



The politics of consumption*

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If Politics, following Aristotle (1984), is a matter of analysing, comparing and ultimately creating practices of human association, we will do well to regard consumption practices as inherently political. Such a regard requires us to take a comparative-prospective disposition towards the roles and practices that underpin the production and distribution of subsistence and luxury. It also requires us to treat the functional mechanics of what political economists used to call ‘the mode of production’, that is, the set of practices through which human societies produce their means of survival and distinction, thereby reproducing themselves, as characteristically political. This special issue brings such a series of politically-oriented accounts of contemporary consumption practices together. Its contributors attempt to see practices of consumption for what they actually are, beyond the motifs of concealment and construction which we briefly discuss by way of introduction below, for the sake of debating what these practices might eventually become. Consumption, we argue, is political: to seek to analyse as if it were otherwise is to dogmatically seek refuge in a world of fantasy.

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This is not to say that we should disregard fantasy in attempting to account for the politics of consumption, however. The most enduring account of the natural state of consumption, as it were, comes to us in the form of a work of fiction – Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1994). Through Robinson’s memoirs, countless readers have vicariously gained experience of the Hobbesian predicament of absolute liberty, of the responsibility for social production in the absence of a social contract – where almost nothing is yet in place and where almost everything remains up for grabs. Defoe’s novel invites its readers into the engineering room of the social machine, an imagined but imaginative site wherein social conventions momentarily give way to the creation of the social and where current political practices temporarily make way for the production of new political principles. Little wonder then, as Karl Marx put it, that ‘political economists are fond of Robinson Crusoe stories’ (1976: 169). Defoe provides the abstract lie which allows political economists to bring the concrete truth of consumption into ever sharper relief.

Marx is by no means an exception to his own rule. He too discusses Robinson’s predicament, most memorably in the context of revealing what he famously called the secret of the commodity fetish (1976: 163-177). By analysing the capitalist mode of production through the example of ‘its elementary form’ (1976: 125), the commodity which bears the stamps of usability and exchangeability, and by comparing the capitalist mode of production to a series of alternative modes of production (ancient, feudal, cooperative and, in Robinson Crusoe’s case, fictional), Marx sought to reveal the politics of consumption which routinely lie concealed behind the analytical categories deployed by his political economic contemporaries. ‘Bourgeois economics’, as Marx’s critique of political economy would have it, was historically and prospectively myopic (but otherwise correct) in that it produced:

forms of thought which are socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically-determined mode of social production, i.e. commodity production. The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour on the basis of commodity production, vanishes therefore as soon as we come to other forms of production. (ibid.: 169)

Bourgeois economics, for Marx, certainly did a fine job of describing historically-produced reality on the terms produced by the extant mode of production – capitalism. The critique of political economy which he produced, however, sought both to contrast capitalism to historically and hypothetically extant modes of production, and also to posit an alternative mode of production which might eventually come into being. Of the latter Marx writes:

Let us finally imagine, for a change, an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force. All the characteristics of Robinson's labour are repeated here, but with the difference that they are social instead of individual... The total product of our imagined association is a social product. One part of this product serves as fresh means of production and remains social. But another part is consumed by the members of the association as means of subsistence. This part must therefore be divided among them. The way this division is made will vary with the particular kind of social organization of production and the corresponding level of social development attained by the producers. (ibid.: 171-172)

The Marxist critical project, then, affirms that it isn't enough to understand the politics of consumption by analysing and contrasting modes of production – a critique of political economy, as he sees it, must also produce an imaginative space within which political economic alternatives can be proposed, considered and ultimately produced. Marxism, then, seeks to think behind whatever it is that bourgeois political economic categories have *concealed* in order to make it possible to *construct* an alternative political economy. This possible act of construction, however, leaves the important political questions concerning the consumption and distribution of the 'total product of our imagined association' (ibid.) demonstrably open, ultimately answerable not by a political economic vanguard, Marxist or otherwise, but rather by 'the particular kind of social organization of production and the corresponding level of social development attained by the producers' (ibid.). This non-committal formulation of such crucial questions must be seen as an instance of political *and* philosophical prudence. An ancient political-philosophical predecessor for it exists in Book II of Plato's *Republic* (1997: 1011-1012) where we find Socrates cautiously saying to Glaucon:

It isn't merely the origin of a city that we're considering, it seems, but the origin of a *luxurious* city. And that may not be a bad idea, for by examining it, we might very well see how justice and injustice grow up in cities...The things I mentioned earlier and the way of life I described won't satisfy some people, it seems, but couches, tables, and other furniture will have to be added, and, of course, all sorts of delicacies, perfumed oils, incense, prostitutes, and pastries. We mustn't provide them only with the necessities we mentioned at first, such as houses, clothes, and shoes, but painting and embroidery must be begun, and gold, ivory, and the like acquired. Isn't that so?

Yes.

Then we must enlarge our city, for the healthy one is no longer adequate. We must increase it in size and fill it with a multitude of things that go beyond what is necessary for a city – hunters, for example, and artists or imitators, many of whom work with shapes and colours, many with music...

The *Republic's* enigmatic account of consumption, just like Marx's, throws seemingly trivial everyday human foibles and follies into a broader political light. Painting-likers, pastry-eaters and shoe-wearers alike, thus illuminated, must come to see themselves as interconnected actors consciously negotiating the political nature of productive social bonds throughout everything that they do: gawking, gobbling and grinding not least of all. Just as Marx unveils the mode of production lurking behind each and every instance of consumption, so too, citizens electing to lead a *luxurious* life within the ideal republic, Socrates demonstrates, must be co-related with the existence of otherwise needless toil and conquest. Having pointed this out, however, Socrates prudently refuses to announce whether the costs of a life of luxurious consumption are fairly paid for, nor does he cast political-philosophical judgment over whether a life of luxurious consumption is justifiable in principle (Berry, 1994; Springborg, 1981). The philosopher instead brings us towards the logical realisation that the cost of luxury is toil and tussle, as well as towards the empirical realisation that these costs have traditionally been borne by the non-beneficiary. After that, it is left to Socrates' protagonists, as well as to Plato's subsequent readers, to decide whether the life of indulgent consumption is one worth having, which is also to say, one worth working for. Political and philosophical prudence yet again – the devil is in the sociological detail.

Socrates' mercilessly brief account of consumption, like Marx's account of commodity consumption, certainly does not oblige dandies and decadents to abandon the dearly-prized world of indulgent consumption as such. They rather both insist upon taking that world's privileges with something other than a pinch of salt. Both the *Republic* onto *Capital* underline how the relationship between consumption and production is inherently political – even a pinch of salt has to be pinched from somewhere and by somebody. We will do well to bear the political nature of consumption practices in mind.

Concealing the politics of consumption

The free Athenian did not need Socrates to reveal the hidden mode of production to him; he already knew perfectly well that the foundation of his own freedom was nothing other than the ritualised and naturalised domination of others. Slavery was not a poorly kept secret malevolently lurking behind an allegedly hypocritical ancient Athenian free citizenry. It was rather the citizenry's understanding of freedom's openly acknowledged condition. We should not then say that the ancient Greeks ignored or disingenuously failed to recognise how the satisfaction of the tastes of some necessitated the heightening of the tribulations of others. We should rather say that the ancient Greeks directly confronted this

matter as a political problem, the natural solution for which seemed to them to be slavery.

This ancient Greek understanding of partial freedom (freedom for the few at the expense of the many) did not lend itself towards intensely reflective or self-reprimanding political-philosophical scrutiny, at least not until much later (Hegel, 1991). Aristotle's avoidance of the potential paradox that a citizen's freedom is dependent on the existence of a necessarily subordinate class, as Marx pointed out, therefore says a lot less about the limits of Aristotle's intellect and a lot more about how Aristotle's intellect, as with anybody else's, is conditioned by the extant mode of production¹. Just as the ancient Greek idea of a freedom that is dependent on slavery obviously seems an absurd proposition to the liberal sensibilities of the contemporary reader, so too, the very idea of a 'free-labourer'² would have appeared to the ancient Greeks as little other than a regrettable contradiction in terms.

The inherently political nature of consumption, then, was previously bathed in the ancient Greek light of proximity. Within the ancient Greek *agora*, free citizens came face to face for the purpose of political deliberation: the marketplace was the mutually acknowledged site of politics. The politics of contemporary consumption, by way of contrast, comes very much shrouded in the darkness of distance. The contemporary marketplace visitor is rarely, if ever, engaged in such a self-consciously political act. What was an inherently public role – going to market to debate – has now become a distinctively private matter – going to market to consume. The place in which the practicalities of the good life used to be debated has become the site in which images of the good life get bought and sold. The contemporary *agora* exists not for the sake of the *polis* but for the sake of the *oikos*³.

1 'Aristotle himself was unable to extract this fact, that, in the form of commodity-values, all labour is expressed as equal human labour and therefore as labour of equal quality, by inspection from the form of value, because Greek society was founded on the labour of slaves, hence had as its natural basis the inequality of men and of their labour-powers.' (Marx, 1976: 151-152)

2 'This worker must be free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization [*Verwirklichung*] of his labour-power'. (Marx, 1976: 272-273)

3 Contemporary analysts of the politics of consumption, as will be argued throughout this special issue, have put concepts such as *buy-cotting* and *prosumption* to work in order to suggest that contemporary consumption is undertaken with an unprecedented level of sensitivity towards ethical and political issues. The veracity of such a claim is both affirmed and denied throughout: most obviously within the Arvidsson vs. Zwick feature.

Contemporary market participation, then, is largely a matter of internalisation – into (increasingly virtual) shopping baskets, into houses, into bellies, into fantasy spaces of the mind. This is all to say that what was once a political site has now become a site which serves to conceal the political. Regarding the complex social-psychological dynamics through which politics of consumption gets concealed today, Bruce Robbins (2002: 86) reminds us of the opening of David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988). There, a Marxist-feminist academic gazes out of an airplane window and begins to imagine the huge and hidden world which the contemporary consumer simultaneously acknowledges and ignores:

The housewife, switching on her electric kettle to make another cup of tea, gave no thought to the immense complex of operations that made that simple action possible: the building and maintenance of the power station that produced the electricity, the mining of coal or pumping of oil to fuel the generators, the laying of miles of cable to carry the current to her house, the digging and smelting and milling of ore or bauxite into sheets of steel or aluminium, the cutting and pressing and welding of the metal into the kettle's shell, spout and handle, the assembling of these parts with scores of other components—coils, screws, nuts, bolts, washers, rivets, wires, springs, rubber insulation, plastic trimmings; then the packaging of the kettle, the advertising of the kettle, the marketing of the kettle, to wholesale and retail outlets, the transportation of the kettle to warehouses and shops, the calculation of its price, and the distribution of its added value between all the myriad people and agencies concerned in its production and circulation. The housewife gave no thought to all this as she switched on her kettle.

Robbins presents this uncanny moment as one which we have all experienced – it is that precise moment in which we peep over the precipice of commodity consumption and catch a glimpse of the vast and sublime backdrop of production. We all know this relatively distant world of production exists as the very condition of possibility for the relatively close world of consumption *and yet* we are very rarely disposed to think much more about it, let alone actually do anything disruptive in it. This peculiar moment of partial recognition, Robbins suggests, is as trivial as it is troubling: trivial because it is so patently obvious that the things that we consume appear to us from somewhere, troubling because 'this moment of consciousness will not be converted into action' (ibid.). We order another cup of coffee. We turn back to the book we had been reading. We get on with our lives in the world of consumption, a world behind the back of which the world of production is regularly, necessarily, partially concealed. These complex dynamics of concealment warrant the sort of sustained attention which our contributors grant them.

It isn't only from contemporary consumers that the world of production is structurally or even wilfully concealed, however. Bourgeois economics remains alive and well within contemporary analyses of capitalist social relations.

Consumer Culture Theory's (CCT) chief proponents, for example, boast of how the 'stale polemic' that 'portrays consumer culture as a domain of ideological indoctrination and consumers as passive dupes of the capitalist culture industry' has been jettisoned in favour of a more dialogue-infused model (Arnould and Thompson, 2007: 9). Elsewhere, Critical Marketing's spokespeople describe their contribution as an 'eclectic framework of critique which leaves space for many voices other than those of card-carrying critical theorists' (Brownlie et al., 1999: 9). Cova, Kozinets and Shankar for their part somewhat more diplomatically but nevertheless ultimately-Marx-grave-dancingly suggest that

Marxian concepts such as commodity fetishism, reification and commodification still provide perceptive insights for our understanding of a market society. But this passive absorption model of consumers is not what we see. (2007: 4)

Such a politics concealing account of consumption is not unique to business and management studies. In the world of anthropology, Daniel Miller (2010: 80) for example, complains that research 'dressed in the guise of critical or radical political endeavour' is little other than a 'claimed concern with the actually oppressed conditions of our humanity' while Binkley and Littler (2008: 520) bemoan the 'chest-thumping denunciations of the 'culture industry'... one of the left's favourite intellectual parlour games'. To suggest that there is a politics of consumption based on concealment, then, seems to run the risk of disingenuously speaking "from a middle-class subject position" and to be "steeped in a longstanding critique of materialism... often directed at the supposed consumer excesses of the working class" (Arnould, 2007: 146). Contributors to this special issue may face similar reactionary accusations. We believe, however, that this risk is very much worth taking.

Constructing the politics of consumption

The politics of consumption is not always a matter of concealment in need of critical revelation, however. Sometimes the politics inherent to consumption are only too apparent. The 'kitchen debate' between Nikita Khrushchev and Richard Nixon in Moscow at the American National Exhibition in 1959 offers a compelling case in point. Rather than seeking to demonstrate US superiority to the USSR through the evidence of military might, a modern kitchen instead served to symbolise the comforts and luxuries available in a consumer society yet denied under communism (Image 1).

Consumerism was here very explicitly constructed as a tool of political propaganda - this remains the case. The rise of mass consumer culture marked by the prominence of suburban living, attendant mass-produced automobiles and the provision of money necessary to finance it all, here and elsewhere became ideologically entangled with

politicised ideas of empowerment, modernity, democracy and freedom. As Schwarzkopf's (2011) and Tadajewski's (2006) histories of marketing practice have pointed out, the ideal of an equivalency between democracy and the freedom to choose (e.g. Friedman, 2002) was largely the outcome of the American ideological front during the McCarthy era and later on during the Cold War. The construction of consumer culture hence was and remains an ideological battlefield, the continuation of war by other means⁴.



Figure 1: 1959 – Nixon tempts Khrushchev with a variety of US consumer goods in Moscow.⁵

Today, consumption is part and parcel of the contemporary political toolkit of financialization (Martin, 2002, see also Fine, this issue: NB fn. 24): the most democratic form of 'economic shock therapy' (Klein, 2007). In Ireland, for example, the consumerist 'excess' of the Celtic Tiger era is often recalled to morally justify the imposition of an imbalanced austerity. But the Celtic Tiger

4 The complex relationship between consumption in the East and the West is memorably dramatized in *Good Bye Lenin* (2003) where the collapse of the Berlin Wall beckons in an invasion, not of NATO military forces, but of Western brands. In one indicative scene, we see a statue of Lenin being taken away by helicopter whilst simultaneously, on the streets below, articulated lorries carry the objects of Western consumerism into the previously Eastern city. Consider also: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-1987-0704-077_-_Berlin,_750-Jahr-Feier,_Festumzug,_Computer.jpg.

5 Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/sep/18/design.jackmasey>.

was emphatically not a rising tide that lifted all boats, but rather one which widened the already large gap of economic inequality (Allen, 2000)⁶. So, when Christian Pauls, German Ambassador to Ireland announces ‘Basically, *you* got carried away on this new found prosperity,’ and is paraphrased as declaring that Ireland had a ‘party’ and now has to ‘pay for it’ (Delaney, 2012), consumption is measured as a gross average in a manner which is systematically blind to distributive disparities. Hence in Ireland the consumer is constructed as deserving of the buckle-tightening political pain currently administered:

So you didn't go ‘crazy’ and buy a house or a car? Well, perhaps you took a personal loan or used a credit card to buy something that you just couldn't wait to save for... Still annoyed at being lumped with the blame for the mess that you had no hand, act or part in creating? Then take a moment to check your pay slip; you know the piece of paper where the numbers kept increasing to keep pace with the madness going on all around you?...Did anyone ever complain that they were being paid too much for doing too little and offer to work for less? (Quinlan, 2012)

Contemporary consumption, then, has become constructed as a political sin which needs to be paid for. Inasmuch as a booming economy came with a promise of a rising tide that would lift all, those previously located at the margins of consumer society who suddenly experienced boosted spending power are now judged to have made their purchases in a state of reckless excess. By an ideological sleight of hand, indulging in the pleasures of consumerism means to have become culpable: *you* are now asked to take responsibility for *your* ‘carbon footprint’ which is attributable and reducible to *your* actions and can be calculated and applied in the form of a judgment of guilt (Cremin, 2012; Jones, 2010). Every time *you* travel to work, every time *you* take a flight, *you* produce an act of pollution (Bohm and Dhabi, 2008). Likewise, in food consumption, the consumer is cast a rational, independent person that freely ingests what he or she wants; if they choose to overeat or not exercise, that’s their fault (Albritton, 2009). If they cannot withstand food advertising they are stupid and ill-equipped. In both cases, responsibility is externalised from the state and capital alike and the consumer becomes cast as the entire frame of reference, thereby blindsiding the larger and often invisible actions that lead to planes in the sky and food on the table.

The Road to Serfdom was believed to have been littered with the detritus of paternalistic over-reliance (Hayek, 2001). The road to liberty, by way of an elevating contrast, was one to be walked by heroically self-determining agents (Rand, 2007; Rand 2008). The way of consumptive self-determination, however,

6 Ireland is one of the ‘Big Seven’ countries in the world with the highest ratio of financial assets in tax havens to GDP, while the top 5% of the population hold 40% of the country’s private assets (Hebous, 2011; Merrill Lynch, 2010)

is today one and the same with the road to serfdom – the supposedly free consumer is now forced to ‘take upon oneself the costs and risks of the economic and financial disaster’ (Lazzarato, 2012: 12). For today it is ‘the population’, as Lazzarato explains, which ‘must take charge of everything business and the Welfare State externalise onto society’ (*ibid.*: 9; see also Foucault, 2009; Foucault 2010). The contemporary consumer, in this sense, is guilty of the mortal sin of having consumed. This irreparably fallen nature must be paid for indefinitely and, paradoxically, through yet more consumption. Contemporary consumption, then, is routinely constructed as inherently political to the extent that it is both responsible for causing the global recession, through its excesses, and also responsible for overcoming the consequences of these excesses through yet more consumption!

Contributing to the politics of consumption

In May 2012, we extended an open invitation to Dublin’s Royal Society of the Antiquaries of Ireland, in order to debate the politics of consumption⁷. This special issue is largely the result of discussions which took place during that event, though it also includes contributions from colleagues who were not able to join us in Dublin. The issue includes a mixture of conceptual and empirical investigations into the politics of consumption, a head-to-head debate on the idea of consumer citizenship, a series of notes on the relationship between art, politics, and consumption, and reviews of two recent books which tackle germane questions.

As was the case with the conference proceedings, Ben Fine’s ‘Consumption matters’ also lifts the curtain on this special issue. Fine’s piece offers a detailed retrospective account of the nature and importance of the Marxist inspired System of Provision (SOP) approach to the politics of consumption with which his name has been synonymous. The generously detailed piece initiates the reader into the methodological predecessors, as well as the conceptual and empirical resources, which characterise the SOP approach to the politics of consumption. It also accounts for some of the many debates within which it has been and remains mired. Beyond the 2 Cs of the politics of consumption which has helped us frame this brief editorial, Ben adds 10 more whilst suggesting further possibilities still. Beyond these 10 Cs, the core contribution of ‘Consumption matters’, in addition to offering an account of contemporary

7 The conference programme can be downloaded here: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/events/politics-consumption> and a brief write-up of the event is available here: <http://cppeblog.org/?p=156>.

debates on the politics of consumption, is a speculative consideration of what lies in wait for any consumer-oriented politics.

As the author of numerous books on environmental philosophy and the politics of consumption, Kate Soper was also a natural keynote speaker for the conference – we are delighted to be able to include her work here. ‘The dialectics of progress: Irish ‘belatedness’ and the politics of prosperity’ plays on James Joyce’s famous and fondly ironic comment about the Irish being the most anachronistic race in Europe. Soper uses it as a launchpad for a unique account of Irish globalization which journeys through Irish politics and literature and forces us to confront the quixotic, and poignant, nature of Irish capitalism. The contribution also gives the reader a succinct overview of Soper’s influential concept of alternative hedonism. Throughout, Soper urges us to reconsider what we mean by progress, even going so far as to point towards ways of living out such a reconsideration. Loitering, conviviality, relocalization and, above all, a non-instrumental ethics of leisure, stand at the core of what Soper contributes to the debate.

Peter Armstrong’s characteristically spiky effort to resuscitate the classical concept of alienation within consumption-orientated debates is written against the backdrop of his conspicuous disdain for the fast and loose way in which this concept has been supposedly dispensed with, on the one hand, coupled with the casting of an equally scornful eye upon self-improvement television, on the other. As readers of Armstrong’s work have come to expect, the piece is as sharp and exacting as it is subtle and erudite. Matthias Zick Varul’s socialist defence of consumer culture then presents a counter-intuitive exposition of how many Marxist ideals are actually to be found within practices of consumer culture. Contrary to the popular polemic against consumption as a site of selfish materialist alienation which should be avoided in the name of socialism, Varul presents his case.

Eleftheria Lekakis’ then contribution offers the reader a glimpse into the concerns which will be expressed within her forthcoming book on the politics of Fair Trade. Bauman’s analysis of liquid modernity offers a poetically fitting conceptual framework through which she analyses how contemporary coffee consumers negotiate the porous distinction between consumption as a means of helping the impoverished, on the one hand, and consumption as a means of helping the self towards a refreshing pick-me-up, on the other. Isleide Fontenelle’s analysis of the construction of consumer guilt then rounds off the papers section of the special issue by paying particular attention to the media representation of responsibility and guilt, demonstrating the gradual emergence of the self-reproaching consumer as a malleable political instrument

Next in the issue we have a pugilistic head-to-head between Adam Arvidsson and Detlev Zwick on the idea of consumer citizenship. The battle is not quite a matter of the blue corner versus the red corner, though the antagonists do end up dividing their analyses along overtly political lines. Drawing on the relevance of the work of Tarde, Arendt and Aristotle to an analysis of the politics of consumption, Arvidsson envisions a new mode of collaborative production in an era of media-rich, networked and digitized society. He ambitiously showcases a number of novel ideas, including a new type of value – reputational value – through which he accounts for why people consume collaboratively and productively. Zwick’s response, on the other hand, attempts to pinpoint the pitfalls of Arvidsson’s vision of contemporary economic rationality. While Zwick agrees with Arvidsson’s account of the norms of communicative capitalism, he is emphatically opposed to it as a post-capitalist *vision*, suggesting it is more a reconfiguration of the current unequal distribution of resources than a radicalisation thereof. As the conversation continues, Arvidsson and Zwick further clarify what they each understand to be at stake in the debate concerning contemporary consumer citizenship and end up standing quite opposed.

Also in the spirit of reversing arguments, Olga Kravets’ and Stevphen Shukaitis’ notes avoid the dominant paradigm of a consumer culture that appropriates counter-discourses by instead returning to Constructivist concerns with thinking of objects as comrades in a revolutionary struggle, as opposed to slaves to our hands. Such was the richness of discussion generated by the discussion between Shukaitis’ paper at the conference and Kravets’ response to it that a series of follow up commentaries were solicited. These response pieces form the basis for a general discussion of how objects and commodities can themselves serve political ends. Other than the pieces offered by Kravets and Shukaitis, the integrated feature also includes Antigoni Mamou’s exploration of the radical rejuvenation of one of the most co-opted radical images of all, Jim Fitzpatrick’s portrait of Che Guevara and Andreas Chatzidakis’ ethnographic overview of how commodities have laid claim to competing narratives in austerity Greece. The artist David Mabb presents and discusses some of his work on the encounters between William Morris and Popova – it is from this encounter that our special issue received its cover. The special issue then rounds off with George Patsiaouras’ review of Daniel Miller’s most recent book on consumption, and Angus Cameron and Gareth Browns review of NAMA Lab’s political work.

Taken together, each of the contributions underlines the renewed importance of considering consumption not simply as a site of economic phenomena, but, moreover, as a site of politics that must be correlated to logics of production, capital and social responsibility. Such investigations are all the more important now at a time where the politics of consumption is simultaneously concealed and

constructed, denied and affirmed, neglected and expected. The pieces underline the need for a politically-oriented analysis of the politics of consumption, not only for the sake of informing political debates concerning the nature of consumption, but also for the sake of informing political practices and the role which consumption might play within these.

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