathing about these 'myths of consumption,' arguing that these often add up to two all-pervasive assertions: 'consumption is good' or 'consumption is bad.' However, the fact that writers continue to rely upon and reproduce these myths is a testament to their power, and to the fact that we're still not thinking hard enough about what consumption means.

The steady growth of interest in consumption in human geography was largely due to the widening of the scope of the discipline following the 'cultural turn,' though the topic had already been addressed by geographers before this in discussions of housing (Hamnett 1989) and retail (Wrigley 1988). However, it seems likely that if geographers are confused about consumption this is a reflection of our indiscriminate borrowing from a long list of disciplines, often compounding existing problems and avoiding the challenge of integrating ideas from very different backgrounds. The dominance of ideas about the symbolic power of consumption suggests that of all the disciplines we have borrowed from, cultural studies has been the most influential. In this chapter we aim to clarify some of this confusion by taking an overview of different understandings of consumption. We also suggest that what is needed is a more sophisticated grasp of the *social* nature of consump-

tion and more attention to its *materiality*, the physical presence of objects and living things that possess different abilities and attributes and occupy specific spaces and times. It has been argued that these twin concerns of sociality and materiality are also underemphasized within cultural geography as a whole (Philo 2000).

Thus we begin our chapter with an account of three different approaches to, and definitions of, consumption, which we would argue get increasingly more convincing. The approaches are not intended to be neatly exclusive, or to reflect the way ideas have developed: it's simply a useful framework. We then provide a review of some of the work done by cultural geographers and others, structuring our discussion around different spatialities of consumption. Because a full review would be impossible in the space available, this chapter could usefully be read in conjunction with other recent reviews of geography and consumption (see, for example, Jackson & Thrift 1995; Crang & Jackson 2001; Crewe 2000, 2001).

Defining Consumption, I: Uses and Needs

The *OED* defines consumption as "using up; destruction; waste . . ." Economists have typically contrasted consumption to *production*, and economic geographers, at least until very recently, used the term to refer to the purchase of manufactured goods or services by individuals or collectives (firms, nations, etc.). From this perspective the particular use to which the object or service is put is relatively unimportant – consumption is merely the necessary corollary of production just as leisure is secondary to work. Where economists did stop to consider the nature of this demand, they tended to attribute it to 'needs,' needs which are universally felt (for food, clothing, shelter, etc.) and easily satisfied.

While this viewpoint still dominates neoliberal economics, left-leaning academics are more likely to subscribe to a perspective which draws, in more or less faithful ways, on the writings of Karl Marx. Sometimes known as 'the production of consumption' argument and closely associated with the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, it suggests that the nature of contemporary consumption is entirely due to the logic of capitalism and the expansion of mass production. Modern advertising and marketing have replaced standardized consumption with a more effective organization of consumption into many profitable niche markets. The notion of consumption has also been expanded so that, for example, the 'culture industry' which orchestrates the production of consumption also turns cultural forms – paintings, trips to the theater, and so on – into commodities (Adorno & Horkheimer 1979; Adorno 1991). From this perspective modern consumer society *manufactures* – rather than simply fulfilling – our needs and the 'real' values of objects are obscured by their market values (Rojek 1985).

In some accounts this view of consumption is closely linked with postmodernity. The widespread influence of Jean Baudrillard's explorations of signs (symbolic meanings) as commodities (1970) and the work of Fredric Jameson (1987) has led to a pervasive association between consumer society and postmodernity. For David Harvey (1989) the production of consumption is driven by a shift towards post-Fordist social organisation, producing a consumer society marked by plurality, difference, and novelty, which are all read as ways of manufacturing desire. Whether they accept this periodization or not, these arguments have been strengthened by

analyses of the role of consumption in everyday life, such as studies of department stores in the nineteenth century (Williams 1982) and malls in the twentieth century (Chaney 1990; Hopkins 1990). Much of this work has taken a particular interpretation of Walter Benjamin's studies of the 'dreamworlds of consumption' of Second Empire Paris (1978), emphasizing hedonism, desire, and fantasy.

Miller (1995a, 1995b) points out that many of these accounts of consumption assume a set trajectory for this sort of social change: a fall from a premodern Eden into modern (or postmodern) materialism, commodification, and market exchanges and values. Anthropologists have used this trajectory to differentiate between advanced and 'primitive' cultures, even though systems of exchange, forms of 'money' and so on existed before (and beyond) Western capitalism.[1] The historical trajectory identified by Miller has its counterpart in geography, as this kind of consumer society is taken to be something which spreads from particular centers (the West, the USA) through globalization, displacing 'authentic' forms of consumption (Classen 1996). Again, as we suggest below, this is a model of consumption which has been subject to critique as studies have revealed the extent to which even the most seemingly 'global' of products, such as Coca Cola, are incorporated into highly localized cultures of consumption (Miller 1998b).

This first set of understandings of consumption all revolve around questions of need and use, and the key debate concerns whether these needs are 'real' ones or not. But what if consumption is not about the instrumental uses of objects but about their *socially-determined values?*

Defining Consumption, II: Making and Displaying Identities

From this second perspective consumption is a meaningful activity which helps us create social identities and relationships with others; as we do this the things we consume are given human values. Marx and Adorno recognized this but felt that these meanings were distortions of the true 'use-value' of objects because in a capitalist society commodities acquire 'fetishized' meanings through exchange (see Watts 1999; Castree 2001). The fetish, a term originally applied to ritual objects, refers to the attribution of human values to nonhuman objects. Think about a pair of trainers (or sneakers), for example. They could be described as 'sporty,' 'casual,' or 'sexy,' but literally speaking they are none of these things; to describe them in this way is to attach human values to them. Their use-value is a function of warmth, comfort, and other aspects of utility, while their exchange or fetish values are acquired through design, marketing, advertising, and so on. Both Marx and Freud were concerned that fetish objects stand in for (or replace) 'natural' human relations like those produced through labour or sexual desire (Dant 1999). Of course, ideas of the 'usefulness' of objects are themselves arbitrary (Doel & Clarke 2000), so that some trainers are better for running in, others for idle loafing. However, the power of these ideas lives on in our everyday condemnations of the 'materialism' of others.

In recent years this view has been largely replaced by a more positive conception of consumption, suggesting that it plays a key role in the production of identity and the communication of this identity to others. Consumers are held to be active and creative rather than passive 'satisficers' or dupes, and this is sometimes linked to a

postmodern consumer culture where the line between high and low culture has been eroded and identities are put together in a 'pick-and-mix' style (Fiske 1989).

The work of Thorstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu on consumption and social hierarchy is commonly cited to justify this argument. Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1994) argued that the late nineteenth-century *nouveau riche* displayed their wealth through leisure and 'conspicuous consumption' in order to differentiate themselves from their inferiors. Less convincingly, Veblen also suggested that tastes percolate downwards through society because those below *emulate* the tastes of those above, providing an ongoing logic for fashion as the leisure class looks for 'the next big thing' to stay one step ahead. This is a highly influential notion, but one which rests on all kinds of unlikely assumptions (Campbell 1987); this is especially obvious in the historical literature, where emulation is seen to drive the eighteenth-century 'consumer revolution' despite the fact that working-class tastes appear to run alongside, rather than behind, middle-class tastes (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Breward 1999). Bourdieu's much more convincing *Distinction* (1986) considers the nature of taste and argues that it is intimately tied up with class and (to a lesser extent) gender. 'Cultural capital,' the status acquired through tasteful and knowledgeable consumption, is passed on through education and socialization, and is consequently unevenly distributed throughout society. Despite his suggestion that class and gender are to some extent performed, for Bourdieu consumption largely reflects and reproduces preexisting identities (de Certeau 1984).

These writers are often used to support arguments which suggest that identities are defined by consumption rather than production, and consequently take the form of a fragmented set of lifestyles rather than the firm class identities associated with work. The consumer uses material and symbolic goods – clothes, food, musical tastes – to tell themselves and others who they are. While this has been a highly influential argument, we want to argue that there are two problems with this work. Firstly, the idea of communication through consumption, and secondly the assumption that it is done for the benefit of the self as a separate entity. The first point has been well made by Colin Campbell (1995, 1996). Campbell points out that the meanings of displayed objects are highly unstable, varying from person to person and from one context to another. While consumption is clearly meaningful, it is not a *language*:

> One can indeed 'say it with flowers' (and with other things); that is to say, convey love, affection, gratitude, or the like . . . to one or more other people. However, in these circumstances not only is it the case that actual objects are transferred to specific targeted others, but such acts are themselves usually clearly situated in time and space, something which helps to determine their 'meaning.' (Campbell 1995: 115)

Campbell is arguing that consumption only makes sense as communication when the possibilities of misunderstanding are very much reduced. Giving your mum flowers will probably get your message across (though it could be thanks, sorry, or something else); handing them out to strangers on the street could mean anything. Similarly clothing can communicate something but it is only likely to be the simplest kind of information; even uniforms can be ambiguous.

As for the second criticism, anthropologists tend to study objects from the point of view of their place within social networks of exchange, so that their meaning is

tied to the relationships that exist between giver and receiver. In this sense, consumption is as much about others as it is about ourselves. Daniel Miller's (1998c) ethnography of shopping in north London found that most of it was done by women buying food and essentials for their families rather than 'treats' for themselves. In fact Miller suggests that although many academics assume that shopping is mainly about buying 'treats,' it is in fact the exception that proves the rule. For Miller, shopping is all about love – the love family members bear for one another and the obligations that go with this. Consumption, then, builds familial and other relationships rather than purely individual identities. Of all the people Miller interviewed and observed, only teenagers could be said to consume in a self-indulgent way – and this is because at this stage in their lives their identities *are* being carefully constructed.[2]

Work influenced by these arguments has therefore sought to investigate the place of objects in everyday life without assuming that their symbolic meaning is merely a matter of individual interpretation.

Defining Consumption, III: Material cultures

In their critique of the economist's obsession with the uses of objects, the anthropologists Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood suggested that we should

> Forget that commodities are good for eating, clothing and shelter; forget their usefulness and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking; treat them as a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty. (1996: 62)

For Douglas and Isherwood consumption actively organizes the world, "making visible and stable the categories of culture" (1996: 38). The allocation of objects to families and guests, prescribed ways in which they may or may not be used and other aspects of consumption *create* gender relations, distinctions between 'us' and 'them' and so on. As a result "consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over, licked into shape" (p. 37). In this respect there are many similarities between contemporary consumption in the West and supposedly 'primitive' systems of exchange like the North American *potlatch* or the Melanesian *kula* (Mauss 2002). Ethnographies of consumption in the West should therefore avoid making presumptions about what commodities mean because consumption is an active and creative process at the heart of social life.[3] Marianne Gullestad's research on home-making in Norway, for example, argues that do-it-yourself home-making activities were not simply about the expression of individual identities, it is one way in which people go about 'constructing homes, genders and classes' (Gullestad 1993).

Arjun Appadurai notes that to study objects "we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories" (1988: 5). These 'cultural biographies' show us that commoditization is a *process*: objects become commodities when they pass into the sphere of market exchange, and pass out again when they are bought; they may be subsequently resold, and so on (Kopytoff 1986). At each stage they acquire different meanings. Douglas and Isherwood note that "It is all right to send flowers to your aunt in the hospital, but

never right to send the cash they are worth with a message to 'get yourself some flowers' " (1996: 38). This is because commodities are more anonymous than gifts. Money marks the boundary between family and market since it can be used to convert commodities into gifts. The importance of this can also be seen in Peter Corrigan's ethnography of household clothing practices in Dublin (1989). Corrigan found that the daughters of the families refused to let their mothers buy clothes for them after they reached the age of about fourteen, receiving money instead. After this age, market relations are preferable to family ones. Corrigan explains this as a desire to loosen family ties, since a gift of money gives the daughter autonomy over her clothing decisions. This both reflects and produces the power relationship between mothers and daughters; daughters are resisting the power symbolized by previous gifts.

This kind of analysis shows how consumption plays an important role in making and changing social relationships (or social spaces). It refuses to make assumptions about what objects mean or to read them simply as symbolic meaning or individual identity. Instead both the social nature of consumption and the materiality of consumption practices and processes are acknowledged. It is this more contextual approach to consumption which has become increasingly influential within geography as the examples we now discuss suggest.

Geographies of Consumption

In this second part of the chapter we focus on the approaches taken to the study of consumption geographies. Like other reviews of consumption (see Jackson & Thrift 1995), we frame this discussion through an exploration of some of the different spatialities or geographies within which consumption might be analyzed. We begin by looking at sites or spaces of consumption suggesting that attention has shifted from spectacular sites of consumption like the mall to more informal spaces of consumption including domestic spaces. We then discuss the spatial structures of 'systems of provision' by focusing on the geographies of commodity chains as well as the idea of circuits or networks of 'commodity culture' (Jackson 2002). This approach to commodity circuits recognizes the complexity of the networks within which processes of commodification are entangled including the role of consumers themselves. We conclude our discussion, and our chapter, both by emphasizing this more social and materialist approach to the study of consumption and by highlighting some of the areas within which new work on the geographies of consumption might usefully be developed.

Sites and Spaces of Consumption

A focus on the geographies of sites of consumption, emerges particularly from economic geographies of retailing. This subdiscipline of economic geography has been transformed from a narrow focus on retail locations to a more complex study focusing in particular on retail restructuring and regulation but also on the experiences of both retail workers and shoppers (Wrigley & Lowe 1996). This transformation has provoked new attention on how key consumption sites might be understood. While attention had been focused on the mall as the iconic site of consumption

(Goss 1993; Shields 1992) or other spectacular sites of consumption such as world fairs and expositions (Ley & Olds 1988; Pred 1991), there has been a shift from interpreting such spaces as definitive sites of postmodern architecture and experience. Historical research has challenged the 'novelty' of contemporary consumer experiences (Domosh 1996; Blomley 1996) while others have argued for attention to the more mundane, everyday experiences of shopping centers. A good example of this is the detailed ethnographic study of Brent Cross and Wood Green shopping centers in north London (see Miller et al. 1998; Jackson & Holbrook 1995). Through their observations and discussions with groups of shoppers, Miller et al. argue that shopping malls should be seen as retail spaces which are actively socially and culturally constructed and contested. For example, ideas about ethnicity and national identity are actively constituted and reworked within the spaces of the shopping center – manifest for example both in the attitudes of some Wood Green shoppers towards 'foreign' products and in the construction of Brent Cross as a space for the (re)production of ethnic identities by others. Work on shopping centers also highlights questions about public space, surveillance and control (Jackson 1998) issues also emphasized in more critical studies of American shopping malls (Mitchell 2000). Miller et al. (1998) also emphasize the role of consumers not as passive 'dupes' but as complex actors involved in a process which involves social relationships and detailed consumer knowledge. As we suggested in our example of this relationship between social relationships and consumption drawn from Miller's work earlier, this ethnographic work revealed an understanding of shopping not as a site of fantasy or as the pursuit of hedonistic pleasure through the purchase of 'treats.' Focusing instead on 'shopping as provisioning' (1998c) reveals how shoppers were embedded in networks of care towards family members. Purchases were understood either directly as representing their love for their family, or more indirectly, for example in the valuing of thrift, as being evidence of their identities as 'good mothers'.

If some attention has been focused on understanding the complexity of what goes on within the shopping mall, other geographers have sought to expand our attentions to alternative sites of consumption. For example, Nicky Gregson, Louise Crewe, and Kate Brooks offer a detailed ethnography of the practices of consumption in the spaces of 'second hand' retailing including charity shops/thrift stores, vintage clothing stores, and car boot sales to emphasize that such places are significant for understanding how consumption practices and identities are produced (Gregson & Crewe 1994, 1997, 1998; Crewe & Gregson 1998; Gregson, Crewe, & Brooks 2001a). In particular, they emphasize how goods acquire meaning and distinction as they are recirculated within the commodity circuit. This parallels interesting work on the global circuits of second-hand clothing which also illustrates the transformations in the meanings of garments which occur during their passage through the commodity circuit (Hansen 1999). Another important finding of the work is the significance of the materiality of the purchase, particularly in relation to embodied purchases such as second-hand clothes. Work on these more informal spaces of consumption also help to challenge the distinctions between 'public' and 'private,' with their associated gender connotations, and indeed a number of theorists have turned their attention to domestic spaces of consumption including catalogue shopping and secondhand children's clothes sales (Clarke 1997, 2000).

Such studies again require attention to questions of consumer knowledge, but they also allow a much more nuanced understanding of how consumer goods are actively utilized and appropriated within the everyday spaces and social relationships of the home. Thus Clarke (2000) illustrates, through the medium of the sale of children's second hand clothes, how values such as what constitutes 'being a good mother' are also part of the transaction process.

It is not surprising that the home should be such an important focus; as Tim Dant reminds us, "As well as being a material entity in itself, a house is a locus for material culture, a meeting point for people and things, in which social relationships and material relationships are almost indistinguishable because both are bound together in the routine practices of everyday life" (1999: 61). Along with the home-oriented aspects of shopping, and the do-it-yourself literature mentioned earlier, the material culture of the garden has attracted some attention (Chevalier 1998; Bhatti & Church 2000, 2001). Geographers have also begun to consider the consumption of media (Burgess 1990), and its importance within domestic space (Kneale 1999). This work owes a great debt to research conducted within media studies, and to David Morley's research on television in particular (1986, 1995a). The vast amount of work which has followed (see Morley 1995b and Mackay 1997 for useful reviews) includes examinations of the close relationships that exist between the organization of domestic life and television (Silverstone 1994), radio (Moores 1988; Tacchi 1998), video recorders (Gray 1992), and domestic media technologies in general (Silverstone & Hirsch 1992; Silverstone 1999). While generalizations are risky, most of these authors agree that the practices of media consumption and domesticity are mutually constitutive. In this they differ from the much more private experience of reading (Radway 1994). Similarly, Sarah McNamee's study of children's use of domestic game consoles shows how arguments about access to these machines produced gendered identities and spaces (1997), an argument which is reinforced by the work of Sarah Holloway, Gill Valentine, and Nick Bingham on adolescents' use of information technologies in schools (Holloway et al. 2000; Valentine & Holloway 2002).

Thus work on the consumption of media within domestic spaces once again provides evidence for the value of understanding consumption practices within the context of social relations. An interesting example of this is Marie Gillespie's (1995) study of television and video use among young Punjabi Londoners in Southall. Gillespie's in-depth ethnographic study highlights the specificity of local, contextualized consumption practices. Thus British or Australian soap operas become vehicles for discussing and negotiating kinship, courtship, and marriage reflecting particular concerns of these transnational teenagers. In contrast, discussions about adverts for globalized brands such as Coca-Cola reveal a highly specific enthusiasm for a brand which symbolized for these respondents a concept of Americanization and 'cool' which was an alternative to both a parental Asian culture and an exclusionary Britishness. Gillespie's study reveals then both the importance of local and contextualized studies of consumption practices but also how consumption is embedded within social relations.

Obviously another important consumption practice which is particularly associated with domestic space is the consumption of food. Food has attracted considerable attention from geographers as consumption practice (Bell & Valentine 1997;

Valentine 1999). And again this research has been sensitive to understanding how the provisioning and preparation of food is centrally embedded within, and may also reveal, the complexity of social relations. The consumption of food has also been studied at a rather different scale linking the domestic consumption of food to the commodity chains associated with food provisioning (Whatmore 1995; Goodman & Redclift 1991). This alternative spatiality of consumption – the notion of commodity chains or what have been defined as 'systems of provisioning' (Fine & Leopold 1993) – is the focus of our next section as we move from the sites or spaces of consumption, to a consideration of commodity circuits.

Geographies of Commodity Chains and Circuits

Geographers have had a long-standing interest in researching the chains and networks associated with the production of goods (Dicken 1998). Such work has been important in illustrating at levels which can be both relatively simple and highly complex how systems of production are organized to produce goods for consumption. An example of a relatively simple commodity chain can be seen in the article 'Game, Set and Match: The Making of a Wimbledon Ball' from *The Guardian* newspaper (Abrams 2002). This traces the origins of a Wimbledon tennis ball, emphasizing the links across four continents. It also discusses the repetitive and sometimes dangerous tasks involved in its production by workers in factories and rubber processing plants in the Philippines, rubber plantations in Malaysia, and factories in Barnsley in the UK, not to mention those connected to the ball's production through the provision of raw materials from USA, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, and Greece. The story of the Slazenger Wimbledon tennis ball could be read alongside other often-cited examples of commodity chains such as Nike (Goldman & Papson 1998; Donaghu & Barff 1990) or indeed more popular accounts such as Naomi Klein's (2000) *No Logo*.

A strong theme within many such analyses of commodity chains is an argument about distanciation – both socially and spatially – between the consumer and the product. Geographer David Harvey takes the starting point of his own breakfast to reflect on his dislocation from the complex chains which have been required to assemble the food in front of him: "we can in practice consume our meal without the slightest knowledge of the intricate geography of production and the myriad of social relations embedded in the system that puts it on the table." Or, he continues, we can visit a supermarket and buy a bunch of grapes but "we cannot see the fingerprints of exploitation upon them or tell immediately what part of the world they come from" (Harvey 1990: 442–3). For Harvey this theme of distanciation is inherent in the process of commodity fetishism – consumers are distanced from the social relations underlying the product that they buy and the product itself is sold through processes of marketing which ensures that a shoe with the Nike label comes to signify a lifestyle and aspiration – it is not simply a shoe which is good for running in. Harvey thus argues that the role of academics is to 'unveil' the fetish, tracing back the social relations of contemporary consumption.

While 'unveiling' the fetish may actually be more difficult than it seems, as we discuss below, geographers have become increasingly interested in linking geographies of consumption with materialist commodity chain analysis (Hartwick 1998).

Work has focused particularly on the supply chains associated with food illustrating for example the internationalization of food provision (Goodman & Redclift 1991) and the complexity of these chains such as the links between major multinational corporations and subcontracted groups of suppliers (Arce & Marsden 1993). Yet alongside work on the globalizing tendencies of food producers is work which has considered how global processes are mediated through local specificities (Goodman & Watts 1997; Whatmore 1994). This more nuanced understanding of food commodity chains is reflected in a discussion of the complex networks underlying fair trade coffee (Whatmore & Thorne 1997; see also Smith 1996) or the symbolism underlying the production and consumption of exotic fruit (Cook 1994). Geographers have also used commodity-chain analysis to examine systems of supplier organization in the fashion industry (Crewe & Davenport 1992; Crewe 1996; Crewe & Lowe 1996), the cut flower trade (Hughes 2000), and soft furnishing industry (Leslie & Reimer 1999; Hughes & Reimer 2002).

As some of these studies suggest the idea of uncovering a straightforward 'commodity chain' is far from easy, and indeed the notion of a complex network involving many different actors (as well as nonhuman actants) which may reflect overlapping and sometimes contradictory interests rather than one single logic may be a more realistic way to explore consumption geographies. At the same time, some geographers have expressed dissatisfaction with an overly simplistic metaphor of 'unveiling' or 'unmasking' the fetish. Drawing on an ethnographic project about the consumption of food in north London, Phil Crang and Ian Cook (Crang 1996; Cook & Crang 1996; Cook et al. 2000) draw upon a set of different metaphors of 'entanglement' or 'displacement' to understand the networks within which both consumers and suppliers are involved. They argue that an understanding of food consumption networks requires an analysis of the geographical knowledges held by consumers about the meaning and significance of different foods. In turn these geographical knowledges – about food settings, food biographies and food origins – are themselves utilized in the commodification of new foods within the crowded food retail markets. Thus a process of 'double commodity fetishism' occurs as foods are repositioned within the consumption circuit. This argument might be read as another example of consumer disempowerment in the face of complex global circuits of culinary culture – and there is certainly a need for more work to be done about consumer mobilization and ethical consumption possibilities (Kaplan 1995; Hartwick 1998; Mitchell 1993). However, the thrust of Cook and Crang's argument is rather different as they seek a resistance which comes not from uncovering or unveiling the *fetish* to discover the *real* but rather to a relational or juxtapositional politics which provokes questions through unexpected conjunction or disruption.[4]

A similar argument is made by Jackson (2002) in a paper which draws on recent research about the transnational commodity circuits associated with the consumption of Asian food and fashion in Britain (see Crang et al. 2003; Dwyer forthcoming). This research seeks to understand the transnational spaces of British Asian commodity culture which are understood as multidimensional and occupied by many differently positioned actors including producers, suppliers, buyers, consumers and other cultural intermediaries such as journalists, advertisers and consultants. Drawing on the differences between two companies both selling pickles and sauces in the UK, Sharwoods and Pataks, Jackson illustrates the ways in which

both companies must draw upon, although differently, discourses of authenticity and passion to sell their products. The issue is not which of these is most accurate but how and why such tropes are used. Similarly examples of the rise of so-called 'ethnic chic' in relation to Asian clothing are used to demonstrate the ways in which ideas about 'authenticity' or 'cultural integrity' may be challenged and subverted by both producers and consumers. A nice example of this is the British Asian fashion designer label Ghulam Sakina whose clothes emphasize both the heritage of 'traditional' Indian embroidery and textile skills alongside a 'multicultural' aesethetic of juxtaposition (Dwyer & Crang 2002). Jackson argues that although these approaches to commodity circuits may raise the risk of being too complex for their own good, the multiple connections which they emphasize may open up new spaces for intervention and resistance.

These approaches to consumption geographies incorporate the active role of consumers (although recognizing that these are a highly differentiated group) into the commodity circuit. Geographers have long been interested in the ways in which people are involved in 'consuming geographies' whether it is through the imagination of places and peoples through the consumption of 'exotic' food (May 1996; Cook & Crang 1996) or through the more direct experience of travel and tourism (Urry 1995; Desforges 1998). Such work has been important in forging new understandings of place – for example, considering how (and why) representations of 'otherness' are 'staged' (MacCannell 1989; Crain 1996) and recognizing that oppositions between 'here' and 'there,' 'global' and 'local' are not fixed but fluid and interrelated (Massey 1995; Crang & Jackson 2001).

Conclusion

We began this chapter by providing an overview of different understandings of the concept of consumption. This was followed by an illustration of some work on different spaces and spatialities of consumption. Our argument throughout the chapter is for an understanding of consumption which moves beyond the merely symbolic and seeks to understand the extent to which consumption must be studied as integral to, and constitutive of, social relations. Seeking to transcend the tension which often exists within geography between 'cultural' and 'economic' approaches (Jackson 2002) we have also argued for a materialist and materialized approach to the study of consumption which recognizes that 'things matter' (Miller 1998a). In making this argument through different ways of thinking about the spaces of consumption we want to emphasize again the ways in which these are related. As Crang and Jackson (2001: 2) argue: "consumption is profoundly contextual, embedded in particular spaces, times and social relations . . . but this contextuality is itself constituted from the materials and imaginations of far-flung commodity systems."

While, as we have suggested, we share some of the misgivings raised by other reviewers (Gregson 1995) about the dangers of ignoring the social and the material in consumption studies, our argument here has been to emphasize that studies of consumption geographies and commodity cultures can prove an important means by which broader social, economic or political geographical questions may be explored. Indeed in conclusion we want to emphasize the many areas which still require much further attention from geographers. Consumption geographies still

remain highly concentrated on western contexts and there is a need to direct attention to a more worldwide focus. Notable here is the work being done about new sites of commodification – for example of water (Laurie & Marvin 1999; Page forthcoming) in developing countries. Such work might be particularly helpful in focusing our attention on developing new political interventions in relation to consumer power and consumer ethics. These interventions are tremendously important, and we should not be disheartened if contemporary critiques of the fetish leave us with complex questions, because "answering [them] involves the messy, contingent, context-specific work of politics: of naming the sites and subjects of social, cultural, economic, and environmental exploitation without somehow doing symbolic injustice to them" (Castree 2001: 1524). In that respect, the fact that geographers may now be less certain what consumption 'means' might, after all, be a good thing.

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NOTES

1. Even if this were not the case, careful attention to the development of modern consumer societies (e.g. Glennie & Thrift 1992; Glennie 1995) shows that there are a number of problems with the idea that capitalism and industrialization created a 'consumer revolution' (McKendrick, Brewer, & Plumb 1983).
2. This may be part of the reason that this idea of hedonistic consumption is so influential – a great deal of work in cultural studies was inspired by work on youth subcultures and their appropriations of objects like the motor scooter and the safety pin (Hall & Jefferson 1978; Hebdige 1979)
3. It is also worth noting Miller's and Campbell's suggestions that the two problems we've highlighted are related to methodological issues. Work in cultural and media studies which stresses hedonism is often based upon casual observation rather than rigorous ethnography. Miller points out that the idea of hedonistic consumption is so strongly embedded in everyday understandings of shopping that it always surfaced in his interviews with shoppers – yet his observations of their actual shopping practice produced very different results. Only ethnographic work would have got beyond this simplistic 'discourse of shopping.'
4. See Cook 2001 for an exploration about how this might be done in relation to pedagogy.

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